

How to Handle Church Conflict: Lessons from Acts 6

When churches grow, problems inevitably arise. The early church in Acts 6 faced a significant conflict that threatened to tear apart their unity and fellowship. Yet through godly wisdom and Spirit-led leadership, they transformed a potentially divisive situation into an opportunity for greater ministry and growth.

What Causes Conflict in Growing Churches?

Growth Brings Growing Pains

The conflict in Acts 6 emerged during a time of rapid multiplication. The church had moved from addition in Acts 2 (3,000 added) through subtraction in Acts 5 (Ananias and Sapphira) to multiplication in Acts 6. Growth is part of God's plan, but it often comes with challenges.

Just as children experience growing pains physically, churches experience growing pains spiritually. When your physical body grows, it can hurt. When the spiritual body grows, it can hurt too. The key is recognizing that growth-related conflict is normal and can be navigated with wisdom.

Cultural and Generational Differences

The specific conflict involved two groups: the Hebrews (traditional Jews from Judea) and the Hellenists (Greek-influenced Jews from outside Israel). The Hebrews viewed the Hellenists as compromising with Greek culture, while the Hellenists saw the Hebrews as stuffy traditionalists.

This mirrors many church conflicts today - team suits versus team shorts, traditional versus contemporary, older versus younger generations. Satan often uses these small differences and personal preferences to create big messes that can divide families and destroy fellowship.

How Should Leaders Handle Church Conflict?

Address Issues Directly

When the apostles heard about the complaint regarding neglected widows in the daily food distribution, they didn't ignore it or hope it would resolve itself. They called the whole congregation together for clarity and transparency. Kicking problems down the road only makes them worse.

Stay Focused on Your Calling

The apostles recognized they shouldn't abandon their primary calling to "serve tables." It wasn't that they couldn't or wouldn't do this work - it was that they shouldn't because they were called to something else that would benefit the church more: prayer and ministry of the Word.

Leaders must stay focused on their God-given calling rather than trying to do everything themselves. This requires the wisdom to know what to delegate and what to keep.

Delegate Wisely

The apostles proposed selecting seven men with specific qualifications:

- Good reputation in the community
- Full of the Holy Spirit
- Possessing wisdom for difficult circumstances

Effective delegation involves seeing the problem, listening to solutions, investing in qualified people, taking risks by giving full responsibility, and undergirding them with prayer and support.

What Makes Ministry Effective?

Spirit-Filled People

Why was being "full of the Holy Spirit" important for distributing food to widows? Because you can do ministry with wrong motives and still get results, but it won't glorify God and will eventually lead to burnout.

Ministry done with the wrong heart follows a predictable pattern: first you get bummed out, then you burn out from self-focus, and finally you bow out. Service to Jesus should never feel like a prison sentence - it's meant to be a blessing flowing from love.

Small Beginnings Lead to Big Opportunities

Several of these "table servers" went on to significant ministry. Stephen became a powerful Bible teacher and the first Christian martyr. Philip took the gospel to Samaria and saw great revival. Small ministry leads to big opportunities when done faithfully.

How Do You Know If Your Decisions Are Godly?

James 3:17-18 provides an excellent test for godly decision-making. Wisdom from above is:

- Pure - focused on God's glory, not self-driven
- Peaceable - brings peace to hearts
- Gentle - considers others' weaknesses
- Willing to yield - moved by the Holy Spirit with consideration for others
- Full of mercy - shows compassion
- Full of good fruits - produces positive outcomes
- Without partiality - shows no favoritism
- Without hypocrisy - demonstrates sincerity

What Were the Results of Handling Conflict Well?

When the early church handled this conflict with godly wisdom, five positive outcomes resulted:

1. Peace within the church - the solution pleased everyone
2. Preaching continued - the Word of God spread
3. People multiplied - disciples continued growing
4. Priests converted - even religious leaders came to faith
5. Satan's plans defeated - division was prevented and unity preserved

Interestingly, all seven men chosen had Greek names, showing the Hebrew leadership's sensitivity to the Hellenist concerns. This demonstrated genuine care for those who felt overlooked.

Life Application

When facing conflict in your church, family, or relationships, remember that problems are opportunities for God to work. Don't give Satan a foothold by allowing preferences to become divisions. Instead, seek God's wisdom, stay focused on your calling, and be willing to be part of the solution rather than just identifying problems.

Consider these questions: Are you a peacemaker or are you making pieces of the lives around you? When conflict arises, do you seek to understand different perspectives with humility? Are you willing to delegate or accept delegation for the greater good of God's kingdom? Most importantly, are you allowing the love of Christ to rule in your heart even when dealing with difficult situations?

The goal isn't to avoid all conflict, but to handle it in a way that brings glory to God and strengthens His church. Small acts of faithful service, done with the right heart, can lead to significant opportunities for ministry and impact.