

## RESOLVING CHURCH FAMILY DISPUTES

There is a whole nasty history about disputes, conflict and violence. Gen.3 records the origin of disputes. It is in this chapter where we find disagreements, conflicts, anger that fuels conflict coming in to take away the peace of man.

The family that was supposed to hear from God, a family that was supposed to stay together, and even build capacity to resolve disputes was not doing so! You see the reason we have conflict and even fail to resolve it, is because of failure to build oneness as a family of God that He intended us to be, and be able to value what God values.

The first conflict that came into being because of sin, is recorded in Gen. 4. It was the first armed conflict between family members. It came because of Jealousy. Jealousy is a killer! (Go to text)

The church which God saved from Egyptian bondage, again did not stay as one family, so they also didn't know how to resolve disputes! Right from the time of deliverance, they struggled with Moses taking them out of their comfort zone Egypt.

That church was characterized by hatred, attitude and negativity., and at one time they argued with Moses why he had married a Cushite woman. In Num. Num 12:1 *"Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman."*

The NT church family was not in any way different! Jesus lived in a heated conflicts and disputes with the Pharisees . in Matthew 12:38-42

*"Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*

In Matthew 16:1-4 The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. But He replied to them, *"When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' "And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?"*

So you see, He who was without sin, wasn't understood in a world full of sin. In John 4 we get a reflection of how the Jews and Samaritans hated one another (*read John 4*)

Church disputes have been taking center stage because of sin.

What is a dispute? A dispute is a situation defined by the parties' underlying goals and beliefs, mutual perception and communication, and the facts involved. It's a conflict or controversy; of claims or rights; demands on one side, met by contrary claims or allegations on the other side.

The conflict itself is a process of communication--an engagement of fields of expression. In a dispute, Passions and *beliefs* become evident; the nature and intensity of hidden interests surface.

In 1Cor.8:1ff *“Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. [NET Notes, TSK] 2 If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. 3 But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. [NET Notes, TSK]*

*4 Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.... (that’s belief) so there was a conflict, a dispute concerning who the true God is! Belief systems, cultures etc are very central when it comes to causing a dispute, as well as when it comes to resolving the disputes!*

One of the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century especially in international relations is that of terrorism! It's built on belief! Their war is non- conventional, they use human beings as shield, they attack civilians, they don't respect international humanitarian laws! They do all this becoz of beliefs! A belief can harbor sin! A culture becoz its human made can tolerate sin! You will never resolve a problem which has sin as its origin by using another problem! Since 1864 laws and protocols have been adopted to protect civillians and innocent people from terrorists. As incidents that degraded humans occurred, more protocols kept being adopted by states to deal with the abuse of rights! In 1948 there was a treaty about Genocide., yet in 1994 just in Rwanda here we had a tragedy! What am I saying? disputes will never be resolved by laws and protocols! They will be resolved by realizing how sinful our beliefs are, and how ready we are to acknowledge God as our creator and worship him!

So the early church much as it started as one family, it was characterized by disputes which they failed to resolve becoz of sin, pride, prejudice etc, and people just have to repent of all this!

You know back in military science, there was a man known as Thomas Aquinas. He is associated with the just war theory. For him when you have a dispute or conflict, you can justify war. He says, war should be fought if you want to address wrong, because its inevitable! But he proposes ways that if at all you have to fight, how should you fight the war? He does not address the question of acknowledging how sinful we are and propose better ways of resolving conflicts! Instead he proposes revenge. **Revenge** is a harmful action against a person or group in response to a grievance, be it real or perceived. It is also called payback, retribution, retaliation or vengeance; it is characterized as a form of justice! Yet for us believers, the bible says very clearly in **Lev. 19:18** *“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.”*

Now Right in Acts 6:1 we get to see disputes in the church as a family. *“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.”*

One of the things you have to note is the fact that “they were increasing in number!” Now technically in conflict, we have what we call Intra-conflicts and Inter-conflicts. Intra is within yourself.....you yourself are a walking dispute! while inter is between two parties! Inter-personal disputes occur when there are many people, and that’s what happened in Acts 6.... *“they were increasing in number”*

The church family holy as it is, set apart for God, yet they were having a dispute! So what did they do? Lets see in Acts 6:2 *“And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.”* They recognized that much as they were a family, united in one belief, they had different gifts. Gifts are good but they can become a source of dispute!

\*Before resolving any dispute or conflict you must know whether it is ripe or not! A dispute goes through certain stages:

**The Latent Stage:** This is also known as the Potential stage. It is when conditions for a conflict are ripe but the conflict has not yet come out. For example, two

people in marriage have completely two different personalities; you are failing to adjust, you are listening from your Mother too much, (*for us men*). There is no transparency and openness, (especially in finances) and you have not terminated past relationships! Everyone who wants to get married is at this stage!

**Perceived Stage:** Also known as the realization stage. This is where one realizes that there's a conflict. One perceives that there is a problem! This stage involves rumor mongering. This is where you hear people saying, "Honey you have changed"! During this stage, there is normally no evidence; it's just perceptions!

**Personalization Stage:** This is a stage where one can point out the actors in the dispute; ie. Who is responsible, or who is in the conflict. Here there are emotional feelings involved and people feel bad against each other. It is hard to talk to each other here. Here even maids, can tell that you are having a problem!

**Behavioral Stage:** This is when the dispute becomes manifest and visible through behaviour. Conflict behavior is seen here, and you can physically fight at this level. Behavioral stage is very dangerous for a Church or believers.

**Outcome Stage:** The outcome stage is the result of a dispute. It may be negative or positive, depending on how you have resolved the dispute.

As a family that has been set apart for God, we are not to act as non-believers do. In fact the whole bible is full of knowledge and revelation on how we can iron out our disputes amicably! There are two basic approaches on resolving disputes:

**1. Destructive methods:** Where there is suppression of the weaker party in conflict, by the stronger party. The stronger party always wants to suppress the weaker party. Professionally we call these as the "Upper dog" (super power) and the "Under dog" Even when you know you are in wrong, you don't accept! You don't repent because you think you are big!!! Today repent of this your wickedness!

**2. Constructive Approach method:** Where the focus is to solve the problem. This is where conflict/ a dispute is seen as a problem to be dealt with, and not the person. Many of us want to deal with the person and not the problems. But as believers we are saying deal with the problems. This is why many people get hurt when they resolve their issues in courts of law.

Let me teach you something here: there are two theories of Justice! Restorative & Retributive justice. Retributive justice is a theory of justice that focuses on the punishment of the offender. For them, Justice has been done when the wrong-doer has been sufficiently punished."

Restorative justice is an approach that focuses on the needs of victims and offenders; that instead of the need to satisfy the rules of law, a victim is given an active role in a dispute and offenders are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions, in order to repair the harm they've done—by apologizing, returning stolen money,

Courts and court processes follow what we call retributive Justice, but for us Christians we follow restorative justice where forgiveness, is applied instead of punishment!

How do we **resolve** issues as believers in this family of church!

1. **Seek to address the root causes of a dispute.** Look at those overriding common interests with your opposing party, and address them. Don't scratch the surface! Looking at common interests reduces the intensity of a conflict and scope and makes it easier to resolve. One of the interests can be shared loyalty to church, or family. Look at the common goal, that which brings you together! The more important this goal, the more likely it will help to avoid or dampen conflict that might hamper it.

In Romans 12:17-21 says that *"never pay back evil for evil to anyone respect what is right in the sight of all men. if possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of god, for it is written, "vengeance is mine, i will repay," says the lord.*

2. **Clarify your Dispute Situation**

You need to clarify your common goals and beliefs, mutual perception and communication, and the facts involved. In The conflict itself is a process of communication--an engagement of fields of expression.<sup>4</sup> Passions and beliefs become evident; the nature and intensity of hidden interests surface. In the process of achieving a new structure of expectations, conflict integrates underlying goals and mutual perceptions into a balance among the central interests at stake, the resolution, and the ability of the parties to support them. The balancing process can be shortened, intensity reduced, antagonism lessened, and the resulting

- expectations made more realistic by clarifying the conflict situation. In this four rules should help the parties.
3. **Determine the facts.** Fact finding is important in resolving conflict, conflicts are generated by a misperception or misunderstanding of the facts involved.
  4. **Be sensitive to the other's position and perspective.** See the conflict through his/ her eyes. In **Philippians 2:4** it says, *“do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”* Resolving disputes is partially empathizing with the other, understanding one's field of expression. That's why Paul said in **1Cor 8:13** *“Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”*
  5. **Seek Peace and not war!** You are a believer! In **Luke 17:3** *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”* In Proverbs 16:7 It says *“When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.”*

Finally we pray into the following scriptures:

Colossians 3:13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

Hebrews 12:15 “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.