

7 Ways to Help You Get Along With Church Folk

Conflict creates a very real and present threat to believers, not just with various denominations but within a single church as well. Though our faith alone should be enough to unite us, often it's not. Rightly handled, conflict does not have to cause division, and can actually cause God's people to come into greater unity. And what the enemy meant for evil, God will use for good. Skilled conflict resolution doesn't come naturally, however. It requires commitment to relationship, persistence in seeking a solution, and a willingness to forgive and love in spite of differences.

In order to walk in unity we must have the proper spiritual attire on. Colossians 3:12 says that we are to, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering[.]" Without these things, conflict will reign.

God-Honoring Ways to Facilitate Unity

Go to God first. Before you speak out rashly or in anger, go to God and get His perspective on the issue. Much conflict could quickly be snuffed out if we didn't speak or act immediately. During one moment of conflict, Moses erupted and he lost access to the Promised Land. However, when Moses did manage to keep his cool and get God's perspective on situations, he was able to resolve these situations and restore unity.

Think before you speak. Conflict often escalates when something is said in a harsh or accusing manner. Proverbs 25:11 reminds us that "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." Anything that we say, especially in moments of conflict, should be clear, kind, true, and appropriate. There is a right time and a right way to say everything that needs to be said.

Notice the "needs to be said" above. Not everything needs to be said. Part of thinking before you speak is knowing when not to speak at all.

When conflict arises, do a heart check and think about the goal for saying a particular thing—is it to put someone in their right place or to prove ourselves right? These are very good reasons to not speak at all. Before speaking be sure the Spirit directs and you speak in love.

Seek peace. When conflict surfaces, peacemakers are needed. Romans 12:18 reminds us that if it is at all possible, we are to "live peaceably with all men." That requires that we are proactive about seeking peace in the midst of conflict.

A very effective way to do that is to act in the opposite. Return love for hate, prayers for persecution, kind words for insults. In other words, don't play into the enemy's hand, our real source of conflict. (See Ephesians 6:12.) Instead, overcome evil—in this case, conflict—with good.

Be gentle. We never know what another person is going through, and sometimes personal situations can spill over into other relationships causing conflict. Make every effort to understand where the other person is coming from. Be willing to hear them out without judging or presuming to know their heart

motives. Choose to lay aside your own feelings and opinions in order to listen to someone else's.

No matter how frustrated or angry you feel, be gentle. Even in the midst of conflict, be willing to demonstrate that you still love and care for the other person. We all need grace; be the one to extend it.

Practice humility. Conflict should never be about who wins and who loses. It's not a game, because when conflict is resolved, we all win; when conflict persists, we all lose.

Pride is the downfall of many relationships. Unity requires humility. Refuse to assign blame, gossip, or otherwise contribute to the conflict. Admit that you could be wrong and take responsibility for your part in the issue. Stay humble before God and others, and seek resolution that doesn't include personal gain.

Go for the molehill, not the mountain. Conflict often escalates into a huge mountain when we build up layer after layer of hurt and offense. Any conflict should be dealt with immediately so it doesn't grow out of control.

Involve only those that need to be involved, which is very rarely everybody. "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (James 3:16). Act quickly and keep it small to avoid having a molehill turn into a mountain.

Persevere. If the conflict isn't resolved during the first attempt, don't give up. Ask God to give you the strength to continue seeking resolution, even when your attempts don't seem to yield any results.

Be lovingly consistent in your efforts and pray for the Holy Spirit's intervention. Never forget that God is bigger than the conflict. Walk by faith and not by sight and you'll soon realize that the conflict is just a small pebble in the hand of a mighty God.

While these are by no means the only ways that we can resolve conflict with other believers, they are some of the most effective, especially when combined. As we learn to stand united we will grow together in love.

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Tammy Darling writes from her home in Three Springs, Pennsylvania. She is the author of 1,300 published articles, and two books.