

# Nine Pitfalls of Church Conflict

By Chris Crain

Executive Director | Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, Alabama

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In the life of any church community, conflicts are inevitable. They can arise from various sources and at different times, causing tension and straining relationships among believers. James wrote, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask" (James 4:1-2, ESV). As followers of Christ, we need to be aware of situations that may create church conflict and proactively work toward resolution and reconciliation.

Conflict happens when desires, opinions, goals, or beliefs collide and can be healthy when it brings about positive change. However, unhealthy conflict usually begins when someone doesn't get what they want or expect.

Church conflict is a break in fellowship rooted in sinful behaviors. I hope to shed light on some common sources of conflict within churches, as well as critical moments that can intensify tensions. By understanding these factors, we can foster a more harmonious and loving church environment.

## **Nine Pitfalls of Church Conflict**

1. Moral Failure (Leadership): One of the most damaging situations leading to church conflict is when leaders experience moral failure. It erodes trust and can create division within the congregation. Biblically, churches must hold each other—leaders included—accountable and ensure that the members of the body exhibit integrity and character that aligns with biblical principles. In our general approach to failure, we should embrace grace. Jesus said, "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37, ESV).

2. Immaturity: Spiritual immaturity among church members can give rise to conflicts. A lack of emotional and relational maturity may result in misunderstandings, gossip, and judgmental attitudes. Some secretly believe, "I am right. I know what is best. Everyone else has the problem. They need to get on the right page." Encouraging spiritual growth

and discipleship within the church can help address this issue and foster a more gracious and understanding community. God's Word says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:18, ESV).

3. Failure to Meet Expectations: Unmet expectations can lead to disappointment and frustration within the church. It is important to establish clear and realistic expectations while fostering open communication to avoid misunderstandings and address any concerns promptly and lovingly. From job/ministry descriptions to governing documents to leadership meetings, setting the right expectations is essential. Good work in this area is a way to obey this biblical command: "[Be] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3, ESV).

4. Failure to Implement Change Appropriately: Change is often necessary for a church to grow and adapt to the needs of its members and the surrounding community. However, when change is implemented poorly or without proper communication, it can create resistance and conflict. Leaders must ensure that change is introduced with transparency, patience, and a spirit of collaboration. Most Baptists strongly believe in the doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers. Because the Body of Christ has direct access to God through the power of the Holy Spirit, the church should be able to discern God's will and move forward together in unity!

5. Personality Differences that Drive Sinful Responses: Each person brings a unique personality to the church community. Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 share the variety of gifts that God's Spirit gives to the church. Unfortunately, these differences can sometimes devolve into conflict when individuals respond sinfully to one another. Cultivating a grace, humility, and forgiveness culture can help mitigate conflicts stemming from personality differences.

6. People with Power and Influence: Conflict can arise when individuals within the church exert power and influence in unscriptural and self-serving ways. It is crucial to encourage servant leadership and emphasize the biblical principles of humility, accountability, and seeking the best interests of others. When things go wrong, we must quickly forgive and seek restoration. Jesus said, "But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15, ESV).

7. Using Church Leadership Positions for Self-centered Reasons: Conflicts are bound to occur when individuals seek leadership positions for personal gain or to promote their own agendas. Church leaders should be selected based on humility, servant-heartedness, and commitment to Christ's teachings.

8. Idolatry: Preferences, traditions, demands, and even the pursuit of success can become idols that divide the church. Our ultimate allegiance should be to God alone, seeking unity in Christ while valuing diversity within the body of believers.

9. Critical Moments: Leadership transitions, periods of change, busy seasons, and crises are often critical moments that can heighten conflicts within the church. Recognizing these moments and responding with wisdom, empathy, and intentional communication can help you navigate potential conflicts more effectively.

In conclusion, conflicts within a church can be challenging, but with a humble and Christ-centered approach, they can also provide opportunities for growth, healing, and increased unity. Remember, not all conflict is unhealthy; we need different perspectives to help us achieve the best outcomes. Let us strive to be aware of the potential pitfalls that create unhealthy conflict.

When—not if—church conflicts occur, may we work diligently towards resolving conflicts in a manner that glorifies God and strengthens our bonds as a church family.

May the love, grace, and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ guide us as we navigate through these challenges together. Sometimes—especially when the offense is small—we need to forgive, let it go, and put the situation into God's hands: “Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense” (Proverbs 19:11, ESV).

With sincere gratitude,

Dr. Chris Crain, Executive Director

Birmingham Metro Baptist Association