

One day a preacher went to his monthly meeting with the elders and presented an idea that he believed he had received from God.

After giving his most impassioned plea and really “selling” the idea to the elders, they voted down the preacher’s proposal 12-1.

The elder leading the meeting said to the preacher, “Sorry, but it looks like the only vote you received for your proposal was the vote you cast for it.”

The elder continued, “Well, that’s all we had on the agenda tonight.” So he asked the preacher to lead a prayer to close the meeting.

The preacher did not want to give up on an idea that he felt God had given him, and so he lifted up his hands to heaven and prayed with all his heart, “Lord, I know my brothers here do not have the same vision that you have given me. Please help them see that this is not my vision, but that it is your vision. Please give us a sign.

In Jesus name, AMEN!”

Immediately, a lightning bolt with a loud clap of thunder bursts in through the window in the meeting room, striking the table, splitting it in two and knocking all the elders to the floor. As the dust cleared, the preacher looked at the elders and said, “So, what do you think about my proposal now?”

The lead elder sighed and said, “Well, I guess that’s 12 votes to 2, still not enough to pass your proposal.”

In the scripture from the New Testament Peter went to the church of Jerusalem with the vision God gave him. Peter might be joyful and excited as he was reporting to the church the advancement of God’s Kingdom to the Gentiles. They had received the Word of God! It was great news of accomplishment.

But instead of appreciation and recognition, what he received is objection and criticism. The believers of Jerusalem were not happy that Peter ate and

intermingled with the Gentiles. They thought that Peter had betrayed their trust. They accused him of doing something that was unlawful. Peter obeyed the will of God but then experienced hostility like he had never known before. Peter faced a conflict with Jewish Believers.

One thing most of us would do anything to avoid is conflict. Nobody likes to be confronted, But there comes a time in life when we have to confront. We're quick to believe the lie that if we just avoid the conflict, or at least minimize it, then it will diminish over time and eventually go away. However, conflict worsens with negligence. It doesn't just go away.

In the book, *The Safest Place on Earth*, Larry Crabb wrote, "The difference between spiritual and unspiritual community is not whether conflict exists, but it is rather in our attitude toward it and our approach to handling it. When conflict is seen as an opportunity to draw more fully on spiritual resources, we have the makings of spiritual community"

Our question is not whether conflicts will come, but how we will handle them. In the healthiest churches, the leadership doesn't announce, "There will be no conflicts here; that's not how we do things." Rather, the message will be that when conflicts do arise, we won't run from them. Conflict is hard. Facing it is uncomfortable. Experiencing conflict affects our daily rhythms and routines. Conflict can even cause us to doubt God's goodness, His will for our lives, or His love for us. However, in fact, God often uses conflict to refine our character, draw us closer to Him, and, ultimately, to glorify Himself.

In Acts 11, Peter did not avoid or neglect conflict, but he used conflict as an opportunity to demonstrate the love and power of God.

Peter could have thought that Jewish Christians in Jerusalem was on the wrong side of the fence, and were missing God. So, Peter could have thrown up his hands and said, “I give up! You guys are hopeless! You don’t even care about the lost people God wants us to reach!”

However, he began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened. He speaks with divine anointing from God. He boldly claimed that the Holy Spirit is talking to him directly. He also mentioned that six brothers were also present with him to attest the veracity of his story.

Peter patiently communicate with them how God convince him about the conversion of Gentiles to Christian faith until God opened the heart of conservative Jewish believers.

Healthy communication is the way that conflict can be resolved in our lives.

Resolving conflict is different from avoiding or managing conflict. We have to learn to communicate in times of conflict.

In Peter’s saying in Acts 11, we can find a specific way to communicate in the situation of conflict. He repeatedly said, “I was in the city of Joppa,” “As I looked at it closely,” and “I also heard a voice.” He used I-statements.

In the 1960s Thomas Gordon used the term “I-messages” while doing play therapy with children. I-messages are often used with the intent to be assertive without

putting the listener on the defensive. It is contrasted with “you-messages”, which often begins with the word “you” and focuses on the person spoken to.

For example, If I say, “You have made me feel very upset.” The listener may feel it necessary to defend themselves. Such a situation will often lead to a disconnection between all involved. If, instead I were to use 'I-statements', I could say it this way: “I feel pretty upset that this thing has come between us.” As we use I-statements, this decreases the chance that the other person will become defensive.

Peter did neither pointing the finger, nor used “you-messages” to blame Jewish Christians. Peter used “I-statements” to say exactly what's going on. It's delivering a clean, clear explanation of how it is from his side and how he would like it to be. Then, Acts 11:18 says, “When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.” Conflict between Peter and Jewish believers was resolved.

As you know, skilled conflict doesn't come easy. It requires dedication, persistence and the willingness to forgive when things go poorly. In other words, it mirrors the rest of our Christian walk.

So, Paul teaches us in Colossians 3:12-13, “As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord<sup>[f]</sup> has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” Dealing with conflict can take varying amounts of mental, emotional, and physical energy. God's goal is always reconciliation! God's goal is community! God calls us to be peacemakers.

God created us as unique individuals. Our diversity leads to natural differences as we each bring different perspectives to life. The problem is not that we are different, the problem is what we do with our disagreements. We should seek unity in our relationships and not demand uniformity.

I want to finish the sermon with a story.

A young man about to enter the regular army was talking with an old soldier. The old soldier had been giving him some strong advice on the subject of obeying orders. "But suppose, General," said the young man, "orders sometimes conflict. What am I to do in a case like that?"

"Well, in the first place," replied the old soldier, "they never will if they emanate from persons who have the right to order. If you find yourself at some time seemingly subject to such conditions, you may depend upon it that there has been a mistake somewhere. In that case, however, the safe way is to find out who the superior is and obey him."

Today God invites us to seek to follow his commands and trust His wisdom through even the most difficult times of conflict. Conflict is not something to avoid or ignore. It is an opportunity for the triumph of grace. When we strive to reflect God's love, forgiveness, grace, and mercy to those we are in conflict with, we provide a beautiful witness to God's character, grow more like Jesus Christ and glorify Him.