

BIBLICAL GUIDELINES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE CHURCH

“Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3)

Obviously there is no such thing as a perfect church, in fact if you were to find it, the moment you entered the doors you would ruin it. Even though our position in Christ is perfect, our practice is far from it. Actually, it's our responsibility to be practicing our position every day. As sinners saved by grace we should all be cutting each other a break and following the Golden Rule. “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the Prophets (Mt. 7:12; Lk. 6:31). Unfortunately there will always be ‘friction in the flock.’ Those problems will not just go away. We can not ignore them or pretend they don't exist, they will only continue to build up and get worse. Therefore, we had better be prepared to get help from the Lord and others. You need a plan of action as a starting point to move in a solution-oriented direction. Hopefully this study can provide you with some necessary structure to face any crisis that may occur. It is absolutely imperative that the Church of Jesus Christ especially, models how to deal with every person and problem according to the Word of God. It has given wisdom for thousands of years on how we are to live in this world abundantly, effectively, fruitfully and victoriously. It is critical that we “contend for the faith” (Jude 3). There is so much at stake –the doctrinal and moral purity, unity and maturity, individual lives of people in the church, and the testimony and witness of the church. Most importantly of course, the Name of Christ, God's reputation and His glory are on the line.

How much we love God is seen by how quick we are to obey Him. After all, why call Him Lord (even Lord of His Church) and do not the things that He says (Lk. 6:46). As you begin the process of resolving problems in the church, there are a few foundational areas to consider before you proceed. Here are four essential questions that reflect some necessary commitments that all in leadership need to make. It is important that everyone is on the same page right from the start, so that the Holy Spirit to be free to work.

1. Are you all committed to the spiritual qualifications of leadership?

Those in spiritual leadership have a greater responsibility before the Lord. You are to be examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:2-4). There is a higher standard that we are to be held accountable to. Our submission to the Lordship of Christ in every area of our lives is expected. In fact, if you are in a leadership role as an elder or deacon, which are the two ‘official’ Biblical offices revealed for the New Testament Church, you had better qualify according to God's characteristics. Examine yourself in light of these qualifications set forth in Scripture. Do not forget that these qualifications are in God's Word for obvious reasons. Many times the very one that is not ‘in line’ with these things (and the things to follow) will be your biggest problem, which brings nothing but gridlock. So we must take these matters very seriously.

1Tim. 3:1-13

Titus 1:5-9

Where are you at in your commitment to these things? Many problems become worse if those in leadership are not even qualified to be in the position of “decision-making” and leading the flock according to the blue print God Himself put forth. When each one in leadership is committed to cultivating these characteristics and levels of maturity, they will be in a deeper spiritual unity with each other and the Lord in accordance with His will.

2. Are you committed to Biblical unity and love? (Jn. 13:35)

“By this all men will know you are my disciples if you have love for one another.” Also Jesus prayed for our oneness (Jn. 17:11,20-23) because our witness to the world is at stake (vs.23)! No wonder Satan attacks in all kinds of areas and issues that polarize people and have the potential of splitting churches. Therefore, you also need to be committed to Biblical unity. Observe its importance:

Eph. 4: 3-6,13

Ps. 133:1-3

2 Cor. 13:11

Rom. 12:5

1 Cor. 12:25 (12-27)

Rom. 12:16

Col. 3:14

Rom. 15:6

Phil. 1:27-30

Phil. 2:2-4

Phil. 3:15-16

Phil. 4:2-3

1 Cor. 1:10

Rom. 16:17

1 Pet. 3:8

Titus 3:10-11

John 17

3. Are you committed to unanimity?

According to 1 Cor. 2:16 "we have the mind of Christ"- meaning that this unanimity is the norm for Christ's church. In fact, if there is disagreement, then it stands to reason that someone doesn't have the mind of Christ. Obviously Christ is not divided and would not contradict His will.

So, it is all the more important and better that a decision be put on hold if the leadership is not in unity. In fact this is a time that the Lord wants you to slow down and make sure you're not running ahead of Him. He wants to lead His church, so let Him! This is where those who have the "instant society" mentality must learn to wait on the Lord (Isa. 40:28-31; 64:4). Some issues may be 'preferential' in nature and you can 'agree to disagree' in certain issues, as long as all are completely supportive of the final decisions. Sometimes there is a place for legitimate compromise. However, there are clearly those issues that are "non-negotiable" – where Scripture speaks clearly. These are not open to debate (discussion of application, yes) but not a 'vote' because God expects unconditional surrender of our will to His (Lk. 22:42).

Therefore, since God commands unity, oneness, like-mindedness and harmonious relationship, we had better quickly get in line with His revealed will and structure everything (marriage, family, church...) accordingly. Otherwise, Satan will continue to roam around 'devouring' (1 Pet. 5:8), strategizing (2 Cor. 2:11), gaining ground (Eph. 4:27), and leaving a path of casualties of spiritual warfare. So, start 'agreeing' to these Biblical principles and guidelines and start glorifying God (Rom. 15:6).

4. Are you willing to sign a covenant/contract holding yourselves accountable to a plan of action resolving things in a Biblical way that would honor God?

Finally, I strongly 'suggest' –that you all sign a covenant committing yourselves to some/all of these guidelines. If someone won't sign it... (why?) or later refuses to cooperate, that may very well reveal an unteachable spirit, unsubmissiveness, stubborn pride, a hard heart or one who's not committed to discovering "the mind of Christ" on these matters. It is better that they step down from their leadership role than to be a "Jonah in the boat" (Jonah 1:1-15) or an "Achan in the camp" (Josh. 7). In fact they may even have to be removed if they can't cooperate (Titus 3:10) or if they force their way (3 Jn. 9-11). There is no room for the 'my way or the highway' attitude. That may sound harsh but Paul said to do it for the sake of the purity and unity of the church (1 Cor. 5:6-13). God requires a servant's heart, which is willing to sacrifice and submit in order to meet the needs of others, as well as cooperating with the Holy Spirit.

The following scriptural principles are arranged as a suggested checklist of steps to help you unify yourselves individually and corporately, in order to pursue a solution oriented direction. Defeat and failure are inevitable if you do not follow some plan of action.

PERSONAL FOUNDATIONAL PREREQUISITES

Someone once said that our greatest spiritual growth comes not necessarily from learning new information as much as it comes through applying what we already know. This is truly the case whenever we are at a crossroads in making decisions. We tend to neglect and over look the obvious. Unfortunately many times we have become immune to certain Biblical insights forgetting that they are God's terms which we must not sidestep.

1. HUMBLE YOURSELF -before the Lord

2 Chron. 7:14

1 Peter 5:5-6

Micah 6:8

James 4:6-10

This heart attitude and action is the starting point because God sets Himself up in opposition to the proud (James 4:6; Isaiah 14:12-14; Daniel 4:30-37; Acts 12:21-23). Humbling oneself is the continual acknowledgement of who we are, what we've done, where we're at ...in light of who God is. (Isa. 6:5; Ps.22:6; Lk. 5:8; Rom. 7:14; Job 40:4; Job 40:17; Lk. 18:9-14; Gen. 32:10; 1Tim. 1:15) When you honestly come before God (on His terms), only then will He respond by giving you grace (whatever you need!) James 4:6 also see vs. 10.

2. BE TEACHABLE –Here is where we must abandon several “comfort zone” attitudes that cripple ones ability to listen and learn: “I have heard these things before.” “I am beyond all this.” “I already know this.” “Do not confuse me with the facts – my mind is already made up.” It's common to hear these statements for they reflect a stubborn pride that would quench the Spirit and retard, if not halt, one's spiritual maturity. Isn't it interesting that when Jesus told the “parable of the soils” (four heart conditions) He said, “Be careful **how** you hear” (Lk. 8:18). Being teachable means being unconditionally open and honest with God and others so that when the truth is “brought to bear” in my life, no matter what I use to think or believe, I am willing to admit I was wrong and make the appropriate changes. It also involves the courage to accept whatever may happen and no matter what people may think, I must do the right thing according to God's revealed will. Proverbs 1:5, 7-8; 5:1; 7:1-3; 8:32-36; 9:8-9; 10:8; 12:15; 13:1; 15:5,10,12,31; 16:20; 18:2; 19:20,27; 21:11; 22:27; 23:12; 28:9; 29:1. Some further example: Acts 16:14; 17:10-12, 17; 18:7-11, 24-28. Being teachable means that I have a receptive, respectful attitude whenever someone is speaking. I need to prayerfully discern what I am hearing with several key questions in mind. (1) Lord, what do you want me to learn and understand from this person? (2) Is what they are saying consistent with God's Word? (Or contradictory?) (3) Am I listening with the right attitude? (4) Are there any areas in my life where I may need to change adjust or “upgrade” my thinking and/or living? (5) What does God want me to do with what I have learned? How can I apply it? (6) Who now, does God want me to share this information with, in order to edify them?

- “He that has ears, let him hear” is an appeal to teachableness and action regarding what Jesus said. (Matt.11:15; 13:9,43; Mark 4:9,23,7:16; Luke 8:8,45; Rev. 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 13:9)
- Develop a teachable Spirit. Here is how to pray (Ps. 25:4-5; 27:11; 86:11; 119:12, 18, 26, 33, 64, 66, 68, 73, 108, 124, 133, 135; 143:10) Here's what to do. 1 Timothy 4:15-16; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14-17; James 1:22-25.
- Scripture warns us about quenching the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19) (many warnings in Proverbs). In fact Acts 7:57; 28:23-27 and 2 Timothy 4:3-4 illustrate why some “resist” the truth. Why else do people resist change or truth?
- Make sure you are ready and willing to yield to the wisdom from above, Js. 3:13-18. In contrasting the wisdom of the world and the wisdom from above James defines God's wisdom as “willing to yield” (17) meaning teachable. It doesn't matter what I've thought or how it has always been done or even what man's popular policies, bylaws or laws say. God's Word is the final absolute authority to which we must all yield. I am responsible to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29; Heb. 11:23). If man's laws or opinions clearly violate God's truths, then we must all submit to the Lordship of Christ, even if I am left standing alone on the Word of God. Surrendering my will to His will is not optional. The teachable heart will be open and obedient to the Lord in all matters as well as being approachable.
- Be approachable – periodically (or maybe at the end of each year) ask those around you:
 1. Is there anything I've ever done to offend you or anyone else you know of?
 2. Is there anything I need to resolve and make right in my life...?
 3. Is there anyway I can improve or do things more efficiently?

3. EXAMINE YOUR OWN HEART -before the Lord. Here is where you take personal responsibility to see if there is anything in your life that may be hindering God from using you. Remember Achan (Josh. 7) or Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

Ps. 26:2 1 Cor. 11:28

Ps. 139:23 2 Cor. 13:5

Mat. 7:3-6

Ask God to show you what may be hindering the Holy Spirit from working in and through you. This is how you begin to cleanse yourself in order to be a "useful vessel" for the Master. (2 Timothy 2:21-22)

• What kind of heart attitude do you have? (Matt.13:3-23; Luke 8:4-18) observe the 4 types of "soil" condition in which the seed (Word) falls on.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

• What hinders God's Word/Spirit from working in and through us?

Ps. 66:18

Lk. 8:14

Gen. 3:7-13

Rom. 4:20

Is. 28:15b

Rom. 7:7-25

Jer. 5:25

Rom. 11:20-23, 30-32

Matt. 13:21-22

2 Cor. 10:4-5

Mk. 7:13

Gal. 6:9

Matt. 13:58

Heb. 3:13 (hard-heartedness)

Matt. 15:8-9

Js. 1:22, 26 (being deceived)

• Personal Evaluation Questions "Search me O God" (Ps.139:23). Take time to write out the things that God's Spirit convicts you of. Use a separate sheet of paper(s).

- a. Have I fully dedicated myself to God? (Rom. 12:1-2)
- b. What sins have I not taken seriously enough to deal with? (pride, lust, selfishness, anger, worry, covetousness)
- c. Am I right with God? And others?
- d. What may I be trying to avoid or cover up? (Prov. 28:13)
- e. Have I been completely honest in all my dealings?
- f. Where have I gotten lazy or apathetic? (Rev. 3:15-16)
- g. How am I handling my money?
- h. Where's my spiritual relationship at with the Lord? Word? Prayer? Worship? Fellowship? Spiritual gifts? Witnessing? Serving?
- i. Am I really "qualified" to serve in spiritual leadership? (1Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9)
- j. Do I need to make restitution for any thing in the past?
- k. Is there genuine confession and repentance in my life or is it superficial? (Jer. 8:11)
- l. Am I having victory in my thought life and over temptation? (2 Cor. 10:3-5)
- m. What does my schedule prove to be my priorities? (Mt. 6:33)
- n. Am I responding right to trials, temptations, and testings? (Mt. 4:1-11)
- o. What area of my life is the Holy Spirit not controlling? (Eph. 5:18-21)
- p. What past failures have I not made right?
- q. Are my goals pleasing to the Lord?
- r. What and who am I really placing my trust and security in?
- s. What am I placing value in? Eternal or temporal things?
- t. Am I avoiding that which hinders my moral purity? (Rom. 13:14)
- u. Is there any thing in my life that is unresolved?
- v. Are there any relationships in my life that are unreconciled? (Mt. 5: 23-24)

- w. What attitudes or behavior need to be more Christ like? (1 Jn. 2:2-6)
- x. Is there anyone who I have not completely forgiven?
- y. Is there anyone who I need to go to to ask for forgiveness?
- z. Am I being a good and faithful steward of all that God has entrusted me with?
- aa. Have I behaved inappropriately or in ways not honoring God? What's going on in my heart? Is there idolatry (1Cor. 10:14) or spiritual adultery? (Jas. 4:1-4)
- bb. Have I spoken words that have hurt or offended others?
- cc. Why am I doing what I am doing? (motives)
- dd. How clearly is the fruit of the spirit evident in my life?

It's also a good idea to ask your spouse or a friend to give some input by asking "Have you observed anything in my life where I may have offended someone or where I need to change or improve?" Remember, this is all about getting the log out of your own eye so you can clearly see to help others with their "splinter." We must be teachable and approachable if we are going to help others. One person wisely said, "The unexamined life is not worth living."

4. CONFESS YOUR SIN (1 Jn. 1:5-10; Ps. 51; Jas. 5:16; Isa. 29:15-16) **AND FORSAKE IT** (Prov. 28:13). The word 'confess' means 'to say the same things as'- to agree with God and call what you've been guilty of... sin... admitting that you've broken His law(s), offended His holiness, grieved and quenched His Spirit, rebelled against His authority, rejected His will and replaced it with your own way. Most assuredly God is listening to your heart more than your words and here's where being broken and honest before God comes in. You must take full responsibility for your sin, no justifying, rationalizing, excuse making, minimizing, smoke screening, denying, hiding, covering up, no redefining with 'psycho babble' or new terminology that just relabeled 'sin,' no attacking others, or shifting the focus, no lying or twisting the truth, no defensiveness or avoidance. See Isa. 28:15. No blame shifting – "it's someone else's fault." You can't blame your parents, boss, job, friends, pastor, church, childhood, environment, circumstances, spouse, children, personality, or anything or anyone in the world, not Satan, not even God (Gen.3:8-13). But rather, you need to say, "I am responsible for what I've done. I am accountable to God for my words, behaviors, responses...(Rom. 14:12; Matt. 12:36; 15:18-19). I sinned by _____ and I agree with God (His word) that I am guilty of _____. Would you forgive me?"

Then praise God for His forgiveness and thank Him for the cleansing blood of Christ on the cross without which is no forgiveness (Heb. 9:22). Sometimes confession must also be made to others (Jas. 5:16) especially if they are involved in our lives in some way. Be tactful and appropriate in this area –it could lead to revival or rejection –so make sure you're saying what God wants you to say and if in doubt get some further counsel regarding those issues and what should or shouldn't be said. Remember unconfessed sin will obviously hinder not only your spiritual growth but your ability in discerning God's will and truth.

5. REPENT –Godly sorrow (brokenness over sin from honest humble confession) produces repentance (2 Corinthians 7:9-10) **AND REPLACE SIN** (Eph.4:20-32). This is the next step in taking personal responsibility for your responses, attitudes, actions...

2 Chron.7:14

Acts 3:20

Rev. 2:5

1 Thess. 1:9

Matt. 3:8

Luke 13:1-5

Repentance means, "changing one's mind" which leads to a change in one's life. Turning from sin means turning to righteousness (1 Thess. 1:9). Paul tells us we need to "put off" the old man and "put on," replace it with the new man (Eph. 4:20-32). Only when we confess and forsake sin by replacing it, will we truly experience God's mercy (Prov.28:13) and forgiveness (Jn. 8:1-11; Is. 43:25; 55:7; Jer. 31:34; Ps. 103:8-11).

6. RECONCILE RELATIONSHIPS –Jesus said that before we can 'go on' with God (even before giving an offering) we must be reconciled to our brother.

Matt. 5:23-24

2Cor.5:18-20

Rom. 12:17-21

- Make every effort to get things right and make peace, after all we are to be “peace-makers” (Matt.5:9).
- Sometimes it is necessary to get outside help in reconciling people (Phil. 4:2-3).
- Remember unreconciled relationships also hinder spiritual progress and discernment.

7. PRAY –You’ve got to be seeking God in your own life if you expect prayer to work elsewhere. Here are just a few Biblical insights that should not only be a motivation but a reality in your daily prayer life.

- a. Start giving thanks in everything (1Thess. 5:18)
- b. Keep on asking for wisdom (Js. 1:5)
- c. List and make your requests known (Phil. 4:6-7)
- d. Come boldly before Gods throne for mercy and grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:14-16)
- e. Cast all your cares on Him (1 Pet. 5:7)
- f. Come to Him with your burdens (Matt. 11:28-30)
- g. Pray that you may not enter into temptation (Lk. 22:40)
- h. Pray for those in authority over you (1 Tim. 2:1)
- i. Pray because the Holy Spirit intercedes according to Gods will (Rom. 8:26-27)
- j. Pray for Gods will to be done (Lk. 22:42)
- k. Pour out your heart to God (Ps. 62:8)
- l. Pray in faith (Matt. 21:22; Js. 1:6)
- m. Pray because it avails much (Js. 5:16)
- n. Cry out to God (Ps. 27:7; 34:6)
- o. Pray with confidence according to God’s will (1 Jn. 5:14)
- p. Pray in Jesus name (Jn. 14:13-14)
- q. If you don’t pray you’ll faint (give up)(Lk. 18:1)
- r. (Eph. 1:15-23)
- s. (Matt. 6:1-15)
- t.
- u.
- v.
- w.
- x.
- y.
- z.

8. GET INTO THE WORD -DAILY (Psalm1) and GET THE WORD INTO YOU (John 15:7)

- If you are praying to be teachable and asking God for wisdom to understand and do His will, then start reading God’s word! All scripture is inspired (God breathed) (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and profitable for
 - Doctrine- teaching us what is right
 - Conviction- exposing what is wrong
 - Correction- showing us how to get right
 - Instruction- showing us how to stay right

The Word of God makes us “complete, thoroughly equipped for all good works” (2 Tim. 3:17). It is the all-sufficient, absolute authority and truth, which reveals everything we need to know about God, how to have a relationship with Him and accomplishing His will. We have “all the things we need that pertain to life and Godliness through his precious promises” (2 Pet. 1:3-5). We are blessed if we don’t walk in the counsel of the ungodly... but meditate on the word day and night (Ps. 1:1-6). It is the only truth that can save us (Js. 1:18-21), cleanse us (Jn. 15:3; Eph. 5:26), sanctify us (Jn. 17:17), produce faith (Rom. 10:17), cause spiritual growth (1Pet. 2:2), build us up (Acts 20:32), set us free (John 8:32), prevent us from sin (Ps. 119:9,11), help us overcome sin and defeat Satan (Mt. 4:1-11; Eph. 6:16-17), discern between truth and error (1 Jn. 4:1-6), and guides and directs us in the way we are to go (Ps. 119:105,133). These are spiritual words which produce spiritual life! (Jn. 6:63; Heb. 4:12) We must be diligent to study it accurately (2 Tim.

2:15) search it (Acts 17:11) let it dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16) meditate on it daily (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:1-2) and be doers not just hearers who delude themselves (Jn. 13:17; Js. 1:22-25). We should be “abiding in Him (Jn. 15:1-7). Since we are “complete in Christ” (Col. 2:9) and “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Him” (Col. 2:3), then we can confidently expect Him to guide us in every decision we make, especially regarding his Church! If we are teachable, we will be honest with God’s truth which is settled forever in heaven (Ps. 119:89). And submit our will to His (Lk. 22:42) no matter what we or others think or ‘feel.’ There will most certainly be principles and guidelines that God will reveal, that relate to our problems and conflicts in every area of life. We have but to discover and apply them by putting them into a plan of action that we will commit ourselves to obeying. So when conflicts, problems, and trials come up, be the first one to defuse the tension and start moving in a solution-oriented direction by asking:

- What do you think God wants you /me/us to do?
- How can we solve this according to Scripture?
- What does Gods Word say about _____ ?
- Are there any relevant Biblical principles we can apply to this?
- What all do we need to do to solve these problems **now**?

Think about 1 Cor. 2:16 for a moment. “But we have the mind of Christ” -the same word for “understanding” (mind) is used here implying that as believers because we have (1) the Word of God and (2) the Spirit of God, we can know what He wants us to do in every situation. “He will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly’ ... (Ps. 84:11). “He will perfect that which concerns me (Psalms 138:8). Also see John 7:16-17 implying Christ’s deep commitment to give us assurance of what’s right if we’re willing to do it. Observe what the living and powerful Word of God can do:

Js. 1:18,21	Jn. 15:3	Eph. 5:26	Jn. 6:63; 8:32
Jn. 17:17	Rom. 10:17	Ps. 1:1-6	Heb. 4:12
1 Pet. 2:2	Acts 20:32	1 Thess. 2:13	1 Jn. 4:1-6
Ps. 119:9,11	Mt. 4:1-11	Eph. 6:16-17	Ps. 119:105,133

Also see: Psalm 119:18, 25-38, 47, 71, 89, 97-100, 130, 165 List the benefits of God’s Word from Ps. 119.

This is the only way to develop like-mindedness and unity. The mind of Christ is revealed through His Spirit using the Word. This is the final authority by which we must all be transformed and renewed in our minds (Eph. 4:23). We must all obey, follow and submit to the Scriptures. No one is exempt. We must hold each person accountable to doing what God says through His Word regardless of “feelings,” “opinions,” “popularity,” “relationships” or “circumstances.” We must bring the Word of God to bear in each and every situation and ask, “What does God’s Word say about this?” We must examine “the whole counsel of God” and be faithful to communicate the truth in love (Eph. 4:15; 1 Cor. 13) as we apply it in our lives and in the lives of others! (Js. 1:22-25). Jesus explained the vital relationship that we must have with Him in Jn. 15. If we are not connected to the source (abiding in Him) like the branches to the vine we can do nothing (Jn. 15:5).

Don’t just be in the Word of God to search for solutions –Seek the God of the Word! Having a worshipful attitude when spending time in the Word builds intimacy with God. Intimacy with God is the key to conceiving and birthing all God’s plans, power and purposes into our lives! We are as strong or weak depending on how we cultivate our knowledge of God and our relationship to Him. It is too easy to substitute “busyness” for time with the Lord. Observe Lk. 10:38-42 – Martha was focused on the service for Christ, Mary was focused on the Lord- “the one thing needed”- “the good part, which will never be taken away”... and it was a choice! I too have been guilty of loving ministry more than the Lord, but the more I “taste” and “experience” the Lord the more I want. No amount of activity in the Kings service will ever make up for neglecting the King himself!!!

9. **DEPEND ON GOD’S SPIRIT** (Rom. 8:4-14) we are told to be controlled by the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26). Victory only comes to those who are completely relying on Him – not their own limited power (Zeph. 4:6). The Holy Spirit is our teacher and our Helper (Comforter) (Jn. 14:25). He is the Spirit of Truth (Jn. 15:26) and will guide us in all truth (Jn. 16:13), as well as convict (Jn.

16:8-11). He dwells in us (Rom. 8:9) in order to lead us (Rom. 8:14) and bears an inner witness to our Spirit (Rom. 8:16). The Holy Spirit makes intercession for us according to the will of God (Rom. 8:26-27). He will never contradict what is revealed in the written Scriptures... He will reveal it, therefore, His guidance will be consistent with the Word of God (Jn. 16:13). Therefore, if someone is 'feeling' led to say or do something that clearly 'goes against' what is already 'written,' be assured it is not the Holy Spirits leading! (And that's another problem that has to be addressed.) God's Word is not a book of suggestions, options or opinions to be brought to a popular majority vote – anything short of unconditional obedience is to grieve (Ephesians 4:30) and quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19) and give Satan 'more ground' (Ephesians 4:27). Every believer (especially in leadership) had better understand the Spirit filled life.

10. BE PREPARED FOR SPIRITUAL WARFARE “We are not wrestling against flesh and blood but wicked spiritual powers” (Eph.6:10-18). Don't ever minimize Satan and/or his demonic forces trapping people in sin and taking them captive (keeping them in bondage) (2 Tim. 2:23-26). Obviously we should not be on a “witch-hunt” or looking for a demon spirit in every Snickers bar. However, one would either be a fool or completely Biblically illiterate to ignore the New Testament teaching on the matter. Well over 200 times the New Testament speaks of the reality of this unseen “force,” these persons of evil influencing, trapping, blinding, deceiving, tempting, afflicting, weakening, hindering, planting evil thoughts, enticing, “sifting,” possessing, taking away the seed (Word) from hearts, striving, devouring, hurling fiery darts, beguiling, attacking, and causing and creating all kinds of problems for God's people. Actually he's been at it from the very beginning... to the very end! Certainly we must be balanced in our focus “looking unto Jesus” (Heb. 12:1) not the enemy. We can rejoice continually in the fact that neither he nor his schemes against the church will prevail, since Jesus promises to build it (Mt. 16:18). Besides that, he is a defeated foe to crush under our feet (Rom 16:20). So we better know how to have victory over Satan and win these spiritual battles. We are told by Paul that we should not be ignorant of Satan's devices (2 Cor. 2:11). The Devil is a roaring lion out to devour (1 Pet. 5:8-9). He is also the “accuser of the brethren” (Rev.12:9-10) and wants to produce animosity, slander, gossip, hurt, unforgiveness, pride, selfishness, anger, impurity, all sorts of sinful words and actions that polarize relationships, create division, dissent and divisiveness, thereby destroying the love and unity that Jesus declared to be the distinguishing characteristics of His disciples (Jn. 13:34-35) and His church (Jn. 17:11, 20-23)! So you had better put on the whole armor of God so you can stand against the strategies of Satan (Eph. 6:10-18). AND learn how to resist the Devil (James 4:7) by submitting to God –so that Satan will flee! Read Matt. 4:1-11 and notice that Jesus Himself (The Word Incarnate) used the Scriptures to defeat Satan in every temptation! Also 2 Cor. 10:4-5 tells us the only way to ‘pull down spiritual strong holds,’ bondage and deception... is by bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Bring it all through the filter of the Word – which is a living and powerful sword... (Heb. 4:12-13) effectually working in those who believe (1 Thess. 2:14). So let the Word dwell in you richly (Col. 3:16) and feed the spirit because greater is HE that is in you than he that is in the world (John 4:4). Our victory only comes by faith (and obedience) (1 Jn. 5:4-5).

11. TRUST IN THE LORD- (Prov. 3:5-6) with all your heart. Do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him (through prayer and obedience to His Word) and He will make your paths straight.” He will take the responsibility to get you where you need to be, without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6) our faith (in Christ) is what gives us victory in overcoming the world (the flesh and the Devil). We cannot rely on our own understanding or FEELINGS - our feelings are never the barometer for determining truth. Don't ever “go with your heart” because it is deceitfully wicked (Jer. 17:9). In fact Prov. 28:26 says, “he who trusts in his own heart is a FOOL.” God tells us to “walk by faith not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Not even “experience” can be trusted because it is based on man who is not just “flawed” but totally depraved (Rom. 3:10-18). So rather than putting our trust in “man” (self/others) or even princes,” it is better to trust in the Lord (Psalms 118:8-9). By the way your “faith or trust quotient” (capacity and ability to trust in the Lord) is directly proportionate to your “taking in” the Word of God (Romans 10:17)! Remember, if we're obeying the revealed will of God we can always take comfort in the sovereignty of God! We can

trust His plan and purposes, which He works together for good (Rom. 8:28-29). We can rest in His sovereignty and control over all things. God is not in heaven wringing His hands crying, "Now what do I do, they've ruined everything!" Take some time to study Ex. 4:11; Ps. 139:1-24; 135:6; 115:3; Prov. 21:1; Eccl. 3:14; 7:13-14; Isa. 40:11-17; 41:4; 43:10-13; 44:6-8; 45:5-9; 46:9-11; 48:15-18; Dan. 4:2, 17, 24-25, 31, 34-35; Acts 17:23; Rom. 8:28-29; 9:14-24; 11:33-36. When you actually write down what God shows you about Himself from these verses, you will rest more confidently in Him. And by the way these verses in no way excuse (man) us from fulfilling our responsibility! We still must...

12. BE OBEDIENT TO GOD'S WORD. This means unconditional submission to Christ's Lordship (authority)-no matter how we feel or what we've believed or what others think. And no matter what the cost we must do the will of God and apply the Scriptures. There will be no lasting change or transformation into Christ likeness without surrender of our will. (Luke 22:42). Any of my "control" or "demands" rooted in selfish ambition must be relinquished. The following verses reinforce some serious warnings about our responsibility to obey. (James 4:17)

James 1:22-25	Phil. 2:12-13
Joshua 1:8	John 14:21,23
1 Tim. 4:15-16	Phil. 4:13
1 Tim. 4:7b	Phil. 4:9
1 John 2:5-6	Deu. 11:26-28
James 2:17,20,26	Deu. 12:28
Luke 6:46	Isaiah 48:17-18

13. LOVE- (Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor.16:14) This is the key concept that Jesus Himself said fulfilled the law. Everything else is summed up in Mt. 22:34-40.

Also observe 1 Cor. 13:1-3	Eph. 4:15-16
vs. 4	John 13:34-35
vs. 5	Heb.13:1
vs. 6	1 John 3: 11-18
vs. 7	1 John 4: 7-21
vs. 8a	1 John 5:1-5
vs. 8-13	John 14:21, 23-24

2 Cor. 5:14-15- The love of Christ is our motivation to live for Him. Are you operating out of love? How can this love be demonstrated to all involved? One of my professors said it this way, "Love is everything you do without self in view." Also remember that love also means protecting the purity and unity of the whole church by dealing firmly with false doctrine, or unrepented sin, or anything or anyone that causes division, disobedience, discord, or divisiveness... (1 Cor. 4:21). The parent- child relationship portrays the obvious balance needed to love and discipline. Obviously Gods parenting us (Heb. 12:5-11) involves chastening, discipline, correction and guidance. The paradoxical communication sounds something like this "Yes, I love you, but no you can't have your own way (which would be ____)." So "let all things be done in love" as you proceed in every area of life and ministry.

THE NEXT STAGE

Don't skip over or minimize the previous steps, they serve as a checklist that we should ask the Lord to "never let us get 'immune'" to their importance. As each of you in leadership applies these principles in your own life, (honestly before the Lord), it will prepare all of you, together, for facing what's ahead. There will be powerful unity motivating you with greater spiritual sensitivity to what's really going on! When you know the that the others around you are taking these proceeding prerequisites seriously, you'll have a deeper trust in your relationships.

1. APPLY THESE PRINCIPLES NOW CORPORATELY -Take time to look up all the verses (and even add more) for a devotional time before each meeting, one section at a time. Discuss how they practically apply to all of you in spiritual leadership responsibilities. Also discuss the importance and the relevancy of them to your present situation. Even add further references to expand the Scriptural instruction.

2. COMMIT YOURSELVES to working together for the “long haul” using these (or other) guidelines for all you do. Again, writing up a covenant of some kind and signing it before God and each other will hold each other more accountable (Heb. 3:13) to the seriousness of doing things God’s way. Besides, in spiritual warfare when its now obvious what Satan wants to do to Christ’s church – you “soldiers” had better know where each other stands in the “rules of engagement.” You need to know the commitment of those comrades who are “watching your backs.” The trust factor is critical. If someone can’t/won’t sign or continue to pledge their faithfulness to following Biblical principles that encourage unity in resolving matters to the glory of God, they should step down, and get out of the way or be “put off” the leadership team. Why? Because it never fails... they will end up “fouling up” the whole process and setting every one back. You’ve obviously got to be on the “same page” and committed to the Lord, each other and working through things together in unity, striving consistently to do God’s will.

3. PRIORITIZE SCHEDULING OF TIMES AND DEFINE PURPOSE OF MEETING (1Cor. 14:40)

A. Clearly define the purpose for a special meeting and the issue to be discussed.

B. Find the blocks of time when everyone can be present at these meetings, which are set aside from regular business, to resolve a crisis situation. 100% attendance is imperative and should be required. It’s not impossible, everyone must make it their priority to responsibly lead this church according to the mind of Christ. If somebody just can’t get to these meetings maybe they should be willing to step down while this particular issue is being resolved. Here’s why... The one who missed “that” special last meeting will, nine times out of ten, “hinder” the progress that was previously achieved. Why? They missed out on experiencing

- The devotional time that deepened your spiritual lives closer together.
- The prayer time where God knit your hearts together.
- The process of how problems were pinpointed.
- The crucial discussions which surfaced and clarified other related issues.
- The spiritual dynamics of how God’s Word came alive.
- The tone of communication and how certain conclusions were reached.
- The relevant-connection that occurred as solutions came to light.
- The moving of God’s Spirit bringing together all the loose ends.
- The incredible unity of everyone discovering “the mind of Christ” together on these issues...

Everyone being there will help everyone to be unanimous. If you’re not unanimous then someone doesn’t have the mind of Christ because Christ is not divided! If you’re not all of the same mind (1 Corinthians 1:10) something is wrong. Obviously, depending on the nature and the seriousness of the problem, the leadership needs to make this determination on a case by case basis. But consider this, even in the secular sports world, a player who misses practice may have to “sit this next game out.” He can’t just pretend to understand the strategies of play and how to be team player successfully. If he attempts to get into the game now – he’ll just mess it up for the rest of the team. Everyone must be present, because the one who is not many hinder the unity and set the whole process back. This is one reason why so many issues should not be left up to a congregational meeting, let alone a vote, since it is “impossible” for the whole church to experience the above! (See attachment)

C. Finally, think about setting some time limits for these meetings – not to put God in a box or quench the Spirit, but to keep things moving and not from becoming too open-ended. It will keep you from falling into the trap of “the paralysis of analysis” – you could waste hours, days... in morbid introspection or just rehearsing the same things over and over... so be sensitive to the time issues for all involved and seek to resolve matters quickly. Eph. 4:26 says, “don’t let the sun go down on your wrath nor give an

opportunity (a foot hold, jurisdiction, ground) to the Devil.” Therefore, other business should be put on hold, if possible, for a more appropriate time. This problem is a priority, Satan’s already “gained too much ground” and too much is at stake to allow the sun to keep going down on these unresolved problems. Start moving in a solution oriented-direction and ask, “What does God say about this?”

4. SURROUND AND SATURATE YOUR MEETINGS WITH PRAYER AND WORSHIP- For most prayer may seem like a “no-brainer” but I’ve been shocked at how many people/leaders have not seriously demonstrated this crucial dependence upon God for...help, grace, wisdom, guidance, love, conviction, understanding, truth, humility, teachableness, sensitivity, strength... Begin and end your meetings with all of you praying out loud. “But that will take too much time!” Listen, you can’t afford not to, in fact if necessary pray also during the meeting (1Thess. 5:17).

“But WORSHIP?” That sounds odd,” you may say. Consider the following statements on worship from Dick Eastman, “Worship provides a place for God to dwell on earth in all His fullness (Ps. 9:11; 22:3). Since God is “enthroned in the praises of His people” – worship “invites” God into our lives in a very special and real way. “Worship provides an opportunity to encounter God in all His fullness firsthand” (Ps. 46:10; Prov. 9:10). That is exactly what is needed in every thing we face, right? “Worship provides our primary means to mobilize and release the resources of God into the needs of the peoples” (Ps. 77:11-15; 2 Chron. 20:21-22; Acts 16:25-26). The question is how badly do you want God’s intervention and/or power, honor, grace, presence, provision and help...? Since God has all the solutions and all the answers to our problems we had better get close to Him! Worshipping God, not for what we get out of it, but for His Glory, and to please Him, brings numerous “by products” and spiritual blessings. These all result in His “showing up”- revealing Himself, bringing Him into “the room” or whatever situation, in a very powerful way! (Acts 16:25-26).

5. AGREE ON THE PERSON WHO WILL LEAD THESE MEETINGS

Select one person to ‘moderate’/oversee these meetings. This person needs to be agreed on by all to keep things ‘on track’ and under control, not allowing other unrelated issues or rabbit trails to be brought up which “derail” the agenda. Keep a record of what may need to be addressed at a later time, always asking, “How is this related to the matters at hand?” Also he must not allow attacking, slander, anger, unwholesome or offensive speech... Also, anyone or anything that is not part of the problem or part of the solution should not be given any time at this meeting. If someone has “necessary input” have two or three of you meet with them before the meeting and or get a brief statement in writing. Many other ‘qualifications’ would be necessary to consider regarding that one leading the meeting. It would depend on the circumstances or people involved, and therefore an outside professional person may be needed right from the start. However, God has given to the church pastors who should be respected and able to do this. Also see 1 Cor. 6:1-6. Also other pastors in a denomination/or other churches would be one way of finding a qualified arbitrator.

6. IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM(S) –Remember, these problems are the very thing that God has sovereignly brought and/or allowed into your lives, so that you will seek and find Him! So, be asking, “Lord, what do you want to teach me”? We must maintain the attitude of “considering it all joy when we encounter various trials” (James 1:1-5). Sometimes friction can bring about order in the church and meet people’s needs (Acts 6:1-7). Secondly, it can bring about unity in a congregation and unanimity within the leadership (Acts 20:28-32; 1Cor.1:10). Thirdly, friction can also force people to deal with unspiritual attitudes & behaviors in themselves and others. When dealt with Biblically (Matt. 18:15ff; Gal.6:1; ...) it serves as a warning and deterrent to the whole church (1Tim.5:19-20). It’s beneficial to realize that according to 1Cor.11:18-19 “factions” can actually serve a positive purpose. They expose the different sides and ultimately reveal who passes the test of spiritual genuineness, purity, and consistency with the Scriptures (1Thess. 2:1-16). Also whom the Lord loves He chastens (Heb. 12:3-11) and afterward it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to those who ... cooperate!

Here's where each situation needs to be "sorted out" individually. Take the time to do it, be patient, but keep the process moving. 1 Cor. 14:40- 1 Thess. 5:21- 1 Cor. 16:14-

a. Personal examination (Ps. 139:23; Mt. 7:3-6) -everyone involved needs to make sure they are right with God. This is no time for "sin in the camp" (Josh. 7), in fact it is never acceptable to tolerate sin or allow it to build up and go undealt with. Ps. 66:18 reveals that unrepentant sin will "hinder" our relationship with God and He will not be "free to work" in our lives until you get back on track spiritually. Remember, "a little leaven (sin) leavens (influences) the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6). When sin is tolerated sin will permeate and corrupt the whole local church.

b. At the meeting have corporate examination – write up appropriate relevant questions in advance. (see "e" below)

- Is anyone in leadership at fault?
- Are there any sins, issues, failures or problems unresolved even since the church started?
- How can these matters be rectified before we proceed?

c. Determine who all is involved in this present conflict. Who else knows about this? Ask those already involved, who did they talk to, and why? Trying to take back what has already been said is like trying to retrieve the feathers from a pillow that was shaken out from the tallest building in the city on a windy day. You'll be unable to do it completely, but "damage control" is also a vital part of resolving, restoring, and reconciling all involved, so that we can minimize Satan's casualties of spiritual warfare. It is important that you get the names of all the individuals involved, so that they can be contacted and communicated with appropriately. This is no time or place for hearsay or anonymous quotes. Scripture says, "Let every word be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses" (2 Cor.13:1; Matt.18:16).

d. Deal with one person at a time personally and privately (Matt. 18:15). Sometimes the more people that are in the room the less is accomplished because everyone demands their say and their own way at the same time creating confusion. 1 Cor. 14:33 says, "God is not the author of confusion but of peace." Therefore, careful and thorough investigation must be made in an orderly manner determining all who are part of the problem and part of the solution. Be alert to those who are 'sinning with their mouth' at this point or creating a 'power struggle' rather than acting with humility, submission or commitment to handle things God's way! If there is resistance and rebellion, their divisiveness (Titus 3:10-11) may lead to further 'sowing of discord' (Prov. 6:19), thereby hindering cooperation, unity, reconciliation and resolving these matters in God-honoring way. These people must also be instructed that they not discuss these matters with others since Satan loves to use this stuff to divide and conquer! Help these people to fulfill their Biblical responsibilities for the preservation of unity, maturity, love, and purity of the church. It obviously is what God wants, so that He can be given the credit and made to be seen as powerful to all.

e. Get the facts (Prov. 18:13) you cannot give accurate answers until you hear the matter (LISTEN)! Investigate all sides asking the who? what? when? where? how? why? questions. Who all is involved and who knows about this directly/indirectly? What did they do? What is the problem? Who all have you talked to about this? What actually was said? Who was hurt? Who sinned against who? How did they respond? What happened and when, where, why? Who said/did what? What is this person "track-record"? Do they reflect a history or pattern of ____? Keep in mind that many times the one coming in is the key to solving the matter. Realize that everyone involved has possibly contributed something to the problem. What kind of persons are you dealing with? (Gossips, scoffers, fools, unteachable, troublemakers, busy-bodies, meddlers, immature, picky, critical, complainers, deceptive, manipulators, controlling, selfish, prideful, arrogant, malicious, rebellious, unsubmitive, or conceited. Proverbs would be a good study to increase your ability to 'spot' certain types of people. Also, see Rom. 1:28-31; 1 Cor. 5:9-13; 2 Tim. 3:1-7-13 and section #7 c. of this study. The list goes on but make sure you take notes, writing down the accounts of these facts as well as their interpretations, because you are dealing with peoples perception more times than with the reality! You can't minimize how someone personally feels about a particular conflict/issue, yet they still

may need to be 'corrected' in order to 'field' or 'process' this matter Biblically. Give them a chance to talk, but keep them on track.

Note: Remember to especially be sensitive, loving and patient because when issues are 'personal' and emotions are highly charged, rational thought takes time, people are hard to deal with (Prov. 18:19). Sometimes even members of that person's family will 'take up a reproach' holding the sin against the person even though it was not committed against them personally. This will complicate matters and 'feed' the hurt parties resulting in (1) a root of bitterness springing up (2) causing trouble and (3) defiling (polluting, contaminating) many (Heb. 12:15). All this because they've resisted the grace of God at the start, when they could have responded Biblically- by forgiving. Even though going through this process takes time, every one will learn and grow spiritually mature through it! Every one involved is responsible and accountable to obey the Word of God and made the right choices and decisions in every trial we face, RIGHT? No one is exempt from having to apply Scripture to their circumstances and/or relationships. Finally, as you gather together all the facts, make sure you try to understand! If those involved don't think you care enough- you've lost this person, or family, or _____. Someone once said, 'people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.'

f. Listen carefully (Js. 1:19; Prov. 18:2). Someone said "God gave us two ears and one mouth, that means we should listen twice as much as we speak."

g. Write down notes regarding what is said by whom. Keep accurate records of information resulting from your investigative process. Have a separate section for 'issues to address later and who may need to be involved. Writing things down helps you 'to sort it all out,' to 'pin point the main issues,' and to discover problem patterns. It also forces you to define and clarify the problems so that you can begin to restore the casualties in this spiritual battle.

h. Call in all who are involved, at perhaps a later point, if necessary, in order to "cross-examine" and get the story straight (Mt. 18:16; Prov. 18:17). Just hearing one person's perception, spin, interpretation is not enough. Scripture tells us of the importance of 'establishing every word in the mouth of two or three witnesses so that we do not make hasty judgements. This will help to determine deeper issues beyond 'their role' in this present crisis. It will reveal the magnitude of this and other compounding problems and how far reaching it all is. Also by calling everyone in separately it helps to establish the authority of the leadership within the church to be responsible for handling such matters and assuring those involved of your commitment to be 'judging righteously' and fairly (Jn. 7:24). Finally, all those who are involved in the sin /problem /issue/conflict will also need to know their part in the solution. As public as the problem has become that's how public the solution needs to be communicated. Be sure to be communicating the Biblical instruction to everyone involved throughout this process.

i. Define the problems (and people) that are now causing division that need to be resolved, reconciled and restored. People have sinned and been sinned against and choose to be offended!

- Doctrinal difference/interpretations of Scripture
- Unreconciled interpersonal relationships (offended, hurt feelings, bitterness, holding grudges) Remember, just as people choose to be offended they can choose to forgive.
- Unresolved problems from the past (marriages, churches, ministries, relationships...)
- Personality conflicts "I can't get along with ___ they're just too ___."
- Power struggles /authority issues (my way verses your way) Who's got to have control or the last word?
- Policy disputes, opinions, preferences, (you may need to write up "position papers")
- Communication breakdowns (misunderstandings, gossip, false accusations, criticism, back biting, slander, lying, hurtful & unwholesome speech...)
- Disciplinary problems (sin, unrepentance)
- Philosophy of ministry- How do we do it? Spiritual gifts, passions, motivations, priorities
- Unrealistic expectations - Not measuring up to "the standards" or "my" values

- Peoples interpretations and perceptions of circumstances and relationships are 'their' reality
- j. It is very important to take the time to diagnose and deal with the root causes rather than just the symptoms of the friction. To do otherwise is like filling a cavity instead of doing a root canal. Don't settle for superficial answers or solutions (Jer.8:11).
- k. Summarize everything up to this point. Does everyone agree on the problem (people, issues, sins) that needs to be resolved, reconciled and restored? If not, why?

7. RESEARCH AND DISCOVER BIBLICAL SOLUTIONS (2 Tim. 3:16-17) This is most important, because Satan will do anything to keep you from moving in a solution-oriented direction. Just talking about it isn't enough!

- a. Put these problems into Biblical categories since we are to "judge with righteous judgement" (Jn. 7:24). The Word of God is obviously the only authoritative standard for truth by which to accurately "discern" matters consistently according to God's will. (Ps. 119) It will take time, so everyone must do their 'homework.'
- b. Start asking (the Lord and everyone involved for answers/solutions) (Js. 1:5)
 - What does the Lord want for His Church (people)?
 - What do you think God wants us/you to do?
 - What does He want to teach us about _____?
 - What does Scripture say about these matters? (directly or in principle)
 - What 'light' does God's Word shed on this particular issue?

You would be surprised how quickly you can begin to 'diffuse' a volatile situation as soon as you start asking those questions.

Use a concordance, Topical Bibles, Christian books, and other resources (videos, tapes...) and have each person start researching these matters. This is an incredible window into everybody's soul right now and God wants to get your attention... don't drop the ball here! Start researching and studying – all of you, to find out what God wants to teach all of you through this. AND find out what God wants every person involved to do at this point. If you don't have time to do this, you don't have time to serve in this position of spiritual responsibility.

c. Be careful not to make hasty judgements or rush to "label" someone. HOWEVER, knowing the Biblical categories will help to "filter" (everything and everyone) through the scriptures.

God gives us much instruction regarding relationships among His people and how certain people are to be dealt with. It is not always an easy answer, but it is still wisdom even if we don't fully understand.

In every situation we must be discerning about the 'type' of people we are dealing with and follow through obediently with the appropriate Biblical response. Therefore, who are the people that need to be: (Be sure to look up verses and understand the context as with all Scriptures.)

- Reconciled (Phil. 4:3)
- Restored (Gal. 6:1)
- Rebuked (Lk. 17:3-4)
- Warned (1 Thess. 5:14)
- Admonished (1 Thess. 5:14)
- Disciplined (Mt. 18:15-17)
- Avoided (2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 5:9-11)
- Kept away from (1 Tim. 6:3-5)
- "Shunned" & "Shamed" (2 Thess. 3:14-15)
- Counseled more personally (Gal. 6:1)
- Comforted (2 Cor. 1:3-4)
- Corrected (2 Tim. 2:25)
- Shown patience (grace) (1 Thess. 5:14)
- Encouraged (1 Thes. 5:11,14)
- Helped (1 Thes. 5:14; Gal. 6:2)
- Instructed (Col. 1:28)
"taught," & counseled
- Confronted (Gal. 2:11-14)
- Rejected (Titus 3:10-11)
- Forgiven (2 Cor. 2:7; Matt. 6:12-15)
- Turned away from (Rom. 16:17)
- Delivered over to Satan (1 Tim. 1:20; 1 Cor. 5:5)
- Put away (1 Cor. 5:13)
- Brought back (James 5:19-20)

While some of these terms may sound harsh you can not deny their existence in Scripture. It is revealed by God Himself for the protection, purity, maturity and unity of His church. (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Cor. 5:1-13).

d. Write down the specific principles that are relevant and directly related to the matters at hand. Ask God to give wisdom in understanding and knowing how to apply His Word. I'm certainly not trying to 'oversimplify' this process, but it helps greatly to 'chart' the course you're on. Here's how everyone involved can see the movement in a solution-oriented direction.

THE PROBLEM(S) clearly defined	PEOPLE INVOLVED their part	BIBLICAL SOLUTIONS relevant scriptures	PLAN OF ACTION who's applying what	TIME FRAME to be done	FOLLOW UP?
1.					
2.	(Reorganize this chart and put on separate paper for those involved.)				
3.					

e. Write out a plan of action defining who needs to apply what Scriptural principles. Are all in agreement? Acts 15:23

f. Determine some time frame in which each one involved needs to implement their plan of action. Don't leave this "open ended." Knowing (hearing) and doing makes all the difference in the world (Js. 1:22-25; 4:17). This involves discipline (1 Tim. 4:7b) and accountability (Heb. 3:13).

g. Also it may be necessary to check the church bylaws and constitution for any instruction or explanations that may be relevant to this situation. Be alert to the fact that many bylaws do not have any scriptural basis. This does not mean that they would necessarily be wrong but they had better not contradict or go against the revealed will of God in the Bible. (For further discussion on By-laws see attachment at end.)

h. Finally ask "is there any thing further that needs to be followed up or is this issue now resolved, reconciled, and restored?"

8. GET OUTSIDE COUNSEL IF NECESSARY (Prov. 11:14; 12:15; 15:22; 20:18)

If the procedure 'stalls' or disagreements and interpretations are hindering unity in resolving the problems, then bring in qualified Biblical leaders, pastors, counselors who can objectively point out what is needed. Sometimes 'mediation' is needed (Phil. 4:2-3; 1 Cor. 6:1-7; Deut. 17:8-9)

9. COMMUNICATION (Eph. 4:25-32). A good definition of communication is a meeting of meaning. This implies that you have taken the time to understand what all those involved mean by what they have said. Over thirty times in Proverbs we are called to pursue understanding. To do so we need to ask questions rather than assume things, we need to listen (Js.1:19) to the point of understanding. Prov. 18:2 warns that "a fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind."

- Reveal only what is necessary to those involved as part of the problem and/or part of the solution.
- As public as the sin is that's how public the confession needs to be.
- Avoid gossip, slander, dishonesty, attacking, and all unwholesome and offensive speech.
- Use words of edification - building up (solution-oriented).
- You will probably have to correct wrong thinking, which has distorted ones interpretation. Remember, you are many times dealing with one's perception rather than reality.
- Speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).
- Also take time to make "numerous" observations from 2 Tim. 2:23-26!

10. DISCIPLINE yourselves for the purpose of godliness (1 Tim. 4:7b). The Greek word is where we get our word for gymnasium/gymnastics- implying 'practice' diligence, hard work- doing the right thing over and over again until it becomes part of your life. We can change and replace habits in Christ's power (Phil. 4:13).

11. PERSEVERANCE- (Gal. 6:9-10; 1 Cor. 15:58) many times people start out excited and committed to following a plan of action that they are convinced is right and they'll do it for a while, but then 'crash and burn' or give up- Don't let that happen- persevere and stick with it.

- The more we do the right things the easier it becomes.
- The power comes from the doing (Phil. 4:13).
- Keep walking by faith not by sight (feeling, experience) (2 Cor. 5:7).
- See 2 Tim. 2:3-7,15; 1 Cor. 9:24-27.
- Keep on 'keeping on'.

12. ACCOUNTABILITY (Heb. 3:13). More and more Christians are knowing the support and extra 'boost' that being held accountable brings them as they desire to make those changes that glorify God. If we don't have someone helping us DAILY (as the verse says!) we can become "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." So we need the ministry of the body of Christ (Heb. 10:24-25) encouraging us on the right paths. "Checking up" on people, commitments, and progress... shows our care and concern, but don't go overboard.

13. EVALUATION What have we accomplished? Learned? What could we have done differently? Better? How can we prevent these types of problems from getting worse? What sermons could be preached along the way to instruct? Or warn? Or prepare?... Did we do everything we set out to do? What has God taught me? Us?

14. EDUCATE EVERYONE FROM THE BIBLICAL TEXTS THAT GIVE INSTRUCTION IN THESE MATTERS- (1 Tim. 4:11, 16; 2 Tim. 4:2-4) Each person has a scriptural responsibility to follow God's guidelines immediately, so we can keep the enemies use of the problem(s) from being catastrophic in the church. These should be studied out (along with the whole book of Proverbs) and arranged as prepared planned responses /plans of action to apply in any given situation. Obviously you will need to add to this list, but here's the starting point! Preventative sermons should be preached and instruction should be given before, during and after a 'crisis' so that these principle truths won't be a surprise when relevantly connected up to any given situation. In fact this is how 'the mind of Christ' (Biblically understanding things) will cause you to be like-minded toward one another...that you may, with one mind and one mouth (in unity), glorify God (Rom. 15:5-6).

Ex. 22:28	Prov. 22:10; 26:20	Rom. 15:14	Eph. 4:1-16
Lev. 19:17	Prov. 27:5-6	Rom. 16:17	Eph. 4:20-32
Deut. 10:12-13;	Prov. 28:9, 13-14	1 Cor. 1:10-13	Phil. 4:2-3
Deut. 11:1, 13-14,	Matt. 5:23-25	1 Cor. 3:1-15	Col. 3:12-17
Deut. 11:18-23,	Matt. 7:1-5; 16-20	1 Cor. 11:18-19	1 Thess. 5:12-15
Deut. 11:26-28	Matt. 18: 15-17	1 Cor. 5:1-13	2 Thess. 3:6, 13-15
Deut. 17:8-13	Matt. 18:21-35	1 Cor. 6:1-8	1 Tim. 1:20
Ps. 101:5	Matt. 22:37-39	1 Cor. 12	1 Tim. 5:17-20
Prov. 6:16-19	Lk. 15:1-32	2 Cor. 2:1-11	2 Tim. 2:24-26
Prov. 10:18-21	Lk. 17:3-4	2 Cor. 10:4-5	Titus 3:9-11
Prov. 11:9-14	Jn. 8:1-11	2 Cor. 12:19-20	Heb. 12:14-15
Prov. 15:1	Acts 15; 23:5	Gal. 2: 11-14	Heb. 13:7,17
Prov. 17:9; 14	Rom. 12: 14-21	Gal. 5:13-26	Js. 4:1-10
Prov. 19:11	Rom. 14:19	Gal. 6:1-7	Js. 5:19-20

These references as well as those throughout this whole study, will give you the majority of Biblical instruction regarding what course of action you'll need to take, but keep looking further and gain new insights. Personally take time to read and meditate on these scriptures so you won't miss the principles that directly speak to the issues you're facing. Organize them appropriately so you'll have them ready.

15. PREVENTIVE SERMONS - Sermons could actually be topically designed and preached to instruct people in advance to potential areas of conflict. Seek to educate the whole church, if possible, before "something hits the fan" and things get messy. Especially when there are problems, use the pulpit to reveal what Scripture says about these matters. Outline the Biblical principle primarily to inform everyone about what God says each one is responsible to do. Be careful not to abuse the pulpit for any selfish agendas.

Consider topics like unity, maturity, purity, qualifications of Spiritual leadership, purposes of the church, solving problems God's way, how to handle hurt, resentment, bitterness, how to handle detrimental information, gossip, criticism, sins of the tongue, reconciling relationships, how to restore one another, spiritual gifts, love, forgiveness, the authority of Scripture, the fruit of the Spirit, sin and its consequences, sexual sin, church leadership, Satan's strategies, spiritual warfare, rebellion vs. submission, church discipline, commitment, building up the body, doing your part, anger, pride, God's purposes in trials, temptations and testings, (see p. 16 of study for other references). This is a window of opportunity, where the Holy Spirit can mature and deepen the spiritual walk of those who are sensitive and teachable.

We always have the expectation that someone else should change, but God always wants to get "my" attention. We need to say or ask, "What am I responsible to do?" "Lord, change me." "Help me do my part for Your glory". Then we have to leave the results in God's hands. Remember, we won't succeed because we're clever, but because we've been obedient.

16. STUDY AND LEARN FROM THE EARLY CHURCH EXAMPLES (Acts 6:1-7; 15:1-33)

They faced the issue (listened, identified the problem) They took action (solved the problem)
(See attached sheet on principles from Acts 15)

17. OBSERVE HOW JESUS "COUNSELED" THE 7 CHURCHES REGARDING THEIR PROBLEMS

(Rev. 2:1-3:22) another whole significant study on the church

18. ABOVE ALL "DO ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD" (1Cor. 10:31; 6:20)

Eph. 6: 6-8

Col. 3:17, 23-24

God's reputation is at stake in the witness and testimony of His church, resulting from how you handle those things that which will bring Him greater glory (love, unity, truth, Christ likeness...), and come to the place of forgetting the past (once matters are resolved) and press toward the goal... (Phil. 3:13-16).

- Be sure to review this study. The more you review it the sharper your senses will be, especially while going through the process. Be sure to add further steps and insights along the way since life, people and problems are so complex and don't always fit onto our "models" or methodologies. This study is a result of my own struggle, my own desperate study and crying out to God, even my own failures after being in the ministry since 1978. I am confident, as I offer you this plan of action that it will not only get you started but even through many conflicts as you depend upon the Lord and submit completely to applying His Word in everything.
- And finally... "Lord please 'fill in' all that this study misses, anything that You know is needed for Your church to be victorious, so that its witness will make You famous to all."

Recommended Reading for this Study

The Peacemaker - A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict - Ken Sande

A New Testament Blueprint for the Church - John Moore and Ken Neff

Multiple Church Staff Handbook - Harold J. Westing

Handbook of Church Discipline - Jay Adams

Setting Your Church Free - Neil T. Anderson

Healing the Wounded - John White and Ken Blue

The Master's Plan for the Church - John MacArthur

Firestorm: Preventing And Overcoming Church Conflicts- Ron Susek

Ready To Restore - Jay Adams

Other Related Studies Available Through Biblical Church Ministries

The Biblical Process of Restoration

Feelings of Hurt

God's Sovereign Purposes For Trials & Stress

Humble Yourselves

Understanding How Stuff Happens

Learning God's Way to Forgive

Simple Steps to a Solution-Oriented Direction

Battlegrounds for the Tongue

Why Does The Past Keep Coming Up?

Gossip: A Victim Or A Victor

Biblical Change: The Put Off-Put On Dynamic of Eph. 4:22-32

How To Walk In The Spirit

Help I've Fallen...But I Can Get Up

Spiritual Warfare

Understanding How The Past Influences The Present

Church Government

How To Begin Moving In A Solution-Oriented Direction

Church Leadership

Dealing With Mind "Build Ups" And Controlling The Thought Life

Understanding And Dealing With Temptation Biblically

For further information on these materials and other seminars such as: Marriage and Family, Parenting, Communication, Self Image, Spiritual Gifts, God's Will, Evangelism & Discipleship, Church Planting, How to Apply Scripture, Answering the Cults and Other Objections, Burn Out Recovery, Scheduling, Planning and Goal Setting, A Biblical View of the Enemy, Devotional Projects and Spiritual Growth, Breaking the Bondage of The Occult: Witchcraft, Demons and Magic, Hope For Life Dominating Problems, Worship and Praise, Motives and Motivations, Living The Proverbs, The Fatherhood of God, The Names of God, Prayer and Why God Doesn't Seem To Answer, The Problem of Suffering and Healing...and more, please contact:

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MOVING IN A SOLUTION – ORIENTED DIRECTION

(Principles in Acts 15 from the Early Church)

Acts 15

- vs.1 - A problem arose
- vs.2 - disagreement led to division
 - it was “irreconcilable” by them
 - they admitted that outside counsel was needed
 - they sent “representatives” to the spiritual leadership (elders)
 - they expected the question (issue) to be resolved
- vs.3 – they didn’t lose sight of their ministries (callings)
- vs.4 – they reported everything (data gathering process)
- vs.5 – they listened & got the facts
 - they identified the problem(s)
- vs.6 – the leaders, alone, set up a time to meet together, immediately
 - their agenda was focused toward this 1 problem (one at a time)
 - they moved in a solution-oriented direction
- vs. 7 – they communicated, talked, listened, discussed, debated
 - one gathered & reviewed the “pre-history” relating to the matter
- vs.7-8 – they stuck with the issue & relevant information
 - they used God’s word to get things into perspective
- vs.7-9 – they used Scriptural principles/Biblical insights foundational to the issue
- vs.10 – they raised powerful questions regarding the application of God’s word
- vs.11 – they established unity in what they all believed
 - they reached certain basic conclusions & recommendations
- vs.12 – notice this was not a “congregational meeting” but that the whole multitude kept silent! During this process they were still being fed & encouraged with what God was doing through evangelism & discipleship
- vs.13 – one “in charge” (over the meeting) brought together conclusively the matter with firmness yet flexibility!
- vs. 13-18 – further scriptural confirmation was given consistently reinforcing the direction they all needed to go.
- vs.19-21 – practical solutions were given
 - a strategy was devised
 - they reached conclusive unified solutions to the problem
- vs.22 – the plan of action was communicated to the whole church
 - the whole church submitted to the elders decision (unity)
 - they chose those who would be responsible to carryout the plan of action
 - they utilized other church leaders to communicate the final resolution
- vs.23 – they put it in writing! To clarify & confirm all the necessary communications they drafted a “policy” based on Scriptural principles & their practical ramifications to the problem.
- vs.23-29 – they explained the problem, the process, & the solution
- vs.28 – they had obviously sought the Holy Spirit’s guidance through the whole process!
- vs.23,30 – they communicated the solution to all involved “as public as the problem – that’s how public the solution needs to be made”
- vs.30 – they immediately followed through implementing the complete resolution
 - they called a special meeting to “declare” (not debate) the solution
- vs.31 – everyone rejoiced in unity & was encouraged
- vs.32-35 – they even had a special seminar of exhortation & strengthening since no doubt, these matters had “taken their toll” & Satan had used the problems to cause hurt & division. So now was a time to recover some of the casualties of spiritual warfare & bring healing & strengthening to previously polarized relationships.
- vs.33 – they responded back favorably to the elders
- vs.34-35 – they kept on teaching & preaching the Word!
- vs.36-41 – another problem arose...”but that’s another story” for you to analyze

DISCIPLINE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

- A. Discipline is A Solemn Duty
1. The Principle of Self Judgment
 - 1 Pet.4:17
 - 1 Cor.11:31-32
 2. Discipline in the Local Church is Imperative
 - Matt.18:15-18
 - 1 Cor.5:1, 11-13
 - 1 Cor.6:1, 5-6
 - 2 Cor.2:5-7
 - 2 Thes. 3:6,11,14
 - 1 Tim.5:19-22
- B. Disciplinary Offenses
1. Difficulties Between Members
 - Matt.18
 - 1 Cor.6:5-6
 - Phil.4:2-3
 2. Disorderly Conduct
 - 2 Thes.3:6,11,14
 3. Open, Gross Sin
 - 1 Cor.5:13
- C. Disciplinary Penalties
1. Private Admonition
 - Matt.18:15
 - 2 Thes.3:15
 - 1 Thes.5:14
 2. Public Censure (before others)
 - 1 Tim.5:20
 - 3 John
 3. Social Ostracism
 - 2 Thes.3:6-14
 - 1 Cor.5:11
 4. Church Excommunication (Mt.18:18)
 - 1 Cor.5:11-13

God speaks positively about how to maintain the purity and unity of the church, His Body. We are committed to applying these principles in the appropriate situations. (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15-17; I Cor. 5:1-13; I Tim. 1:20; Gal. 6:1; 2 Thess.3:6; 3:14-15; Titus 3:9-11; Rom.16:17-18; Js. 5:19-20) From careful study of these passages, the initial purpose of this procedure is to restore the one whose sin has overtaken them and/or has begun to effect others and the testimony of Christ. According to Matt. 18

- v.15 (1) "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you." A private, prayerful, loving reproof or admonishment using the Scriptures (2 Tim.3:16-17) to restore a sinning brother is the Biblical responsibility of mature believers (Gal.6:1).
"If he listens to you (repents and changes), you have won your brother".
- v.16 (2) "But if he will not listen (and continues to sin), take one or two others along so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." Here you are not only confirming Scriptural communication and agreement on the sin issue they are guilty of, but you are also establishing your concern and support to helping them get things resolved.
- v.17 (3) "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church..". At this point, the elders of the church are to be advised and shall take appropriate steps:
- a) those who attempted the restoration must present the situation to the elders.
 - b) the elders are to contact the one that is "accused" for the purpose of investigating and affirming the past, present and future action (s). (Prov.18:13; 14:15; 25:2; 18:17)
- v. 17 (4) "...if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan..". (an outsider). The unrepentant brother will be removed from the membership and put out of the church. (also see I Cor.5:1-13; I Tim. 1:20) Also, Scripture teaches that we are to "withdraw ourselves from them" (2 Thess.3:6), "have no company with them" (2 Thess.3:14; I Cor. 5:9-11) and we are to avoid them. (Rom.16:17-18)

Even though these verses are very clear, this is not an easy process, but we must nevertheless trust and obey God. Also note that there is no "timetable" given in Scripture to this procedure, so prayerful sensitivity to God's sovereign leading is crucial. Finally, we must still be open and allow for the unrepentant one to turn back to the truth and confess their sin (Js.5:16, 19-20) and therefore forgive, welcome back and restore that one to fellowship! (2 Cor.2:5-11; Lk.15:11-32).

UNDERSTANDING HOW "STUFF" HAPPENS

Problem



- Results of living in a fallen world (Eccl. 9:12)
- Frustrations of being with sinners and sinful natures
- Something is done or said
- Somebody is hurt and/or chooses to be offended
- Someone is sinned against
- Expectations or "demands" are not met
- Preferences /opinions are attacked or "minimized"

Inter
Personal
Conflicts

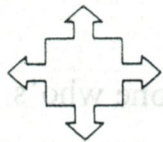
Thinking



- People "process" what's happened (Prov. 23:7)
- Pride /selfishness creates unbiblical reasoning (Prov. 28:25-26)
- People lean on their own understanding (Prov. 3:5-6)
- "Perceptions" become more distorted (Prov. 19:3)
- Interpretations lead to (wrong) conclusions (Prov. 14:7-9, 16, 33)
- Wisdom /truth is not applied giving-way to foolishness (Prov. 15:14)
- Feelings get in the way (Prov. 28:26)

Sinful
Behaviors Are
Manifested

Response



- Not seeking /choosing Biblical wisdom (Js. 1:5, 2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- One chooses to be offended rather than to forgive (Eph. 4:31-32)
- The grace of God is resisted (Heb. 12:15)
- Holding a grudge > resentment > bitterness > anger
- Ignorance and /or disobedience to God's Word (Prov. 12:15-16)

Complications
Brought
About

Spiritual Consequences



- The sun goes down on the anger (Eph. 4:26-27)
- Satan is given "ground" (Eph. 4:26-27)
- The grace of God is further resisted (Heb. 12:15)
- A root of bitterness springs up (Heb. 12:15)
- People get angry at God (Prov. 19:3)
- The Holy Spirit is grieved (Eph. 4:29-30)
- The Holy Spirit is quenched (1Thess. 5:19)
- Pride now blinds /deceives one from even seeing the truth (Js.1:22-25; Prov. 16:5, 18-19; 18:12; 21:24; 28:25)
- Further disobedience to God's Word hardens hearts (Heb. 3:7-8,13,15) becoming an "abomination" (Prov. 6:16-19; 16:5; 28:9)

Testimony &
Witness of
Love & Unity
As Destroyed

Inter Personal Conflicts



- Tensions mount (Acts 15)
- Personalities get involved
- Relationships become polarized (Phil. 4:2-3)
- People are unreconciled (Matt. 5:23-24)
- Issues are unresolved (1 Cor. 6:1-8) problems go unresolved
- No one is restored (Gal. 6:1)
- Emotions have become so heated that any attempts to help may even be resisted - Things have not been "defused" (Prov. 15:1)

Sinful Behaviors Are Manifested



- Trouble escalates (Heb. 12:15)
- Communications break down (Prov. 26:17-28)
- Gossip, backbiting (Prov. 11:9, 11-13; 16:27-28; 17:9; 18:6-8; 20:19; Ps. 101:5)
- Slander, defamation of character (Prov. 26:20)
- Evil speaking, lying... Rumors spread (Prov. 10:18-21, 31-32)
- Unforgiveness demands that someone has to pay (Prov. 24:29)
- People seek revenge instead of following Rom. 12:14-21
- Works of the flesh rather than the fruit of the Spirit are seen (Gal. 5:16-26)
- Matters are not handled Biblically (Matt. 18:15-35; Prov. 22:10; Titus 3:10-11)

Complications Build Up



- Many people are defiled (Heb. 12:15) (contaminates)
- The facts are ignored (Prov. 18:13, 17)
- People take up a reproach – holding something against someone who's never personally sinned against them (Rom. 15:3)
- Contention and friction breed disharmony (Prov. 15:1)
- People begin taking sides causing division (1 Cor. 1:10-13)
- Divisiveness and "attacks" result in disunity (Prov. 6:16-19)

Testimony & Witness of Love & Unity Are Destroyed



- Instead of glorifying God – Satan has now taken many people "captive" to do his will rather than God's! (2Tim. 2:24-26)
- Jn. 13:35; 17:20-23

A Word of Warning Regarding Bylaws

A serious tragedy in the church today is that an overwhelming majority of churches have substituted their Bibles for their bylaws. The traditions of men have replaced the word of God. When a problem arises the people and most leaders will ask, "What do the bylaws say?" as if that's the authority. One stinging indictment against most church bylaws is that there are no (or very few) Scripture references! I have read at least a hundred different church bylaw/constitutions over the years. I still have most in a box (as evidence). Another thing they have in common is that they have substituted the word "pray," which **IS** our only "lifeline" for "vote" (which is not in scripture). Sadly, church leadership in America has fallen into the democratic thinking of "polling the audience" and getting the "popular opinion", rather than seriously pursuing God and His will in a matter. I might add that seeking God would certainly require more time in His presence. Unfortunately, today's spiritual leaders are too busy and want quick fixes, rather than seeking the Lord, or waiting on the Lord. (Jer. 14:22; Isa. 40:25-31)

In 1 Sam.8, there was more than the famous "two thirds vote" when Israel demanded a king, they wanted to run things the way the world runs it. Consequently, the Lord said to Samuel, "they have rejected Me, My reign, My rule and My authority over them, they have forsaken me and chosen to serve (be under) **other** gods" (vs.6-9). Even after Samuel's (and God's) warning they insisted on handling their governmental matters "like all the other nations." They believed that this new (king) would..."fight their battles." What a striking and shocking parallel to today's church. Most churches might not think there are any problems with their bylaws (which are mostly written up by attorneys according to statutory laws of incorporation under the state's authority). But the major problem with "By-laws"... is that this document which is suppose to be so vitally important in defining and detailing who we are and what we are all about as Christ's church, doesn't even include any Biblical basis for what's being said. Where is the "chapter and verse" foundation (Matt. 7:24-27) that needs to be a clear testimony communicating to all how this church will function practically here and now for the glory of God?

Now to be "fair and balanced" on the issue, there is a place for writing certain "position papers" on significant issues that affect the church today. There is a place for organizational charts, job descriptions and written policies so that things can be clearly communicated and "done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). But where the Scriptures already speak, there is no need to add to it. It may be necessary to define how Biblical principles will be applied. But there is serious Scriptural warnings to those who "by pass" what is already revealed and create additional man-made guidelines which compromise, avoid, ignore, replace, contradict or make void God's word (Mk. 7:13). Observe the following passages:

Ps. 1:1-6; Josh. 1:7-9; 9:1-27; (14-15); Prov. 3:5-6; Judges 21:25; 17:6; Deut. 4:2; 12:8, 28, 32; 13:18; Rev. 22:18-19; 1 Cor. 6:1-6; Gal. 1:6-12; 3:1-5; Eph. 4:11-16; Col. 2:18-23; Matt. 15:6-9; Titus 1:10-14; 2 Tim. 4:2-5; Rev. 2:12-17; Num. 22-25; Acts 15.

The major point that I want to make right here is: We had better do our Scripture study and research thoroughly enough, so as to have the Biblically revealed insights as our deliberate foundation for what we are doing and why!!! God has limited His working and power to His Spirit working through the Word (Jn. 15:26, 16:7-15). Too much is done "in the flesh" (man's way and power) and "apart from Him we can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5), but in Christ we can do all things (Phil. 4:13; Col. 1:29).

A Word About Congregational Involvement

Do not have a congregational meeting in an attempt to solve problems. Acts 15 shows us how the early church resolved matters. In fact, that's why God established Elders/ leadership in the first place -there was a need for a body of mature godly believers to handle these matters. In a congregational meeting, when everyone is given a "voice", it develops into a "free-for-all". It is never appropriate to raise unresolved conflicts or problems. Everyone's emotionally charged "spin" or opinion will ultimately lead to anger, yelling, taking sides, foolish "half-brained" comments, attacks, and further bitterness. It should never be a forum to vent criticisms or grievances. Those things should be handled according to other Biblical principles (Gal 6:1, Matt 18:15-17). Otherwise you're just opening the door to Satan and allowing him a free hand, and the results are often disastrous. Too many "seeds of disintegration" get planted and one may never be able to pick up the pieces, resolve the issues, or reconcile and restore people (humanly speaking). I have all too often heard of how bringing a matter to a congregational vote (which by the way is not in Scripture) has destroyed churches. People play politics, manipulate, define their issues, state 'their' case and take sides. This forces everybody into different camps (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:1-4) and "a house divided against itself cannot stand" (Mk. 3:24-26). Once people take sides- pride, agendas, controlling egos, "rights" and _____ (etc.) replace humility, meekness, serving, _____ and there is no serious thought about what God wants or having "the mind of Christ" on the matter (2 Cor. 2:16). People have left churches for the stupidest reasons. Some have even rejected Christianity after witnessing the petty differences at a Congregational meeting mushrooming into a "fiasco". Churches have split over the most pathetic issues. No wonder God established the governing of His people through the "elders". Now, I must be quick to add that this does not mean the people do not have a "voice" (Acts 6), but it does mean that they do not have the final say! Any one in the church should have the freedom to come privately to the leadership and express their views, opinions, observations, thinking preferences and related Scripture on any given matter. However, when you open things up to a vote, you are just encouraging mob rule and clearly the majority is not always right. In Num. 13-14 the ten spies influenced Israel so negatively that the whole generation missed God's blessing and died off in the wilderness. Also see 1 Sam. 8 when "the majority" "ruined" God's original intention and design.

According to the Scriptures the congregation is to submit to the leaders decisions (Heb. 13:17). In fact, that's what the elder's responsibility was throughout the Old and New Testament. When there is a problem an appropriate general statement of public communication may be necessary (depending on what is being spread around). You should write up a brief explanation informing the congregation that,

"Some problems (name general areas) have recently surfaced and the leadership has committed themselves (if you already have) to thoroughly investigating these matters according to Biblical principles and some outside counsel. We affirm our desire to resolve, restore, and reconcile (these things) God's way. We are seeking the mind of Christ in order to be obedient to the Lordship of Christ and pursue unity, purity, and maturity, all for the glory of God. We are facing these spiritual battles (one at a time) and we are trusting God's Spirit to lead us in God's will. We are asking everyone to pray along these lines with us that we will have wisdom, understanding, love, and unity in applying God's Word in these matters."

It's suggested that you communicate this in writing, perhaps a separate bulletin insert and/or a letter to the congregation. Plus - read it on a Sunday morning. The more public you make known your solution oriented direction, the quicker it will help the church to "trust" you (in the right sense of the word) and begin or continue praying. You should also include as much relevant Scripture in preparing your statement as necessary to establish the Biblical basis for what you are doing. It is of utmost importance that the leadership all sign this statement. And depending on the severity of the matter, standing up together in the service might be in order, representing unity in the Spirit to resolve, reconcile, and restore, according to a Biblical plan of action. Sermons should be preached in order to educate the whole church on how these things should be handled. The Scriptural principles that relate to the issues that need to be dealt with must be taught. At times like this people need to be pointed in the right direction so that they can respond right and know that there is hope in Christ. Therefore, rather than creating further problems through a congregational meeting, make sure things are dealt with appropriately through those who are Biblically responsible. And make sure that these matters are communicated discreetly and sufficiently to all.

Simple Steps to a Solution–Oriented Direction

(Lasting Biblical Change)

1. Humble yourself (pray) (2 Chron. 7:14; Js. 4:6-10)
 - Come to Him (Matt. 11:28-30; Heb. 4:12-16)
 - Be honest with God about what's going on
 - Acknowledge who you are in light of who HE is
 - Confess your sin (Ps. 51, 32; 1 Jn. 1:7-10)
 - Ask for wisdom (Js. 1:5)
2. Identify the Problem\Sin Area (relational\circumstantial issues) (Gen. 4:1-7)
 - Evaluate- ask the questions: who, what, when, where, how, why... (Prov. 18:13, 17)
 - Understand (Prov. 4:7) patterns, connections, reasons...
 - Define them (thoughts, attitudes, responses, words, actions [behaviors] emotions...)
3. Discover the Biblical Solutions (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Ps. 119) (God's will on the matter)
 - What's the relevant scripture that relates to these areas?
 - What do I need to repent of? (Prov. 28:13; 1 Thess. 1:9)
 - What must I replace 'put off' – 'put on'? (Eph. 4:20-32)
4. Write out a Practical Specific Plan of Action (Deut. 6:6-9; Prov. 3:3; Acts 15:23)
 - What principles do I need to apply to these – 'issues'?
 - How will I implement these into my life? (Who, what, when, where, how, why???)
 - What "life restructuring needs to take place for change to occur? (people, places, things...)
5. Pray it Into Your Life Daily (1 Jn. 5:14-15; Matt. 26:41)
 - Depending upon the Holy Spirit to produce the change in your life (Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:16-25)
6. Do it! (Js. 1:22-25) Commit yourself to action\ obedience to God (Lk. 22:42)
 - Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. (1 Tim. 4:7)
 - The power comes in the doing. (Phil. 4:13)
7. Perseverance – continue consistently – don't give up! (Gal. 6:7-9; 2 Cor. 4:1; 1 Cor. 15:58; 2 Thess. 3:13)
 - Stay connected to the Source (Jn. 15:1-11)
8. Accountability (Heb. 3:13) Have someone 'check up' – help, encourage and pray with you.

Simple Direction **MAKING A COVENANT**

There are over 25 references to contracts, treaties and covenants all throughout Biblical history. A contract is a written document defining an agreement between 2 or more people to do something. It is a way to prove one's seriousness and to pledge their commitment to be held accountable to follow through on what's been promised. Someone has said that "the contract" is a man-made document that most often has "loopholes", clauses and legal jargon which subtly gives each party room to manipulate their way out of it. Whereas, a covenant is a more serious vow before God and/or with God, to be completely responsible in fulfilling the terms which have been defined and which one has committed oneself to (Eccles.5:4-5).

For those in spiritual leadership to sign a covenant defining Biblical guidelines as how to proceed in solving problems God's way, should in no way be threatening to those who are teachable and unconditionally surrendered to the Lordship of Christ. This is a much more serious pledge to sign than the things we all "mindlessly" sign throughout the course of our lifetime. It's not a legalism (man's attempts at salvation or spiritual maturity) but a natural step for the leaders to publicly declare their commitment together to handle everything according to the Scripture. This commitment is to be fulfilled for as long as one would be in the position of spiritual leadership. This covenant is made for the sake of Christ and for the protection & preservation of His church.

LEADERSHIP COVENANT

Made before God in the presence of
those of _____

(churches name)

"Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3)

"I plead with you brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind & in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10).

Based on the authority of the Scripture, it's principles & commands, I acknowledge that I am held to a higher standard and must be an example in everything (1Pet. 5:1-3). As one in spiritual leadership I am responsible to meet the qualifications for a leader (1Tim. 3:1-13, Titus 1:3-9) and fulfill my Biblical role. I must be diligent to preserve the unity, purity and maturity of the body of Christ and walk worthy of my calling (Eph. 4:1-16). Whatever "issues" might arise in my life or in this church, I commit myself to applying the Scriptural principles put forth in this study (plus others that apply, as agreed upon by the spiritual leadership of this church). In addition to the above I will also:

1. Strive to be of one mind - to be in unanimity in all decisions by seeking the mind of Christ (1Cor. 2:16)
2. Humble myself before the Lord (Js. 4:6-10)
3. Be teachable (Js. 3:17)
4. Examine my own heart (1Cor. 11:28)
5. Confess my sin (1Jn. 5:10 and forsake it (Prov. 28:13)
6. Repent (2Cor. 7:9-10) and replace it (Eph. 4:20-32)
7. Reconcile relationships (Mt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:17-21) in my own life
8. Pray for this church
9. Abide in Christ and His word (Jn. 15)
10. Depend on God's Spirit (Rom. 8:4-14; Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 5:18)
11. Be prepared for spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-18)
12. Trust in the Lord (Prov. 3:5-6)
13. Be obedient to God's word (Js. 1:22-25)
14. Do all things in love (1Cor. 16:14)
15. Commit myself to cooperate with the others at all required meetings (Eph. 4:3)

LEADERSHIP COVENANT

16. Pray diligently and worship the Lord (1Tim.5:17)
17. Examine everything carefully, getting "all" the facts (1Thess.5:21; Prov.18:13) in order to identify the problems(s)
18. Research and discover Biblical solutions (2Tim.3:16-17)
19. Work out a plan of action for all to follow (Acts 15:23)
20. Reconcile those involved (Phil.4:2-3)
21. Restore those who need it (Gal.6:1)
22. Follow the steps of Matt.18:15-17 & other related Scriptures (#6c & #13)
23. Get outside counsel if needed (Prov.11:14, 15:22)
24. Commit to appropriate communication (Eph.4:15, 25-32)
25. Encourage all to discipline themselves towards godliness (1Thess.4:7b)
26. Persevere, don't quit or give up (Gal.6:9-10)
27. Hold others accountable and allow myself to be held accountable to doing God's will (Heb.3:13)
28. Evaluate and learn from what has happened, so I can teach others (Ps.51:13)
29. Make any and all necessary changes wherever needed (Js.4:17)
30. Do all to the glory (magnification, honor) of God (1Cor.10:31)
- 31.
- 32.
- 33.

If I should resist or refuse to submit myself to following these guidelines, and the others of this leadership think I should step aside temporarily or "step down", I will.

Signed _____ Date _____