

## Tension and conflict are essential in the church

Too often in the church today we see conflict or tension as bad, something to be avoided. A quick look at the first half of the book of Acts shows this simply doesn't measure up with reality. Whenever the church grows, there is conflict and tension. The cause and therefore the resolution is always the same. But, if it is handled correctly, the Kingdom can expand through every situation. Here are nine examples of conflict/tension and the cause and the cure.

1. **Acts 5.1-11**—Ananias & Sapphira. Sin crept into leadership and the cause was for leadership change. In most turnaround churches some leadership will not be able to make the changes necessary for growth to occur. It may be sin in their life like this example of Ananias and Sapphira, or it may be a cultural issue. Either way, if they cannot deal with their issues and get on board, they too need to leave (not necessarily in a casket!). See #5
2. **Acts 6.1-4**—Grecian widows. A new structure was needed. In churches that grow, inevitably there will be tension because the structure needs to change as the church grows. The tension that results from inadequate structure simply needs to be addressed and the structure adjusted. You can tell if it is a structural issue if once the structure is changed, the need/tension is resolved.
3. **Acts 8.9-24**—Simon the sorcerer. New converts brought old ways into the church. In this situation it appears Simon simply had not yet put away his old ways. He begged for pardon when Peter pointed out his sin. Inevitably, when a church is reaching lost people, the new converts will bring some of their old ways into the church. As in this case, it needs to be dealt with quickly and then move on.
4. **Acts 9.26**—Disciples in Jerusalem shunned Paul. This is the opposite problem from #3, old believers don't want to accept new believers, they just don't trust them. Often new believers bring in new ways of doing things or bring old reputations along with them. Older believers find it too easy to dismiss younger believers and refuse to relate closely with them because of appearances, past reputations or practices. The older disciples need to get over it. See #6
5. **Acts 9.30**—After they got rid of Paul, the church experienced a time of peace, it was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord...sometimes good leaders need to leave to allow God's spirit to move in the church...they will be used somewhere else after a time of growth and recovery. Sometimes leaders simply can't lead where the church needs to go. It is not because they are bad leaders, but rather it is not the right place or time. It is a matter of calling. Paul went on to become THE leader in the expansion of the Kingdom around the Mediterranean Sea, but he was not the right guy for Jerusalem. At times leaders need to leave, not because they are wrong, but they are in the wrong place.

6. **Acts 11.2**—The circumcised believers criticized Peter. Older Christians struggle with new methods of evangelism. Peter is criticized by the disciples (and leaders) for reaching out to the non-Jew, Cornelius. Often when churches begin to grow they do so through methods of reaching people that have not be used previously in the church. This causes the settled saints to react negatively like those in Jerusalem. They actually called a meeting and severely criticized Peter who didn't even want to go in the first place. New believers will only be reached through new wine skins and this will come at a cost of tension at best, conflict at worst.
7. **Acts 13.13**—John Mark leaves Paul and Barnabus in the midst of ministry. Younger Christians can't stick when the going gets tough. This no doubt caused tension (see #9) because Paul didn't want to take John Mark on the next journey. As the church grows, younger Christians don't stick with their commitments and leave. This causes tension in the body for a variety of reasons; others wonder why they are leaving or ministries they were involved in hurt.
8. **Acts 15.1ff**—Council of Jerusalem settles dispute between Judaizers and Paul over circumcision. For the first time, different cultures were introduced into the church. This tension was clearly over competing cultures. Too often church conflicts are simply over competing cultures. If a plateaued church is going to grow, there must be a cultural shift. Often old cultures don't die easily. In this case the competing cultures could peacefully exist side by side, but in different congregations. This conflict led to a clarification of theological issues and an acceptance of different cultures.
9. **Acts 15.36ff**—Paul and Barnabus had a sharp dispute over who should be on the team because of competing philosophies of ministry. Sometimes ministries need to split when two philosophies of ministry emerge. As churches grow, sometimes competing philosophies of ministry develop and a multiplication of ministries needs to occur. Churches need to multiply, they need to grow healthy and large and launch large churches. A great time to do this is when there appear competing philosophies which are not wrong, just different. As in this case, the parting was typified by brotherly love as we later read of John Mark in 2 Timothy 4.

There is nothing wrong with conflict...the only question is whether you will allow it to sharpen your focus on the kingdom or divide you. The KOG always grew.