

# Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love

*(guidelines for those times when we disagree)*

Though we would often like to think so, Christians are not immune to conflict. We face conflict in our homes and churches, in our neighborhoods and work places. Whenever and wherever we interact with other people, conflict becomes a possibility.

One of the hardest things about conflict in the church is that we are tempted to believe *(and often have been taught)* that it should not exist there. Our ability to express our feelings and values clearly, and our ability to hear the same from someone else, can be limited by any one of a number of things. Differences of opinion are not always rooted in sin. What happens in our church is most often of critical importance to us. This means that the emotional stakes are high. When our church means so much to us, when our expectations are that conflict should not be found there, and when we experience the honest, human struggle of trying to communicate effectively? we find ourselves living within a set of circumstances that hold significant potential to harm and even destroy.

Conflict becomes destructive partially because we try so hard to avoid it, and because we don't know how to handle it in positive and healthy ways. The guidelines that follow are an attempt to help you to grow in this area of your life and faith. They are intended to help both individuals and groups. If we are to effectively use conflict to help us, we will need a set of skills.

Our hope is that these Biblical principles will help you know how to think about, and how to act within, times of conflict. Our prayer is that they will help you better understand, and more fully embrace, the opportunities that come to us when conflict arises.

We suggest that you post these guidelines in rooms where people meet and decisions are made. We encourage you to duplicate these pages and distribute them to your members and leaders. Make them available during meetings that are held within the life of your church. Make them accessible so that whenever conflict begins to emerge, they will be available and hopefully useful.

Pastoral Relations Committee  
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## AGREEING & DISAGREEING IN LOVE

*(guidelines for those times when we disagree)*

*"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."* --Ephesians 4:3 (NIV)

Both as individual members and as the body of Jesus Christ we pledge that we shall seek to use these guidelines whenever there is disagreement between us.

**IN THOUGHT**

1. **We acknowledge** that conflict is a normal part of life, including life within the church. *Romans 14:1-8, 10-12, 17-19; 15:1-7* 2. **We affirm** that when handled correctly, conflict can produce positive, God-honoring results. 3. **We agree** that (*with God's help*) working through conflict can be an important means of personal and corporate spiritual growth. *Ephesians 4:15-16a* 4. **We believe** that conflict can be an arena for God's revelation.

## IN ACTION

A. We will confess our weakness, needs, and sin, and commit ourselves to pray for a mutually satisfactory solution whenever we find ourselves in a disagreement. *James 5:16*

B. As outlined in Matthew 18:15-22, we pledge to go promptly and directly to the person with whom we disagree or with whom we are in conflict. We promise NOT to speak about or criticize individuals behind their back. Such deeds serve only to broaden the divide that exists between us, and clearly fail to honor the person and teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. *See also Matthew 5:23-24.*

C. When we go to the person(s) involved, we will at all times seek to convey a spirit of gentleness, patience, and humility. *Philippians 4:5, Colossians 3:12*

D. We pledge ourselves to listen carefully, to consider fully, and to make every effort to understand correctly BEFORE responding. *James 1:19-20; Proverbs 18:13*

E. We will make every effort to work together toward a common understanding of our differences, always willing and ready to acknowledge our part in any conflict or disagreement. *Galatians 6:1-5*

F. We will refrain from making judgements, will avoid labeling, and will put an end to name-calling. We refuse to resort to threats, and so much as possible we will seek to act in a non-defensive, non-reactive way. *Romans 2:1-4; Galatians 5:22-26*

G. We will be straight forward regarding issues and sensitive when it comes to people and personalities. *Matthew 10:16*

H. We promise to make a sincere effort to work through disagreements constructively. *Acts 15; Philippians 2:1-11*

This means:

- We will tell our story carefully.
- We will listen to another's story intently.
- We will seek to identify the issues, interests, and needs of both parties, rather than to take sides or positions.
- We will attempt to discern a variety of options that address each party's needs (*rather than simply seeking to defend our own way or position*).
- We will evaluate options by how they meet the needs and satisfy the interests of all parties, and not simply those of one (*or our*) side.
- We will work toward a solution in which both parties gain, both grow, and both 'win.'

- We will cooperate with an emerging solution, accepting the possible rather than demanding the ideal.
- We will express gratitude to one another for each positive step taken toward mutual agreement.

## **IN LIFE**

1. We will be firm in our commitment to seek a mutual solution. We will be stubborn in holding to our common foundation in Christ. We will be steadfast in love, abiding in hope, faithful in prayer. *Colossians 3:13-15, Romans 12:12*

2. We will be open to accept skilled help. If/when we cannot reach an agreement, we will seek out and use those with gifts and training in mediation in the broader life of the church. *Philippians 4:1-3*

3. We will trust the Body. If we cannot reach agreement or experience reconciliation we will turn the final decision over to others within the broader life of the church. If need be, we will be willing to allow others to arbitrate our differences, promising to abide by and to support whatever decisions are finally made. *Acts 15*

4. In matters between Christians, we will believe in and rely on the Body of Christ as we seek both peace and justice. We will at all times resist turning to courts of law to settle issues within the church. *I Corinthians 6:1-6*