

February 13, 2021 - Pastoral Letter

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

As I begin this journey with you as your called pastor, I want to share with you how I approach conflict resolution.

Do not be surprised, because as sinful failing human beings we are constantly in a battle with the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature. And thru that, we will have periods of disagreement and conflict within the body of Christ. In order to deal with that conflict, I believe it is good that we start with a common, Biblical perspective on how to go about resolving issues.

In the end, we are sisters and brothers in Christ. We want the best for each other, our congregation, and most of all, for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Please accept these principles in a spirit of love. They are sent to you in love.

In the love of Christ,

Pastor Lucero

Biblical Principles on Resolving Conflict

The following guidelines for reconciling relationships between Christians are based on Matthew 18:15-20. Their ultimate purpose is to bring the kind of emotional and spiritual healing between people that Jesus Christ came to give to a broken world. These steps should be used when you commit a sin (James 5:16; Matthew 5:23-26; Matthew 18:15-20), when you see another sin (Matthew 7:1-6; Galatians 6:1-5; James 5:19-20), or when a leader sins (1 Timothy 5:17-22). Such matters should also be addressed quickly, with sensitivity to Matthew 5:23-24.

Covenant ...

In obedience to God's Holy Word and commitment to practicing Biblical Conflict Resolution, I promise to follow the Principle of Priorities. That is, my priorities are to glorify God, build harmony in my church and avoid conflict. I will do as Matthew 18 admonishes—"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you."

First Step ...

I will not first share the offense with another person (not even my pastor, the elders of my congregation, my spouse, or my best friend). I am committed to restoring our relationship rather than exposing my brother's or sister's possible sin. I recognize most of our problems are often personality clashes, and I will try to understand their actions based upon their perspective. I will endeavor to put the best construction on all things and to see the situation from a Christ-centered heart. I will seek to love them as Christ has loved them—unconditionally.

Second Step ...

If going to the person alone does not resolve our differences, I promise to seek a neutral and mature individual who will listen to each of our perspectives of the problem. This person will hopefully be able to shed light on one or both of our blind spots or needs to change in order to glorify God. I also recognize that the "witness" may reveal or say things I won't like, but believe God is using him or her to resolve the conflict rather than take sides. (The "witness" must be an individual with deep spiritual wisdom and highly respected by all those involved).

Warning ...

I will not seek to find others who also been offended, nor share with potential "witnesses" my concerns prior to the meeting with my "offending" brother or sister. The purpose of having a "witness" is not to validate my

hurt, but rather to open my heart and mind to the possible needs I may have regarding my relationship with others.

I realize my friends may naturally listen to my concerns, but also take up my offense. I will, therefore, not cause them to become a party to a possible division and disharmony because of our friendship. Whenever I feel an urge to share the perceived offense with my friends, I will seek instead to pray and commune with God about my hurt.

Confronting Leaders in the Church ...

I believe in the scriptural admonition to not rebuke an Elder (pastors, or other church workers), other than in grave matters of misconduct and open sin (1 Timothy 5:19). I will earnestly pray for and follow those who have been placed in authority in my church. I will not allow anyone to criticize them without following Matthew 18 and without a specific person present.

If I have a problem with a pastor, or other spiritual leader, I will go first to that person. I will not share with anyone my concern. I will listen and try to understand his or her perspective of the problem. If I am not satisfied with his or her explanation and continue to have animosity toward that person, I will ask his or her permission and counsel to find a "witness" who will listen to our conflict.

If the "witness" finds that I misunderstood the situation and should continue no further, I will trust God to complete His work in my life by casting my burden on the Lord and leaving it there. If the "witness" agrees with my concern and find the church worker to be in the wrong, but the worker refuses to hear the "witness," we will find a group of two or three other "witnesses" who will hear the matter and determine what God is doing through this conflict.

Serious Step ...

If I continue to find fault with a leader and cannot relate in "spirit and in truth," I will seek to find another church rather than cause any conflict or disharmony. I am committed to pleasing God through resolving my conflicts, even if it means separating myself from the source of my irritations.

Ultimate Goal ...

I commit myself to be spiritual rather than "normal" and supernatural rather than "natural" when it comes to solving my problems with others. I want God's will and way to resolve my conflicts, and I will do as the Holy Scriptures teach, regardless of my normal and natural feelings. My ultimate goal is to glorify God through bearing much fruit, getting involved in ministry, and avoiding and resolving conflicts.

Counsel from Scripture For Conflict Resolution

When a Brother or Sister Sins Against You ...

Jesus says, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name there I am with them." Matthew 18:15-20

Your Spirit Should Be a Spirit of Helping ...

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Colossians 3:12-14

An Admonition to Watch Yourself ...

Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." Luke 17:1-4

How Not to treat your pastors ...

When a congregation calls a pastor and the call is accepted, all parties should enter into their relationship with the distinct understanding that, as far as they are concerned, this relationship is to continue until the Lord clearly indicates that the call is terminated. Congregations, boards, or individual members of the congregation, who are constantly finding fault with their pastor and making life miserable for him in the hope that the pastor will leave, are transgressing the command of the Lord: "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm." (Psalm 105:15)

How Often Must I Forgive? ...

Some people think that following Matthew 18 means only following verses 15-20 "to the letter." However, if we continue on to verse 22, it is clear that Jesus intends for us to follow His teaching in "spirit and truth." We are never given permission to do less than what we are told in verses 15-20, but we are clearly commanded to do more! "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'" (Matthew 18:21-22)