

Biggest Loser- Conflict

Last Sunday we began this series of messages entitled “The Biggest Loser.” Of course the TV show and this series are all about healthy bodies. The healthy body we’re concerned about is this local assembly of the body of Christ called New Hope Baptist Fellowship. The TV show is all about breaking down old, unhealthy habits and establishing new, healthy, life-changing habits in an extremely fast and life-changing fashion. This series, similarly, is about breaking the old, unhealthy habits and patterns that keep this church from achieving optimum health and community impact and developing new, Christ-honoring, healthy habits, and I think it would be wise for us to do so as quickly as possible.

Last Sunday we saw how in the first church, as reported in Acts 4, the church had come together in a prayer meeting. They didn’t waste any time whining or complaining. They didn’t even offer up much in the way of personal prayer request. They praised God and asked for boldness to proclaim the gospel and to do the miraculous. The bible says they were all of one heart and soul. The place was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Grace and power was on all of them. Interesting result: The church members, of their own will, began to sell personal property and give it to the apostles to use where needed.

Two elements of a healthy church were revealed in that event: **Unselfishness** and **unity**. I would like for us to continue on the theme of unselfishness and unity today as we consider what it takes to be a healthy church. One of the biggest hindrances or

even complete disruptors of unity in any church is the way we handle disagreement and conflict. This church, and every church, has at least one major problem: people. People, even those who are reasonably striving well to please and serve the Lord, come to the place fairly often where we disagree. This is normal and can sometimes even be healthy. But how we handle our disagreements can have massive impact on the health, short and long term, of the church. I would like for us to consider three scenarios, two from scripture and one from my personal experience and see if we can glean some nuggets of relevant application to help us achieve and maintain unity here at New Hope.

1 But a man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a piece of property. **2** However, he kept back part of the proceeds with his wife's knowledge, and brought a portion of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. **3** Then Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the proceeds from the field? **4** Wasn't it yours while you possessed it? And after it was sold, wasn't it at your disposal? Why is it that you planned this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God!" **5** When he heard these words, Ananias dropped dead, and a great fear came on all who heard. **6** The young men got up, wrapped [his body], carried him out, and buried him. **7** There was an interval of about three hours; then his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. **8** "Tell me," Peter asked her, "did you sell the field for this price?" "Yes," she said, "for that price." **9** Then Peter said to her, "Why did you agree to test the

Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out!" ¹⁰ Instantly she dropped dead at his feet. When the young men came in, they found her dead, carried her out, and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Then great fear came on the whole church and on all who heard these things. Acts 5:1-11 (HCSB) This is the first recorded "issue" that came up in the early church. The issue was that a husband and wife agreed together to deceive the church. **Relevant Points:**

*Peter discovered or discerned that they had lied.

*Peter did not talk about it among the apostles or other church members. He confronted Ananias directly and promptly.

*He gave them each opportunity to repent.

*He let God carry out the judgment!

*"Then great fear came on the whole church" The church gained strength because of the way the "issue" was handled.

The next potentially divisive and destructive issue that came up in the church is found in the very next chapter:

1 In those days, as the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. ² Then the

Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, "It would not be right for us to give up preaching about God to wait on tables. ³ Therefore, brothers, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the preaching ministry." ⁵ The proposal pleased the whole company. So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶ They had them stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷ So the preaching about God flourished, the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith. Acts 6:1-7 (HCSB)

This issue was potentially a much more divisive and destructive problem. It could have caused some serious damage to the fellowship. It might even have led to the first church split had it not been handled correctly. It was racial.

Also, the church had become, in probably what was a few months time, a mega-church. There were likely well over 10,000 brand new believers being taught and ministered to.

Relevant Notes:

*They did not have a church business meeting. Just the apostles/pastors had a meeting to resolve the issue.

*No complaining or arguing took place once the initial complaint was registered. A solution was presented and agreed upon. Seven “deacons” were chosen from among the apostles who were to oversee the distribution among and serving of the widows.

*Preaching flourished, the church grew, and many surrendered to ministry

Personal experience: Jay???

Mean, disrespectful, roudy, loud, obnoxious,

I did not respond irrationally/continued to teach, minister, witness

Patient

God moved

Rules of engagement: Our military, even and especially in time of war, has rules of engagement. They set specific guidelines as to how military personnel are to respond to enemy combatants in various types and levels of situations. These are manmade and subject to change as leadership changes.

Our Lord has given us the church rules of engagement and they are immutable. To violate any of them is to, at the very least, weaken the health of the church and quite possibly cause great harm and division, opening the door for Satan to deceive and

destroy. Weak and young believers are the most vulnerable in these situations.

Let's consider God's rules of engagement. His purpose in giving us these is to achieve and maintain perfect unity. Don't worry if you're a guest today. This isn't just about the health of New Hope. It is about life. These principles will work in any church any home, and any relationship.

Rules of engagement:

1. Identify the issue between scriptural/moral issues and those related to opinions, traditions, and personal comfort. This is big!

Jesus was confronted by the Jewish leaders because His disciples did not follow the traditions of elders.

⁶ He answered them, "Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written: These people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. ⁷ They worship Me in vain, teaching as doctrines the commands of men. ⁸ Disregarding the command of God, you keep the tradition of men." ⁹ He also said to them, "You completely invalidate God's command in order to maintain your tradition!" Mark 7:6-9 (HCSB)

Throughout the 34 years I've been in the ministry, almost every conflict I have seen, overheard or been in the middle of, has been over traditions, not doctrine or moral failure.

Before you pull out all your big guns, make sure it is a biblical principle you're fighting for and not your own self-centered agenda.

2. Determine the cost of entering into a conflict. Is it worth the energy and effort? To be honest with you, if it didn't do so much irreparable harm to so many, I would have to laugh at most of the silly things church members have gone to war over. Much blood and treasure has been wasted on silly, insignificant issues.

28 "For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? **L**uke 14:28 (HCSB)

Jesus was talking about the cost of discipleship, but it is a reasonable question we should ourselves before engaging our time, energy, testimony and treasure in conflict.

There is a "hidden" cost most church members don't consider when they choose to go to war over an issue. They may consider what it will cost them, but because of the selfish nature of most church conflicts, they never consider the horrendous impact on the young and spiritually immature. Our city and nation are strewn with the bodies of the wounded, fallen and scarred. Bombs have landed in the churches and homes of the innocent leaving them devastated and disillusioned with the church. So please consider the potential consequences- good and bad.

3. Watch your words/anger

Anger is not a sin. Jesus got angry. There are plenty of things that go on in and out of the church that should stir up righteous indignation. But, we must not let our anger get out of control. As soon as it does, we are adding gasoline instead of water to the fire.

19 My dearly loved brothers, understand this: everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, **20** for man's anger does not accomplish God's righteousness. **J**ames 1:19-20 (HCSB)

26 **Be angry and do not sin.** **E**ph 4:26a (HCSB)

When I was in the Boy Scouts, we had to start fires with kindling and one or two matches. Most people cheat and start them with gasoline or some other highly combustible liquid. You can start fires with gasoline but you have to put them out with water. Uncontrolled anger is gasoline to a conflict. It can lead to sin, hurt, and division.

24 Don't make friends with an angry man, and don't be a companion of a hot-tempered man, **25** or you will learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare. **P**rov 22:24-25 (HCSB)

4. Initiate resolution and reconciliation (or shut up)

16 Six things the LORD hates; in fact, seven are detestable to Him: **17** arrogant eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, **18** a heart that plots wicked schemes, feet eager to run to evil, **19** a lying witness who gives false

testimony, and one who stirs up trouble among brothers.
Prov 6:16-19 (HCSB)

You are either a part of the solution or part of the problem. You're either a peace maker or a war monger. Ask an honest friend which terms better describe you. Some of my favorite people in all the church are peacemakers. "Blessed are the peacemakers!"

5. Resolve issues quickly

²³ So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Reach a settlement quickly Matt 5:23-25 (HCSB)

Every day that an issue, feeling, or hurt goes unresolved is another day of bitterness, hatred, jealousy, and unforgiveness spreading through the body like the most progressive and deadly forms of cancer. And, it will continue until the body is racked with pain, wounds, and suffering.

²⁶ Don't let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and don't give the Devil an opportunity. Eph 4:26b-27 (HCSB)

6. Follow biblical procedure/Don't listen

This, without a doubt in my experience, is the most frequently and severely violated behavioral principle of Christ and the bible among otherwise well-meaning and faithful Christians.

15 “If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. **16** But if he won’t listen, take one or two more with you, so that **by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established.** **17** If he pays no attention to them, tell the church. But if he doesn’t pay attention even to the church, let him be like an unbeliever and a tax collector to you. **Matt 18:15-17 (HCSB)**

New Hope application: You have a problem, go to the person. Don’t talk to anyone else! If someone comes to you with a problem and it’s not about you, stop them immediately, don’t listen, pray for them, then escort them to the person they have a problem with.

If that doesn’t work, bring in a mutually respected church leader.

7. Forgive

3 Be on your guard. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. **4** And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and comes back to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.” **Luke 17:3-4 (HCSB)**

Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you must [forgive]. **Col 3:13 (HCSB)**

Forgive even if he doesn’t repent. You must!