

Resolving Conflict in Ministry

**Module 2:
Selfish Believers**

Philippians 2:12-18

*“Do everything
without complaining or arguing.”*

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Philippians 2:12-18

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

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Nature of "Self" in the Bible

- ◆ Note **Philippians 2:1-4** – the Issue of Selfishness
- ◆ "Self" is who we are in the image of God.
 - Yet, the "self" is fallen; the image is marred.
- ◆ Several references to "self" are positive.
 - E.g., love others as yourself (Mt.19:19).
- ◆ Most references to "self" are negative.
 - Parallel to flesh/sin nature (see Rom.7:18f).

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Nature of "Self" in the Bible (cont.)

- ◆ The fallen "Self" must be disciplined and controlled.
 - A disciple must "deny himself" (Mt.16:24-25).
- ◆ A "selfish believer" is one who allows the fallen nature/self to dominate his life.
- ◆ Spiritual immaturity is a related concept.
 - The immature seek their own pleasure and see things only from their perspective.
 - See I Corinthians 3:1-4; Hebrews 5:11-14

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Examples of Selfish Believers

- ◆ Contention over insignificant, non-doctrinal issues (e.g., music styles; carpet color; the “piano”).
- ◆ Churches in South – inner-city evangelism.
 - *Afternoon Sunday School – separate from when others attended*
 - *Feared threat to facilities (cleanliness, etc.)*
- ◆ Peter in Matthew 16:16-25 (“setting your mind”).
- ◆ Our tendency to “grasp” for position/reputation.
- ◆ Rebellious Israel in Deut.32:3-6 – “a warped and crooked generation” (i.e., the people of God!).

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A Related Passage For Conflict Among Believers

I CORINTHIANS 6:1-8: *If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? ² Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! ⁴ Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? ⁵ I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? ⁶ But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers!*

⁷ The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? ⁸ Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters.

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A Related Passage For Conflict Among Believers

PRINCIPLES FROM I CORINTHIANS 6:1-8:

- ◆ Believers are responsible to judge their own issues in the context of the body.
- ◆ The effects of internal conflict among Christians upon unbelievers is harmful.
- ◆ Believers should be willing to suffer personal loss so that the cause of Christ is not maligned.
- ◆ Question: Does 1 Cor. 6 prohibit one Christian from using the law and law officials against another Christian or taking another Christian to court? {Note: issue of access to the courts}

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Relational Wisdom

Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*

Influential organization that promotes mediation and reconciliation.

Website: <https://rw360.org/slippery-slope/>

Note the slippery slope chart (next slide).

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Characteristics of Selfish Believers

- ◆ They promote personal interests above the interests of Christ and others.
- ◆ They want their way and have no room for varying opinions.
- ◆ They think they have the big picture and the best interest of others at heart.
- ◆ They are self-centered and self-seeking.
- ◆ They are blind to their own selfishness. {KEY!}
- ◆ They resort to complaining and arguing.
- ◆ They threaten the unity & testimony of the ministry.

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A Model for Voicing Complaints & Grievances

- ◆ In the Proper Spirit.
- ◆ To the Proper Person(s).
- ◆ In the Proper Context.
- ◆ For the Proper Reasons.
- ◆ With a Potential Solution.

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Principles for a Godly Response

- ◆ Don't promote them because of their noise!
 - *An immature/selfish leader can be a curse.*
- ◆ Expose selfishness through positive teaching and models. {Christ, Paul, Timothy & Epaphroditus}
 - *Note: Negative examples as well (e.g., Israel).*
- ◆ Don't expect immature believers to respond to rebuke with maturity.
 - *Direct rebuke will likely escalate the problem.*
- ◆ Allow room for self-correction through the convincing ministry of the Spirit of God.
 - *Matthew 21:28-32 – giving “room to repent”*

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Principles for a Godly Response

- ◆ Seek to harness their passion and energy for constructive purposes.
 - *Sometimes people's complaints derive from undiscovered and unused gifts.*
- ◆ Appeal to and follow the example of Christ.
 - *Christ did not "grasp" but "emptied himself."*
- ◆ Highlight examples of servitude and sacrifice within your midst.
- ◆ Continue to be a servant, even to them.

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What May Happen

- ◆ If they repent, you have gained a fellow servant in the cause of Christ.
- ◆ If they continue to be immature, they will not grow or advance in ministry.
- ◆ If they become divisive within the Body, you may need to follow Romans 16:17-19 (marking & separating from them).

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Summary and Related Scripture

- ◆ Promote servanthood in teaching & models.
- ◆ Be an example of servanthood even to them.
- ◆ 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 – Contrasts spiritual, worldly, and infant believers.
- ◆ Galatians 5:13-15 – Don't "devour one another," but "serve one another in love."
- ◆ James 4:1-3 – The origin of fights & quarrels (i.e., passions/desires and means of satisfying them).
- ◆ 2 Timothy 2:23-26 – Avoid quarrels; gently instruct with patience.

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Conflict in the Philippian Church – Wisdom Model

Text	Philippians 1:12-18	Philippians 2:12-18	Philippians 3:2, 15-21	Philippians 4:2-3
Type of Conflict	Contentious Christians	Selfish Believers	False Teachers	Conflicting Leaders
How It's Manifested	Envy & Rivalry	Complaining & Arguing		
Godly Response	Promote Christ	Promote Servanthood		
If Positive Result	Win an Enemy	Gain a Fellow Servant		
If Negative Result	Isolation Departure Discipline	Immature Ineffective Discipline		

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The Violence of Love, by Oscar Romero

A Church that does not provoke any crises, a gospel that doesn't unsettle, a Word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a Word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of a society in which it is being proclaimed –

What Gospel is that?

Very nice, pious considerations that don't bother anyone, that's the way many would like preaching to be. Those preachers who avoid every thorny matter so as not to be harassed, so as not to have conflicts and difficulties,...

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The Violence of Love, by Oscar Romero (cont.)

...do not light up the world they live in.

They don't have Peter's courage, who told that crowd where the bloodstained hands still were that had killed Christ: "You killed him!" Even though the charge could cost him his life as well, he made it.

The Gospel is courageous; it's the good news of him who came to take away the world's sin!

Prayer: God give us wisdom and courage to confront sins and offenses in a spirit of love for the purity and unity of your Church and the glory of your Christ. Amen!

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