Biblical guidelines for confronting

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself or you also may be tempted. Bear each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ." Gal 6:1-2

This article is written to help train leaders in a church plant to deal with issues in emerging churches. It may also help in team life. Very few of us are comfortable with confronting either in a discipling relationship, in a church situation or on a team. For many of us, confronting is the most difficult part of relating to others in our community or church. Yet it is essential to godly, loving, growing relationships.

God's Word is filled with 'confrontations'. I am using the word "confront" here to cover several Biblical terms including: restore (Gal. 6:1); instruct (2 Tim. 2:25; 4:2); confront (Ez. 16:2); disciple (Prov. 10:17); admonish (Col. 3:16); warn (1 Thess. 5:14); correct and rebuke (2 Tim. 4:2).

For example, in Ps. 23:3 we read, ***"He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness, for His name's sake"***. Why do we need to restore people? The answer is, ***"For His name's sake."*** We seek to restore people because they haven't walked in the paths of righteousness and God's honour is affected. How are we to do this? Gently. Remember, ***"The bruised reed He will not break"***. Also remember ***"the paths of righteousness"*** are not 'the path of legalism' and rules and regulations.

Twelve guidelines

Failure to confront when it is our responsibility may be sin. We tend to view confronting others as merely optional in our lives. But we need to see it as seriously as God does. Prov. 24:11-12; 24-25 says, ***"Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to slaughter. If you say, 'Behold, we did not know this' does not He who weighs the heart perceive it." "Whoever says to the wicked, 'You are in the right' will be cursed by the people ... but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight and a good blessing will come upon them."*** See also Mt. 18:15; Eph. 4:25-27 and James 5:19-20.

Keep in mind that the purpose of confrontation is restoration and reconciliation and not retribution. Your goal is that the person's relationship with God and with the church might be restored. See Gal. 6:1 and Mt. 5:23-24.

Spend enough time in prayer before confronting. Confess any destructive attitudes, feelings or actions. Ask the Lord to give you a loving, caring attitude towards the person. Ask Him to guide you and give to you the right words and questions. Pray that they will be open to what you have to say.

If someone has offended or hurt you in some way, work on bearing with them and forgiving them before you confront. See Rom. 15:1; Eph. 4:31-32 and Col. 3:12-14.

Before confronting the other person ask yourself if you are biased for or against them. Remember confrontation is not a 'spiritual' way of gaining revenge. Don't avoid confronting, because you are their friend or because of their support for you in the past. See Prov. 26:28; 27:5; 29:5 and Rom. 12:17-21.

Find the most appropriate timing for confrontation. ***"Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him!"*** (Prov. 29:20). See also Eccl. 3:7 ***"... a time to keep silence and a time to speak."***

If you are angry, don't use the confrontation for "garbage dumping" on the person. Although some calm expression of your anger may be appropriate, try to deal with the cutting edge of your anger long before you confront them. Otherwise the time will degenerate into nothing more than a shouting match. Remember, if you squeeze a sponge you find out what is in the sponge! In the midst of a time of confrontation, remember you are being squeezed! Let what comes out of you be wisdom, understanding and gentleness. See Prov. 12:18; 15:18; 17:14;

29:11 and James 1:19-20. [Proverbs is really very useful among our Muslim friends.] Solomon is very highly regarded and the honour culture he was speaking into is much the same as the cultures we are familiar with. When training leaders from a Muslim background use Proverbs a lot.

Primarily confront behaviour rather than character or personality. Most judging of others involves the latter two. Character change is usually a very slow process. It is very discouraging to be told, *"You must change now or else!"* Ask that actions should change. See Gal. 2:11-14 for an example.

Be open to receive confrontation as well as to give it. Ask for it whenever appropriate. See Prov. 15:10, 12, 31-32.

Confrontation is most effective when we already have a strong, caring relationship in which we have consistently affirmed the person. See Prov. 27:6, ***"Faithful are the wounds of a friend, profuse are the kisses of an enemy"***. The word "friend" implies this kind of relationship. In this sort of situation Biblical confrontation usually helps the relationship become stronger.

Seek to resolve the issue with the person directly. Never gossip about them. Prov. 25:9-10 says, ***"Argue your case with your neighbour himself and do not reveal another's secret, lest he who hears you bring shame upon you and your ill repute have no end."*** See also 1 Pet. 2:1.

Your manner of confronting is extremely important. Here are some key points:

- Confront gently – Prov. 15:1,4 and 2 Tim. 2:25
- Confront patiently – Prov. 25:15 and 1 Thess. 5:14
- Use "sweetness of speech" whenever possible – Prov. 16:21,23
- Avoid arguing – Prov. 17:14; 18:19 and 2 Tim. 2:25
- Make sure you are speaking the truth. Be sure you have done your homework and have ascertained the facts of the case. If in doubt as to the truth, use tentative statements or questions. Always give 'the benefit of the doubt' – Prov. 12:17 and Eph. 4:15,25
- Avoid rash words. Remember you are confronting for restoration, never for punishment. (Prov. 12:18 and Eph. 4:15,25)
- When your feelings are involved, use "I" words, rather than "You" words – i.e. "I am angry" rather than, "You make me angry". When you use the "I" word you take responsibility for your feelings (i.e. blame yourself), rather than trying to blame the other person for how you feel. Note Paul's use of the "I" word when confronting the Corinthian believers – 2 Cor. 2:4, 20-21.

More guidelines and practical ideas

Constantly reaffirm your relationship. Let the person know that you value them and your relationship with them. Remember the great example of the Lord Jesus in this when He "confronted" the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3.

Confront clearly and concisely. State what is fact, what is feeling and what is conjecture. Our perception of what has happened is often very culture bound. Try to focus clearly on what you observe and how you interpret that and, if appropriate, how you feel about it and how you wish the person would change their behaviour.

Effective confrontation is always a dialogue and never a monologue from you. So listen to the other person's point of view. At least listen as much as you talk.

Realize that you may be confronting others non-verbally through silence, facial expressions, tone of voice etc. Non-verbal confrontation is very difficult to receive. It is hardly ever effective and is usually very harmful to relationships.

Biblical confrontation skills are an amalgam of Biblical teaching and culture. Don't rely only on culture for we aim to live Biblically. But usually the Bible is close to a Middle East Semitic culture and that is the predominant culture many of us live in. Learn how to confront effectively in the

specific culture in which you find yourself. Ask people of that culture – especially mature believers – about appropriate confrontation and what people of your culture should avoid doing when confronting. But keep to Biblical values as well.

Judge the effectiveness of a confrontation by the long-term change in behaviour or attitudes, not by the person's immediate reaction. It is usual for a person to respond poorly to confrontation. Allow time for the Holy Spirit to work. Often there is repentance and change. It is worse when the person seems to respond well, but over time there is no change in behaviour. This is hard to deal with.

Don't automatically take the blame yourself when a confrontation doesn't go well. Carefully review the guidelines above and ask yourself how effectively you confronted the other person. Learn for the next time. But also realise that the ultimate responsibility for change belongs to the other person. Recall that several of the confrontations of Jesus "failed" humanly speaking (the Pharisees didn't change). Keep praying and loving that person.

Learn to receive confrontation well. We need to confront well, but learning to receive it is even more important. Probably the Bible has more to say about receiving confrontation well than actively confronting. Again, the Book of Proverbs is very helpful culturally as well as Biblically.

Here are some verses from Proverbs:

Receiving confrontation well

- ***"Rebuke a wise man and he will love you."*** 9:8
- ***"He who heeds discipline shows the way to life."*** 10:17
- ***"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge."*** 12:1
- ***"Whoever heeds correction is honoured."*** 13:18
- ***"Whoever heeds correction shows prudence."*** 15:5
- ***"He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise."*** 15:31
- ***"Whoever heeds correction gains understanding."*** 15:32
- ***"A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool."*** 17:10
- ***"Rebuke a discerning man and he will gain knowledge."*** 19:25

Receiving confrontation badly

- ***"Fools despise wisdom and discipline."*** 1:7
- ***"If you had responded to my rebuke I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you."*** 1:23
- ***"You will say, 'How I hated discipline, how my heart spurned correction.' "*** 5:12
- ***"Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse."*** 9:7
- ***"Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you."*** 9:8
- ***"Whoever ignores correction leads others astray."*** 10:17
- ***"He who hates correction is stupid."*** 12:1
- ***"A mocker does not listen to rebuke."*** 13:1
- ***"He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame."*** 13:18
- ***"He who hates correction will die."*** 15:10
- ***"A mocker resents correction; he will not consult the wise."*** 15:12
- ***"A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed without remedy."*** 20:1

Responding to verbal attacks

It isn't too difficult to respond well when someone confronts us lovingly and gently. But when we are attacked, we are tempted to respond in kind. Our anger, hurt and defensiveness take

over and control our responses, usually with sad consequences. But we can learn new patterns.

A core belief of ours should be:

"When I am attacked, my first responsibility is to respond in ways that will glorify God."

We must help leaders to remember 1 Pet. 5:3, ***"Being examples to the flock"***. This can be seen as 'being the standard' of how to confront and be confronted. 1 Cor. 10:31 says, ***"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."***

There are perhaps three things to work on that will enable us to receive confrontation well:

1. Learning and drilling ourselves to have appropriate responses
2. Making a commitment to God to respond in those ways
3. Relying on God for the power and wisdom to respond Biblically

So when someone confronts us in anger, we respond in ways that will calm his anger. However, a core belief should be: "nothing always works". People are different. Cultures are different. Spiritual maturity is different. You might do very well in responding in Godly ways, but the other person is still mad at you. You can't control the feelings of others or force them to give up their intention to gain revenge. Remember Romans 12:18, ***"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."*** It is not always possible, but when we respond in Godly ways and teach them Biblical principles, we significantly increase the probability of the person becoming calm and rational so that it is possible to deal with the issue at hand.

10 Biblical ways to defuse an attack

Here are some strategies from Scripture to defuse an angry verbal attack:

- Keep silent – Is. 53:7 and Jn. 19:9;17:22
- Think before you react – Prov. 15:28; 29:20 and James 1:19-20
- Really listen carefully – Prov. 19:20; 18:2,13 and James 1:19
- Respond gently – Prov. 15:1; 16:21; 25:15
- Agree – (Mt. 5:25 and Jn. 18:37)
    - ✧ with whatever is true
    - ✧ In principle that there has been a breakdown in relationships and that restoration is very important.
    - ✧ With the possibility of truth
- Give caring feedback – Jn. 19:11 and 1 Pet. 3:9
- Bless the person – Lk. 6:28 and Rom. 12:14
- Avoid quarrelling – Prov. 16:21; 17:14 and Eph. 4:31
- Offer to help – Mt. 5:40-41 and Lk. 6:27-28
- Ask for forgiveness – 1 Sam. 15:24-30; 25:28 and Mt. 5:23-24

Conclusion

I have heard and read a number of reports of small house churches splitting up or even imploding. In trying to assess the reasons for lack of growth and lack of multiplication, one of the major reasons seems to be an inability to confront and receive confrontation in a Biblical manner. Polarisation happens very quickly in the group. None see any half tones or qualifications. People are culturally molded into very inflammable responses that often become raging passions that lead to ferocious attacks on others.

Not surprisingly, in honour-shame societies all this leads to a lack of cohesiveness in a church group. As a result, there is no church growth. I hope this Bible study, with its focus on Proverbs, can be used to help you work through these Biblical principles with trainee leaders in a quiet and non-confrontational way when there is no crisis.