

# Managing Conflict in the Church

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The first sin reported after Adam's and Eve's disobedience was the sin of Cain killing his brother Abel, and we have been killing each other ever since. One of the dreadful consequences of the Fall is human warfare. The history of the human race can be traced in terms of endless wars and divisions.

The history of God's people can also be written in the language of wars and divisions. And it isn't just false doctrine versus orthodox doctrine or liberal versus conservative. There are Bible-believing churches that have 95% agreement on all fundamental doctrinal issues (something the world doesn't have), yet they are constantly fighting and dividing.

One of Satan's most successful strategies for keeping churches weak and ineffective is in-church fighting and unresolved conflict. This is a life and death issue to our local churches. But it is especially important to our leaders because they are most often at the center of conflict or have to manage conflict.

*Christianity Today* published an article entitled, "Why Pastors Leave the Ministry." You might think that sexual immorality or finances would be the primary reason, but no. The number one reason why pastors leave the ministry is because they get tired of endless interpersonal conflict and complaining within the family of believers.

In his remarkably penetrating book, *The Mark of the Christian*, Francis Schaeffer, speaking from years of experience, states that a crucial issue to be faced in most conflicts is not just the issue at hand but the kind of words, actions, and attitudes displayed in the midst of conflict:

I have observed one thing among true Christians in their differences in many countries: What divides and severs true Christian groups and Christians - what leaves a bitterness that can last for 20, 30, 40 years (or for 50 or 60 years in a son's or daughter's memory) - is not the issue of doctrine or belief that caused the differences in the first place. Invariably, it is a lack of love - and the bitter things

that are said by true Christians in the midst of differences.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible says the same thing. To the fighting church at Corinth Paul points to the "more excellent way" as a solution to their many conflicts. This "way" is the way of love. Love curbs the many self-centered vices that destroy church unity.

The New Testament's principles of love provide much positive instruction for resolving conflict and maintaining unity.

Let's look in a brief overview of now at how love (the more excellent way) reduces, tempers, and heals conflict.

## Love Curbs the Vices That Divide (1 Cor. 13:4-5).

At the root of most fights and divisions is perverse pride. Pride (and religious pride is the worst) not only explains why we fight so much, but why we seem to have no power to reconcile our divisions and disagreements. "Through insolence [pride] comes nothing but strife" (Prov. 13:10a). But love is not arrogant. It acts with a lowly, humble spirit.

Selfishness also generates much needless strife. But love is not self-seeking. It seeks the advantages and good of others.

Jealousy creates petty rivalry, poisoned dispositions, slanderous talk, and mean-spiritedness. But love delights in the betterment of others.

The irritable, angry spirit quickly inflames emotions. But love is not quick to anger. "The slow to anger calms a dispute" (Prov. 15:18b). So when conflict occurs, if you choose to act arrogantly, selfishly, jealously, or cantankerously, you will make matters worse. You will aggravate disagreement, distort differences, and hinder any hope for agreement. You will wound people with cutting words and poison discussions with sinful attitudes.

If, however, when you encounter conflict with fellow believers, you will remember to speak in love and respond humbly and selflessly, and control

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1970), 22.

your anger, the differences will be more manageable and bitterness would be more quickly forgotten.

### Loves Promotes the Virtues That Unite.

Love greatly tempers conflict because it is "patient" and "kind."

Love always bears up under the stresses of criticism and attacks. It always believes and hopes; it rejoices in all that is good and true; it can never delight in evil of any kind; its nature is to unite and heal brokenness. Love is a gloriously positive quality.

Furthermore, one of the most important qualities of love for dealing with the battles of life is forgiveness: "[Love] does not take into account a wrong suffered" (1 Cor. 13:5). Unforgiving people cling to their grievances and wounds in a way that doesn't allow conflict to end.

### Love Forbids Hate, Personal Retaliation, and Revenge.

The ethical demands of Christian love are radical by the world's standards and contrary to our fleshly nature. Christian love requires that we love our enemies, not hate them. This love for one's enemy is not simply reframing from retaliation, and it's certainly not a do-nothing attitude. On the contrary, it's to be a positive, proactive response. It entails praying for blessing, showing kindness and mercy in time of need, and seeking peace with the enemy (Matt. 5:44; Rom. 12:14-21).

Jesus teaches:

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; (Matt. 5:44-45)

Following our Lord's extraordinary teaching on loving one's enemy, Paul writes, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.... 'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink [acts of kindness]; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head [shaming them by kindness and thus perhaps changing their minds]'" (Rom. 12:14, 20, 21).

Whether those who hate you are hostile unbelievers or believers, it matters not. You are still obligated to bless them, pray for them, show kindness to them in their need, and win them with loving deeds.

The Scripture also prohibits the spirit of retaliation, the get-even mentality which is so much a

part of the world's thinking: "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone" (Rom. 12:17). "See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people" (1 Thess. 5:15). "Not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9). When we are insulted, we are not to insult back in kind; when attacked, we are not to attack back; when we are criticized, we are not to criticize back in kind; when hurt, we are not to strike back to hurt. As Edwards reminds us, the very "nature of love is good-will" towards others.<sup>2</sup>

The Scripture further forbids taking personal, private revenge, taking justice into our own hands: "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). It is God's prerogative to punish evil, and He has also established human government and courts to judge and punish evil doers (Rom. 13:1-7).

Instead of seeking retribution, we are to "overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). We are to gain victory over evil by kindness, forgiveness, and trust in God. Yet all too often Christian people are overcome by evil in their conflicts with others.

When people's feelings have been hurt, they somehow think can do anything they want in retaliation. They can leave the church, divide the body, explode with uncontrolled anger, cut people off, villainies whomever they want, lie, hate, and backbite. And they can justify the most wicked behavior with the simple excuse, "But I've been hurt!" But love abhors what is evil and harmful to others. It doesn't rejoice in evil of any kind.

Finally, John gives some of the most severe warnings in the Bible against hate of a brother or sister. He says repeatedly, "Love one another" (1 John 2:9, 11; 3:14, 15; 4:20, 21). True believers do not hate.

### Love Covers a Multitude of Sins

Peter writes, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

Peter introduces his appeal to fervent mutual love with the prepositional phrase "above all." The phrase "above all" emphasizes the urgency and importance of love. We can't live together without it. It is a binding force.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 196.

Peter isn't simply saying, "Love one another." He says, "Keep fervent in your love for one another love." The word "fervent" conveys the idea of "at full stretch," thus love with intensity. It is to be "earnest," "constant," "at full strength," "with deeply felt emotions."

The reason for this urgent appeal to love "at full strength" is that "love covers a multitude of sins." By this, Peter means love covers all kinds of offenses, hurts, annoyances, disagreements, disappointments, sins both small and large, real and imagined, that we all experience at the hands of others.

Howard Hendricks, professor at Dallas Seminary, in his typically humorous style puts it this way, "Many of us are like porcupines trying to huddle together on a bitter cold night to keep each other warm, but continually poke and hurt each other the closer we get."

At no time do we poke one another more painfully than when we are involved in controversy. Without fervent love for one another, however, we could not survive such injuries and maintain church unity.

Only love has the power to cover: to freely and repeatedly forgive; to understand people's weakness and complexities and to put things into proper perspective; to put a blanket over others faults; to swallow one's pride. Or in Paul's words, "Love...does not take into account a wrong suffered. [Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Love doesn't rejoice in evil. Love seeks to cover, not expose a believer's sin to the world. Jesus' love for His disciples covered their many sins or He couldn't have lived with them. He knew their weaknesses and sins, but love covered.

This doesn't imply that love ignores or condones sin. Love abhors "what is evil" (Rom. 12:9). Love covers a multitude of sins, not all sins. There are times that love requires exposure and discipline of sin for the welfare of others. Seeking the welfare of the other, love knows when to cover and when to expose! It is not self-concerned but others-concerned. But even then its purpose is not to expose and shame, but to redeem and restore (2 Cor. 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 4:16; Gal. 6:1).

### Love Considers the Welfare of the Weaker Believer

From the beginning of the Christian era, believers have fought over the use of their freedoms in Christ. And we still quarrel today over these marginal issues. Among Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome, intense conflict arose over food regulations and ob-

servance of holy days. Paul calls these issues "disputable matters." By this, he means they are not fundamental doctrines, but secondary issues.

Among the principles he lays out for resolving this conflict is love: "For if because of food [the issue of debate] your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died" (Rom. 14:15). The lifestyle of love requires a believer to sacrifice legitimate uses of one's joyous freedom or liberty for the sake of a weak believer's spiritual welfare. Love builds up others; it doesn't destroy others. It unites, not divides. It sacrifices for the good of others. Pride and selfishness refuse to forego rights and freedoms for the sake of a weaker believer.

Love protects weak and misguided brothers and sisters (Rom. 14:15). Love says, "If food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble" (1 Cor. 8:13).

Christian leaders are to model the kind of love that is willing to sacrifice one's glorious liberties for the sake of others. This is love not seeking its own advantage, but the good of the one loved (Rom. 15:1-3). Love denies self for the good of the conscience of others.

### Practical Solutions to Solving Conflict with Love

Leaders and teachers have to engage in debate (Acts 15:2, 7). They have to persuade and convince, defend and argue for their ideas and beliefs. This is a normal part of the task of leading and protecting people. It is also an essential means by which we learn and improve our ideas and beliefs.

There is nothing wrong with Christians disagreeing or trying to persuade one another to the rightness of their position. What is wrong is loveless conflict that ends in sinful, ruined relationships.

If when we disagree, however, we use biblical principles to handle conflict, we will be far more effective in persuading people and far less destructive in our disagreements and conflicts.

Before looking at solutions to loveless conflict, we must first understand the positive aspects to conflict.

### Positive Aspects of Conflict

First of all, conflict exposes our true inner character and spiritual condition (1 Cor. 11:19). In the midst of conflict we discover our weaknesses and strengths. Fighting can bring out the worst in us or the best. We find out how we measure up to the biblical demands of love. Are we short tempered, angry, unforgiving? Are we proud and selfish? Are we poor listeners, distrusting of others, independ-

ent, unteachable, cowardly? Or are we humble, patient, kind, levelheaded, wise, balanced, submissive to others, forgiving? God can use the pressure of conflict to reveal to us who we really are. It often humbles us and causes us to repent and seek God's help for our weaknesses and lack of love.

Second, conflicts always help clarify our doctrinal beliefs. In Acts 15 the apostles and the elders of Jerusalem met in council to debate Gentile requirements for salvation and entry into the community of God's people. As a result of this conflict, greater unity and clarity of the gospel resulted.

Doctrinal conflict forces us to study Scripture more diligently, to reassess our beliefs, to sharpen them, and to correct our doctrinal weaknesses and faults.

Conflict also sharpens and improves ideas, plans, agendas, or solutions to problems (Acts 6:1-6).

Third, conflicts can help improve our communication and problem-solving skills. Conflict forces us to learn to speak more accurately and carefully and to learn problem-solving skills. Look at Paul's letters. He is a master communicator and diplomat speaking to people from widely diverse cultures. When we look at society today we see people handling conflict by violence, killing, or lawsuits. Learning good skills in managing conflict will help you in every area of your life, starting with your marriage, in your work, and in the church.

Fourth, conflict can strengthen group relationships. It is a myth to think that people who love one another never fight or disagree. People in excellent marriages and healthy churches conflict. Godly men and women can fall into sharp disagreement as did Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:39).

Good people have legitimate disagreements and different perspectives from one another. If, however, we follow God's Word when we conflict, we can more easily live together with our differences, resolve differences, heal from hurts, understand each other's perspective, appreciate one another, and trust one another (2 Cor. 7:6-16).

Fifth, God is wonderfully glorified when we resolve our conflicts in a sane and loving way. Our churches also become more healthy communities and witness to the world of the transforming power of the gospel when we resolve conflict according to the more excellent way. So conflict does have positive aspects to it.

### Some Specific Principles for Managing Conflict

The Scripture gives many guidelines for handling conflict. The problem, however, in the heat of battle conflict is that we often forget to implement the biblical principles and fall into the world's way of fighting for power, control and manipulation. Here are some important Christian principles for handling conflict in love.

**Be Spirit-Controlled.** When facing conflict, the first and most important thing I can say to you is this: Be Spirit-controlled, not out of control (Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:16). Don't be controlled by the flesh and the devil. The flesh produces nothing but confusion, division, and bitterness. "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are...enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying" (Gal. 5:19-21).

If, however, you are controlled by the Holy Spirit, you will be loving and self-controlled because these are the first and last of the nine fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). You will also be kind, gentle, patient, peaceful, and joyous. So a Spirit-controlled leader will be a loving leader and will handle conflict according to the "more excellent way."

**Control the Passion of Anger.** In any conflict the first emotion to control is anger. The Scripture tells us that the old, unregenerate life is the life of uncontrolled anger. The new life in Christ is a life of controlled anger (Eph. 4:26, 27). When people become angry, they often don't care what they say or do. They no longer think straight. Their behavior is out of control, so the devil takes control of the situation and blows everything out of proportion. Furthermore, angry brawling grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30, 31). Loving leaders, however, are not easily provoked to anger (1 Cor. 13:5). They are calm and patient.

The Bible gives many warnings about the dangers of anger. A leader especially needs to know these Scriptures and obey these warnings at the moment conflict erupts:

- \* "A fool always loses his temper" (Prov. 29:11).
- \* "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife" (Prov. 15:18).
- \* "And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression" (Prov. 29:22).
- \* "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court" (Matt. 5:22).
- \* "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.... Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice" (Eph. 4:30, 31).

\* "slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:19, 20).

\* An elder cannot be "quick-tempered" (Titus 1:7) "or pugnacious" (1 Tim. 3:3).

**Be a Peacemaker, not a Troublemaker.** The last of the seven deadly sins listed as an abomination to the Lord God is "one who spreads strife among brothers" (Prov. 6:19).

Jesus taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9), and to His contentious disciples, "Be at peace with one another" (Mark. 9:50). To strife-ridden Christians in Rome, Paul writes, "Let us pursue the things which make for peace" (Rom. 14:19).<sup>3</sup> We are to be "diligent [that is, 'spare no effort'] to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). We are to aggressively pursue peace and harmony. One of the qualifications of a church elder is "peaceable" (1 Tim. 3:3). A qualified church leader cannot be a fighter or a contentious person (1 Tim. 3:3).

Peacemaking is hard work. It takes wisdom, self-control, and putting the good of others first. It can be costly in time and effort. And peacemakers are often misunderstood and maligned.<sup>4</sup> But peacemaking is blessed by the Lord Jesus Christ and indispensable to the unity of the local church. A pastor confronting a church at war with itself publicly declared, "It is time to wage peace." Scripture warns, "Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife" (Prov. 26:21).

We are not, of course, talking about peace at any price or surrendering the truths of the gospel. That is not peace.

God's peace does not peacefully coexist with falsehood, sham, or injustice; so God's peacemakers cannot simply ignore peace-destroying sin and error, any more than a surgeon can simply close up an infected wound: an abscess is bound to develop.<sup>5</sup>

Many of our conflicts, however, are not about the central truths of God's Word, but about secondary issues, program changes, or personality clashes

<sup>3</sup> Rom. 12:18; Eph. 4:3; James 3:18; 1 Peter 3:11.

<sup>4</sup> "Peacemakers can look like cowardly 'pleasers of men' when they are compared with bold champions who courageously disregard the opinions and feelings of human beings" (Sermon by Dennis E. Johnson, Peacemakers, in John M. Frame, *Evangelical Reunion*, [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991], 172).

<sup>5</sup> Sermon by Dennis E. Johnson, Peacemakers, in John M. Frame, *Evangelical Reunion*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 171.

that can and should be peacefully resolved. Paul E. Billheimer writes, "Most controversies in local congregations are produced, not primarily by differences over essentials, but by unsanctified human ambitions, jealousy, and personality clashes. The real root of many such is spiritual dearth in individual believers, revealing lamentable immaturity in love."

Loving leaders are peacemakers (Rom. 12:18); they "wage peace."<sup>6</sup>

**Be Humble.** Underlining most conflict and unresolved division is ugly, human pride. Proverbs tells us that, "through insolence [pride] comes nothing but strife" (Prov. 13:10). Strife existed in the mature church at Philippi. Paul's solution to the conflict was for them to take on Christ's attitude of humility and selflessness (Phil. 2:1-8).

Bible-believing Christians must be especially guarded against pride of knowledge and feelings of doctrinal superiority. The Scripture warns that "knowledge makes arrogant" (1 Cor. 8:1). People with knowledge can be unteachable, argumentative, and offensively opinionated. But truly knowledgeable people know their limitations, understand that there is a great deal yet to learn (1 Cor. 8:2), and that all our human systems of explaining the Bible need continuous reform and refinement. Even the brilliant Paul confessed, "For we know in part and we prophesy in part.... For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:9, 12). Thomas Carlyle wrote: "The Bible is full of infinities and immensities."

So we need to be humble and teachable. The fact is we can learn much from those who disagree with us and oppose us. "Love," the Scripture says, "is not arrogant" (1 Cor. 13:4). It doesn't have a superiority complex. It is humble and modest when challenged.

**Control the War of Words.** In the midst of conflict don't speak in exaggerated terms or use hurtful language. Don't throw words around like daggers at your brothers and sisters. Daggers wound and kill. Often in conflict people use exaggerated language and cutting words that only inflame people's emotions and distort issues. As the Bible says, "Sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness" (Prov. 16:21).

The Scripture warns of the destructive power of words and encourages the use of edifying words:

<sup>6</sup> Paul E. Billheimer, *Love Covers: A Viable Platform for Christian Unity* (Fort Washington: Christian Literature Crusade, 1981), 34.

\* "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear" (Eph. 4:29).

\* "Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6).

\* "And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity... and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell" (James 3:6).

\* "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well" (James 3:2).

\* "The tongue of the wise brings healing" (Prov. 12:18).

\* "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov. 18:21).

\* "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1).

\* "A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word" (Prov. 15:23).

\* "And sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness" (Prov. 16:21).

\* "Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances" (Prov. 25:11).

\* "A fool's lips bring strife" (Prov. 18:6).

\* "Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones" (Prov. 16:24).

When involved in sharp disagreement, consciously guard your choice of words, soften the polemics, control your voice and emotional expressions, and speak graciously and thoughtfully. There are times when it is best to say nothing; silence is the best response in certain highly emotion situations. Always speak constructively, not destructively. Love builds up (1 Cor. 8:1). "Love does no wrong to a neighbor" (Rom. 13:10). Love does not rejoice in evil of any kind (1 Cor. 13:6). Love should thus significantly affect the way you talk and respond to people.

**Don't Attack the Person, Attack the Issues.** In debate, keep your arguments focused objectively on the issues of discussion. Don't attack the person or tear down the person's character or family. Don't level people with accusations. In most cases your brother or sister with whom you disagree is sincere and well meaning. So there is no need to bring up all your opponent's character faults, sins, and past failures. That just hurts people and deepens the rift.

If you keep your disagreements focused on the issues, then it will be easier later to reconcile and heal differences. But if you insult a person or rip into his or her emotions with accusations, you may win the argument, but the relationship will be ruined for a long time.

Love does not seek to tear people down. It is compassionate and kind. "Love does no wrong to a neighbor" (Rom. 13:10). Love "does not act unbecomingly" (1 Cor. 13:5). Love "rejoices with the truth" (1 Cor. 13:6).

**Seek to Understand, not Just Argue.** Honestly seek to understand the other person's arguments, reasoning, and position. It's amazing how little we really listen to those who disagree with us. We immediately react by justifying our position, defending our egos, or seeking to win the argument.

But maybe the other person is right, and you are wrong. Maybe you have something to learn. Maybe you have ideas or beliefs that represent half-truths, faulty logic, or extra-biblical conclusions. Your thinking may not be straight. Don't always assume you are right and the other person is wrong. This is why it is important to listen to your opponent; he may be your best teacher. "A wise man will hear" (Prov. 1:5). "But a wise man is he who listens to counsel" (Prov. 12:15). "The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer" (Prov. 15:28).

Furthermore, don't misrepresent the views of your opponent. In fact, be overly fair. Follow the "Golden Rule" "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you" (Matt. 7:12). "Love is patient, love is kind...is not arrogant...does not seek its own, is not provoked" (1 Cor. 13:4ff.).

**Seek to Find Areas of Agreement.** When facing disagreement with a fellow believer, be sure to emphasize and clearly state your areas of agreement. Be deliberate about this. Write them down for all to see. This may help to identify more clearly the actual areas of disagreement and how divergent they are. Don't be the kind of person who feeds exclusively on differences and disagreements. As Christians we have far more in common in the fundamental beliefs of life and in our ultimate goals than differences. Love always "believes" and "hopes" (1 Cor. 13:7). Love unites.

**Be Tolerant and Forgiving.** One of the virtues necessary for living a lifestyle worthy of our high calling and for maintaining the unity of the body of Christ is "showing tolerance for one another in love" (Eph. 4:2).<sup>7</sup> "In other words, differences between believers are to be tolerated."<sup>8</sup> In the heat of con-

<sup>7</sup> "Showing tolerance" (Greek participle *anachomenoi*) means "putting up with, enduring, bearing with, forbearing." This is a Christian virtue. But forbearing with false teaching is not a virtue and should not be done (2 Cor. 11:4, 19, 20).

<sup>8</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 509.

flict we are to make the effort to forbear with one another's annoyances and weaknesses and to do it with "love." If not done "in love," we will soon become resentful of having to put up with one another's faults. But love is "patient;" love "bears all things" and "endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:4, 7).

But not only are we to be tolerant with one another in love. We are also to be "forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (Col. 3:13). Conflict produces legitimate grievances and complaints on every side. So along with putting up with one another's annoyances, we are to graciously forgive as the Lord graciously forgave us. He is the model for our responses.

**Balancing Love and Truth.** Christians are called to fervently love one another. Love and unity are strongly emphasized in the New Testament. Christians are also called to be doctrinally sound and to protect themselves from the evils of false teaching. "We are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" (Eph. 4:14). We are to know the truth and defend it.

So we are to balance "truth and love" (2 John 3) and "grace and truth" (John 1:14). One of the great chapters of the New Testament on the need for unity and sound doctrine in the church is Ephesians 4:1-16. In this section Paul uses the little phrase "in love" three times to begin the section and end it. Furthermore, the passage also commands us to be "speaking truth in love." (Eph 4:15). So truth and love cannot be separated.

**Love Covers.** The Bible says, "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8; Prov. 10:12), and love "does not take into account a wrong suffered" (1 Cor. 13:5). In the midst of conflict, things are said that shouldn't be said; people don't speak as graciously as they should speak. So without love that covers, we would not be able to live together.

**Pray and Exhort.** Jesus prayed for the unity of His people, and you should pray and exhort those you lead to unity and peace.

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