

Special Issues

Detailed Outline

Part 4 of 4

Even with the best policy, decision making can be thwarted by certain things. And you will need to deal with these, because they will affect every church. Let's look at some of these.

V. When Decision Making is Difficult

A. Going against Tradition

1. Most traditions start out good.
 - a) Even the apostle Paul spoke of the "traditions."
Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. (1 Cor. 11:2 NASB)
 - b) The word, traditions, means "that which is handed down."
 - c) In Paul's case, it refers to those truths handed down from the apostolic teaching.
2. Some traditions are biblical.
 - a) The Lord's Supper, in chapter 11, is one such tradition.
 - b) It is to be done with two symbols, the bread and wine.
 - c) This carries the weight of Scripture.
3. Other traditions are creative solutions to problems or challenges of ministry.
 - a) Example: Sunday school began in 1780's, promoted by Robert Raikes as an effort to reach children who were being sucked up by the industrial revolution
 - b) They were working all weekend long, most were illiterate.
 - c) SS was begun as a movement to limit child labor and to help them learn to read
 - d) The Bible was the primary text.
 - e) The idea became popular and spread to the US.
 - f) "By the mid-19th century, Sunday school attendance was a near universal aspect of childhood." (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/asktheexpert/whendidsunday-schoolstart.html>)

4. Today, we loosely use the word to include any action or ministry that has become identified as an unchanging practice in the church.
 - a) They are tried and shown to be effective.
 - b) But over time, they become set in stone, even when the reason for their original implementation has changed or is no longer there.
5. Illustration
 - a) I was involved in a new church plant, with lots of creativity and innovation.
 - b) But after five years some things became hard to change.
 - c) Everyone got used to sitting in the same seats, listening to the same music.
 - d) Someone came in, asked why don't we change a certain thing. I found forming in my mind those dreaded words, "Because that is the way we do things here."
 - e) Resistance to change can creep up on you.
6. Some traditions are good, some are neutral.
7. Some traditions may encase unbiblical perceptions or hinder biblical thinking.
 - a) We need to confront those kinds of "traditions" face to face.
 - b) We need to think through carefully the original reasons for what has now become a tradition, and what are the reasons for continuing it.
 - c) A church that is unable or unwilling to think critically of its own traditions, is a church that will stagnate and be left behind in reaching the current generation.
 - d) There is much evidence to this happening, when you see churches that have only senior saints, and very few young people.

B. Going against an Inbred History

1. This is related to the difficulty of traditions, but concerns something that has a specific history of difficulty.
2. This is the "sacred cow." Something that everyone knows if you bring it up, conflict will immediately arise.
3. Many churches have this.
 - a) There has been an unsettling compromise in just ignoring the problem.
 - b) An unholy truce has been tacitly accepted—for the sake of maintaining unity or at least avoiding further conflict.
4. You need to understand carefully the background. Usually a sacred cow is an issue that was never resolved in the first place.

5. Illustration:
 - a) Early in my Christian life, I had just been exposed to the issues of the sovereignty of God and free will of man. So I spoke about it with the youth group I was leading.
 - b) I was told that the church had decided a few years earlier that no one was to speak, teach or preach on that subject. I was totally bewildered.
 - c) There was a history. Whole church was inflamed. They didn't know how to discuss the matter, extreme view points were thrown out there. No one listening anyone else.
 - d) That was just going to need some time, healing.
6. Have to ask, "Is this the hill that I want to plant my flag on?" How much do I want to make this an issue? Does this need to be resolved?
7. Elders must be those who hold faithfully to the Word of God and apt to teach. In fact, most of the characteristics of elders come into play in difficult situations like this.
8. Above, the elders must be able to pray together about these kind of difficulties.

C. Going against a Few "Strong Men"

1. One strong-minded person can influence others, form a resistance or put a stop to anything.
2. It might be a person who:
 - a) May have been at the church longer than anyone else
 - b) May be an eloquent or persuasive with words
 - c) May be well connected or related to many others in the church
 - d) May not even be in a formal leadership role
3. This is where a plurality of elders, who are biblically qualified, is essential.
4. Illustration: One church I know had no elders.
 - a) One man resisted the idea of elders.
 - (1) *He had been there longer than anyone else.*
 - (2) *He was related to many people in the small church.*
 - (3) *He controlled everything that happened*
 - (4) *No one was willing to go up against him.*
 - b) Finally, one man was willing to take a stand.
 - (1) *He began teaching about eldership.*
 - (2) *In time, he called an elders' meeting.*
 - (3) *Two other men showed up, the older man did not show up.*
 - (4) *They began acting as elders.*
 - c) The older man tried manipulating, coercing, gaining support, against "usurpers."

- d) But, the new elders stood firm, weathered the resistance.
- e) In the end, the church accepted it.
- f) The older man faded into the background and no one listened to him anymore.

5. You need to the courage to confront, in a loving way.

D. When Family is Involved

1. “Blood is thicker than water” is a proverbial statement conveys the idea that loyalty to one’s relatives can very much skew a man’s judgment.
2. These things are stronger than you’d expect.
3. If a decision by the elders affects a family member of the one of them, it may be wise for that elder to recuse himself from the discussion and decision-making in that case.

E. When Music is Involved

1. It seems that music is one of the touch stone issue of existing churches.
 - a) Music evokes strong emotions. We hear a song and it brings a flood of memories.
 - b) Each generation seems to enjoy a different style
2. Interestingly, the Bible does not contain any audio recordings.
 - a) We don’t know what kind of music the early church enjoyed!
 - b) Paul didn’t instruct about which rhythms are godly and which are worldly.
3. What we do know is that, regardless of our musical style, God desires our worship to be “in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23)
4. But, how do elders approach this issue without dividing the church?
 - a) With much prayer, seeking God’s wisdom and insight—like any other decision.
 - b) BUT, we need to recognize that the more an issue touches people deeply and emotionally, the more careful you need to help people on it.
 - c) Study the subject, pray about it, discuss it, listen to each other’s hearts and souls.
 - d) BUT, address it with Philippians 2:1-3 in mind. This is a strategic, important passage

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phil. 2:1–4)

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VI. Conclusion

As you know, some decisions are very difficult. How important it is to have a plurality of biblically qualified elders to discuss together, seek the Lord together, and work together in leading the people of God – so that the church of God will not be deterred from its mission of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in all of the world.

We recommend the book *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* by Ken Sande as an excellent, in-depth treatment on resolving conflict in the church. This will be a great help to elders becoming better decision makers when there are strong differences in the leadership.