

# HOW TO RESOLVE A GRIEVANCE



By Al Ells, M.C.

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You often find out after the damage is done: “She told all the women at the Ladies' Bible Study that she did not agree with my decision and that she and her family are leaving the church,” Joe shared. “As leader of the Bible Study I wish she had come to me first. We may have been able to iron out our differences. Now I hear two other families are also leaving the church as a result.”

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Conflict is a normal and natural part of life within families, marriage, the work environment and even the church. As Joe found out and studies indicate, few of us resolve conflict well. Most often when conflicts arise, we tend to react negatively rather than respond in ways that resolve conflict, glorify God and bring peace to the situation (1 Corinthians 10:13). Frequently, we seek out others, complain vociferously and try to gain allies that support our position. This usually results in more upset, angry people.

What can church leaders do to prevent conflicts from becoming major problems? One answer is to offer appropriate ways to address grievances. Churches, like all organizations need to provide safe and Biblical avenues for the resolution of differences, complaints or problems in order to better facilitate peace and unity.

Consider using the following procedure, or one similar to it, to help individuals who may be experiencing a grievance. Adhering to it can help assure an orderly and biblical process of resolve and reconciliation.

## **Step 1: Matthew 7:5 – Examine Oneself**

Examining your own contribution to the situation, described in biblical terms as "getting the log out of one's own eye," is the first thing every believer should do. This also means examining one's motives: "Is my pride hurt? Am I just feeling rejected or insecure? Is it really my grievance or am I taking on someone else's?" Self-examination is the prerequisite to challenging another.

**A Major Caution: – *Don't "sow discord among the brethren".***

**Proverbs 6:19**

Be very cautious about going to friends and family members with your grievance. Only speak with others about your disagreement, offense or problem if you are asking them for help in "getting the log out of your own eye". Otherwise you are only trying to get support for your grievance and gain an ally. This is "sowing discord" and it is one of the things "the Lord hates"

**Step 2: Matthew 18:15 – *Going to my brother.***

After examining my own contribution and motives I must then go to the other person, taking responsibility for my own shortcomings, and sharing my grievance with the other person. This step should start with the individual or department head who has responsibility for the problem, complaint or issue that concerns me.

**Step 3: Philippians 2:3-4 – *Reconciling and restoring.***

Reconcile with each other by listening to the other person, considering their needs, and asking forgiveness, as appropriate. Remember, one can expect to be heard but not necessarily agreed with. This may result in graciously agreeing to disagree.

**Step 4: Matthew 18:16-17 – *Petition the Eldership.***

If your grievance has not been fully addressed through Steps 1-3, you may then take one more step by forwarding your grievance in writing to the Senior Ministry Leader, copying the Chairman of the Board of Elders. As the ordained leadership, they will respond on behalf of the church. You should be very specific in your written grievance also sharing what steps you have taken to resolve it.

**Please note:** The Eldership may respond to the grievance either in writing or if they deem appropriate by scheduling a meeting with the aggrieved party. The goal would be to "reconcile and restore" and if need be "to judge the issue" by making a final decision regarding the grievance.

**Step 5: Ephesians 4:32 - *Let go of the offense.***

Graciously accept the final action of the church leadership by forgiving and letting go of the issue or offense. If you cannot fully accept the decision, then consider graciously leaving the church and finding one you can fully support. All the while you must still maintain an attitude of forgiveness toward the other party and the church, refusing to speak negatively and disparagingly about them.