

ETHICS AND ETIQUETTE OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY  
OF OGBOMOSO BAPTIST CONFERENCE

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## ABSTRACT

This research work; "Ethics and etiquette of conflict management: A case study of Ogbomoso Baptist Conference highlights its implication on the mission of the church and how to handle conflict ethically or manage it to our benefits. The variables interest is to examine the ethics and etiquette of conflict management in Ogbomoso Baptist Conference, causes and consequences of conflict and solutions with an attempt to suggest some possible steps that may lead to peace in our churches and for harmonious living among members.

Basically, the methodology employed to carry out this research work include textbook, journals, oral interview conducted with selected people, use at questionnaires, perusal observation and experience a Baptist pastor in Ogbomoso.

The result of the findings of this work shows that conflict exists in many local churches in Ogbomoso Baptist Conference, the quality of leadership in Ogbomoso Baptist Conference influenced conflict management in the involved churches, it is clearly known that conflict has both positive and negative effects.

Both the leaders and members are responsible for conflict management in the church. There is need for every church to accept the inevitability of conflict. Also we should try to settle disputes amicably among ourselves. All arbitrators in church conflict should be neutral in their contribution to amicable settlement of differences in our churches. Never should they take side on issues, but they should be fair, honest and tender hearted in handling conflict. As Paul said, they should endeavor to "speak the truth in love" to the end that Christ may be glorified. And finally within this context the arbitrators should stand neutral in their contributions.

## B. Conclusion

Conflict in our churches is a thing that needs urgent attention. We should endeavour to live at peace with one another. The church is mandated to preach Christ and not crisis. Sola Aworinde has this to say:

There is so much confusion in many Nigerian Baptist churches today as to the acceptable model of worship in Baptist churches. So much time, money and energy have been needlessly spent on settling disputes between factions in local churches that disagree on what is Baptist or non Baptist in public worship.<sup>61</sup>

The quotation above is a good example of what some of our churches are passing through not only in Ogbomosho Baptist Conference, but also in all other Conferences

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<sup>61</sup> Sola Aworinde, *Blest Be the Tie: Unity in Diversity* (Lagos: charisma creations, 1990), 30.

in Nigerian Baptist Convention; that is why what Walter Shurden said Baptist is very relevant at this juncture. He said:

Controversy is inevitable among Baptist. Baptist life is built upon the basic democratic principles. Which not only allow controversy; they encourage it. There is a strong stubborn streak of individualism in Baptist life. If you begin where Baptist begin -with individualism and freedom. You are driven to where Baptist are driven – controversy and conflict.<sup>62</sup>

The individual differences among us as Baptist are factors of themselves that can lead to confusion, conflict and crisis, but as a body of Christ, it calls us to learn to tolerate one another's short-coming and inadequacies for mutual growth.

Therefore, let us conclude this essay in the word of Lloyd Elder that as Baptists:

The answer is not to deny conflict. Not to run from it. Conflict is a reality of human life. We must face that, in fact, one of our greatest witnesses may be in facing conflicts where there are differences that are important and need to be dealt with. But how we argue with each other and how we cope with our conflicts may be one of the greatest witnesses to a world that is desperate to know that there is a better way to abundant life and trusting relationship.<sup>63</sup>

The challenge before us now is the endeavour to have the mind of Christ which is always depending on the revelation of God in every situation. Our attitude should always be, "What Jesus Christ would have done if He were to be in my situation." May God give us the spirit of humility to accept one fallibility and depend on infallible God.

It is the prayer of this writer that this little write up will contribute to prevention and settling of conflict in our local churches and will stimulate other

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<sup>62</sup> Emiola Nihinlola, "The Need for More Discipleship Course," *The Nigerian Baptist*. No 1. Vol. 78, January, 2000, 27.

<sup>63</sup> Lloyd Elder, *Blueprints: 10 challenges for great people* (Nashville: Broadman press 1984), 171.

concerned people to do research on church conflict and give us their findings and recommendations to help the church of God to live in peace and not in pieces.

### **C. Recommendations**

The writer of this essay wishes to recommend the following steps for our churches for consideration to minimize the negative effect and maximize the positive effects of conflicts.

1. Every church should accept the inevitability of conflict. As Paul Tournier writes:

It is possible for people to work together at a common task without there being differences of opinion, conflicts, jealousy and bitterness. And in a religious organization they are less willing to bring these differences out in to the open. They feel quite sincerely that as Christians, they ought to be showing a spirit of forgiveness, charity and mutual support. The aggressiveness is repressed, taking the form of anxiety.<sup>64</sup>

Wherever there is a trouble amidst us, we should admit it and seek a means of settling it in a constructive way. Conflict is not 'a do or die affairs'. Our differences are to be settled amicably and in the spirit of Christian's reconciliation.

2. Whenever there is a conflict we should try to talk things out among ourselves and if the differences cannot be resolved within us, we should not be afraid to involve an arbitrator as laid down by the Nigerian Baptist Convention, beginning from Association, Conference and the Convention levels. We should never see these bodies of Christ as intruders in our domestic affairs; we should be opened to them, respect them, and acknowledge their elderly role as representative(s) of Christ to help us settle our differences. Never should any church, group of people or any person dare take one another to their court of

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<sup>64</sup> Paul Tournier, *The meaning of Person* (Nashville: Broadman press 1982), 24-25.

law for settlement of our disagreement(s). No court of law has even be a solution to the differences of the church of Christ.

3. In settling such conflict there should be no victor, no vanquished, rather Jesus Christ the owner of the church should be the winner and let Satan the enemy of Christ be put to shame. Never should church conflict be seen as a win or loss struggle, but our differences should lead us to openness and mutual understanding that will result in mutual agreement to edify the body of Christ.
4. All arbitrators in church conflict should be neutral in their contribution to amicable settlement of differences in our churches. Never should they take side on issues, but they should be fair, honest and tender hearted in handling conflict. As Paul said, they should endeavour to “speak the truth in love” to the end that Christ may be glorified.
5. All our theological institutions should have a course on church conflict and should be made compulsory for every student Pastor. Also, the annual Minister’ Conference should have church conflict as theme from time to time to equip our Pastors in our churches on the art of conflict management. This will serve as a preventive measure to forestall conflict in our churches.
6. The Convention should produce a discipleship course on conflict resolution, principles to help our members to solve their difference according to biblical teaching. In the word of Rev. Dr. Emiola Nihinlola in a letter to the Editor of The Nigeria Baptist, January 2000:

Most church workers and officers need help on how to resolve church conflicts and creatively manage crisis that often arise in the church life and administration. It is an open secret that poor management of conflict in churches and denominational life is a major set-back in our contemporary experience<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> Emiola Nihinlola, “The Need for More Discipleship Course,” The Nigerian Baptist, No 1, Vol. 78, January, 2000, .27.