

Managing disputes in the Ecclesia

Covid Lockdown

It has been such a long period of time with no physical sharing of fellowship, relaxing and social time nor working together to witness. This impacts on us all.

During lockdown many will have prayerfully thought about personal situations, faith and relationships - often impacted by losses of employment and bereavement. Questions are being faced of who and where we are and our individual roles in the ecclesia – particularly if we have zoomed with other ecclesias and seen a difference.

Disagreements are to be expected

Do not be afraid of conflict. When people come together to talk about issues that matter, it is both natural and productive for disagreement to occur. In fact, that is what makes meetings interesting!

The Council at Jerusalem was about a deep difference over Jewish Christian expectations of the law of Moses particularly a requirement of circumcision - and the apostle's insistence on Grace. There was an agreement which was acceptable to both sides: some of the law of Moses was to continue but salvation was by Grace (Acts 15:1-21)

A basis for considering Difference

For each of us our prime role is to love God and then to love our neighbour.

This will affect the way we consider each other and how we understand our motives and feelings

Romans 12 NKJV

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. ¹

Unity is the aim as far as possible in all discussion:

Ephesians 4

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

¹ For a detailed consideration of this verse see Behind the Scenes- Disagreements Disputes and Conflict Chapter Four here: [Behind the Scenes \(chsn.org.uk\)](http://chsn.org.uk)

Unity in the context of being subject to one another:

Ephesians 5:20

giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Arranging Discussion

This may involve those with opposing opinions considering the following:

1. The overall aim is not to “win the battle” but to have a situation where both parties feel they can accept the outcome.
2. Mediation and Negotiation are primarily based on logic. Emotional, angry and hurt feelings around being let down and not valued and misunderstood - will get in the way of achieving the aim.
3. Clarify exactly what you want to achieve
4. What does the other party want to achieve and what do you think is most important to them?
5. What can you give up which the other party will think is important but which you can lose in order to gain your aim?

Some thoughts:

- When arranging discussions on the subject, it is important to name and agree boundaries beforehand and that the discussion is primarily on the role of each seeking unity and being subject to one another. Different views will be expressed in this context.
- Set a time limit for the meeting
- The chairperson will need to be seen by both sides as independent from the discussions with skills to summarise and manage challenging situations.

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Disputes and differences in the Ecclesia

The Specific Issue of the Roles of Sisters in the ecclesia

Making an issue of the problem usually means people having to take sides.

One option is to call a truce. Now might be the time to develop fellowship and accept that the matter will be discussed in say six months' time. It gives a time for prayer, personal reflection and listening to the various views.

Some comments and questions about 1 Cor 14:33-36 and 1 Tim 4:8-15

- The prime argument for sisters being silent in the church seems to be that the words are there in "black and white" to be justified by scriptural themes and therefore any argument about background and culture of the time is irrelevant.
- In seeking unity, look for some common ground between the parties on which to build.
- What does *being silent* mean in practical Ecclesial life?
- Is it possible to distil Paul's teaching in these verses to a key phrase or point of understanding? For example, "*it is not acceptable for sisters to teach and have authority over men*". If this is accepted as the basis for the debate by both sides, a discussion can then be developed on what this means in practical life.

Some possible discussion Points

- What does it mean to have authority over men?
- Is the "teaching" specifically about the teaching of doctrine or all public speaking?
- How does the silence of sisters apply? In all circumstances or just for example at the Ecclesial Breaking of Bread Service?

What else might be an issue?

- Sometimes "change" can be a significant part of the issue
It can be very challenging for many to hear a sister read or pray and it is important this is recognised by those seeking change. This can be an unexpressed reason for resistance.
- We need to think about what we each personally bring to the debate from our background, personality and upbringing.
- Maybe for some there is a concern over how other Ecclesias may react to any agreed change.

Following the agreement at the Council at Jerusalem the individual members of the church in its many ecclesias, had to come to terms with a major change with each taking responsibility to seek unity and to be subject to one another. The final agreement involved mutually giving up part of their demands – keeping the law or not keeping the law. Think about the tensions between Jews and Greeks, their culture and background and different languages. (Acts 15)

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Reference link here: [Behind the Scenes \(chsn.org.uk\)](https://www.chsn.org.uk)