

ALLIANCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

CURRENT MINISTRY EXPERIENCE CASE STUDY PAPER

FAMILY CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH

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**ABSTRACT**

Family conflict in the church can be very dangerous if not resolved immediately. It can start a flame that will consume the whole congregation. Though it is normal in the churches today, it is not something that should be accepted. There are many examples of family conflict in the bible, so we can see that it has been happening since the beginning of time. However the bible also tells us how to resolve conflict. Family conflict brings division in the churches, if it goes unnoticed. It causes the leaders of the church to make unhealthy choices, which can affect the members. There should always be a plan in place to handle family conflict in the churches.

## **INTRODUCTION**

If we take a survey of the local churches, we will find out that most of them started with just immediate family members. The family unit is very important to the body of Christ. The church can be seen as an extended family, which helps people to understand how to live together in unity. It is understood that if there is no unity, then there will be division. Conflict can be very destructive when it gets out of control. Most local churches chose to ignore conflict, hoping that it will blend in as part of the norm. Family conflict in churches is an issue that should be dealt with immediately, before it festers and becomes an open wound. Conflict comes in the church as a consuming fire and before realizing what is happening, it destroys everything that is in its path. Family conflict is one of the many issues that pastors have to deal with in the churches. In my opinion, pastors and leaders should always be aware of family conflict in the church and strategize a plan to combat it when it strikes. The question is how can this plan be implemented?

The subject presented here does not only focus on if there is family conflict in the church, but when there is, what are some of the ways to eliminate the conflict. Is there a way that conflict can be resolved without anyone getting their feelings hurt? The bible teaches that we must be able to handle conflict with love. If we are chastising someone, it should be according to the word of God. The subject of this study is Temple of Truth, a current ministry context that has been experiencing family conflict for a long time. This conflict was the cause of many members leaving the church. There was also a division in the church of choosing one side over the other. The pastor was faced with the dilemma of whether to chastise the family and risk them leaving or to sit by and do nothing. What are some of the steps the pastor can take in order to protect the members from being caught up in this family conflict?

## **BACKGROUND**

The Temple of Truth church has been in existence for over forty years. It is a storefront church which can hold a capacity of about 75 members. The church started off with one family which consisted of a mother and her two teenage daughters. The church began growing when the mother brought in members of her family, who subsequently joined the church. As time went by, the congregation was made up of about 25 members all from one family. Later on other people started visiting the church and the church grew to 50 members.

## **CASE PRESENTATION**

In the beginning of 2015, I witnessed the Temple of Truth church experience a decline in membership. Most of the members who were not part of the foundation family began leaving the

church. It was said the reason being that the mother in the church, whose name I will call Ms. A for the purpose of this study, had a conflict going on with her family, which the other members of the congregation became aware of. The conflict started when the daughters of Ms A, Michelle and Sara who are now adults, started fighting against one another. During this conflict, some of the other family members in the church began to choose which daughter they were for or against. The conflict got so out of control that one can visibly see the animosity between the two sisters and the mother. They will all come to church, but when it was time for greeting in the church, they did not greet each other. The mother started putting the two daughters against each other, by choosing one over the other. This is when the members of the church started talking about what was happening, and the pastor was asked to have a meeting with the mother and her daughters. The pastor called the meeting, but instead of talking to them as a group, he spoke to them one by one. Each of them gave him their own side of the story. The members in the congregation came to the realization that the pastor did not want to talk to them, because he was afraid that they would leave the church.

In July 2018, Michelle was ordained as a minister. She was later elevated to sit on the pulpit with the other ministers of the church. Ms. A was not pleased about this decision that the pastor made. She was very jealous of her daughter and she verbally expressed it. One day, a member heard her saying, “ she was the one who brought all these people in the church and the pastor never ordained her.” “He just laid his hands on her and called a missionary.” The member told the pastor what she heard, and he requested a meeting with Ms A to try to resolve this conflict. After the meeting, the conflict just got worse. Sara began to take the side of her mother. Whenever Michelle was preaching she would sit in the pew and mumble things under her breath.

This was very distracting to the other members of the church. The pastor was asked again to have a meeting with the mother and her daughters, but this time he refused to do it.

The members of Ms. A's family began to talk openly about the family conflict. They said that she was the one that was causing the confusion. Some of them expressed that they could not stay in the same church with her, knowing that what she was doing was against the word of God. Even though the membership started dropping because of this family conflict, Ms A was still saying that she was not responsible for anything. This conflict was growing into a family feud. Everyone talked about it and wondered how this was going to be resolved. The church was in turmoil and confusion because of this family conflict. The pastor decided that he did not want to get involved so he said nothing to them.

The two sisters continued the family feud. It got so bad that when there was a gathering where the members would sit and eat, both sisters took turns bashing each other at the table. The more they started talking, we realized that this feud was very old and it had many layers that they needed to peel off. One day two other siblings visited the church, Ms A said, "I am happy they are all here together." She called on the ministers to pray for them. This did not turn out very well because Ms. A refused to let Michelle, her daughter, be part of the prayer team. After the service, Michelle and Sara got into it and this was the showdown. Sara decided that she was not coming back to the church. She said, "Michelle can not stand in the pulpit and preach to me. I do not want to hear anything she has to say."

As time went by, Michelle and Ms A tried to come together and make peace for the sake of the members in the church. Ms. A asked the ministers to pray for both of them and she told her daughter she forgave her for everything she had done. It looked like everything was going well

on the surface, but they were still fighting against one another outside of the church. When they came to church it was obvious, even though they pretended that everything was good.

By this time there were only ten members in the congregation. The mother and daughter conflict started spreading to the members in the congregation and before long the mother was in conflict with the members. Four of the members decided they were going to leave because of Ms. A. The members of the clergy after seeing what was happening asked the pastor if they could have a meeting with Ms. A. The pastor gave his permission and was present at the meeting which was very intense. I was asked, as the secretary of the church, to join the meeting to take minutes. Each minister took turns talking to Ms A, asking her if there was any way this conflict could be resolved. Ms A blamed her daughter for what was going on and said as a minister she should show her more respect. The meeting ended on what seemed to be on a good note. The next week Ms. A did not come to church which was kind of strange, she was always in church. This went on for two to three weeks. When one of the members decided to reach out to Ms A she told her that she was not coming back, because the pastor and ministers did not listen to her and they took the side of her daughter.

It has been two years since Ms A left the church. During that time the pastor passed away. The church now has a new pastor. She is doing everything she could, to build back the membership in the church. She has regular meetings with the ministers, including Michelle who stayed after her mother left. We can see changes happening even though they are very small at this time. Michelle is more happier now that her mother is not in the church. The church is much lighter now that the family conflict is over. The members that remain are saying that they are

feeling the Spirit of God in the church. They now have the desire to invite people to come to the church. The family conflict destroyed the church but we believe that God is able to build it back up.

#### **DISCUSSION: HOW CAN THE CHURCH ADDRESS THIS ISSUE?**

In order to have a fair discussion let us look at how the pastor handled this conflict. What could the pastor have done differently? Let it be known that the pastor is called to be the shepherd of the sheep. His duty is to take care of the congregation and to protect them from issues such as this. The pastor's lack of interest in this family conflict only made it worse. Ms. A was allowed to scatter the sheep. Michelle and Sara were not chastised for their actions. The pastor stood by and let the members leave the church all because he wanted this family to stay.

It was clear from this scenario that the pastor did not have any plan to combat family conflict in the church. In the words of Michael Dewar, "There has to be an intentional strategy to prevent destructive conflict from running its course and trashing the church." (Church and Family Conflicts, p56). If there was a conflict resolution plan in place, this family conflict could have been resolved peacefully. The pastor should not have allowed the members of the church to manipulate him. This shows that there was poor leadership in the church. In order to combat conflict in the church there has to be strong leadership. It was very imperative for the pastor to call the family together from the moment he learnt about this conflict. Talking to them one by one could not resolve the issue. It was the duty of the pastor to ensure that the family did not cause division in the church.

This family conflict could have been handled biblically. Jesus said, “ If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.” (Matthew 18:15). There should also be a plan to have training in conflict resolution, so that the church will be able to combat any conflict when it rises up its head. In this case, the church should have some peace makers that will help to resolve the conflict. Ken Sande was on point when he said, “When Christians learn to be peacemakers, they can turn conflict into an opportunity to strengthen relationships, preserve valuable resources, and make their lives a testimony to the love and power of Christ.” (The Peacemaker, p.140).

The family conflict in Truth Temple church could have had a different outcome if it was handled the right way. None of the family members involved needed to leave the church. There should have been proper Biblical counseling for the family. There was a need for them to be taught how to resolve conflict from the bible. We are called to be our brother’s keeper. Those of us who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. (Roman 15:1).

## **CONCLUSION**

The church, which is the body of Christ, was commissioned by Jesus to love one another. We are to take care of each other in times of need. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:10 that there should be no division among us, we should be perfectly united in mind and thought. Family conflict in the church has proven to be the catalyst for division in the church. Since the church is the extended family of God, we ought to be able to resolve conflict from the word of God. Those

who are called to lead the church must not be afraid to address conflict. They should have the ability to gently restore peace in the church. According to Sande, to resolve any type of conflict in the church, this should be done in a gospel centered and biblically faithful manner.(The Peacemaker,p.180). Family conflict has no place in the church, therefore it should be rooted out.

### **Works Cited**

- Dewar, Michael W, *Church and Family Conflicts, How to Settle Conflicts Peacefully in the House*. Dwelling Place Cleansing, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11236, 2019
- Sande, Ken. *The Peacemaker, A Biblical Guide to Resolve Personal Conflict*. Baker Books Grand Rapids, MI, 2004