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SUNSET ACADEMY OF LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Course Name: Conflict Management - Role of Relationship
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Course description:

This course deals with principles for understanding and resolving conflict in the home, the church, and life in general. This particular lesson will focus on the role of relationship in determining the types and causes of conflict.

Course Objectives: By the end of this class students will be able to:

    A.   Identify the types of relationships within which conflict can emerge.

    B.   Understand the issues related to role-based and values-based conflict.

    C.   Appreciate the role of power in conflict and avoid inappropriate uses of power.

Outline of the class:

    A.   Organize the class into discussion groups of 3-5.

    B.   Ask them to address the following questions (10 minutes):

        1.   How does relationship affect the occasions when you have been involved in conflict?

        2.   Do you tend to have more conflict with those who have similar roles and status to you or those who hold different roles and status? Why?

    C.   Afterward, groups summarize their observations and compare with others (10 minutes).

    D.   The instructor leads a discussion of the following principles related to relational conflict:

        1.   There are two types of relationship:

            a.   Symmetrical - relationships based on similar roles or approaches. Paul and Barnabas' conflict over John Mark (Acts 15:36-41) is an example of this. This would also be the case in a conflict between two elders, for example.

            b.   Complementary – relationships where clear differences are acknowledged. An example of this kind of conflict would be the interaction between Philemon and Onesimus (Phile. 10-18). This would be comparable with conflicts between elders and ministers.

        2.   There are two basic types of conflict within relationship (Gangel and Canine 2002, p.189ff):

a. Role-based conflict happens when there is a lack of clarity about expectations between those who occupied either similar or different roles. For example, the elders might expect the preacher to do certain things as a part of his ministry, while the minister may expect something different (intra-role conflict). This is fertile ground for conflict. Or, on the other hand, two ministers in the same church might lay claim to a certain duty and conflict might result because of jealousy or envy. Some elders might align with one minister and others with the other one. Now the conflict is "inter-role" since the elders now have tension within their ranks as well between the elders and the ministers.

b. Values-based conflict is usually a result of "scarce resources" (money, space, people). However, what is really going on is a question of values. You must justify why you hold your position—why what you want, or value should be valued by others. For example, if the elders are considering whether to keep their current minister or seek someone else, one elder might value the relationship with the current minister (even though he is not as effective as he used to be) while someone else may value ministerial effectiveness over the relationship. The clearer and more honest participants are about their values, the more likely that the conflict can be resolved positively (Gangel and Canine, 193).

3. The Role of Power in Conflict

a. Power is defined within relationship.

b. Types of power (French and Raven 1960, 601-623)

i. Reward (you have something I want)

ii. Coercive (threat of negative consequences)

iii. Legitimate (mutually agreed-upon authority)

iv. Referent (desire by one to be like the other)

v. Expert (special skill by one creates dependency)

c. As usual, power is highly susceptible to abuse. If all parties involved in conflict are clear about their roles and empowered to be honest about their values, conflict can be more appropriately managed toward the accomplishment of their shared mission.

4. Conflict management styles (Gangel and Canine 2002, 236ff)

a. Forcing (using power inappropriately)

b. Confrontation (expose and solve)

c. Smoothing (emphasize similarities)

       d.   Avoiding (withdraw to minimize distress)

       e.   Compromise (split the difference)

           * A person may use several of these, depending on the situation. Each of these has some merit, though "forcing" might be appropriate in more limited settings (like child rearing or in a privately-owned business).

Conclusion:

    A.   We are all involved in a variety of different relationships within which conflict might emerge. It helps to understand the nature of those relationships so that we know how to manage those conflicts.

    B.   Creating an environment within which we and others can express our values enthusiastically yet peacefully can make conflict less frequent and less disruptive.

    C.   In the next two lessons we will discuss some biblical examples of conflict and discover some models we can implement to resolve conflict.