

How to Handle Conflict and Accountability **1 Timothy 5:19-21**

Introduction:

1. Two of the most difficult issues in life are accountability and discipline (whether at home, work, or church). Yet they are so needed. But what is the right way to go about implementing them?
2. Why do we have problems in the home with marriages and children, problems at work, problems at church, etc? Many times, it is a lack of accountability and discipline.
 - Do you remember when every person in Israel did that which was right in his own eyes? The results were chaos and division.
3. In our text, Paul deals with these issues in a very practical, straightforward way. The context of our passage is dealing with leadership in the local church (elders, pastors).
4. We learned about the position and work of spiritual leaders in the church. We also saw the proper response of God's people to their leaders (love, generosity, support).
5. But what about a pastor who goes astray and is involved in sinful practices or forsakes the true teaching of God's Word? Can this happen? Absolutely! Considering the potential, many churches go to one of two extremes:
 - Some churches establish a group (or board) that micro-manages the pastor and tells him what to do, how to lead, what to preach, etc.
 - Other churches allow the pastor to do anything he desires, with no measure of accountability built into the church's structure.
6. There must be a balance. Pastors must be allowed to use their leadership and teaching gifts freely, without restraint from other church officers. Still, they must be accountable when their words or actions are not in accord with God's Word.
 - This is also true in the home and workplace.
7. The principles that Paul gives about accountability and discipline of elders apply beautifully to so many other areas of life. Let's examine Paul's instructions.

First, be sure of your facts. vs. 19

1. If a person comes with a rumor or gossip, a church member is not to even receive it. This word "*receive*" means "to accept near." This is good advice for any and all gossip that somebody would bring to you.
2. If somebody makes an accusation, he or she is to come with one or two credible witnesses that are ready to confirm the accusation. The word "*accusation*" means "a complaint, a criminal charge."
 - This principle of multiple witnesses is seen throughout Scripture. Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; Deuteronomy 19:15
 - Even then you have to be very careful. They set up multiple false witnesses against Christ and against Stephen right before killing them both (framed).

3. The accusers should be willing to face the accused face to face, with witnesses present.
4. Many godly people have been ruined and broken by slander, lies, and gossip. Paul tells Timothy, “Be sure of your facts.” **Illustration:** “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire.”
5. This holds true in all areas of life. Sometimes we are so quick to believe bad about people. It is part of our old, fleshly, perverse nature.
 - Sometimes we are so quick to believe evil about our children, or our spouse, or our fellow family members in Christ.
 - Grace says, “I’m **not** going to believe bad about you until I have no other choice or you admit it.
6. Satan is called the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10), and when we accuse a person falsely or receive a false accusation as truth, we are doing the devil’s work for him.

Second, be open and honest. vs. 20

1. I have heard stories of churches where the deacons or a powerful man in the church runs the pastor off during the week and no explanation is ever given to the church. That, of course, is not appropriate.
2. Handling conflict is never easy, yet it must be handled with wisdom. Private sin should be handled privately, but if somebody makes an accusation against an elder, and there are two or three witnesses to confirm it, you can rest assured that others know about it too.
3. In this case, the situation should be handled publicly with the church, but with taste and tact. If the pastor steps down from his position, then things don’t have to be detailed. This will just hurt people and do irreparable damage.
4. If the pastor refuses to step down and refuses to repent, then more drastic measures may need to be taken. Why handle it publicly? Paul said, “...*that others also may fear.*”
5. It is an object lesson to everyone that sin carries consequences and that even church leaders are not above this principle.
6. It is for the good of the people (to learn by example), and for the good of the fallen pastor (to give opportunity for public repentance).
7. How does this apply to other areas of conflict in our lives? If we have a problem with another person, go to him or her, and handle it openly and aboveboard. Too many times we talk to everybody except the person we have the problem with.
8. When it comes to conflict or having to confront somebody and hold them accountable, honesty and openness are crucial. Don’t try and do it slyly.

Third, be consistent. vs. 21

1. One of the biggest problems when it comes to the issues of accountability, discipline, and conflict is inconsistency.
2. Paul said that when you apply these principles of righteousness, be consistent. Don’t prefer one above another. Do it without partiality.

3. This is so true in all areas of life. Whether it is at work or child-rearing, consistency is so crucial. You can't play favorites and confront certain people with sinful behavior and then give others a free pass because you like them.
4. This undermines the whole idea of God's righteousness and godliness. God is a God of impartiality. He doesn't play favorites. He holds us all accountable to the same principles of His Word, and one day we will be judged by that exact standard.
5. No matter what Timothy's personal feelings might have been about a person, he was to obey God's Word no matter what.
6. Timothy was not to be prejudiced or partial toward others. There are no seniority rights in the local church. Everyone is on the same standing with God and must come under the same principles and guidelines.
7. Be consistent. This holds true in child-rearing, and it also holds true in the workplace.

In Conclusion:

1. These principles are so true and are so helpful in every walk of life.
2. Conflict is inevitable in this life. It is going to happen. We must handle it in the right way.
3. As we hold others accountable, we would be wise to remember these instructions to Timothy:
 - Be sure of your facts.
 - Be open and honest.
 - Be consistent.