



The First One to the Cross Wins

By Alfred Ells, M.C.

Ever have a conflict with your spouse, associate, or family member? Who won? Susan and I have had many conflicts in our marriage, especially when we were younger and more immature. Her common refrain was, “You just want to win!” At first I didn’t agree—I thought she was the one who always wanted to win. Over the years I’ve become convinced we both want to win and so do most people in conflict.

But what does winning mean? People may define it differently, but it boils down to insisting statements like, “I know I’m right, period” or “I’m not wrong, you’re wrong” or even “I just want to be heard,” really meaning, “You need to agree with me.” Common to each of these beliefs is the word *I*, not the word *we*. Conflict, by definition, is being at variance or contending over fact, opinion, or perspective. It’s a clashing of wills. Studies indicate that most people do not like conflict and that people have differing ways of dealing with it. For example, in my early years I would stuff my feelings and thoughts, remain agreeable and pleasant, until I was finally triggered by Susan’s continuing indifference. I then exploded, said anything and everything that came to mind, but was over it ten minutes later. Meanwhile, Susan was devastated by my explosion, withdrawing and giving me the cold

shoulder for days at a time. Obviously, we had a very difficult beginning to our marriage. It was by God’s grace that we survived.

It was years later that I one day realized—the first one to the cross wins. What this sentence came to mean for me is that we both needed a godly perspective of our conflict. Instead of pushing and arguing for my way, or totally yielding and abdicating any responsibility for our conflict, I needed to gain God’s view of my position and the overall conflict. What does this look like when conflict arises? Consider the following guidelines:

1. Control yourself! Perhaps the most necessary yet difficult part of resolving conflict is ensuring that you maintain control of yourself. Proverbs 16:32 states, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who captures a city” (RSV). In my case I first needed to learn how to deal with my feelings appropriately. I had to be quick to resolve angry feelings, and work on controlling my thoughts so I could be patient and appropriate with Susan.
2. Deal with your anger—it hinders, not helps. A good lesson to remember is that simmering anger in a conflict does not produce good

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April

27–30 Paul Dreger at Exponential Conference in Tampa, Florida

May

11–12 SHAPE North Central Region, St. Paul Park, Minnesota

18–19 W. Pennsylvania Leader Training

Please contact Paul soon for scheduling in 2015 in your region. Requests are already beginning to fill the spring calendar.

Submissions

E-mail SHAPE-related articles and relevant photos to Paul at PDreger@chog.org to be considered for SHAPE newsletter. Submission implies consent for publication.



CHURCH OF GOD
MINISTRIES

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results. As James 1:19–20 shares, “...But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God” (NASB). Raised voice, fierce looks, stubbornness, and contemptuous behavior is often a sign of unresolved and uncontrolled anger. It will provoke more anger and defensiveness instead of resolution.

3. When conflict arises, pray first—talk later. Going to God in prayer first is your only real assurance of gaining the healthy, right perspective of your actions and the conflict. Having a conflict means there is a problem that needs to be worked out. When I stopped blowing up and started praying about my issues with Susan, a lot of things changed for the better. Stepping back from the situation, praying, and then talking really helped me handle conflict much better.
4. Don't be a hypocrite—take the log out of your own eye first. As Matthew 7:4–5 so aptly states, I needed to examine my own culpability first before accusing or challenging Susan on her behavior. My favorite verse to remember in conflict is that “God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6 NASB). Some of our early fights and problems needed all the grace God could give! And neither one of us was very humble. Being “first to the cross,” for me, meant being first to acknowledge my shortcomings and ask forgiveness.

5. Be the first to actively listen. Take the initiative to listen first and

attempt to understand what message the other person is attempting to share. Adopt an interview style by asking questions. Don't be defensive when you are the listener. No interruptions—wait until the other person has finished sharing before you respond. Even if you disagree with what you are hearing, don't react. Instead, summarize what you are hearing the other person say so that he or she knows you have heard him or her. My mother was a great listener. Seeing her practice this step made me a better listener.

6. Stick to the topic and look for areas of agreement, not just disagreement. Most conflicts escalate into sinful quarrels when the parties to the conflict don't stick to the topic. Susan and I used to switch topics so frequently that we would

forget what the original conflict was all about. It helps to uncover and summarize areas of agreement. Oftentimes, we agree on so much more than we disagree.

7. Forgive, forgive, forgive (Matthew 18:21–35). There is no true resolution without forgiveness. The first one to forgive is the peacemaker. Matthew 5:9 states “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God” (NASB). It pays to be first to the cross.

NOTE: Leaving behind the anger and bringing self-control, humility, understanding, and forgiveness to a conflict makes it much easier to resolve. All it takes is for one party to the conflict to be the “first to the cross” and the conflict will subside and have a high probability of resolution.



Paul was privileged to pray for the children of the Pitfour Church of God in Montego Bay when he preached there on Sunday morning after the SHAPE Orientation Retreat. Several of the children joined him for this picture following the service.

10 Keys for Effective Leadership in the Church

How much more can be said about leadership!? While we may tire of the subject, trying to digest all that is being said about it, we must admit that the challenges we face as leaders will always be before us. So it is good to take a couple minutes and remind ourselves of some of the key issues involved in effective leadership. Here are ten thoughts to encourage you and help keep you headed in the right direction on the issues you are now facing:

1. **Maintain trusting, caring relationships.** Disconnection from others weakens one's ability to influence others positively.
2. **Maintain integrity at all costs.** Honesty, humility, and trustworthiness are critical to effective leadership.
3. **Always remember that respect is much more powerful than popularity.** Live to please God and not people.
4. **Maintain a proper stewardship of your own life.**
5. **Don't travel alone.** Build an effective team of competent spirit-filled leaders and followers.
6. **Keep your focus.** Don't allow secondary issues to keep you from the primary mission.
7. **Lead from a positive position of vision, rather than from a negative position of defense.**
8. **Maintain awareness of cultural and congregational trends.**

Ignorance is a primary enemy of effective leadership.

9. **Be willing to let go of ministries and methodologies that have lost their focus and effectiveness.**
10. **Be bold.** Be willing to risk for a kingdom purpose.



Unless otherwise noted, SHAPE articles are written by Paul Dreger. He has served the Church of God for thirty-nine years as pastor, area administrator in Tennessee, and currently national director of SHAPE (Sustaining Health and Pastoral Excellence).

SHARE Has Arrived!

SHARE—Sustaining Health And Relational Excellence—Regional Orientation Days are now being scheduled. These one-day meetings will introduce the SHARE

concept and process, as well as the SHARE material, and show how the principles and practices of SHAPE can be incorporated into the life of local congregational leadership through

the SHAPE cluster. There is still time for you to be involved in this first year launch of SHARE. The goal is to launch SHARE in six regions this year and at least six regions in 2016.

SHAPE Jamaica Launches in March!

On March 5–6, pastors from throughout Jamaica gathered at the Weslore Great House Retreat and Conference Centre in Montego Bay for the launch of the first cohort of SHAPE in the Caribbean region. The two days were spent in relationship building, introducing SHAPE to those in attendance and helping create a vision for pastoral and congregational health for the years to come. Five clusters are scheduled to begin meeting after Easter over the last weeks of April and first week of May. Rev. Adinhair

Jones, executive chairman of the Church of God in Jamaica, and Rev. Milton Davidson, pastor of the Pitfour Church of God in Montego Bay, provide leadership for the ministry of SHAPE in Jamaica. Please pray for this new work among the pastors of this country as they seek to come together to spur one another on to greater health, and to be catalysts for revival and transformation for the Church of God in Jamaica.



Pastor Milton and Muriel Davidson, of Montego Bay. Pastor Davidson serves as the Jamaica SHAPE coordinator.