

# **Biblical Troubleshooting**

## **or, Solving Problems God's Way**

*Todd Clippard*

I have used personal computers for more than fifteen years. My first computer was a DOS-operated system with an 80286 processor running at 8 megahertz. I remember making the changes to Windows 3.1, Windows 95, 98, 2000, ME, and now XP with considerable difficulty (I'm holding off Vista as long as possible!). I remember frequent "conflicts" and "crashes" as each new operating system attempted to run older programs. Though not as frequent, various conflicts and problems still arise.

When problems arise, manufacturers and programmers have a list of troubleshooting tactics designed to correct your problem. Before you call someone else or fix your computer with a hammer (as I have often threatened to do), you should go through the troubleshooting guide and try to resolve your issue. If you call customer support, they will ask you if you tried the list of troubleshooting ideas. If you haven't, you will be instructed to do so before involving them in your problem. The computer manufacturers and programmers know their product and provide the means to resolve most errors.

The same goes for when we have conflicts in the church. Our Divine Manufacturer and Programmer (Psalm 100:3; 139:14) has given us explicit instructions on how to resolve problems or conflicts in the church. Furthermore, he expects us to pursue his troubleshooting options before we involve anyone else in the matter.

In Luke 17:3-4, Jesus gave the following instructions on conflict resolution: "Take heed to yourselves, If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent: thou shalt forgive him." The disciples' reaction to this admonition was one that I suspect we should give today – "Lord, increase our faith" (v5).

A similar admonition for personal offenses is found in Matthew 18:15, where Jesus said, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, **go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone**: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." Additional instructions are given in this text if the matter cannot be resolved, but I believe any issue between brethren can be resolved one on one if both genuinely love the Lord and a spirit of meekness is present among both parties (Gal 6:1).

The advantages of following God's troubleshooting plan are many. First and foremost **it's the right thing to do**. It is always right to do right. Moreover, going to my offending brother one on one shows that I am willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. He is my brother and there is no place for evil surmising (suspicion) among

brethren. Going to my brother also proves my love for him and for his soul. Moreover, there is always the possibility that I have misinterpreted some situation or action on my brother's part. There may be no grounds for rebuke, but going to my brother both corrects my understanding and spares both of us undue embarrassment. Finally, going to my brother one on one keeps the rumor mill idle and stops the mouths of those would sow discord among the brethren (Prov 6:16-19). Few things can divide a church faster than a gossip: "A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends" (Prov 16:28 NKJV). Proverbs 26:20-22 says, "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire ; so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly." The best way to put out a fire is to **prevent** it in the first place.

When a brother sins in a public way, and that sin is known among the church, the Bible provides another means of troubleshooting the problem – "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal 6:1).

Note in this case there are "spiritual brethren." Oftentimes when one is confronted with sin, he attempts to divert attention away from himself by trying to bring down other brethren. Peter did this very thing when Jesus turned up the heat on him in John 21:15-19. In verses 20-21 Peter attempted to deflect attention from himself to John, but Jesus would have no part of it. The fact of the matter was that Peter's issues were the ones being dealt with at that time. If John had been in some fault, Jesus would have certainly dealt with it, but not then.

Consider also that these spiritual brethren are attempting to **restore** the erring one. They have not come to verbally abuse, belittle, or in any way marginalize him. They have the purest of intentions – the saving of their brother's soul. James wrote, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he that converteth the sinner from the error of his way **shall save a soul from death**, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (5:19-20).

Finally, we see that each restorer possesses within himself a spirit of meekness. Each gives consideration to himself, for he knows not what the future may hold for him. He goes knowing that one day he may be on the side of error. He is not haughty, for he who thinks he stands better take heed lest he fall (1 Cor 10:12). He goes to the erring one and deals with him in the same way he would want to be confronted. He goes in the spirit and practice of "the golden rule" (Matt 7:12).

May God give us the faith and courage to properly resolve conflicts and problems using his Divine troubleshooting guide. TC