

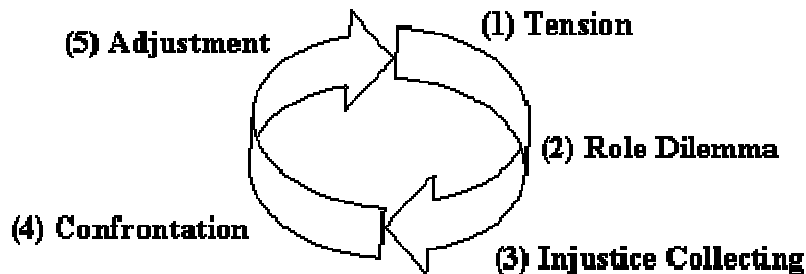
Northeast Bible Church Conflict / Concern Resolution Process

The purpose of this document is to provide a specific set of biblical and wise guidelines for how conflicts and concerns will be handled by those members and attendees who have Northeast Bible Church as their church home. The aim is to fulfill God's directive to be at peace and maintain unity among ourselves. 2 Corinthians 13:11 is a representative passage for this high calling:

Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. (ESV)

The basic nature of conflict may be attributed to many things scripturally such as power, control, the sinful nature, misunderstandings, gossip, slander, and well-meant missteps. Regardless of the reason, God has called us to be united as believers in Christ under His headship. Before reading our procedure, please carefully consider the practical nature of the Conflict Cycle.

The Conflict Cycle



The conflict cycle has been well-documented as a common pattern for how conflicts grow and thrive. It explains things at home, at work, in civic organizations, politics, and of course, with the church. This pattern allows us simply to identify where we are in the process, to understand what is happening, and to appreciate why the biblical directions make sense.

Consider each stage:

1. **Tension** – Tension can be caused by anything from a misinterpreted facial expression, misinformation spread from one person to another, differences in personality and values, or genuine mistreatment. In general, appreciating differences (see Romans 12 & 1 Corinthians 12), along with love and forgiveness (Colossians 3:13-14), solves a conflict or concern at this stage. Also, directly discussing the tension follows the basics of Christ's teaching in Matthew 18:15-20.

2. **Role Dilemma** – Role Dilemma is an escalation of the Conflict Cycle, and occurs when an individual(s) concludes that the other person(s) with whom he or she has tension is not qualified for the role they have in the relationship. This ‘role dilemma’ can be with a husband, wife, teacher, boss, employee, coworker, or church leader. The idea in the conflict is that, since the person is not qualified for the role, he or she does not have to be dealt with according to the role. This means that a boss doesn’t have to be followed, a husband doesn’t have to be respected, a wife doesn’t have to be loved, etc. Once we conclude that the person is disqualified, we tend to move to the next step in the cycle. Respect for God’s work through authority is a large part of the solution for the Role Dilemma stage (Roman 13:1-7; Hebrews 13:17).
3. **Injustice Collecting** – Injustice Collecting is the step that is best described as ‘building your case,’ because you are headed to ‘court.’ In this stage there is a collection of information (examples, witnesses, rumors, etc.) to ‘prove’ how unjust and unqualified the person with whom there is conflict ‘really is.’ In this part of the Conflict Cycle a great deal of damage can occur as others are drawn into the conflict as witnesses, friends, or individuals who really just want to help. The problem is that this stage often violates several important passages: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (love); James 4:11-12 (not acting as a judge toward other Christians); Proverbs 18:17 (only hearing one side of an issue).
4. **Confrontation** – The Confrontation step is when things come to the point of presenting the case. This stage is often—but not always—a painful outburst of emotion and accusations. If people are helped through this stage with others present, it can often come to fresh clarity if the parties are operating in good faith (Philippians 4:1-3). Often at this stage many misunderstandings can be cleared up (Proverbs 18:17), but too often emotions have been over-charged when conflict goes this long.
5. **Adjustment** – The Adjustment step takes on various paths. Sometimes the adjustment involves resolutions and reconciliations, while at other times one or both of the parties involved simply ‘leave’ the situation, job, church, etc. The most common adjustment is to go back into the Cycle and commit to ‘do better’ without things really being resolved. Tension then builds again, etc.

Oftentimes, the struggles we have in life involve the various systems we have in place around us. These systems often dictate how things will go. For example, a regular maintenance system for an automobile leads to fewer mechanical breakdowns compared to a system that just assumes “if it ain’t broke don’t fix it.” Conflicts and Concerns often follow a similar type of pattern when there is just a take-it-as-it-comes approach. Usually things aren’t discussed or resolved. Concerning Conflicts, the Lord gave us a very clear set of instructions in Matthew 18:15-17 (as mentioned in the NEBC Member Covenant):

¹⁵ “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not

listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.” (ESV)

The basic idea Jesus is teaching is in the power of real communication. In His instructions, he is working very clearly from private to public, and offers three stages. First, you go alone. Next, you take someone(s) with you. Third, it winds up before the assembly (church). Also, please notice that the goal is to ‘gain’ a brother. Getting vengeance or removing the individual from the church is indefensible, and only comes as a very last resort (1 Corinthians 5). Last resort, however, means that the other steps have been followed with unity and restoration in mind. Forgiveness is immediately added to Christ’s instructions as Peter understands the nature of what Jesus is asking in Matthew 18:21-22:

²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.” (ESV)

Forgiveness is always in order, and if you can forgive without their asking, then it is all the more noble as well (Colossians 3:13-14)

There are three procedural issues that are addressed in slightly different ways. The following steps are exactly how we will resolve conflicts and concerns within the NEBC family. If you feel these steps are not suitable to your situation, please speak with an Elder about your concerns before taking any other course of action. We want to take the unity of the body as seriously as Christ directs us (Ephesians 4:1-3)

There are three categories of procedures to consider:

Conflicts or Concerns with NEBC Ministry Issues
Conflicts or Concerns with Individuals
Conflicts or Concerns with Elders

Conflicts or Concerns with NEBC Ministry Issues

These issues may include the pastors, the staff, or any of the ministry leaders within the church. This conflict or concern usually revolves around practices in ministry areas. In this area, the following is to be followed:

Objective: To accept or improve NEBC ministry practices

Principle: Matthew 18 with Romans 13

Procedure:

1. Go directly to the person with whom you have a ministry concern, regarding how the ministry is approached, or how the individual is functioning.

2. If you are unsatisfied with the response, you may then go to the individual's direct Supervisor (the person he or she reports to within the church structure).
3. If you are unsatisfied with the response of the Supervisor, you may then meet with the Board of Elders.
4. If you are unsatisfied with the response of the Board of Elders, according to our Constitution, you may then seek to have 10% of the membership sign a petition for a public meeting about the issue. A form and procedures may be secured from the church office for such a petition. All petitions are to be offered openly to the church. The church office will secure a public table for the petition to be read and signed.

Conflicts or Concerns with Individuals

Objective: Reconciliation in order to gain a brother/sister and build up one another in Christ

Principle: Matthew 18: 15-17

Procedure:

1. Go alone to the person who has offended you and tell him/her your concern or offense. A phrase like, "When you _____, I felt _____" can be a helpful approach. If you are too afraid to speak to the person alone, then ask the person if you can bring someone with you (Step 2 below).
2. If step 1 does not resolve the issue, then go with one or two others and follow the basics of Step 1.
3. If Step 2 does not resolve the issue, then you make take your concern to the Elders who will either help resolve the issue or bring it before the church.
4. If you are not satisfied with the Elders' approach you may pursue a petition as described above.

Conflicts or Concerns with Elders

Objective: To maintain the health of the church by having qualified leaders

Principle: 1 Timothy 5:19-20

¹⁹ Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. (ESV)

Procedure:

1. If it is a personal offense not related to the office of Elder, please follow the procedure outlined for individuals (above).
2. Bring two or three witnesses of the offending event or issue. The issue should be an event or issue, not a list of grievances based on rumors or assumptions. We cannot biblically consider any charge that does not have at least two witnesses we can interview.
3. If the Elders deem it appropriate, the Elder will be dealt with publically if there is persistence seen in the issue.
4. The Elders, at their discretion may offer other steps to the person bringing the charge, the witnesses, and/or the Elder against whom the charge is made.
5. If you are not satisfied with the Elders' approach or decision, you may pursue a petition as described above. However, to remove an Elder or Deacon, the NEBC Bylaws require in Section 6 A.(3) –“Upon recommendation by the Board of Elders, an elder or deacon may be removed by a three-fourths majority vote of the eligible membership at a properly called business meeting. The vote shall be taken by secret ballot.

We do not think these procedures are flawless, so we will review them from time to time to improve upon them with your help. We must insist, however, that a violation of these procedures will be seen as disunifying to the church; therefore we will have to consider beginning disciplinary actions. The unity of the body is far too important to neglect or ignore. Thank you for your faithfulness.

The Elders,