
WHEN CONFLICTS ARISE

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

This is a short article taken from one of “Daniel’s Travel Journal” entries he made while traveling, sharing relationship and ministry with friends and churches in various parts of our country and overseas.

Without going into any details—because the whole story isn’t mine to tell—I have spent the last two days talking to several people about things that inevitably happen in church. Being a collection of people, church gives rise to people-issues. No church can avoid the reality of broken humanity, and even when a group of people are each committed to finding and living God’s will, disagreements occur. People can disagree about many issues that are not, in themselves, matters of conscience. There is, for instance, no “right” way to conduct a service, do evangelism or “fulfill” the church’s assignment in the world.

Very often conflicts over one thing or another in church signal a deeper disagreement between people about how church ought to function. When leaders in a church have a different perspective about the church’s calling than the pastor has, things can be painful and confusing. That doesn’t mean that the pastor is right and the leaders are wrong—or vice versa. It simply means that the number of issues about which they disagree with continue to increase until some kind of separation is inevitable.

As often happened at The Coastlands in the years I pastored, people were brought to a level of health and spiritual vitality through the very church ministry that they eventually disagreed with. We had leaders who benefited immeasurably from our ministry philosophy for years, but when their own spiritual life grew healthy enough for them to hear and respond to God’s calling, they (and we) discovered that their ultimate “place” was not among us at The Coastlands, but elsewhere—with different people and with different perspectives.

But people are funny creatures. Often they are so insecure about their own value to God and to the body of Christ that they try to make their current “place” and perspective the “right” ones by telling everyone that their past places and perspectives were wrong. How unnecessary! I see my life in God

as a process of driving through a crowded city on surface streets. The fact that I now turn off one street to enter another, does not make the street I left the wrong one—unless I fail to turn off it onto the next street indicated in the directions.