

JULY 17, 1988

DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

Have you ever noticed that when you have two people trying to decide how to do something that you will have at least two different opinions as to how to do it? Each will think that they are right in their own way. In a broad sense, this is conflict. Conflict is not necessarily *good* or *bad*; however, how we handle conflict can determine if such differences produce positive or negative results.

In conflict situations there is, in general, an initiator and a responder and we need to look at both for successful conflict management. Usually, conflict starts when someone wants to change the status quo because they see a better way or they are uncomfortable with what is happening at the present time. The approach of the initiator can make a great difference in the outcome of the conflict. If you want your city to change the way they operate, then you will get a better hearing if you avoid accusing the officials of being stupid and/or dishonest. The key is to deal with the issues and not with the personalities. If issues can be our focus, then the two parties can work together on the issues rather than fight each other.

What happens if you are the responder to a proposed change? It is relatively easy to deal with such changes if you are not personally attacked. The really tough situations occur when we are accused of wrong motives or incompetence. How we respond can, in either case, make the difference in negative or positive results. In some cases, the person involved is so insecure in their opinions of themselves (or their lack of ability) that the suggestion of change is tantamount to a threat to their position. With such people, there is no way to win--every inch of progress happens only with a major battle. The other side of this situation is when you

have someone who, even though personally attacked, sees through the attack to the root of the problem--the need for change--and responds on the basis of solving the problem and making the situation better.

Moses found himself in the midst of many conflicts in the exodus adventure. After about one month of traveling out in the wilderness their "camping trip" had ceased to be fun and conflicts were on the rise.

EXODUS 16:1-3 The problem was lack of food. The congregation attacked the motives of Moses and Aaron, accusing them of conspiring to commit mass murder by starving all of them to death. Do you think that they really believed that? No, but there is a mistaken idea that we can't really get a person's attention unless we attack them personally. This is the "mule-two-by-four" theory that says to get the mule to do something that you must first get his attention by hitting him in the head with a two-by-four.

We see in this situation another common misconception: "You can't really get any action around here unless you overstate the situation." Accusing Moses of wanting to kill them with hunger, in addition to personally attacking him, was an exaggeration of what they believed. Another overstatement was that they wish that they had been killed in Egypt--at least, they would have died with full stomachs. They could remember the times when there would be a big kettle of meat cooking with plenty for everyone to eat. Those situations probably did not happen very often but that didn't matter since they wanted to make a point. This is another common misconception: "It was better in the good old days."

There was a legitimate concern: food was needed and it was right and appropriate that they noticed the need. The disappointing

factor was their approach to handling the need for change--they chose to complain rather than looking to God Who is the Source for solving problems.

EXODUS 16:4-8 Why hadn't God given them bread and meat up until this time? They had not needed it until now. So many times the blessings that God would give us arrive only when they are needed. Otherwise, these blessings are not appreciated. If the manna had been there before they ran out of other food, then they would have found it to be a nuisance.

The blessing of manna from heaven was going to be an opportunity to see if the people were trustworthy--if they would be obedient. They were to gather what they needed for one day, except on the sixth day they were to gather twice as much. (This is in anticipation of the sabbath observance.) They were not to hoard the food in anticipation of it running out, but were to trust God to provide on a day-by-day basis. Incidentally, if they did try to save the manna overnight, then it would spoil and not be good for them. This daily provision is reflected in the model prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples--"give us this day, our daily bread." There has much been made of the analogy of the daily provision of manna from heaven and the Christian's daily devotional life--the fact that you cannot save it up, but need to spend time with the Lord and in the word each day.

In the evening, quail was given to the people so that they could have meat in their diet. This was important for them if they were to have the strength for travel and for battle. If we were to compare the manna to devotional times, then we might say that the meat, which took preparation time and effort, is in-depth study of God's word.

Moses realized that he was not in control, that he was not the source of power in the situation that he was in. He did not let the people's complaining and accusing rest on

himself or Aaron. He told the people, "Who are we, that you should murmur against us--it is God who is calling the shots and is in control--you are murmuring against Him." This is a good attitude to have when people bring charges against you and complain about things over which you have no control. Refuse to let it bother you, you did not create the situation and are not responsible for everything that happens. We do not need to take the weight of the world on our shoulders and struggle with every problem that is there--this is the source of a lot of anxiety and stress that we do not need. Moses took the complaints and the problems to the Lord because he realized that his own resources were limited but that God is all powerful and can provide. This is faith and trust in action. God did not disappoint Moses.

EXODUS 16:9-12 Even as Aaron called the people together to give them the message from God that God would provide, the evidence of God's presence appeared so that the people would know that God was near. When the leaders obey and trust God, then all the people benefit from such faith. We also see that God does respond to the genuine needs of His people with sufficiency. Wise is that people who recognize that such provision is from God and acknowledge Him as Lord of their lives.