

God is deeply grieved by division among his people. For his sake, we have to at all times and above our own need to be heard or to be right, operate in a spirit of charity, love and mutual respect. Even if another is wrong, how we respond to them reflects our own character. Whenever the conscience of a leader or participant in the Underground is challenged and there is significant disagreement with a decision or direction of the senior leadership, the person should pursue a positive, loving, and humble approach. Dissent of ideas is welcomed but division can not be tolerated.

What is the difference? Dissent is taking a position other than the one espoused by the leadership. This is not a crime. People can and will dissent from decisions that are made. However, positive dissent continues to believe the best about the leadership as people, and continues to hold them in high regard, refusing to use the issue of dissent to injure their reputation or smear their character. Positive dissent focuses on the issue and addresses the people who are actually involved, not bystanders

Division is offensive. It seeks to take an issue and create sides. It draws lines and challenges other people to take their side against the leadership. This is an ungodly approach to disagreement. There is an active and passive component to division. Listening to a divisive argument and taking sides without having heard the other perspective is also divisive. Mature people will refuse to take a side not having heard the other perspective. Division quickly moves away from the issue and toward judgments about people. Posting those judgments or agreeing with them also creates division.

More than wanting to be right or getting to the bottom of perceived controversy leaders should aspire to preserve biblical unity. This does not mean you can not disagree, on the contrary, we can not just ignore our concerns and the challenge of our conscience but we need to do it in a certain way.

Positive Process

1. Take the concern to God in prayer. Dissenting is serious enough that it should not be entered into without a relative degree of clarity about your feelings, the biblical call, and the interpersonal dynamics involved. We should delineate between an offence and a disagreement in the leadership decision(s). Sometimes our concerns are personal and not actually a matter of righteousness. We need to submit our concern to God first and make sure he wants us to move forward with the process of dissent.
2. Consult the Scripture. Is your concern supported by the whole biblical text? Is what you consider a problem actually a problem scripturally? If not, consider coming to the leadership in more of a learning posture of inquiry and not dissent.
3. Go directly to the leadership over you, according to the organizational flow chart, and discuss problems you are having in a timely way. This could include a series of meetings seeking understanding, clarity and compromise. Do not talk to uninvolved people about

Process of Positive Dissent

the issue. Elders, especially, should not resort to power tactics involving inciting others to rise up against their opponents. They will not threaten or menace others to influence their choices. Such tactics destroy trust and break down the ability of a group to work together (Eph. 4:31; Tit. 3:2).

4. Develop a viable alternative. Leadership is complex and it's important as you dissent to understand the perspective of the leaders involved. Developing an alternative will expose you to the nuances of the decision(s) and illuminate your motives. This idea will not necessarily be implemented but will be heard within the series of meetings with the leader directly over you.
5. If, through a series of meetings with the direct leader over you, understanding and compromise has not been reached then schedule a meeting with the direct leader over you and an Executive Team Member to discuss the problems and possible alternatives.
6. A request should be given for a Dissent meeting with the Governing Elders to the Executive Director outlining the problems, what leaders you have met with and possible alternatives.

(This process of dissent is a compilation of these various Scriptures: Matt 18:15-20, Acts 6:1-5, Acts 15:2,6-21, Exodus 18:17-23)

Understanding and compromise is the goal of this process. Those who dissent from leadership directions, and feel their dissent is serious, should seek understanding or compromise with the leadership of the church. If they cannot obtain agreement with the leadership of the church, then you have a few positive options:

- Ignoring the difference and serving in harmony with the leadership's direction; as per Romans 14, some things are simply debatable matters and should not constitute grounds for disunity.
- Finding a church more in agreement with your own point of view;
- Resign your leadership position as a member of the body of elders. Dissent should be, and is allowed in our church. However, the Body of Elders is for those who already agree in principle with the direction of the church.

If you chose to leave or stay in dissent consider the following articles: *Leaving Well* and *Staying for a Change*.

Process of Positive Dissent

