

Biblically Dealing with Complaints in the Church

What should you do when you hear complaints against others?

STEP ONE:

A) Under no circumstances should an anonymous complaint be received by anyone. This does not allow for accountability or resolve and only provides an opportunity for Satan to work the imagination.

B) If someone comes to you with a complaint about any member of the church, it is best to not even hear the complaint until they have completed step one and two. However, some get so upset that they just need to vent. In such cases, let them vent.

C) Then clearly ask them, "Have you talked in private to the person with whom you have the complaint?" This is in accordance with Jesus' words in Matthew 18:15, "*If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.*" Also, Galatians 6:1 says, "*Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.*" Who is it that is supposed to go to the one in sin? It is the one who is spiritual. Also note the purpose of approaching the one who is in sin. It is to restore them. Finally, note that one is to approach the offender with gentleness and humility as opposed to being abrasive and with judgmental pride.

D) If they are too afraid to go to the accused, encourage them to take their spouse with them or you offer to go with them and be a help. In doing so you are holding people accountable to their complaints and even educating them to handle complaints and conflict the way God has intended. No one should be allowed to bring an accusation to anyone in the church without first having sought privately to admonish him or her in love.

STEP TWO:

A) If they go to the accused and don't believe he or she is responding appropriately, then you should ask them if anyone else has witnessed the same problem or sin in this individual. If not, encourage them to pray for the individual. The case is then closed except for continued prayer.

B) However, if there are other witnesses to the sin, encourage them to take one or two of them with them to humbly approach the individual with the issue. Again, this is according to Jesus' words in Matthew 18:16, "*But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.*"

STEP THREE:

A) If the accusers still are not satisfied with the response of the accused, then ask them to present their complaint in writing with signatures to the church leadership (Council). This is so that it is very clear what the complaint is and who is making the complaint.

B) Then the church leadership should call a meeting with the accused, address the issues and give appropriate counsel.

C) If the accused still does not respond, take the defendant before the congregation at a specially called congregational meeting with recommendation from the church leadership. This is in line with Jesus' words in Matthew 18:17, "*If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*" The motive is always for restoration!

COMPLAINTS TOWARD A PASTOR:

A) Steps one and two should be pursued first.

B) Charges of neglect of pastoral duties, false teachings, or unchristian conduct should not be made against the Pastor unless supported by two or more witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19). These charges should be presented in writing to the church leadership (council) together with evidence and the names of the witnesses.

C) The church leadership should then consider the matter, confront the Pastor, and take appropriate action against the accused or his accusers. Any clear charges may be presented to denominational leadership as well.

D) If the accusations prove false, appropriate action should be taken against the accusers. This protects the integrity of the ministry against divisive, slanderous or false accusations. Always keep in mind that you are dealing with God's ministry and His vessels. The church must be careful in guarding these according to God's direction.