

Why Does God Allow His Name to be Dragged through the Mud In Church Conflict?

By Ernie Baker

In the last few months I have heard of, consulted with, or directly counseled more churches involved in conflicts than any other similar time in my 3 decades of ministry, and this is just my little sphere of influence. It seems like church conflict has escalated this year alone. One professional biblical conciliator reinforced this when she told me that the staff of the ministry she is part of is overloaded with dealing with church conflicts this year as well.

Because of this I have found myself asking, "What in the world is going on? What is God up to? Why is the LORD allowing His name to be dragged through the mud?"

We all know that conflicts of any kind cause excruciating pain as pastors are being forced to resign, churches are splitting, and people are becoming bitter. I get why Gandhi supposedly said, "I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

I am repeatedly disappointed with the way I hear church leaders are dealing with conflict just as I am often disappointed with myself. These church conflicts further solidify the perception of the unsaved that the church is full of hypocrites as a new church pops up in town and the town hears the story of the split.

I would like to take a stab at answering the last question I posed above, Why does the Lord allow His name to be dragged through the mud in church conflicts? Some may think that this is not a difficult question to answer since Scripture clearly says "all things work together for good..." ([Romans 8:28](#)). Of course, I agree with that. The Lord is always up to something good in our lives for His glory. But I want to complicate things a bit by showing you why the answer is not that simple. So, this post is not about the practical issue of how to deal with conflict. It is more about the theology behind conflict and what our Lord is up to.

A Theology of Church Conflict

These questions are part of the theological discussion of "Theodicy." "Theodicy," better known as "the problem of evil" poses the questions, How can a good God use evil? How could He have allowed evil in the first place? Is He ultimately responsible for evil? There are no easy answers to those questions no matter what view of theodicy you believe.

So here are some of the issues that I believe make answering the dilemma of church conflict more complicated.

Complicating Issue # 1: Unity is emphasized repeatedly in the New Testament.

If there is anything that could confirm to the unsaved world that Christianity is false it would be conflict. Over and over we are told to "love one another" so much so that Francis Schaeffer even called this "The Mark of the Christian." Our Lord said in [John 13:35](#), "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (ESV).

A classic passage where unity in the midst of potential conflict is emphasized is [Ephesians 4:1-3](#). Paul writes:

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

It couldn't be any clearer—God values unity and desires us to work hard for it. Why then is He allowing so much conflict? My view of His sovereignty would even inform me that it is part of His plan to accomplish His purposes.

Complicating Issue # 2: God says repeatedly that He will not allow His name to be defamed.

The Lord is really concerned about His name not being defamed. In fact, we should be living to make Him more famous, not defaming His name. There's nothing like church conflict for having the potential for people to mock God.

God is really concerned about His glory and He states this clearly. In [Isaiah 48:11](#) He clearly says, “For my own sake, for my own sake, I will do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another” (ESV). If you study what God says about His name in other passages you'll see why church conflict troubles me so much.

A Suggested Answer

So, if God emphasizes unity by sacrificial love for one another and He is highly committed to His name not being profaned, then why is He willing to allow His name to be dragged through the mud? Why doesn't He intervene through the power of His Spirit and melt hearts and cause revival in His church?

A suggested answer:

God is so committed to our growth in holiness that He allows His own reputation to be soiled.

Isn't this what the cross is about? Our Lord allowed His name to be cursed and His reputation to be dragged through the mud so that we can be saved.

I speculate that it's the same reason for why He is allowing so much conflict in His church. What is He up to? He allowed His reputation to be dragged through the mud so we can be saved and He is up to the same thing now for our sanctification. In other words, He is so committed to our holiness that He is even willing to let others defame His name knowing that the pressure of church conflict will promote growth in His children.

Some of my greatest times of spiritual growth were because of church conflict. They humbled me, softened me and forced me to deal with problems with others instead of running or pretending conflict didn't exist. Conflict even led me to become a certified conciliator with *Peacemaker Ministries* (and that was a sanctifying experience as well!). Over and over, conflict has forced me to my knees and stirred me to search for answers.

So yes, the answer is “all things work together for good.” But it is a deeper, richer answer when we look at it the way we have. He is SO committed to your growth to be like His Son that He is even willing to allow His name to be soiled. What a servant our LORD is! But oh how mysterious are His ways.

Join the Conversation

How do you answer the question, “Why does God allow His name to be dragged through the mud with church conflict?”

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