

The Cost of Victory

By Dr. Greg Wiens

This weekend we celebrated our independence. Anything of value costs dearly. It was Thomas Paine who wrote: *“What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated.”* (The Crisis, December 23, 1776) He wrote this as people in America were facing a challenge of fighting for their freedom or succumbing to Britain’s domination. Over 75% of the leaders to whom he presented this lost their lives, fortunes or family members through the war that ensued. They felt FREEDOM was worth giving everything for.

As God’s Church we too have to decide what is our freedom in Christ worth? God the Father paid for it with the inestimable price of Jesus’ death on the cross. What are we willing to pay so that those who live, work and play around us also experience this freedom in Christ?

Recently I wrote of how crises build the character of a leader. We looked at how often there was disagreement or tension in the New Testament church. It was simply a part of ministry and still continues to be today. My observation is that any church, which is committed to reaching people for Christ and building them into disciples, will inevitably experience conflict. Let’s face it; Satan, Sin and the World system are bent against us.

In almost every New Testament epistle Paul, Peter or John deal with evil people IN the churches that they are writing. John writes, *“They (antichrists) went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”* (1 John 2.9-NIV) There were people IN the church that the apostles had to deal with in a manner that led these people to leave.

This past summer as I studied all of the New Testament letters I realized that every church had conflict and often it was centered on people bent against seeing the church effectively reach lost people and build them to become disciples. As I reflected and prayed through it, I had to finally admit that is probably true of our churches today as well. This was a hard fact for me to accept; but I can point to a number of people who are keeping some of our churches ineffective from expanding the Kingdom.

It seems easy for these “righteous” people to point out the sins of those not yet in the Kingdom, but totally blind to the sin or evilness in their own lives. They are self-centered, wanting power, prestige or to control the church. They can challenge anything that keeps the church focused on Her Kingdom mandated vision.

The question as a leader isn’t whether or not we will experience conflict, but rather the question is HOW will we experience the conflict. I had an older pastor once tell me that you really can’t choose the conflicts you will face in ministry, but you can choose when and where. So you should deal with conflict in a way that best positions Jesus to win by choosing the how, when and where of conflict.

The key in these conflicts is to first deal with them Biblically. Do not lie, cheat or be dishonest. We need to try to resolve these conflicts by going to the parties and listening to them and seeking to truly expand the Kingdom through resolving this conflict. As we saw several weeks ago, the church grew as they resolved these issues. But there will be times, when people bent on evil will not be dissuaded

and we must bring leadership to understand motives and a Biblical process of confronting the sin in their life. As Matthew 18.15ff states we must be prepared to allow their sinful heart to become obvious to the larger body their attitude is influencing.

We see Paul clearly apply this principle in 1 Corinthians 5. Paul's message was obvious that you don't expect moral purity from those outside the Body of Christ; you accept them as they are (5.10). But he is dealing with those who call themselves brothers and are sheep in wolves clothing (5.11). Today, we must be careful to deal with sin inside the church in a wise, graceful and Biblical manner. But make no mistake, if we are going to see our churches become the churches that God desires; we will have to deal with sin inside the church. And this will be messy.

I believe that is one of the roles that we as a Florida Church of God Ministries can fill. I don't relish these situations, but it comes with the territory. That is what is meant by choosing how, when and where the conflict is dealt with. You don't have to deal with every situation immediately when it pops up nor do you have to deal with it by yourself. As a leader, when you have to defend yourself, you simply come across as defensive. Therefore, let your Leadership Board cover your back, or let us help you appropriately.

No doubt that; as leaders stand up to sin inside the church, it will cost us dearly. It may cost us our positions, our salaries even our reputations. It was Jim Elliot who wrote before cannibals butchered him, "He is no fool, who gives up what he can not keep, to gain what he can not lose." He knew that there are some things more valuable than possessions and life itself. America exists today because a small group of men and women were willing to sacrifice everything for political freedom. How can we settle for less in the cause of Christ? As we have celebrated, let us consider and resolve this holiday, to sacrifice whatever it takes, so that some day others will be able to experience a freedom in Christ.