

The Challenge of Church Politics

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Some people believe that there shouldn't be "politics" in church ministry. All of us would like for that to be true, but the truth is that when you have two people in a room together, there are "politics." "Politics" happen when differing views exist between people. Every person has a "picture" of how things should be done. Every person has specific needs, interests, and experiences. All these things create "political pressure" as people work together and often compromise in order to build a ministry.



Jesus dealt with significant "politics" in His ministry here on earth. He had to deal with religious leaders who had varying levels of motivation, and government leaders who wanted to control the religious people and all others. He also had to deal with the innocent people in the middle of the political and religious "crossfire." Jesus' style of dealing with politics fell into 2 distinct actions: 1.) Confront face-to-face or 2.) Inspire and train others to deal with the problem.

In a children's ministry (CM) setting, you may not be able to confront the political challenges in a "face-to-face" manner. The source of your political stress may be your direct supervisor or senior pastor. If you cannot directly confront the person who is causing political stress, the only other avenue for you is to submit. Paul told us that every authority on earth is somehow established by God Himself.

"Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience."

Romans 13:1-5

Jesus told us to give respect and service to those in authority over us.

"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Mark 12: 17



When we are "bruised" by fellow believers, or by Christian authorities over us, it is like dealing with a "bad cop." It disturbs our brains and our spirit! We put our trust in those over us, and we want to honor them with our respect and service, but when we face challenges to who we are, or to the ministry that God has placed us over, we find ourselves confused and discouraged.

"Ministry" and "life" have always included the struggle between the politics of "flesh" and the Spirit: Cain killed Abel because of jealousy (who did God love the most?). The world became filled with selfish, evil, ungodly people. God, Himself, had to deal with the "politics" of love in the middle of a creation to whom He gave "free choice."

- Noah was rejected by all those around him.
- God had to destroy the people He loved and save a remnant of believers.
- God "chose" a "race" of people who would be "His people." He would make them an example for all to see and follow. Yet, even they were often referred to as "stiff necked."
- For the thousands of years after the flood, people "wrestled" with politics, selfish power, and the results of not honoring God. God blessed and cursed people and kingdoms based on their reverence of Him.
- Once again, God was discouraged with the petty, selfish actions of people. Instead of destroying the world again, He came to live among us and show us His amazing love.
- Jesus taught and "pleaded" with people to worship God through pure hearts and obedient actions that honored God.
- Jesus was killed by the "politics" of those who had their own agendas.

When you cry out to God regarding a decision that you feel is unjust or "wrong," remember that God knows what you are experiencing. Listen for His soothing "voice" that says, "I understand your pain."



Paul, and the other Apostles spoke and wrote about the struggle between the "flesh" and the Spirit. Their ministries were very effective, and the work of Jesus continued through them. Most of them were killed by "political" people who refused to submit to God.

We, today, carry on the same ministry as God in the Old Testament, as Jesus' life and ministry, and as the Apostles of the early Church: to proclaim the love of God and to challenge people to worship Him with their whole hearts! The Church has always been a fellowship of believers and a haven for powerful people to work out their fleshly, political desires. I love the passage in Hebrews 12:1-3:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Jesus is our example for how to "do" this challenging ministry "thing." He endured the cross only by focusing on the joy set before Him!

Yes, we are surrounded by a "great cloud of witnesses" who have gone before us, and who continue to minister in spite of the political "landscape" of the local church or organization. It is our challenge to focus on the joy of ministry, instead of the pain of the cross! Here are some suggestions for surviving the politics of church ministry:

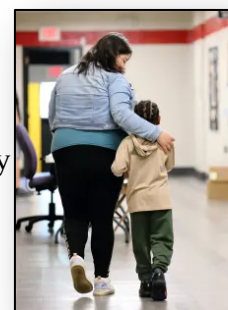
1. **Keep Your Eyes On Him** – Mothers often tell their children, "Don't look at that, look at me" when their children are faced with a terrifying situation. There is an important principle hidden within those words from a loving parent: Don't focus on scary things. As humans, we can easily focus on bad things. When you face political issues, ask God to help you focus on Him, His calling on your life, and the fact that He is more powerful than any political pressure. It is a mental discipline to "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." (Colossians 3:2)

2. **Pay Attention To What Happens Below You** – It is most likely that the political issues are happening “above you” among the senior leadership of the church or organization. Unless that political “climate” directly effects what you do in the CM, just “keep your head down,” and focus on the dear people “under” you. If the political issues effect what happens “under” you, then you do have to deal with it respectfully. There are three criteria that must not be negatively affected by church politics: the safety of the children, the support/safety of the CM team, and the spiritual integrity of the CM.



If the political pressure from “above” negatively effects any of these things, you must hold onto your Shepherd’s staff and speak respectfully against such things. It is sometimes effective to ask a clarifying question to the person who is wielding political pressure your way. When you ask something like, “So, you’re telling me that you are okay with taking the personal and financial responsibility for this decision if children are injured or parents are offended?” Sometimes, those in leadership need to see what you see, and this helps clear the “fog” caused by politics.

3. **Spend Time With The Children And Team Members** – Too often, we in CM leadership stay in our offices and let the CM team deal with the children. This is not good! Yes, you deal with leadership issues that may force you to leave the actual ministry in the hands of others, but if you never spend time with the children, you may focus on why you are doing what you do! If you are dealing with political issues, give yourself some needed “kid therapy” and walk around the CM during check-out. Talk with children, laugh with the CM team, and savor the joys of ministry. This therapy will help you stay balanced if you must deal with the politics “above you.”



The enemy wants you to be discouraged and to give up! Another great passage that speaks about ministering in the midst of church politics is 1Cor. 15:58

"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

Remember who wrote this passage. It is Paul who was beaten, stoned, and imprisoned! If you can't avoid church politics, stand firm and protect the children while dealing with them!