

III. PREVENTING CONFLICT

"None of us is immune from interpersonal conflict. It is as natural as eating."¹ Such an admission reflects the prevalence of destructive conflict in human affairs. The comparison to "eating," however, is faulty in that while eating is necessary to the life of an organism, destructive conflict is not necessary to the life of the church. In fact, there are many places where the Lord makes clear His desire that His people live in unity and harmony. To be sure, such conditions are not "natural" to interpersonal relations but are made possible through supernatural means.

In Paul's epistle to the Romans, chapter 12, verse 18, there is the exhortation: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Often the words, "if it is possible," are taken as an excuse for conflict.

In fact the phrase, "if it is possible" has nothing to do with making allowances for our weaknesses. It rather refers to the limits of peace. Peace becomes impossible when pursuit of harmony involves compromise with evil. As John Murray put it, "The responsibility for discord must to no extent be traceable to failure on our part to do all that is compatible with holiness, truth and right. . . There is no

¹Kelinski and Wolfford, Organization and Leadership in the Local Church, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), p. 101.