

Stick To The Facts

Have you ever reacted to something because you thought someone had done something for a particular reason, only to find out later, that that wasn't their reasoning at all?

It's easy to do. We see Mrs T making a special chocolate cake for the pastor, and then we hear that she has been appointed as head of the Women's Bible study group. Don't you hate it when that kind of favouritism and "politics" comes into the running of a church? And it's so disappointing that so many pastors are so weak and so easily manipulated by women like that.

Plus, of course we know we would have been a better leader than her, but it's just because she weaseled her way into the pastor's good books by baking him a cake.

The trouble is, that the rumour is already half way around the church when we bump into Mrs J at the supermarket and hear how sweet it was of Mrs T to make a special cake for the pastor's non-Christian neighbour Mr J and his only child Jimmy who just turned five last week and was so wishing he could have a chocolate cake for his birthday, like his mummy used to make before she died a few months ago.

And of course later, when we find out through someone at church that it is the Elders of the church who appoint Bible study leaders, and the pastor doesn't even give himself a vote at their meetings, we are left in a pretty sickening position aren't we.

Damaged reputations, broken relationships, needless stress and anxiety. All because we presume the worst from others.

What a shame.

What are the facts?

1. Mrs T made a cake and gave it to the pastor.
2. Mrs T was chosen to be the study leader.
- 3... there is no three... these two are the only facts we know. We made the rest up in our heads.

How much better, when we're feeling "gossipy" like that, if we just stick to the facts. Stop assuming what people's intentions are. Stop assuming what is going on behind closed doors. The bottom line is, there are other explanations which could fit the facts. Good explanations. Positive explanations which don't damage people's reputations.

If, based on the facts, we can think of even ONE positive explanation, then don't we owe it to others, especially our own brothers and sisters in church, to assume that that one is the explanation, rather than one of the negative ones?

Stick to the facts. And be gracious.

In Joshua 22 we read how the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh had built their own altar. The rest of the Jews assumed that this meant they had turned from Yahweh to follow some other god. And that meant war! So off they went, ready for battle.

But when they got there they said, "No way, we still follow Yahweh, he is god of gods and lord of lords. We just thought that one day you guys might stop us crossing over to you guys and worshipping in Jerusalem. So we planned ahead and set up our own altar."

Imagine if they hadn't had the talk first. Imagine if they hadn't said, "Hey, we see what you're doing and we have come to sort you out on behalf of Yahweh." Imagine if they had just attacked. What a sad day that would have been.

In this case, they were both wrong! They both made assumptions about each other's behaviour. Neither of them stuck to the facts.

Imagine you're one of the other Jews. What are the facts? They built an altar. That's it. One fact. Why? Who knows?

It's possible that Yahweh appeared to them in the night and told them to.

It's possible that it's not an altar at all, but just a nice pile of rocks, (altars in those days were made of uncarved rocks).

There are at least two positive explanations. Our "They have rebelled against God and deserve to die" assumption is not the only possible explanation.

But at least they talked about it. Talking can make a lot of difference. It can clear up a lot of misunderstandings.

In fact, if we had talked with the pastor or even with Mrs T right at the start, she might still have a good reputation in the church, and we might still be good friends. Maybe it's not too late to apologise now?

Stick to the facts.

Imagine the best possible motives for others.

Talk about it.

Apologise if you need to.

You might even stop a war.