

# ***HOW TO TACKLE THE TOUGHER SUBJECTS***

Before diving into how to handle a wide variety of difficult topics, it is important to first take into account the core of the group.

We all will always have differing opinions, when a topic comes up such as abortion or same-sex marriage, as a leader we should hit “pause” the second it is mentioned and start with the premise that we are all still saved by grace, we are still a community and a family. Everyone has family members who don’t agree with the same things, but they are still family, and you still love them. Topics like this tend to cause division in the church or in groups, and to move forward in discussing these uncomfortable topics, we have to remain loving and accepting towards one another. There will always be two perspectives.

Having said that, there are some things that shouldn’t have two perspectives at Sandals Church, when these come up it is best to back these things up biblically. Still, these should be presented with gentleness and respect, but here are topics that we have a formal position on:

## ***THE SCRIPTURES:***

The Bible was written by men under inspiration from God. It is completely true in all that it affirms. It is the source of God’s divine revelation and is the final authority for our belief and practice.

## ***GOD:***

God is the completely holy and sovereign creator and sustainer of the universe. He exists in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. All three persons are coequal and coeternal but are distinct from one another.

## ***MAN:***

God created man in his image. Out of all of creation, man is set apart as God’s special image bearer which gives all people inherent worth and special responsibility. Man was created to know God and worship God.

## ***SIN:***

Due to the disobedience of Adam and Eve, sin entered the world and broke God’s good creation. The effects of sin permeate all of creation including people. Sin separates a person from God, from their true selves and from others. Because of sin, man stands guilty before God, deserves punishment, and is incapable of loving, worshipping or cherishing God.

## ***SALVATION:***

The sinful state that man is in cannot be overcome by any of his own efforts. God, according to his grace, offers salvation to man as a free gift that is obtained through faith in the work of Jesus on the cross. Those on whom the work of Jesus is effective are born again: they are given a new heart that loves God, hates sin and desires to live an obedient life.

## ***JESUS:***

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is both fully God and fully man. Jesus lived a perfect life and died as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. He rose bodily from the grave three days after being buried to display his victory over sin, Satan, and death. Jesus will one day return to earth and reign as King.

## ***HOLY SPIRIT:***

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He empowers believers to live the life God has called them to, inspired the scriptures, illuminates the word of God, and convicts people of sin. By the Holy Spirit, believers have spiritual gifts that they use to serve the local church.

## ***CHURCH:***

A church is a localized community of baptized believers committed to one another and the mission of God who gathers regularly with recognizable leadership, practice the two ordinances, and function as a team and family.

## ***ORDINANCES:***

One of the first acts of obedience of a follower of Jesus is to be baptized. The event demonstrates the person's new life in Jesus. Sandals Church practices baptism by immersion. Communion is taken to commemorate and symbolize the work of Jesus on the cross – the bread symbolizes his broken body and the wine or juice symbolizes his shed blood.

## ***THE KINGDOM:***

The kingdom of God is his rule, reign, and authority. His kingdom is present in this world but not fully expressed. When a person is born again, that person is transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God. One day, God's rule, reign and authority will be perfectly expressed "on earth as it is in heaven."

## ***THE FAMILY:***

Marriage is a covenantal relationship instituted by God that is between a man and a woman and provides the foundation for a family. Sexual activity is to only be practiced within a lifelong, covenantal, monogamous, heterosexual marriage.

## ***ETERNITY:***

Man was created to exist forever. Those who are in Christ will spend eternity on the new heavens and new earth in new life under the rule and reign of the good king forever. Those who reject Jesus will experience the wrath of God and spend eternity separated from God in hell.

Those are things that the bible is very clear about that Sandals Church holds tightly to. Now when it comes to the gray areas (anything not mentioned above or things clearly written or instructed in the bible), after having laid the groundwork for the conversation as mentioned above, here are some directions to go:

## ***KEEP THE TOPIC PERSONAL, AND AVOID HYPOTHETICALS***

For example, if someone brings up the issue of abortion, they might throw out a statement beginning with "what if.." This isn't helpful, it quickly becomes an argument of personal thoughts. Keep the discussion personal by asking if they know anyone considering an abortion, or knows someone who has had one, how would they personally treat that person? Do their thoughts on the subject hinder them from showing the love and grace that God shows us? The only productive guidance is to make it personal. "Do you know someone personally going through \_\_\_\_\_? If so, what should your role be in their life?" There is no point in stirring up angst and passion against something out of our control. Everything is in God's control, and God gives us a specific role of sharing the Good News of Christ with those around us. God calls us and uses us to change others hearts for his glory, not because we don't like their actions. Of course we are to keep others accountable and spur each other towards good works, but community and Christianity is way deeper than behavior modification, it's getting to the root and the heart.

It takes a long time for everyone to submit every single thought and feeling to the authority of God, I don't think anyone can say that they have fully done that except for Jesus, so be patient and graceful with others. We need to avoid

casting stones. We have to remember that the world will always offer other ways to live besides God's way, and that doesn't lessen the power and freedom that comes from following God, it only makes our responsibility as Christians greater to reach those who are lost.

Ask everyone to be open to other's thoughts. Continue to make it personal by asking how any of the gray areas affect their faith.

If one person is very firm and aggressive in their views, you may have to talk with them 1-on-1 outside of group and talk through some of the things they are dealing with. (Refer back to the section on Addressing Conflict if needed)

Here is a standard response that you can use when these topics come up, and feel free to fill in the blanks with whatever the topic may be.

"Hey guys, although \_\_\_\_\_ is very controversial, the leadership at Sandals Church feel that things like this can be very divisive and are often there to distract us and pull us away from the core of the Gospel, which is love for God and one another. If we move forward in discussing \_\_\_\_\_, I want to make sure we all understand we are still a family and should be respectful of each other's views. Because the bible does not specifically address \_\_\_\_\_, we can never be certain and are only left with our personal opinions and feelings towards it. If at any point it seems this is no longer a healthy discussion concerning \_\_\_\_\_, we will have to move past it. Remain in love for one another."

Just because this is brought up, doesn't necessarily mean these topics should be pursued by any means by you as a leader. These tools are only if they come up and how to handle them properly. People have completely quit a group over differing opinions, and that's not something anyone wants to happen. As a body of Christ we have to remain in unity and the rhythm of grace that God has for us.

### ***KEEP IT RELATIONAL.***

If you don't know how to answer something, it's totally okay to say "Hey guys, I'm actually not too sure about this one, let me look into it during the week and we can revisit this next week." Then that gives a perfect opportunity for you to reach out. Of course we can't go into every single topic that may come up. If something comes up that you have no idea how to handle, reach out to your Area Leader for some extra guidance

"Know this, my beloved brothers and sisters: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." **JAMES 1:19-20**