

## **STRENGTHENING YOUR RELATIONSHIPS AT CHURCH**

### **1 Thessalonians 5:11-15**

**By Andy Manning**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Usually, the focus of the sermon is on you – how you can be a better Christian. Today the sermon is on us – how we can be a better church. How we can have better relationships at church.
2. Your relationships at church are worth strengthening.
  - i. There are some organizations that you can live without. There are a lot of organizations that you can live without; that you don't need to participate in; that you can abstain from; that you can give up on. Take 'em or leave 'em. Not the church. The church is not a take 'em or leave 'em organization. It is essential. We can't give up on the church. We can't abstain from church.
  - ii. Think about what the church is: The Body of Christ; the Bride of Christ; the Pillar and Foundation of the Truth; the Family of God; God's instrument for world discipleship.
  - iii. Think about Christ's relationship with the church: Jesus is the head of the church; He loves the church; He builds the church; He cares for the church; He died for the church.
  - iv. If there is anything worth committing to, it is the church.
    1. If there is anything worth your time, it is the church.
    2. If there is anything worth your talents, it is the church.
    3. If there is anything worth your prayers, it is the church.
    4. If there is anything worth your energy, it is the church.
    5. If there is anything worth your money, it is the church.
    6. If there are any relationships worth strengthening, it is your relationships at church.
3. Today and next week we are going to learn how to strengthen our relationships at church.

#### **II. TEXT**

1. **1 Thessalonians 5:11-15** "11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing. 12 Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to give recognition to those who labor among you and lead you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to regard them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. 14 And we exhort you, brothers and sisters: warn those who are idle, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 See to it that no one repays evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for all."

#### **III. HOW TO TREAT YOUR CHURCH FAMILY**

1. **Encourage one another.**

- i. **1 Thessalonians 5:11** “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.”
- ii. Encourage (Gk. *Parakaleo*): urge; implore; exhort
- iii. The word “encourage” literally means to call alongside. Encouragement is when people come alongside and motivate us, compliment us, and thank us.
- iv. What does encouragement do? It energizes us. It strengthens us. It gives us emotional fuel.
- v. What are we to encourage each other to do?
  - 1. To remain true to the Lord.
    - a. **Acts 11:23** (of Barnabas at Antioch) “When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts”
  - 2. What does it mean to remain true to the Lord? Keep being the person God wants you to be. Keep seeking the Lord with all your heart. Keep pursuing the fully-devoted life. Keep growing. Keep serving. Keep standing firm. Don’t backslide. Don’t turn away from Christ. Don’t drop out of church. Keep on doing God’s will.
- vi. How do we encourage one another?
  - a. Words of affirmation.
    - i. When you see someone doing something right, something good, then encourage them. “Good job! Keep up the good work! I’m proud of you! I’m impressed by you!”
    - ii. When you see a mother bring her kids to church all by herself, encourage her.
    - iii. When you see an elderly person coming to church, even though they aren’t in good health and it would be easier to stay home, encourage them.
    - iv. When you see someone working hard in the church in some capacity, encourage them.
  - b. Words of motivation.
    - i. Remind each other that the fully-devoted life is worth it.
    - ii. “God will bless you! The hard work will pay off! The harvest is coming! God will reward you. God is pleased with you! You are making a difference. You are doing the right thing!”
    - iii. When you see a couple bring their young child to church, and they have to use the family room because the child is still learning how to behave, encourage them. Your hard work will pay off! Don’t give up!

- iv. When you see your child give a donation or a tithe to the church, even though they have very little money, encourage them. God will bless you! Every little bit helps!
- c. Words of gratitude.
  - i. Thank people in the church when they serve.
  - ii. Thank your Home Group leader. Thank the worship leaders. Thank the people who cook and prepare food at church events. Thank the Hospitality Team. Thank the Greeting Team.
  - iii. **William James** “At the core of the human personality is the need to be appreciated.”
- vii. Author Bruce Wilkinson tells the story of when his daughter brought home three Fs in a row in math. Rather than rebuke her, Bruce took her out for ice cream and encouraged her. Her grades picked up.
- viii. Rick Warren once said that the number one enemy of your life mission is procrastination. But a close second is discouragement. “If Satan can’t get you to put off your life mission, he’ll try to make you quit altogether. He’ll neutralize you.”
- ix. We all need encouragement. Make it a point to encourage your church family.

## 2. Build each other up.

- i. **1 Thessalonians 5:11** “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.”
- ii. What does it mean to build each other up? Acts 20:32 gives us a hint.
  - 1. **Acts 20:32** “And now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all who are sanctified.”
  - 2. It means to help each other grow.
- iii. Everybody in the church should be helping other people grow.
- iv. How do you help other people grow? Ephesians 4:16 gives the answer.
  - 1. **Ephesians 4:16** “From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.”
  - 2. We help each other grow when we each do our part in the body of Christ.
  - 3. You don’t have to be a preacher, or a worship leader, or a Home Group leader to help others in the church grow. You just have to do your part to make the church healthy and functioning and effective.

4. Your part could be Leading a Home Group. Serving – cleaning up after Home Group. Taking pictures. Planning an event. Cooking. Set up and take down. Landscaping. Media. Sound. Music. Maintenance. Giving. Greeting. Offering team. Hospitality.
- v. I'm a member of Cajun Fitness, and they have several types of employees. They have fitness instructors, personal trainers, salespeople, custodians, maintenance people, childcare workers, staff who make and sell the snacks, staff members who hand payroll and accounting, and then there are managers who hire and lead the staff. The mission of Cajun Fitness is to help their customers to get fit. Which of their staff help them fulfill this mission? Is it just the fitness instructors and personal trainers? No. The business only thrives and fulfills its mission as each part does its work. It's the same with the church. The church can only fulfill its mission of reaching the lost and helping them grow up in Christ as each part does its work.

### 3. Honor your pastor.

- i. **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13** "12 Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to give recognition to those who labor among you and lead you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to regard them very highly in love because of their work."
- ii. Now we come to my favorite passage in the Bible. I've been waiting to preach on this passage for a long, long time. This is, in fact, the reason I chose to preach through 1 Thessalonians – just for this passage. Just kidding!
- iii. The Perfect Pastor: A recent survey has compiled the qualities that people expect from their pastor:
  1. He preaches exactly 12 minutes.
  2. He frequently preaches against sin but never upsets anyone.
  3. He works on his sermons from 8 am to midnight, and after working hours volunteers as the church janitor.
  4. He makes \$100 a week, but wears good clothes, buys good books, drives a good car, and gives about \$150 a week to the poor.
  5. He is 28 years old and has been preaching for about 30 years.
  6. He has a burning desire to work with teenagers and spends all his time with senior adults.
  7. He makes fifteen daily calls to church families, visits shut-ins and the hospitalized, spends all his time evangelizing the unchurched, and is always in his office when needed.
- iv. Pastors have a difficult job:
  1. 1700 pastors leave the ministry every month. 9 out of 10 ministers will quit before they retire. 70 percent of ministers constantly fight depression. 50% of pastors feel so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but have no other way to make a living.

70% of pastors say they do not have someone they consider to be a close friend. The average tenure of a pastor is 3.6 years before he quits and moves to another church. 3,500 churches shut down every year.

2. What makes a pastor's job so difficult?
  - a. It is not lucrative, even though it requires a lot of education. For example, a seminary degree requires more hours than a law degree.
  - b. They are expected to be perfect. Perfect character. Perfect marriage. Perfect children.
  - c. They live life in a fish bowl. They are watched very closely.
  - d. They are often lonely, because they can't be honest about their struggles.
  - e. They are under severe attack, because they are the shepherds of the flock.
- v. This passage explains how to treat your pastor:
  1. Give them recognition. Show them appreciation. Acknowledge the important work they do, and the contribution they make.
  2. Regard them very highly. Treat them as very important. Very valuable. Think highly of them.
  3. Love them. Shower them with affection love.
- vi. One of the best ways to love your pastor is to pray for me, for two things specifically:
  1. Pray that I will love you and God enough to tell you the truth.
  2. Pray that I will make decisions to make the church healthier and more effective, not to keep people.

#### **4. Be at peace among yourselves.**

- i. **1 Thessalonians 5:13b** "Be at peace among yourselves."
- ii. Work hard to get along with each other. Work hard for right relationships. Work hard to avoid conflict and strife. Work hard to stay unified.
- iii. You can almost sense Paul saying, "Guys, for God to accomplish His purpose for this church, and in this church, and through your church, you've got to get along."
- iv. Notice that this command comes right after the command to love your pastor. Paul could be saying, "Here's how to love your pastor: Be at peace among yourselves. Get along. Avoid strife, and division, and disunity."
- v. How does the devil immobilize a church? Get us to fight against each other. Get us mad at each other. Get us to divide.
- vi. Some things are worth fighting for. Some things are worth dividing over. Doctrine. Sin. But most church fights don't qualify. Most are petty quarrels.

- vii. Instead of fighting over petty things, over non-essentials, we should be fighting for peace; fighting for unity.
- viii. Let me give you four keys to maintaining unity in the church:
  1. We're better together. That's reason God calls us to be in the church. We need each other for our own spiritual health. But also, we need each other to accomplish God's purposes. The things that God wants to do through us are bigger than any one of us. We need to work together.
  2. Unity is a command. **2 Corinthians 1:10** "Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction."
  3. Unity boils down to bearing with one another (Col 3:13). It is a commitment to work it out rather than walk out. At the end of the day, when push comes to shove, unity means putting up with minor disagreements and offenses. We don't have to agree on everything. We don't expect perfection from each other. Conflict does not have to end in separation. Spend a significant amount of time with anyone, and you're bound to butt heads. You're bound to disagree, or to be offended. That does not mean that you have to leave the church. There are two more options. One, just forgive and forget. Give them grace. Or two, if it's too big of an issue to forgive and forget, then have a peace conference. The two of you need to get alone and reconcile. "You offended me. I'm sorry, and I won't do it again. I forgive you." Unity is the willingness to enter the tunnel of conflict together. Unity is choosing to work it out rather than walk out.
  4. Unity is worth the struggle. Remember what we're talking about: the church of Jesus Christ. Remember the mission – to reach the lost and make disciples; to equip parents to disciple their kids. People are annoying. Dealing with people is hard. But in the end, because of what the church, and why it is so important, unity is worth the struggle.
- ix. If we can't get along, we can't get things done for God.
- x. **Ethiopian Proverb** "When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion."
- xi. By ourselves, each of us is only a tiny spider web. We can't do too much to combat the kingdom of darkness. But together, united, we can do great things for Christ.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

1. Church can be messy. The church is filled with sinners. It is a colossal collection of moral foul-ups. People are difficult. Some people in the church are very difficult. It's like **Adrian Rogers** said, "Some people brighten up a room just by leaving it."
2. But the church is also Christ's body and bride. It is worth putting up with. It is worth working on. It is worth strengthening. So today, let's renew our commitment to the church, and to one another, for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ.