

HOW TO TREAT YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

1 Thessalonians 5:11-15

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The church is not a building. That's why Church Acadiana can exist even though we don't yet own a building. Saddleback Church is one of the largest churches in America. It was started in 1980. It took them 13 years to purchase property, and then it was another two years before they built their first building. So, for the first fifteen years, they met in high schools and in all sorts of other venues. Did they become a church when they finally built a building, or were they already a church before that? They were already a church, because the church is not a building.
2. So, what is the church? The church is the people. It is a gathering of Christ-followers.
3. For a church to be healthy, the people in the church need to relate to each other in a healthy manner. They need to treat each other right. This is why so much is written in the NT about how people in the church need to treat each other.
4. Think about a basketball team. For the basketball team to win, the players have to treat each other right. If they treat each other with meanness, rudeness, dishonesty, selfishness, arguing, fighting, etc., then they won't win. But if they treat each other right, then they put themselves in position to win.
5. The same is true for the church. Our mission is to reach people far from God and help them become fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ. Our unique vision is to equip parents to disciple their kids. For us to accomplish our vision, we have to learn to treat each other right. We have to relate to each other well.
6. Today we are going to look at a passage that teaches us how to do that.

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. FOUR WAYS TO TREAT YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

1. Warn those who sin.

- i. **1 Thessalonians 5:14** "And we exhort you, brothers and sisters: warn those who are idle."
- ii. The marginal note says the word can also be translated "unruly, or undisciplined." Generic for sin.

- iii. To understand this command, you have to understand that God wants us to be holy. He wants His church to be holy. One of the ways that God keeps His church holy is through these warnings about sin.
- iv. The church needs two kinds of warnings:
 - 1. General warnings to the entire church: Preaching about sin.
 - 2. Personal warnings to individuals: Practice church discipline.
- v. First, the church needs to preach about sin.
 - 1. What do I mean “preach about sin”? The church needs warn against specific sins. 1 Corinthians 14:8 says, “If the bugle makes an unclear sound, who will prepare for battle.” It’s one thing for a preacher to say, “Sin is bad! Repent of sin!” Any preacher at any church can do that. It’s another thing for the preacher to stand up and say, “Pornography is a sin. Cohabitation is a sin. Adultery is a sin. Sexting is a sin. Premarital sex is a sin. Homosexuality is a sin. Drunkenness is a sin. Repent!”
 - 2. The warning of this type of preaching is two-fold: First, God will punish those who live like this. Second, the church will not tolerate Christians who live like this. That brings us to the second kind of warning.
- vi. Second, the church needs to practice church discipline.
 - 1. Church discipline is essential for a holy church.
 - 2. During the Protestant Reformation, the reformers set out to identify the essential marks of a true New Testament Church, and church discipline is one of them. Qualified biblical leadership, preaching the gospel, observing the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and church discipline.
 - 3. What is church discipline? When a member of the church (a professing Christian) is living in blatant sin (bad behavior done openly unashamedly), the church leadership is to confront, call to repentance, restore, and if necessary, expel from the church. Notice I said “restore.” The purpose of church discipline is to help a fellow believer repent of sin and get on the path of repentance. If they acknowledge their sin and agree to repent, then they are to be loved and welcomed into the church, although they may lose their positions of ministry and leadership for a time. But if they refuse to repent, they are to be expelled from the church.
 - 4. Paul condemned the Corinthian church because of their failure to practice church discipline. There was a man in the church who was sleeping with his step-mother. And the church seemed to be arrogant about it; maybe they were arrogant about how tolerant and accepting and loving they were. Notice Paul’s words.

- a. **1 Corinthians 5:2** “And you are arrogant! Shouldn’t you be filled with grief and remove from your congregation the one who did this?”
- b. Why is it important to expel unrepentant sinners from the church? Paul answers this question in verse six.
 - i. **1 Corinthians 5:6** “Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough?”
 - ii. When you bake bread, you have to add leaven or yeast to make the bread rise. It only takes a little leaven, and it will affect the entire batch of dough. Paul is saying that sin is contagious. If the church tolerates just a little bit of sin, the it will spread and grow – in that person’s life, and in the life of the church.
- 5. There should only be two groups of people in attendance: Penitent Christians, and sinful non-Christians. If you are a non-Christian, we welcome you at Church Acadiana in all your sin. We don’t expect you to clean yourself up before coming to church and becoming a Christian. But once you become a Christian and join the church, then we will hold you accountable to live a holy life. We must. There should not be unrepentant Christians, or Christians living in blatant sin, participating in church.
- vii. Both of these actions (preaching about sin, and church discipline) require great courage and faith from the church leadership. This is why the ultimate goal of the church cannot be to get bigger. It must be to get better. If the goal is to get bigger, then the church will avoid calling out sin; it will avoid church discipline. Please pray for me.

2. Comfort the discouraged.

- i. **1 Thessalonians 5:14** “comfort the discouraged”
- ii. A second way to treat your church family is to comfort the discouraged.
- iii. The Greek word means to speak kindly, soothingly, to comfort, pacify, console.
- iv. When you comfort other believers, you are acting like your Heavenly Father. The Bible calls the Holy Spirit the Comforter (Jn 14:16). God is called “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort (2 Cor 1:3-4).
- v. **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** “3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. 4 He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”
 - 1. Notice a few things about this passage:

- a. God comforts us in all our affliction. If you are a Christian, and the Holy Spirit lives in you, then He will comfort you when you go through hard times.
 - b. God calls us to comfort others when they are in any kind of affliction. This is one of the reasons God comforts us, so that we will have the strength and perspective to comfort others.
 - c. God comforts us not only directly through the Holy Spirit, but indirectly through other believers as they comfort us. If you want to be comforted, then you need to seek out Christian fellowship.
- 2. Who needs comfort? People who are experiencing emotional and psychological anguish and turmoil. Those who are grieving. Those who are worried. Those who are afraid. Those who are depressed. Those who are discouraged.
- 3. People need to be comforted when they...Lose a loved one. Fail a big test. Get dumped, or get their heart broken. Get battered by an addiction. Struggle with unanswered prayer. Hear that they have terminal illness. I could go on, because life is filled with pain and suffering and sorrow.
- vi. This means that no one in the church should suffer alone. No one should go through hard times alone. We are to comfort one another; and we are to seek comfort in one another. When you see someone in the church suffering emotionally and psychologically, then you need to step in and comfort them.
- vii. How do you comfort someone? To comfort is to make someone feel better; to lift their spirits. There are many ways to do this.
 - 1. Spend time with the person. Just your presence can be uplifting.
 - 2. Offer your condolences. Say, "I'm so sorry."
 - 3. Offer them words of encouragement. Remind them that God is good, in control, and works all things out for our good.
 - 4. A hug.
 - 5. A phone call.
 - 6. A written letter or note, or an email, or even a text message to let them know that you are thinking and praying for them.
 - 7. Pray with them.
 - 8. Food. That's why they call it "comfort food."
- viii. During one very dark season in the life of the church, I was feeling down. I felt all alone. I felt like a failure. My dad could see it, so he invited me to lunch. He fed me, and we talked, and I left there with lifted spirits. That's what the church is called to do for each other.

3. Help the weak.

- i. **1 Thessalonians 5:14** "help the weak"

- ii. Who are the weak? Those who are in need.
- iii. When someone in the church has a need, we need to step in and help. See a need, meet a need.
- iv. There are many scenarios of people who are in need:
 1. A person gets laid off.
 2. A person's house gets flooded or burns down.
 3. A single mother is struggling to make ends meet.
 4. A person's spouse just abandons them.
 5. A woman seeking protection from an abusive spouse.
 6. A person struggling with addiction.
 7. A person loses a loved one.
 8. A person gets sick or injured, and they can't cut the grass, or go to work.
 9. A couple is having marriage problems.
 10. A person's car breaks down and needs transportation.
- v. The purpose of the church can be broken down into five functions: Worship, evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, and ministry. Helping the weak has to do with ministry. Ministry just means service. We are to serve one another in the church, and outside the church.
- vi. We see several examples of this in the New Testament.
 1. The members of the Jerusalem church were selling their property and giving the money to the church so that it could be distributed to anyone in need (Acts 2:44).
 2. They also had a food ministry to serve the widows in the church (Acts 6:1).
 3. Tabitha was a Christian woman from Joppa. She was always doing good works and acts of charity for the widows in the church, making robes and clothes for them (Acts 9:36-42).
 4. There was a great famine in Jerusalem. When the church in Antioch heard that the church in Jerusalem was going through a hard time, they raised a special offering and sent it to them (Acts 11:29).
 5. When Paul was in prison for preaching the gospel, several of his friends visited and met his needs (Col 4:7-11).
- vii. Again, at church, nobody should stand alone. Nobody should suffer alone. Nobody should struggle alone.

4. Forgive those who sin against you.

- i. A major theme in Paul's writings is unity. He wanted the churches to get along and stick together, or else the church wouldn't fulfill its purpose.
- ii. In verse 13 he told "be at peace among yourselves." In other words, how do you handle disagreements, differences, and offenses? Work it out rather than walk out.

- iii. Here in these next few verses Paul is going to give us the most important key to unity in the church, and to maintaining good relationships in the church.
- iv. **1 Thessalonians 5:14c-15** “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.”
- v. These two verses give us the three elements of forgiveness.
- vi. The Three Elements of Forgiveness
 - 1. Be patient with everyone.
 - a. Give people grace. Don’t expect or demand perfection. Don’t make people walk on eggshells around you. Don’t be easily offended. Don’t be quick-tempered. When people disagree with you, or do something offensive, don’t take offense. When you take offense, it puts up a fence between you and me.
 - 2. See to it that no one repays evil for evil.
 - a. Don’t take revenge. Don’t seek to get even. Don’t return insult for insult. Don’t seek eye for an eye.
 - 3. Always pursue what is good for one another and for all.
 - a. Even when they have hurt you, keep pursuing their good. Keep showing them kindness. Pray for them. Don’t talk bad about them. Help them when they need it.
 - b. You don’t have to like people who hurt you. You don’t have to be best friends to people who hurt you. You don’t have to trust people who hurt you. But you must not take revenge, and you must pursue what is good for them.
 - c. When people hurt you, it’s tempting to be selfish – even though you know your actions will hurt them, you still do it. Hurting them is not the goal, but you don’t care. Or it is tempting to take revenge – do something hurtful to intentionally hurt them. Don’t do that. Instead, always pursue their good.
- vii. Forgiveness helps the victim the most.
 - 1. Dr. Don Colbert writes about how you hurt yourself physically when you refuse to forgive: “One of the secret causes of stress plaguing millions of people is unforgiveness. People rehash the wrong that was done to them, or that they misperceive was done to them, and their body immediately has a stress response. When you fail to forgive you lock yourself into long-term stress similar to pulling a scab off a sore so that it never heals.”
 - 2. Joyce Meyer says that bitterness and unforgiveness are like drinking poison and wishing the other person would die.

3. **Dr. Don Colbert** “Bitterness and unforgiveness are like acid; they consume the very container in which they are stored.”
- viii. When people hurt you, remember that you have done hurtful things. When people offend you, remember that you have offended people. When people let you down, remember that you have let people down. When someone talks behind your back, remember that you have gossiped before. If someone lies to you, or steals from you, or cheats you, remember that you have done those things too. And God has forgiven you through Christ.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. The Butterball company set up a Thanksgiving hotline to answer questions about cooking turkeys. One woman asked if she could use a turkey that had been in the bottom of her freezer for 23 years! The Butterball expert told her it would probably be safe if the freezer had been below zero the entire time. He then warned her that even if the turkey was safe to eat, the flavor would likely have deteriorated and wouldn't be worth eating. The woman said, “That's what I thought. We'll give the turkey to our church.” (Paul Harvey)
2. Many people are like that woman: they don't value the church very highly. However, the church of Jesus Christ can be the most wonderful place on earth. It's a place to find love, support, help, instruction, friendship, and purpose. But for the church to be the church as God intended, we have to treat each other right. We can't just go to church. We have to be the church. Let's work hard together to make Church Acadian the best church, our dream church, God's dream church.