



# Formed for God's Family

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## Chapter 21

Notes: This Bible Study is intended to be a companion to "The Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren. The Scripture references in this Bible study are taken from the New King James Version.

## Chapter 21: Protecting Your Church

### Why is it so important to protect the unity of our church?

Unity is necessary for fellowship. If you don't have unity, you can not experience life together as God intended it. As with earthly parents, our heavenly Father is pleased when His children get along with each other. This was the desire of Jesus as He prayed to the Father before He went to the cross...

John 17:20-23 - I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

### Why is the unity of the church at risk?

Because we still have our sin natures. Also, the demonic forces that rule the world seek to destroy the unity of the church as a tactic to discredit the gospel. This is why we should be on our guard, "*endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Ephesians 4:3).

### How can we learn how "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"? What does Romans 14:19 tell us about how we may maintain the unity of the Spirit?

Romans 14:19 - Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

We should focus on what we have in common rather than our differences such as: we share one Lord, one body, one purpose, one Father, one Spirit, one hope, one baptism, one love. We share the same salvation, life, and future.

### When the church falls into division, what kind of issue is the cause of the disputes and conflict?

They are what Paul called "disputable matters," thinks that the Bible does not explicitly address because they have no direct bearing on a person's salvation...

Romans 14:1 - Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

2 Timothy 2:23 - But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.

### Which is better to long for the ideal fellowship while being critical of the failures of the real fellowship or to settle for the real without striving for the ideal?

Neither is good, criticizing the flawed fellowship you have is a sign of immaturity and not striving for ideal fellowship is complacency. You need a balance.

### How is it evidence of immaturity for believers to leave the church at the first sign of disappointment with it?

It is not recognizing the truth that the church is made up of imperfect people. It ignores the fact that we ourselves are also imperfect and that God may be using the situation to teach us something that will help us grow closer to Him.

### What can we learn by staying in situations where we are inclined to bolt?

Reconciliation puts us on the road to stronger character and deeper fellowship...

Romans 5:3-4 - tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

### How can disillusionment with our local church be a good thing?

Disillusionment with our local church can be a good thing if it destroys our false expectations of perfection in this fallen world. It is a good thing to long for eternity when the flaws of this fallen world will be wiped away.

### What does James 4:11 say we are we doing when we criticize others within the church?

James 4:11 - Do not speak evil of one another, brethren.

He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, You are judging a brother when you criticize him.

### What is wrong with judging a fellow Christian?

People often complain about others to try to take attention off their own flaws. Rather than judging others, we would

be better off judging ourselves. We put ourselves in the place of God when we judge others...

James 5:9 - Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

God has a perspective that we can not have, only He alone can accurately know all the considerations needed to correctly judge people...

Romans 14:4 - Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

God is the judge of all, it is wrong for us to try to usurp that role which is exclusively His. This also denies the ultimate reality that God will judge all Christians.

Romans 14:10 - But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Judging fellow Christians also puts us in a position of following Satan who is "*the accuser of our brethren*" (Revelation 12:10).

### **How do you harmonize the Bible's clear instruction not to judge your brother with those that say we should expose evil like Ephesians 5:11?**

Ephesians 5:11 - And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

Not judging our brothers does not address sin that is obvious to all. It is referring to disputable matters that the Bible is silent about. Certainly, we are to speak up about sin that even the world recognizes as such for the good of all involved...

Titus 1:10-13 - For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. One of them, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,

### **What should we be doing instead of criticizing fellow Christians?**

Instead of criticizing one another, we should be encouraging one another...

Ephesians 4:29 - Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

### **What counsel does Proverbs 26:20 give us for protecting the church?**

Proverbs 26:20 - Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.

This verse warns us about gossip which will cause strife among a body of believers.

### **What is gossip?**

I like Rick Warren's definition: "gossip is passing on information when you are neither part of the problem nor part of the solution."

### **Certainly we know gossiping is wrong but is it alright to listen to gossip if we don't pass it on?**

Listening to gossip is almost as bad as passing it on...

Proverbs 17:4 - An evildoer gives heed to false lips; a liar listens eagerly to a spiteful tongue.

Any time you aid and abet sin, you are sinning. Listening to gossip is like receiving stolen property. It also sets you up to be tempted to gossip yourself. You should not even associate with a gossip...

Proverbs 20:19 - He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips.

### **How does gossiping cause divisions within the church?**

The cliché, "what goes around comes around" is true...

when one person starts saying malicious things about another, this usually escalates in the same being said about those involved in passing on the verbal attacks.

Galatians 5:15 - But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

### **When conflicts arise within the church, how should we handle it?**

Jesus gave us some specific guidelines:

Matthew 18:15-17 - Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

### **What is the purpose of the conflict resolution guidelines Jesus gave us in Matthew 18:15-17?**

The purpose of each stage in the process Jesus gave us is to reconcile the relationship with the other person.

**At the third stage Jesus said if the person "*refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*" What does it mean to treat a person "*like a heathen and a tax collector*?"**

Basically this means that you should regard them as an unbeliever. This is how Paul put it:

1 Corinthians 5:5 - deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

**How do we treat unbelievers?**

We would not have them teach or put them in key positions within the church but we do want them to come to church to hear God's Word. We want unbelievers to come to the worship service so that they might come to understand the gospel and be saved.

**What counsel does Hebrews 13:17 give us for protecting the church?**

Hebrews 13:17 - Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Not only do we have imperfect churches in this world, those under-shepherds who the Lord appoints over us are also imperfect so we should not expect them to be otherwise. God is the source of all authority and it is He who puts those who are in authority over us for a reason. We need to remember that church leaders are not going to be able to keep everyone happy, not even Jesus could do this!

**How are we to relate to our pastoral leaders?**

We should respect them for the position they are in because it was God who put them in that position. We should recognize that they are in a difficult (read impossible) situation and help them where we can. They need our love and encouragement at every opportunity...

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 - And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.

As we should not judge one another, neither should we judge our pastoral leaders over disputable matters. As Hebrews 13:17 says, they must give account to God for how they did as leader. Usually, the flaws of the pastor are really a reflection of the flaws of the flock.

**How does a unified church make the gospel attractive to unbelievers?**

All people are looking for love and a place to belong. When a church genuinely loves and cares for its members, people are drawn to it and want to know the Power behind it because it stands out in this fallen world.

**What are you personally doing to protect the unity of our church family right now?**

This study has helped me see the need to live with the tension of longing for the ideal without criticizing the real.