

# 40 Weeks of Purpose

Week 21

## Protecting Your Ecclesia

### POINT TO MEDITATE ABOUT FROM LAST WEEK:

*Relationships are worth Restoring.*

Life is all about Love. So, even if the fire has gone out, you still need to spend some time to stoke things up a bit...

We talked about Restoring Fellowship. The seven steps were:

- 1 - Talk to God BEFORE talking to the person**
- 2 - Always take the INITIATIVE**
- 3 - SYMPATHIZE with their feelings**
- 4 - CONFESS your part of the conflict**
- 5 - Attack the problem, NOT the person**
- 6 - COOPERATE as much as possible**
- 7 - Emphasize RECONCILIATION not resolution**

### VERSE TO MEMORIZE FROM LAST WEEK:

- Romans 12:18 (NLT)

*Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible.*

Good verse. "Do your part". "As much as possible."

### QUESTION TO CONSIDER FROM LAST WEEK:

*Who do I need to call this afternoon?*

Did you?

- It is your job to protect the Unity of your Ecclesia
- Unity of the Body is so important that the New Testament talks about it more often than either Heaven or Hell
- God deeply desires that we experience oneness with each other

- Unity is the soul of Fellowship
- Just like every parent, our Heavenly Father enjoys watching his children get along with each other
- In his final moments before his death, Jesus prayed passionately for our Unity
- It's a clear Biblical command for each one of us
- Ephesians 4:3 (NCV)
  - 3) You are joined together with peace through the Spirit, so make every effort to continue in this way.

- The Bible also gives us some practical advice on how to do this:

### **1) Focus on what you have in common, not on your differences**

- Romans 14:19 (NIV)
  - 19) Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.
- As believers we share one body, one Lord, one Father, one Spirit, one hope, one faith, one baptism, one purpose, and one love
- We have the same salvation, the same life, and the same future
- These things are all much more important than any differences we might have
- We should concentrate on these things, not on our personal differences
- Remember that it was God who chose us and gave each one of us different personalities, backgrounds, races, social statuses, and cultural preferences, so we should value and enjoy each other's differences, not just tolerate them
- Conflict is usually a sign that focus has shifted to less important issues
- We generally argue over "disputable matters" not important issues
- 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:10 (NLT)
  - 10) Now, dear brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves. Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church. I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.
- If you concentrate on loving each other, then harmony results

## 2) **Be realistic in your expectations**

- Don't get discouraged by the gap between what fellowship could be and what it is
- There will always be difference between the Ideal and the Real
- You must love your Ecclesia in spite of it's imperfections
- Longing for the Ideal, while criticizing the Real, is a sign of Immaturity
- Settling for the Real, without striving for the Ideal, is a sign of complacency
- Maturity is living with the tension between the two
- Other believers will disappoint you and let you down, but that is no reason to stop fellowshipping them
- Ephesians 4:2 (NLT)

2) Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.

- There are TONS of reasons to become disillusioned with your Ecclesia
- Rather than be shocked, remember that an Ecclesia is, at it's core, a collection of sinners
- Because we are all sinners, we hurt each other occasionally, and let each other down
- Reconciliation, not running away, is the road to character development
- Besides... there is no perfect church to run away to

## 3) **Choose to encourage rather than criticize**

- It's always easier to criticize how someone else did it, than to do it yourself
- What right do you have to criticize?
- Romans 14:4 (CEV)

4) What right do you have to criticize someone else's servants? Only their Lord can decide if they are doing right, and the Lord will make sure that they do right.

- Romans 14:10 (CEV)

10) Why do you criticize other followers of the Lord? Why do you look down on them? The day is coming when God will judge all of us.

- When you judge someone, four things instantly happen:

- 1) You lose fellowship with God
- 2) You expose your own pride and insecurity
- 3) You set yourself up to be judged by God
- 4) You destroy fellowship of the Ecclesia

- Is it worth all that?

- Romans 14:19 (MESSAGE)

- 19) So let's agree to use all our energy in getting along with each other. Help others with encouraging words;

#### 4) Refuse to listen to Gossip

- Gossip is simply defined as: Passing on information when you are neither part of the problem or part of the solution
- Gossip is NOT lying – You are often telling the truth – But, it's Truth that doesn't encourage or build up – It's Truth that hurts people
- Everyone knows that Gossiping is wrong... And we can sometimes control our tongues
- If you control your EARS also, then it will soon die in your Ecclesia
- If no one in our Ecclesia would allow themselves to LISTEN to Gossip, then pretty soon there wouldn't be any Gossip
- It's much harder to stop yourself LISTENING to Gossip than it is to stop yourself from SAYING it
- You have to have the courage to say, ***“Please stop. I don't need to know this. Have you talked directly to that person?”***
- Remember: Anyone who Gossips TO you, will also Gossip ABOUT you!
- It's sad that in God's flock, the greatest wounds usually come from other sheep, not the wolves

#### 5) Practice Matthew 18

- It's a simple 3-step process
- 1) If a fellow believer hurts you – go work it out between the two of you
  - 2) If they won't listen – take one or two others along as witnesses
  - 3) If they still won't listen – then take it to the Ecclesia

- During conflict, it is tempting to speak to a third party rather than being courageous enough to speak the truth in love to the person who are upset with
- This ALWAYS makes it worse
- Follow God's method for conflict resolution

## 6) Support your Arranging Brethren

- There are no perfect leaders
- But, God did design Ecclesias to have leaders, and He gives them the responsibility and the authority to maintain the Unity of the Ecclesia
- This is often a thankless job...
- There is some good advice in Hebrews:
  - Hebrews 13:17 (MESSAGE)
    - 17) Be responsive to your pastoral leaders. Listen to their counsel. They are alert to the condition of your lives and work under the strict supervision of God. Contribute to the joy of their leadership, not its drudgery. Why would you want to make things harder for them?
- Look at the same verse in the NIV
  - Hebrews 13:17 (NIV)
    - 17) Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.
- The Arranging Board will one day stand before God and give account of how well they led God's Ecclesia
- But, you will also have to give account of how well you followed
- You support them when you honor, love, encourage and appreciate them...
- 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:12-13 (MESSAGE)
  - 12) And now, friends, we ask you to honor those leaders who work so hard for you, who have been given the responsibility of urging and guiding you along in your obedience.
  - 13) Overwhelm them with appreciation and love! Get along among yourselves, each of you doing your part.

**POINT TO MEDITATE ABOUT THIS WEEK:**

*It is MY responsibility to protect the Unity of the Ecclesia*

**VERSE TO MEMORIZE THIS WEEK:**

- Romans 14:19 (MESSAGE)

19) *So let's agree to use all our energy in getting along with each other. Help others with encouraging words;*

**QUESTION TO CONSIDER THIS WEEK:**

*What am I doing to protect the Unity of our Ecclesia?*