

Focus On Mission:
Transformative Christian
Leadership Series

CIVILITY

Recent Books by Dr. Kent R. Hunter

Who Broke My Church?

7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival

An Apple a Day: A Daily Dose for Everyday Faith

Church Politics: Pain-Free Decision-Making

A Nation Reclaims Respect: One Person at a Time

The Amazing Power of God Stories:
Share What God Has Done in Your Life

Focus On Mission:
Transformative Christian
Leadership Series

CIVILITY

KENT R. HUNTER
with **RUPERT LOYD, JR.**

Copyright © 2025 Kent R. Hunter

Cover Copyright © Church Doctor Publishing

Formatted by Church Doctor Publishing

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book without permission is a theft of the author's intellectual property. If you would like permission to use material from the book (other than for review purposes), please contact info@churchdoctor.org. Thank you for your support of the author's rights.

Scripture references in this book are from *The Message* version. Why? According to the brilliant translator, Eugene Peterson, it's not meant to be a scholarly study Bible. It's meant to be a life-learning, engaging Bible that helps you to appropriate God's teaching to everyday life. God's plan is to effectively change your life through the divine power of His Word.

All Scripture quotations are taken from *THE MESSAGE*, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

ISBN: 9798307373859

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

The Miracle of Encouragement	1
Introduction	3
Rekindling the Flame: The Church's Call to Cultural Impact	5
Fueling Your Faith: Encouragement for the Christian Journey ...	8
From Discord to Discipleship: Encouraging Growth Through Spiritual Maturity	9
From Bullying to Encouragement: Promoting Love and Unity in the Church	11
Preserving the Faithful: Confronting Sin and Promoting Unity in Christ	13
Discussion Questions	17
Unholy Gossip in the Church	19
Introduction	21
Speaking Life: Transforming Church Conversations Through Grace	23
Words That Build: Replacing Gossip with Godly Encouragement	25
The Power of Words: Combating Gossip and Building Unity in the Church	27
The Gift of Words: Using Speech to Build Up the Church	29
Discussion Questions	31
Spiritual Disruption	33
Introduction	35
Divided Faith: Rethinking Unity Among Christians in a Fragmented Church	37
Navigating Challenges in Ministry: A Call to Preach with Love	39
Building Bridges: Tackling Division and Encouraging Unity in Ministry	41
Recognizing the Enemy: Addressing Spiritual Disruption in the Church	43
Living Like Jesus: Cultivating Peace and Blessings in Difficult Times	45
Faith and Friction: Understanding and Overcoming Church Disruptions	48

Strengthening the Church: Managing Division with Faith and Grace	50
From Rejection to Redemption: Sharing Faith with Compassion	52
The Weight of the Calling: Encouraging Pastors in Difficult Times	54
Discussion Questions	57
The Power of Spiritual Respect.....	59
Introduction	61
From Gossip to Grace: Building a Civilized Church Family	63
From Discord to Reverence: Embracing Respect as a Spiritual Practice	65
Living to Please God: A Call to Authentic Faith and Mission....	67
Love, Dignity, and Unity: Strengthening the Church's Public Witness	69
From Malice to Maturity: Embracing God's Pure Kindness	71
Discussion Questions	73
Conclusion	75
About the Authors	79

The Miracle of Encouragement

Introduction

Mary asked her friend, “How is it going for you?” Her friend replied, “Do you really want to know?”

That seems like an odd response to an honest question! Yet, it’s so easy to become skeptical and change a positive opportunity into a negative reaction. And why not? Our world brings us all sorts of challenges. Honestly, most people really do care about others. The majority of people are honest, polite, kind, and encouraging. Kindness is not a rare commodity. It just doesn’t make the majority of news reports.

The result? People are hungry for hope. Could you benefit from a healthy dose of encouragement? Think about it: Encouragement reflects an infusion of courage. Why is that important? Much of our public discourse focuses on what is wrong. That fuels discouragement. Discouragement saps your enthusiasm for life.

Enthusiasm is an interesting word with a powerful history. Enthusiasm technically has a powerful impact because God is in you. Think of this word—enthusiasm—broken into pieces. *En* means “in.” The concept of *thus* is a reflection of the Greek word for “God” in the Bible. That Greek word is *theos*. We experience enthusiasm when God is in our lives. Unfortunately, much of the media focuses its highest percentage of content on the negative—the problems or challenges in our world. We are bombarded in the news cycles with reports of bad people doing

horrible things. Often, at the tail end of the program, they close with one positive report. Ninety-five percent of the focus is on what's wrong in the world, and 5 percent reports something positive!

Think about the reality of your life. If you are like the majority of people, most of your experience—the way you act—is positive. You are not perfect. None of us are. So, we're always subject to occasional negative behavior. Yet, for most of us, that is not the norm.

Yet, we are bombarded by the media with the worst behavior, the greatest challenges, the most disturbing issues 95 percent of the time. If someone asked you, "How was your week?" how would you respond? For most of us, we would share some highlights of the positives. Honestly, you might add a challenge that you faced toward the end of your report.

How do you respond to a challenging report? If you are emotionally healthy, you will move into encouragement mode. If you speak encouragement, you will deliver courage. If you speak courage, you are a healer. If you deliver healing, you empower others.

Good preachers who speak from the platform of Scripture focus on both law and Gospel. The law recognizes our sins, challenges, and weaknesses. The Gospel focuses on Jesus, His love, forgiveness, and the power of the Holy Spirit to restore, heal, and empower. Most people need about 10 percent law. We know where we fall short. Most of us need about 90 percent Gospel—Good News—that provides forgiveness and the power to love God and others. In John 12:48, Scripture quotes Jesus: "I did not come to reject the world: I came to save the world." That includes you!

Rekindling the Flame: The Church's Call to Cultural Impact

The auditorium was packed. The anticipation was high. I was one of 500 people waiting to see Thomas Jefferson. Well, not the real Thomas Jefferson.

One of America's earliest colonies was in Williamsburg, Virginia. Today, there is a reenactment village there. The people are actors—in full dress. However, they are also history scholars, focused on their unique roles as people from the early colonial days.

They are not allowed to ever leave their character while they're on the premises of Colonial Williamsburg. So, for “Thomas Jefferson,” the actor, he had to be fluent in the words and character of Jefferson—and only say what Jefferson actually said based on what history has preserved.

He entered the auditorium, spoke about how he just rode his horse into town, and began to talk about what was going on in his life. After his brilliant and stunning talk, he allowed people to ask questions. The first question was probably familiar to him, one he had heard many times. And he was prepared, of course! It was, “Mr. Jefferson, what do you mean by the separation of church and state?”

Jefferson's response was enlightening—and restricted to only what is known that Jefferson actually said or wrote. He

responded that, in his travels through the colonies, he always had a stool tied on the back of his horse. He shared that so many of the churches in the colonies were patterned after the Anglican church from the mother country (England). Families would donate to the church and receive their own pew, with their name on it—just like it was in England. He said he always attended church on Sunday and had the stool so he would have a place to sit.

Then he shared that he had visited some of the new churches that meet in tents. He said the music was more lively and new, and the preachers were “fiery” in their enthusiasm. It was different, he said, but he kind of liked the enthusiasm as compared to the “stodginess” of the Anglican formalism. Yep—“contemporary worship” in the colonies!

Then he launched into his frustration about how the press skewed what he had said about the separation of church and state. He said that there was a push among some Anglican believers to replicate the single state church, like people remembered back home in England.

Jefferson said that he felt that the new churches in the tents, which were experiencing an awakening and having an outreach-oriented impact on the culture, had an indigenous approach and ought to be allowed. There ought to be a separation between church and state—there ought not be simply one official state church. He felt that these fresh expressions of Christianity should be allowed to give people a choice. Jefferson said that the liberal press had taken what he said out of context, saying that he didn’t want Christianity to influence the new government. Jefferson said, “I never intended that.”

In Romans 13:1-7, Paul says, “Be a good citizen. All governments are under God. Peace and order is God’s order. Be a responsible citizen. God will hold you responsible. Live responsibly, because it’s the right thing to do—and you’ll avoid punishment. Pay your taxes, pay your bills, respect your leaders.”

A few years ago, a private group produced *The Founders’ Bible*. It demonstrates, in the context of Scripture, how much the American founding fathers quoted Scripture. It’s an eye-opener!

Did you take a government class in high school? I admit, I wasn’t a very good student back then. But I’m pretty sure we didn’t read Romans 13:1-7.

Now, I know the founding fathers weren’t all theologians. And it’s probable some were deists—people who believe in God, but don’t know who or what God is.

Think about how our nation has drifted. Obviously, the government can’t legislate a person’s beliefs. There is a great portion of morality that can’t be legislated—that portion beyond the “laws of the land.” This is why the church is so valuable to the world. Yet the church has lost its power and presence among so many in modern society. When you want to know who is culpable for this spiritual disaster, look into the mirror.

Are we like those fresh expression churches at Jefferson’s time in the colonies? Or are we perpetuating traditions from another era? Are we open to another Great Awakening? If so, we have a job to do, to reach others. According to the Apostle Paul, it’s all about reestablishing God’s order. Thomas Jefferson agrees!

Fueling Your Faith: Encouragement for the Christian Journey

Who doesn't need practical wisdom and good advice on occasion? Maybe it would be helpful more often. What better source than Scripture? Consider what Paul says in Romans 12:9-12.

You know, people today are looking for people who are authentic. Paul advises: "Love from the center of who you are" (verse 9).

Ever feel weary? Paul says, "Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame" (verse 11).

Feel like you want to give up? Paul says, "Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder" (verse 12).

What about when someone hurts you? Paul says, "Don't hit back. Get along with everybody" (verse 17).

What about when you feel you're getting beat up by evil behavior? Paul says, "Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good" (verse 21).

From Discord to Discipleship: Encouraging Growth Through Spiritual Maturity

Your church's reputation in the community is one thing, but what about the new Christians who leave a meeting discouraged about their church so much that they quit coming to worship altogether—drifting away from their faith?

Would you really want to be responsible for someone falling away from their relationship with God? This is not a recent challenge for Christians. In 1 Corinthians 11:17-19, Paul writes to the people at the church in Corinth: "I'm not at all pleased.... When you meet together, it brings out your worst side, instead of your best." Paul diagnoses the issues: divisiveness, competition with each other, and criticizing one another. This is not a climate conducive for reaching the world for Christ! Any group that is divided will lose, every time. What happens?

Your faith is important to you. It is close to your seat of emotions. It takes *mature* spiritual discipline to disagree without being disagreeable. The challenge goes deeper, however. Many churches operate as a pure democracy: Everybody decides everything about everything. Everyone is invited into the decision-making process. This is a horrible plan! There is no regard for Christian maturity or spiritual longevity. That would be like asking your 2-year-old whether you should make your mortgage payment or spend your money on more toys. Your 2-year-old isn't mature enough to make those decisions.

So, a 70-year-old guy who is a 2-year-old Christian is brought into a heated debate about church finances. Not a good idea! Ironically, the better you are at reaching out, the more new Christians you have at your church, the more likely you'll have divisions about decisions. Why not let time-tested leaders lead?

From Bullying to Encouragement: Promoting Love and Unity in the Church

What if people criticize you for what you do for God? If you like criticism, you need counseling. It's normal to be upset when others criticize you, even when it's in the church.

There are some people in every church who take criticism to a whole new level. For them, criticizing the pastor becomes an art form—they are skilled at it. These types of people not only disagree, but move to the level of being disagreeable. Our church consultants privately call them “church bullies.”

As I write this, my days in junior high school seem like a distant memory. I don't remember much. But I do remember Jerry LaRouque. Just hearing his name conjures up—even for me—the fear of a bully. He was a big guy for seventh grade, both strong and heavyset. He liked to throw his weight around, and he actually hit people he didn't like. I know, because I was one of them. Do you ever remember something so horrible? It's like a movie you can't get rid of in your head! Mine is Jerry LaRouque. My movie is set in the boys' bathroom. He just started beating on me. One of our female teachers found out, came into the boys' bathroom, and rescued me. We never saw Jerry again.

The punches thrown by church bullies are usually verbal, but just as hurtful. The Apostle Paul had critics in the church he started at Corinth. In a letter he wrote after he left that church,

Paul wrote, “I’m not shy in standing up to my critics.” Apparently, the issue was about those who supported Paul’s missionary work. He continued, “We who are on missionary assignments for God have a right for decent accommodations and support for us and our families” (1 Corinthians 9:3-7).

The odd thing about church bullies is that when you ask people to count them, there are only a few. Yet, everyone knows who they are. They also know that they have one, two, three, or maybe four cheerleaders that rile up the group, and everyone knows who they are as well!

If you want to help your church, confront church bullies. Speak the truth in love, like the Bible says in Ephesians 4:15. Remind them that gossip is a sin. There should be no bullying in the Christian family, your church!

Preserving the Faithful: Confronting Sin and Promoting Unity in Christ

There is a vicious war going on in churches today. It's connected to the reality that church members aren't perfect. If you repent, you are forgiven. If not, you are drifting from Christ. If your sin is public, it offends other Christians. If nothing is done about it, the scenario disrupts other Christians and weakens the church—undermining what we believe.

As complicated as it is, the challenge gets worse. What if you are offended by someone? What do you do? What if you make a judgment about the alleged sin, and it's just a simple misunderstanding? Now, you're the sinner!

Jesus has a perfect plan: Confront the person directly, one-on-one. By "confront," it's clear that Jesus isn't suggesting "attack" or "condemn." The purpose is *always* to help.

The idea that Jesus teaches is that you talk to the person alone. If you learn that the offense is accurate and the person repents, this is a spiritual victory. God knows about it. No one else has to know about it. However, what if the person ignores your help? Go back again and take another person as a witness. From the tone, context, and objectives in Scripture, my best guess is that you do not tell the witness the details beforehand. Why would you create a bias?

If the person, after sharing in the presence of a witness, still does not repent, Jesus says, “Tell it to the church.” For two different reasons, I don’t think this implies announcing it to everyone in the congregation at a worship service or a meeting. (1) Churches in the New Testament were generally small, because they met in houses. (2) Perhaps a greater reason is the biblical concept of “love one another.” The real purpose of confrontation is restoration. Think about it: If someone sins and doesn’t repent after your personal talk, and then with a witness, but later repents—what if everyone at church had heard the embarrassing details? What are the chances the person would even stick around your church? How is that helpful? Based on the tone of Scripture, I think “tell it to the church” is best interpreted (and most productive) when it is considered to be a small group of biblically wise elders, a staff team member, or the pastor. Doesn’t that make sense?

One of the most productive ways the Enemy is destroying churches these days occurs when Christians see an alleged offense and don’t know the biblical way to handle it. Instead of telling *no one* and going to the offender directly, they tell someone else. This is the sin of gossip. It provides two victories for the Enemy: the person you are talking about who has sinned and the one you are talking to. And a third: Now *you* are sinning, and someone should confront you!

Many people say, “It’s not gossip, because I know it’s true.” True or not, according to Scripture, it’s gossip—clearly a sin. And, if you say something bad about the person to someone else, that is slander. Both gossip and slander are sinful behaviors clearly identified in both the Old and New Testaments. And, if you put it in writing—your judgments about someone’s alleged sin—it’s called libel. And the Devil has another weapon to destroy your church: email.

I've seen Christians abuse email by making a judgment about an alleged sin (sometimes even targeting a pastor), using email, and copying it to everyone on the email list of a 3,000-member church. With one keystroke, that person committed a sin 3,001 times: 3,000 church members, and one more: their church.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul writes to the believers at the church he founded in Corinth. He has a lot to say, and it sounds at first like he is ignoring the one-on-one approach toward a sinner. It appears he is contradicting the tone of what he advised the church in Ephesus (chapter 4) about "speaking the truth in love."

However, if you read all of chapter 5, this public sin issue had been going on for some time. In verse 9, he alludes to an "earlier letter" that we don't have.

The immediate issue of the public sin in chapter 5 is a guy having sex with his stepmother. It's a public scandal already, but the whole church is ignoring it.

Paul is clear: The whole purpose of dealing with these difficult issues is to bring restoration to the person.

In verses 9-13, Paul reminds the people in the Corinthian fellowship that the church doesn't retreat from the sinful world. Instead, God's people recognize sin and never act as though sin is, well, "just a reality of life." It is never OK to simply live with it and give the impression that, because sin is common, it's just fine.

So, in a society like ours, where divorce is so prevalent, how often do you hear a preaching message about marriage? About sexual activity as a blessing of marriage, within that union? Or,

for that matter, how often do you hear teaching about gossip in the church? Ever hear a message about the misuse of email?

Discussion Questions

Would you say your day is made up mostly of good news or of negative news? How does that make you feel?

Can you recall a time when someone's encouragement made a difference in your life?

Who do you know who could use a "healthy dose of hope"?

Action: Find someone and encourage them.

Unholy Gossip in the Church

Introduction

The way some Christians talk, you'd think they were baptized in horse manure. James 4:11-12 says, "Don't bad-mouth each other, friends. It's God's Word, his Message, his Royal Rule, that takes a beating in that kind of talk. You're supposed to be honoring the Message, not writing graffiti all over it. God is in charge of deciding human destiny. Who do you think you are to meddle in the destiny of others?" (*The Message*).

A new young pastor was in his first year of ministry. He quickly became known for his fiery preaching. On one Sunday, he spoke about "a piece of flesh" the devil uses to disrupt Christians and their churches. Toward the end of his message, he stared down at the congregation and spoke dramatically: "Should I show you that piece of flesh?" The men in the congregation squirmed. The women gasped. One mother put her hand over her 12-year-old daughter's eyes. The preacher raised his voice: "Behold the piece of flesh that destroys God's work!" There was dead silence in the church. And the pastor took a deep breath—and stuck out his tongue!

There are several ways Christians dishonor God with their mouths. One way is to use God's name in a sentence that is not a Bible passage or a tribute to Him. We dishonor God when we argue with other believers. Why does that occur? Our faith is close to our seat of emotions.

We are called “disciples” with the idea that our faith requires *discipline*, which God will supply—if we get out of His way: in our minds and through our mouths.

It seems reasonable to say that God created us with mouths so we could praise Him and articulate how His law and forgiveness dramatically change our lives. Mouths also help us to eat, tell others about Jesus, and kiss our loved ones.

Some believers are mixed up about what Scripture says concerning gossip. They believe it’s not gossip if “it’s true”—if it’s accurate. Yet, if it’s hurtful and harmful about another person, it becomes one of the most destructive tools the enemy uses to disrupt the Kingdom of God.

The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:4 says, “Though some tongues just love the taste of gossip, those who follow Jesus have better uses for language than that” (*The Message*). Gossip flourishes among those who can’t handle conflict. However, no healthy person *likes* conflict.

Gossip in your church is like playing with matches around dynamite. It’s a great way to blow up your friendships, your family, and your congregation. When you gossip, the conversation moves from light to heat. Gossip is a powerful behavior to injure relationships, spread lies, destroy character, hurt friends, and present yourself as an undisciplined fool.

The Scripture provides a powerful antidote for gossip: “Speak the truth in love.” This is not rocket science!

Speaking Life: Transforming Church Conversations Through Grace

Trash talk occurs in churches more than anyone would like to admit. It's a challenge now—and it was in the early church, too.

You know, there's a reason God made us with only one mouth and two ears. We were created with a notion we should listen twice as much as we talk. Sometimes, it's better to keep your mouth shut so people wonder if you are a fool, rather than open it and remove all doubt!

In James 4:11-12, he writes, "Don't badmouth each other. It's God's Word, his message, his Royal Rule that takes a beating in that kind of talk."

There are several ways we Christians can dishonor God with our mouths. One way is using His name in vain. It's offensive to believers to hear people throw God's name around. Neither "God" nor "Jesus" are "four-letter words." Another way to disgrace God with our language is to argue with fellow believers. Have you ever seen church people get into a verbal conflict that spews venomous pain on other believers? Remember the old saying, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me"? What imbecile came up with that? (Sorry for the critical description!)

Another way Christians use their mouths abusively is gossip. That is, talking negatively or in accusation about another person

to anyone but that person. There is a great lie many Christians believe: "It's not gossip, because I know it's true." Not according to the Bible! It's gossip. It's hurtful and harmful. Check out Matthew 18:15-17!

James nails another sin of believer blabbermouths. It is a form of self-conceit: boasting. It's like, "Yeah, I'm going to do this and accomplish that," without saying, "If it's God's will, I'll do it." James covers that issue in verses 13-15. It's the sin of making yourself a god over God. It is spiritual conceit. James suggests saying, "If the Master wills it and we are still alive, we'll do this or that." It is sad, but sometimes the mouth betrays arrogance.

Basically, this is your option: Be full of yourself or full of God. Your mouth tells it all!

Words That Build: Replacing Gossip with Godly Encouragement

It's amazing, the mess Christians cause due to gossip, slander, and judging—and coming to conclusions without knowing the facts—while failing to speak directly to the issue as Jesus directs in Matthew 18:15-17. Whatever happened to Paul's guidance in Ephesians 4:15, to “speak the truth in the framework of love”?

Gossip is when you speak badly or judgmentally about a person to *anyone* except that person. Slander is when you tear down the character of that person, speaking to *anyone* except that person. Even then, “tearing down” is not a form of love! And when you put it in writing—such as in an email copied to all your friends or to the whole church—that's libel. Libel is behavior dealt with legally in court!

If you know anything about the Bible, you would say, “That would never happen in my church!” However, if you know anything about churches, you likely know: This is an issue at epidemic levels, especially after the invention of email.

Email is great, powerful, and helpful. Used improperly, it destroys churches, relationships, church leaders, and, especially, pastors.

Long before email, there was a church in Corinth. The founding pastor, Paul, was followed by another pastor, Apollos. In 1

Corinthians 4 (the whole chapter!) Paul communicates to this conflicted group about Christian manners.

These biblically illiterate young Christians (remember, they didn't have the New Testament—an excuse you can't use) were sideways with each other over: “Who’s the boss? Paul or Apollos?”

Paul calls them out on these issues: jumping to conclusions, being judgmental, not knowing all the facts, not looking from God’s point of view, inflating some reputations, deflating other reputations, comparing, competing, having infantile spirituality, and being full of themselves.

Then Paul says that he loves them, and he’s coming to talk to them face-to-face.

Does this apply to your church? Does it apply to you? What is God saying to you? And what are you going to do about it?

The Power of Words: Combating Gossip and Building Unity in the Church

One of the most disruptive actions in churches is gossip. Would you agree? Yet, the issue goes deeper.

Most churches actually operate the opposite way the Kingdom of God is supposed to work. God's approach for His followers is the concept of low control with high accountability. God isn't controlling and bossy. He isn't shouting the orders every day in every church to every person. Yet, people of the Kingdom practice high accountability: what we do, how we do it. We are accountable to God Himself. When you get to heaven, you want to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

It seems like few Christians and churches hold people accountable in the area of gossip. It may be that some gossip is related to ignorance. You hear some Christians say, "It's not gossip if it's true." That's simply wrong! Anything you say that speaks negatively about another person and that is said to anyone else *except* the person: That's gossip! Tearing down another person, even if it's "true," is slander. Put it in writing, and it's libel!

This disease is chronic in many churches. A person gets upset about another person, sends an email about it, and then copies it to all their friends. You could call it a weapon that blows up your church—a torpedo of the tongue, sent electronically.

In Ephesians 5:4, Paul says, “Though some tongues love the taste of gossip, those who follow Jesus have better use for language than that.” In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus Himself clearly says that if you see or know of another Christian who has somehow offended you or offended God, go to that person directly. Why don’t Christians do that more often?

Some will use the excuse, “I don’t like conflict.” Look, no *healthy* person likes conflict! When Jesus tells us how to get along, He’s not focused on everything you just have to do. He’s focused on the life Christians are supposed to live. Nobody said it’s easy—or fun.

Gossip in churches is like playing with matches around dynamite. Gossip is a great way to blow up your church, disrupt relationships, and demolish everything healthy about your congregation.

During wartime, there is a saying: “Loose lips sink ships.” The amount of harm and disaster you can accomplish with an undisciplined tongue is amazing! With your mouth, you can praise God or destroy others. Your tongue and your emails can damage or destroy, build up and correct. Be careful!

The Gift of Words: Using Speech to Build Up the Church

God has a lot to say about how you use your mouth. For the record, when Christians get sideways with one another, the words from their mouths often hurt fellow believers.

The Apostle Paul addresses this in the letter to the Ephesians at the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5. Paul writes, “Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift” (verse 29).

Do you think about what you say before you say it? Have you ever thought about your words as a gift to others? What about the way you treat waiters and waitresses at a restaurant? Is your tip the only gift? Do you treat them as special gifts from God? What about police officers? Do you go out of your way to thank them for their service? How’s your “gift giving” of the tongue?

In Ephesians 5:31-32, Paul gets specific. Does this challenge you? “Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.” Have you ever been involved in a meeting at church or a conversation in the parking lot (the meeting after the meeting) where the conversation is more heat than light?

In Ephesians chapter 5, verse 4, Paul hits behavior hard: “Though some tongues just love the taste of gossip, those who follow Jesus have better uses for language than that. Don’t talk dirty or silly. That kind of talk doesn’t fit our style. Thanksgiving is our dialect.”

So, 2,000 years ago, church people already needed this lesson. What about today? What about late-night talk show hosts, movies, and social media? The temptations are endless—even talking on the phone can be a challenge. Perhaps humans are smart enough to invent technology, but not wise enough to use it!

Your tongue may be connected to your mouth, but how you use it, as a Christian, is connected to your heart. Does your tongue, your vocabulary, indicate Jesus is your Savior? What about your Master? What will you do about the social discourse in and around your church?

Discussion Questions

Is it possible to “gossip” about someone with the truth?

What is the result of gossip, true or not?

What is the best antidote for gossip? (“Speak truth in love.”)

Action: Think about how you will respond to someone the next time an opportunity to gossip presents itself.

Spiritual Disruption

Introduction

If there ever was a “perfect” church, you should not join it. Why? It would no longer be perfect! The reality of the Christian movement is challenging. The Head of the body—Jesus—is perfect. From the neck on down, we’re a bunch of sinners in great need of forgiveness and grateful for God’s grace and mercy.

At Church Doctor Ministries, we love helping congregations maximize their ability to effectively reach others for Jesus. Most churches benefit from a little outside guidance to reach more people for Christ.

The Apostle Paul was a “church doctor” on several occasions. When he wrote to the church at Corinth, he asked the hard question: “Has the Messiah been chopped up in little pieces?” (1 Corinthians 1:13, *The Message*).

The world of the church is messy. It’s not always because of us, but in spite of us, that the Christian movement changes lives. Wise Christ-followers echo this profound reality: “It’s not me, but Christ in me.”

The way we add human organization to the living organism we call church frequently—and suddenly—becomes a spiritual disruption. We lose our effectiveness and impact.

One of the great disruptions in churches is the way we organize to operate. Many congregations are directed by Robert’s Rules

of Order, which are not found anywhere in Scripture. This leads toward a political approach that hinders a uniquely biblical direction. The church of the New Testament is described as a living, unique body. In fact, Scripture calls it the “body of Christ.” This definition reflects the local church and the worldwide movement of congregations. Your church is alive! It can grow or decline. It can be healthy—or need help to become more effective.

The church is unique among all organizations throughout history. You could define it as an “apostolic theocracy.” The word *apostolic* is a biblical approach to reflect spiritual influence. Decisions are made guided by prayer and Scripture—rather than the use of laws and bylaws. The word *theocracy* reflects that God is in charge and that Christ is the head of the church. It is a commitment to want what God wants—God’s will, reflected in Scripture. To operate with human rules and regulations is not in the best interest of your church, nor is it effective for your mission.

When you face spiritual disruption, identify and recognize the source. You have a spiritual enemy. Satan is silent. He attends your church not to worship, but to disrupt; not to clarify, but to confuse; not to affirm, but to discourage; not to unify, but to divide. This is called spiritual warfare. It confirms that God is using your church—even you—to win the world for Jesus.

Divided Faith: Rethinking Unity Among Christians in a Fragmented Church

It's amazing how often Christians treat other Christians like they are the enemy. I heard about a church meeting where people argued violently with one another. The police were called in, and the news traveled throughout the region. How does that represent Jesus to the world? How do denominations with all their politics represent Jesus to unbelievers?

The Apostle Paul ran into this type of mess when he got a letter from a family that belonged to the church he started in Corinth. The congregation was deeply divided—so much so that Paul asked this hard question: “Has the Messiah been chopped up in little pieces?” (1 Corinthians 1:13).

Those who would look at the Christian movement today would see a faith “chopped up into little pieces.” So, what should we do? Neglect the study of this complicated faith? Abandon our convictions about how we interpret Scripture and come out with different conclusions?

Could it be an ego issue? Are we so full of our arrogant selves that we actually believe our way, our denomination, our approach is, in every respect, 100 percent correct, and everyone else is wrong?

Christianity is both simple and complicated. Someone once said, “God’s Word is so shallow a child can wade in it and so

deep an elephant must swim.” So, it’s likely we Christians don’t see eye to eye on everything. However, on the main issues of faith, we agree to call each other “Christians.” Most would agree that we are Christians first and Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, etc., second. Isn’t it true that we, like the Corinthians, have “chopped up Christ into little pieces”? What if every church was just called “Christian”? What if we kept our distinctions, but we manifested the respect we actually do have for one another, other churches, and other denominations? Paul could have said, “United we stand; divided we fall.” If we’re supposed to win the world, how united are we?

Navigating Challenges in Ministry: A Call to Preach with Love

There was a knock at the door. I excused myself from my family at the dinner table to answer the door. It was two traveling “evangelists.”

They said they were on “a mission for God.” I said “Thanks, but we are believers.” They said, “Oh? What church do you go to?” I told them, and they proceeded to tell me that they had the *real* truth, implying that my church was suspect.

I tried to be polite and told them our family was having dinner. They ignored the hint and pressed on. They were arrogant and rude. It was as if they needed another notch on their religious belts. I said, “Thanks, but no thanks,” refused the literature they tried to pass off, and closed the door. Personally, I give them a “A” for effort and an “F” for “speaking the truth in a spirit of love.”

The Apostle Paul addresses this issue in 1 Timothy 1:5-9. He says to young Timothy, “The whole point of what we’re urging is simply *love*—love uncontaminated by self-interest and counterfeit faith, a life open to God. Those who fail ... set themselves up as experts on religious issues, but haven’t the remotest idea of what they’re holding forth with such imposing eloquence.”

The good news about God’s love in Christ is very special. But it can be fragile and subject to abuse. And not just by zealots of

sectarianism. In fact, some of the best pastors can slip into preaching the Gospel in a way that communicates law. I know—it happened to me!

Sometimes we preachers get under stress. There are a lot of challenges in ministry. However, dealing with challenges often can bleed over into the tone of our messages. We can preach the Gospel in such a tone that it comes off as law—scolding instead of healing.

Paul explains this in verses 8-11. He says, “It’s true that moral guidance and counsel need to be given, but the way you say it and to whom you say it are as important as what you say.”

I’ve counseled pastors who are under stress. Their sermons have the right words, but the tone of their speech is accusatory, like scolding. This is an approach to lose members. However, the real issue behind the issue is stress—and the preacher may not even know it. So, share the good news of Jesus, and make sure your tone of voice is love.

Building Bridges: Tackling Division and Encouraging Unity in Ministry

Some congregations try to operate as a pure democracy—everyone decides everything about everything. They are big on Robert’s Rules of Order and end up with church meetings that last forever—or so it seems. The end result? They discourage one another! The weaker (spiritually younger) Christians are run off, saying, “Who needs this stress? I have enough of that at home and at work.”

At a denominational level, it’s even worse. What is at the heart of the issue when a group of people get together to talk about replacing the carpet in the worship space—and argue about the color of the carpet for hours?

There are two issues. (1) Christians, focused on minutiae, are not busy enough winning the world for Jesus. When you’re in full combat gear, in the middle of battle, you don’t worry about the guy next to you who hasn’t shaved in a week! (2) God’s people don’t stick to biblical issues, but sink into the realm of opinions and personal preferences about miniscule matters. And everybody loses!

In the early church, most everyone was an infant Christian. The movement had to start somewhere, right? In Romans 14, the Apostle Paul spends the whole chapter on disruptive pettiness about inconsequential matters. In fact, there are a lot of different customs about food—what’s acceptable to eat and what’s not.

It's amazing how Christians can get consumed with stupid stuff. And we still do! Does anyone read the Bible?

Paul reminds opinionated Christians to not jump all over others who might be strong on opinions but weak on faith. He says we should treat one another gently. If people have bad opinions, let God handle it, Paul says in Romans 14:4. In verse 9, he says Jesus lived, died, and rose again so we could be free from petty differences. But many Christians argue about what's petty and what's not! That's pettiness on steroids!

In verse 19, Paul says, "Don't you dare let a piece of God-blessed food become an occasion for soul-poisoning." What a great metaphor!

God's Kingdom is not about petty issues. It's about being saved by Jesus Christ. What about all the energy different denominations put into their silos of preference? I'm all for doctrinal integrity, but all this divisiveness? United we stand; divided we fall. We lose too much too often. Let's put our energy into encouraging others, not into finding fault (Romans 14:20). Focus on your relationship with God, but don't impose opinions on others. How complicated is that?

Recognizing the Enemy: Addressing Spiritual Disruption in the Church

The devil attends your church—not to worship, but to disrupt. This enemy is subversive. If he showed up, completely revealing who he is, it would literally scare the hell *out* of you! So, the Enemy is subtle.

The entry point for disruption among church people is the area of emotions. Many people say, for example, “Jesus is in my heart.” So, the Enemy usually gets believers sideways with each other by speaking into their seat of emotions.

Sadly, many believers subconsciously treat Satan as a distant reality, close to the border of a fairy tale. You know, like Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. For example, when was the last time you heard a preaching message about demon possession? Our “sophisticated” reaction to bad behavior is to rely upon psychology and behavior disorders.

This *despiritualization* leads us to tread lightly or even ignore some of the spiritual gifts prominent in the New Testament. They are the gifts of healing, exorcism, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, and perhaps some others. Enter the enormous counterfeit use of some of these issues, and the atmosphere becomes really dicey.

In 2 Peter 2:1-3, the apostle says, “But there were also *lying* prophets [in the past], just as there will be lying religious

teachers among you. They'll smuggle in destructive divisions, pitting you against each other...." The result? Peter continues: "They've put themselves on a fast downhill slide to destruction, but not before they recruit a crowd of mixed-up followers who can't tell right from wrong." The apostle concludes, "They give the way of truth a bad name. They're only out for themselves. They'll say anything, *anything*, that sounds good to exploit you."

If you have been around church for a while, chances are you have experienced this. As a Church Doctor, I can't even count the number of times I've seen church people get divided against each other when these dynamics come into play. So, what are the causative issues that feed disruption in your church?

First, we don't take the Enemy's disruption seriously. This leads to a second issue: We tend to approach challenges rationally when the issue should be addressed spiritually. A third portion of this mix is that we ignore the disruptive intervention of the Enemy—who uses troubled Christians to lead congregations toward self-destruction. A fourth—and perhaps most significant—issue is that we try to solve spiritual issues with people who are at elementary levels of Scripture knowledge. Fifth, we often have long discussions and debates about church challenges without anyone even referencing the Scripture! Finally, when discussions become heated, we rarely stop the arguments and enter into a time of prayer.

Think about it. In most churches, during most disruptions, our problem-solving processes are not much different—in approach—than those of businesses and corporations. If you *are* church, *be* church! Act like church. Operate as the spiritual people you are!

Living Like Jesus: Cultivating Peace and Blessings in Difficult Times

When I was in high school, I had no clue what I would do with my life. I was a poor student. My grades were awful. I just didn't care. I had wandered from God, too full of myself to have room for faith. My parents were committed Christians who made sure I went to church. My dad's approach? "I don't care how late you stay out on Saturday night; I'll get you up for church." Our family sat in the first row of the church—right below the pulpit, so I couldn't sleep.

My greatest passion in high school was to play football. I worked hard to stay in shape. I also enjoyed hanging out with my friends. We liked parties. Then, in my senior year, in a football game with our school's rival, I got clipped from behind on a kickoff return. The guy who clipped me got a 15-yard penalty for his team. I got a knee injury that led to surgery.

While I was in the hospital recovering from the surgery, I was in a room with two other guys about my age. One of them had some issue with his lungs. Occasionally, he would just stop breathing. One night, about 3 a.m., I woke up because he was gasping for breath—turning blue. I pressed the nurse call button. They barely saved him.

For the first time ever, I realized a person my age could actually die. I knew I wasn't ready. In one great reversal, I decided to become a Christian and go into the ministry. Anyone who knew

me in those days was shocked. I heard the word “miracle.” Some of my buddies were skeptical.

During the last half of my senior year, my grades improved dramatically. But that didn’t help my grade point average much after three and a half years of goofing off.

After graduation, my pastor took me to one of my denomination’s colleges. We met with the dean, who looked at my grades and declared, “This man is not ministerial material.” That began a long season of my bad attitude about the denomination, in spite of the fact that I eventually graduated from college, then seminary, and after that, grad school, with a PhD in theology.

It was later that I learned about bad attitudes from 1 Peter 2:18-3:22. Peter writes that even if you’re a slave or a servant and are treated badly for no good reason, you are supposed to put up with it (verses 2:18-20). Peter continues in 2:21-25 by pointing out that “Jesus ... suffered everything that came His way so that you would know it could be done.” He continues saying that Jesus “used His servant body to carry our sins to the cross so we could be rid of sin, free to live the right way. His wounds became your healing.”

In chapter 3, Peter says, “We should be gentle, gracious, honorable, agreeable, sympathetic, loving, compassionate, and humble.” He adds: “No retaliation. No sharp-tongued sarcasm” (3:1-12).

Peter sums up, “Instead, bless.... You’ll be a blessing and also get a blessing.” He continues, “Say nothing evil or hurtful. Snub evil and cultivate good; run after peace for all you’re worth.” He says, “Even if you suffer for it, you’re better off” (1 Peter 3:8-14).

How would that approach change the world? Imagine how it would change the climate of your church. How would it change you? I know, after all those years, those words are still working to change my attitude about my own denomination. It's *hard* to live like Jesus. It's a *challenge* to live in the world of hurts with an attitude of grace. Yet, as Christians, you and I both know: It's right. It's better!

Faith and Friction: Understanding and Overcoming Church Disruptions

Have you ever seen a church gathering where there are emotional outbursts of disruption? Faith is close to your seat of emotion. Churches are full of spiritually deep young people and lifelong members with the spiritual discipline of a 5-year-old. And they are all disguised as “members of the church.” They need your prayers and your help. “God loves the least of these”—and so should you.

In 2 Corinthians, chapters 11 and 12, the otherwise eloquent Apostle Paul gets into a rant of self-pity mixed with a little anger. He never gets into the specific causative issues but talks all around the fact that some are verbally challenging his credibility. In truth, he goes on and on and sounds emotionally defensive.

Yet, the Holy Spirit saw fit to include this in the *Holy Bible*. Talk about eternal transparency! Actually, it adds credibility to the honesty of Scripture—right up there with David’s affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband.

There are three real, important lessons that can be drawn from this Corinthian drama Paul references. (1) Faith in Jesus is fixed deeply in your heart. It lies very close to the seat of your emotions. Have you ever shed a tear, felt emotion, or felt overjoyed in worship? Ever been deeply convicted by a

preached message? If not, perhaps you need to grow more in your faith—letting God move it from your head to your heart.

In 2 Corinthians 12:20-21, Paul makes an account of bad behavior he's observed among the relatively young Christians in that church. He has a list: quarrels, jealousy, flaring tempers, party spirit—politics, anger, mouthing off, rumors, arrogant know-it-alls, and times when the people are literally out of control. What a great advertisement for joining a church! Perhaps Paul was the first, original Church Doctor!

The number one issue is emotions. The number two issue is another reality we see regularly in churches today. We observe church meetings on touchy subjects in congregations where everyone is invited to the meeting. Some are actually foolish enough, or committed enough, to show up! Among them, in disguise, are baby Christians in the church family. And they could be disguised as 80-year-old men and women. That's crazy! Would you ask your 5-year-old to weigh in on whether or not you should make the mortgage payment or spend the money to go to Disney World?

Issue number three: There is a psychological dysfunction called narcissistic personality disorder. The person usually has no clue they have it. Nor does their spouse. It is a subconscious desire to be in charge. People with this disorder tend to use half-truths to discredit other people and divide them against one another. Guess what? One of the most common platforms that draws people with this disorder is churches. Forgiving Christians often allow their behavior, and it disrupts the church.

Yes—this is the church! It profoundly proves that, when we achieve anything important, Christ is really the powerful force: sometimes because of us, often in spite of us!

Strengthening the Church: Managing Division with Faith and Grace

Have you ever seen a church gathering where there are emotional outbursts of disruption? Faith is close to your seat of emotion. Churches are full of spiritually deep young people and lifelong members with the spiritual discipline of a 5-year-old. And they are all disguised as “members of the church.” They need your prayers and your help. “God loves the least of these”—and so should you.

In 2 Corinthians, chapters 11 and 12, the otherwise eloquent Apostle Paul gets into a rant of self-pity mixed with a little anger. He never gets into the specific causative issues but talks all around the fact that some are verbally challenging his credibility. In truth, he goes on and on and sounds emotionally defensive.

Yet, the Holy Spirit saw fit to include this in the *Holy Bible*. Talk about eternal transparency! Actually, it adds credibility to the honesty of Scripture—right up there with David’s affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband.

There are three real, important lessons that can be drawn from this Corinthian drama Paul references. (1) Faith in Jesus is fixed deeply in your heart. It lies very close to the seat of your emotions. Have you ever shed a tear, felt emotion, or felt overjoyed in worship? Ever been deeply convicted by a

preached message? If not, perhaps you need to grow more in your faith—letting God move it from your head to your heart.

In 2 Corinthians 12:20-21, Paul makes an account of bad behavior he's observed among the relatively young Christians in that church. He has a list: quarrels, jealousy, flaring tempers, party spirit—politics, anger, mouthing off, rumors, arrogant know-it-alls, and times when the people are literally out of control. What a great advertisement for joining a church! Perhaps Paul was the first, original Church Doctor!

The number one issue is emotions. The number two issue is another reality we see regularly in churches today. We observe church meetings on touchy subjects in congregations where everyone is invited to the meeting. Some are actually foolish enough, or committed enough, to show up! Among them, in disguise, are baby Christians in the church family. And they could be disguised as 80-year-old men and women. That's crazy! Would you ask your 5-year-old to weigh in on whether or not you should make the mortgage payment or spend the money to go to Disney World?

Issue number three: There is a psychological dysfunction called narcissistic personality disorder. The person usually has no clue they have it. Nor does their spouse. It is a subconscious desire to be in charge. People with this disorder tend to use half-truths to discredit other people and divide them against one another. Guess what? One of the most common platforms that draws people with this disorder is churches. Forgiving Christians often allow their behavior, and it disrupts the church.

Yes—this is the church! It profoundly proves that, when we achieve anything important, Christ is really the powerful force: sometimes because of us, often in spite of us!

From Rejection to Redemption: Sharing Faith with Compassion

Many church leaders publicly speak out about sins. This is a prophetic role for Christians, but sometimes it moves way out of balance. Jesus had a different posture. After His ascension, His body—the church—demonstrated it.

Many like to quote the New Testament letters to make public declarations to nonbelievers who are immoral, drunkards, homosexual, corrupt in business, adulterers, etc. They forget that the New Testament letters were written to those *inside* the church. The Scripture is also a great guide for those who are on a journey to Christ, yet they have not arrived. For those without Christ, those in “darkness” (see John 12:46), it feels like rejection.

Jesus did not reject sinners—and some of the “religious people” had a fit about it. He *did* reject the religious leaders for their posture and added, in John 12:48, “I did not come to reject the world: I came to save the world.”

Rodney Stark in his brilliant book *The Rise of Christianity* tells about the social implications of the incredible growth of the early Christian movement. He demonstrates how, in the cutthroat, dog-eat-dog culture of the Roman Empire, there came along these transformed followers of Jesus who demonstrated phenomenal love, acceptance, and service. Stark goes on to show, from a historical perspective, how this amazing

behavior—so counterintuitive to human nature—made a huge impact. Many wanted to know what happened to change their lives. That created receptivity for the growth of the Jesus movement.

Back to John 12: Jesus goes on to make it clear (as He speaks to His followers) in verse 48: “...whoever puts me off, refusing to take in what I am saying, is willfully choosing rejection” (*The Message*).

Jesus continues, verse 49, “The Father who *sent* [the word for mission] me gave me orders, told me what to say and how to say it.” Church leaders often focus on content—what to say. However, Scripture focuses equally on the need to “exegete your audience before you talk.” That means to learn as much as you can about your audience. When the audience is nonbelievers, the message is not a hardcore challenge to clean up your act. It is love, acceptance, and a relationship with Jesus. There is a different message to Christians than there is to non-Christians. Once people are Christians, the message is hardcore: “Let God clean up your life.” The message to non-Christians is: “A very awesome God loves you so much He gave His own son to make your life better forever” (John 3:16).

The Weight of the Calling: Encouraging Pastors in Difficult Times

In our work with thousands of churches over several decades, I have noticed several types of pastors. Actually, several conditions of pastoral behavior. Looking from the perspective of the pastor as an influencer-leader, you can observe several profiles of these called servants of Jesus Christ.

First, there are enthusiastic, optimistic, and courageous pastors. Second, there are also pastors worn out, struggling with all the challenges that come with the calling. A third category are those who are temporarily defeated or exhausted beyond the point where they can even perceive recovery. Many pastors have experienced all three conditions, perhaps several times during their years of service.

The Apostle Paul himself experienced all of this. And the Scripture is honest and transparent enough not to hide it! In 2 Corinthians 13:1-9, you see a frustrated, worn-out, wonderful servant of God. He is filled with righteous anger. There are signs of severe frustration. Between his written lines, it feels like he's at his wit's end with some of those at the Corinth church whose behavior is destructive to the body of Christ.

As a consultant, I am trained to look past symptoms to causative issues—the issues behind the issues. I'm not able, of course, to visit this Corinthian church from centuries ago. Yet,

in the shadows of this text, there are signals that speak clearly about the human condition, even in churches.

Paul is not new or distant from this group at Corinth. He has been there twice, and, as he writes, he's planning a third visit. He's had correspondence with them. He's also had conversations with leaders who have visited the church and reported back to him. You might wonder, if Paul had social media, would it have helped? Contemporary reality says, "Clearly not!" and perhaps social media would have made the situation even worse. This is not a technological issue!

So, what is the real issue? At the risk of oversimplifying the challenges of churches—which are always complex—there is a spark that starts these fires. Diagnose all we have from both Corinthian letters, and you see a foundational principle. Sadly, it's not at all uncommon in churches today.

The issue is *disrespect*. Think about it. There is disrespect for the body of Christ, the sacred family we call church. There is disrespect for Christ, the Head of His body. There is disrespect for the basic teachings of Christ. (A side issue behind that issue is ignorance or apathy concerning the teachings of our Lord.)

All this piles up into a disrespect for leaders, including pastors and, in this case, the apostle. This disrespect, demonstrated in so many ways, keeps pastors up at night. It contributes to stress and other health disorders. It adds stress to the pastor's family. It divides churches. It clouds the churches' witness to unbelievers. It saps mission energy. It causes pastors like Paul to be defensive.

Pray for your pastor. Encourage your pastor. Show appreciation for your pastor. It's a wonderful, tough, exhilarating,

challenging, spiritual, stressful, very special calling. Love on those who lead your church.

Discussion Questions

Would you agree with the statement: “One of the great disruptions in churches is the way we organize to operate”?

Are Robert’s Rules of Order found in Scripture?

What is a *theocracy*?

How does that differ from the government of your church?

Action: Ensure that Scripture and prayer are part of each church decision.

The Power of Spiritual Respect

Introduction

What makes a person *civilized*? Are those who are from a distant tribal group deep in the Amazon jungle civilized? Is a convicted criminal from a street gang who peddles narcotics civilized? Have you ever done something that could be described as uncivilized? When people are violent in actions that hurt others, is that a threat to what we call *civilization*? If your 5-year-old child throws a temper tantrum, is she breaking the boundary of being civilized? What if she becomes an addict to heroin at the age of 19? Has she become uncivilized?

The concept of “civility” basically means to be “polite.” From that concept, we have the word “politics” and the career choice called “politicians.”

Scripture has a lot to say about civility because it is the cornerstone of civilization. Civilization, in any culture, struggles to function without civility. And God’s Word—Scripture—is not silent on this bedrock subject.

Civility reflects respect. If you drive 10 miles above the speed limit, are you respectful? If you get caught by a police officer and you are fined, does that impact your future behavior while driving? Are you angry that you got “caught”? Is your anger directed toward the officer, the system, or yourself?

What is the impact on a nation when acts of disrespect increase? How does that shape the culture? How do you

respond to a report about “vandals” who rob a store and steal merchandise?

After the United States was grossly disrespected by terrorists who brought down the Twin Towers in New York City, the changes in security at airports felt like a nightmare—and a hassle to many. When you travel, do you have a bad attitude about all that wasted time? Honestly, that attitude demonstrates incivility—a lack of respect.

Do you need a civility breakthrough as you travel through an airport? Do you realize that security workers are there to keep you safe? Do you need to change your behavior? What if you began to thank each one for their service? Could you develop a respectful habit of saying, “Thank you for keeping us safe”? Some of them may ignore it. Others, however, will say, “Thank you.” The important conclusion? **You** became more respectful!

What if every person intentionally exercised more internal respect? It doesn’t cost much to thank the grocery store cashier and wish them well by saying, “Have a nice day.” Think about it: You could start a respect movement. Civility impacts civilization one person at a time.

From Gossip to Grace: Building a Civilized Church Family

Our world today is positioned for civil disobedience. Gossip, slander, and libel are all accepted as everyday behavior. Some politicians are the worst role models for young adults! The world's population has a civility crisis.

"Civility" means "polite." Ironically, the word "polite" is the root word for "politics" and "politicians." Of course, much of the media has followed this path into the gutter of discourse. Some late-night talk show hosts are champions of slander and disrespect. Newspapers and newsmagazines also often report "news" from the position of subjectivity. And it's quite obvious!

"Civility" is the foundation of what we call "civilization." If you lack civility, you are uncivilized. This begs the question, "Are you a civilian?" Civilization can't—won't—function without civility.

The world always bleeds into the church. The church must continually focus on biblical teaching about how to act, how to get along. Jesus Himself is the Master and foundation of civility, and the Scripture is the manual for how to be civil. The Apostle Paul also focuses on civil behavior.

In 1 Timothy chapter 5, Paul writes to young Pastor Timothy, focusing on behavior standards among Christians. In verses 1-2, Paul says, "Don't be harsh or impatient with an old man—

treat him like your own father.” He continues: treat “young men as your brothers.” He says, “Honor older women like you would honor your mother, and younger women as sisters.”

In verses 3-5, Paul expands the civility environment: “Take care of widows ... like family members.” Once again, Paul says, “Treat them like family.”

So many churches operate like organizations. Yet the Scripture here talks about church as *family*. Paul actually instructs Timothy to let the church hire widows and pay them, because many widows need money. How many widows does your church have on staff?

Then Paul specifically speaks against “empty talk, gossip, and trivialities” (verses 11-15). In verse 20, the apostle instructs Timothy to call out everyone who sins, a reference to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:15-17. Paul warns against favoritism or taking sides. He also says, “Don’t appoint church leaders too hastily” (verses 21-23). Notice: (1) Leaders are appointed! No votes, no politics! (2) Make sure that they are right with God—disciplined into leadership.

So, how does this work in your church?

From Discord to Reverence: Embracing Respect as a Spiritual Practice

Could one sentence from the Bible be so powerful that, if believed and practiced, it would change a nation, its government, politics, news media, the divorce rate, and the next generation of those who are young kids today?

Of course, there are many single sentences in Scripture that would turn our world right-side up. One of them is a one-liner from the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians. In Ephesians 5:21, Paul writes these 11 words: “Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another.” That’s easy to read, yet so rare in secular society. How does this fit you?

Our toxic environment is challenged on the subject of respect. Those who never worship Jesus reflect no respect for Christ. In truth, many of those who do worship Jesus show disrespect in their life outside of church—and, sometimes, within the church.

Years ago, I read a report about a church that was divided about some issue, called a meeting, and it broke out into a fistfight. It made the headlines of the local newspaper. Honestly? That is a long way from the good news that is supposed to drive Christian behavior!

Civility is becoming rare—among politicians, the media, the Internet, and even in churches. It is common for a church member to send a hurtful email to the pastor and copy all their

friends. Sometimes pastors, in the heat of a defensive moment, multiply the sin by responding by email and copying all the same people—and even more. This is a surefire strategy for splitting a congregation! Is that being “courteously reverent”?

Civility means respect—and more. To act with civility is to be civilized. It’s what separates humans from animals. Why would any Christian act that way? One reason (not an excuse) is that your faith is close to the seat of your emotions. It’s easy to fall into a trap when your emotions overrule your brain and your heart, your love for Jesus and your church.

A second reason is that many practicing Christians are somewhat biblically illiterate. They don’t know their Bible. So, they don’t know what Jesus taught in Matthew 18 about going directly to a person and dealing with the issues. A third reason is that churches are operated like corporations rather than like the body of Christ. The board is the head, not Jesus. People vote more often than they pray or search for biblical truth. This corporate model kills churches, subtly—little by little. Nail this verse to the wall of your heart: “Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another” (Ephesians 5:21).

Living to Please God: A Call to Authentic Faith and Mission

There's a big difference between religion and spirituality. Religion is going through the motions, following the customs, the systems, the habits, the way we've always done it.

However, delivery systems change. We don't worship them—or we shouldn't! They are vehicles, used on the merit of effectiveness. When Christians cling to delivery systems, they worship false gods. These false gods can be “my favorite Bible version” (that uses words from three centuries ago), building structures, songs, and dress codes. This is a form of religious idolatry.

Spirituality is based on theological basics, focused on Christ, behavior in everyday life, and mission priorities. In short, the principles Jesus taught, not the style of what clothes He wore, are absolutely basic.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12, Paul focuses on spiritual matters. He announces to his audience in verses 1-3: “...keep on doing what we told you to do to please God, not in a dogged religious plod, but in a living, spiritual dance.” He summarizes: “Live a pure life.” Then Paul lists issues that are universally obvious: “Keep from sexual promiscuity ... give dignity to your body.” He continues, focused on civility: “Don't run roughshod over ... your brothers and sisters ... their concerns are God's concerns” (verses 4-7).

Paul expands in verses 9-10, "...getting along with each other." He clarifies the spiritual foundation: "You're *God*-taught in these matters ... just love one another."

Paul adds in verses 11-12, "Stay calm; mind your own business; do your own job ... living in a way that will command the respect of outsiders...." Concern for the respect of outsiders is an absolute commitment to the primary mission of the church and of every Christian!

In this age of the Internet, these words jump off the page and pierce our hearts, our religious game-playing, and our mission impotence that has led much of the Western world toward the decline of the Christian movement.

The results? Misbehavior is on a rampage! We've become numb to atrocities that ought to keep us awake at night, that ought to so rile spiritual Christ-followers that we begin a spiritual revolution, take up the cross, dump any old, out-of-date religious, feel-good, impotent strategies, and take back each of our personal worlds for Jesus Christ.

It's time—way beyond time—to quit playing church. We can do this. We can do "what pleases God," as Paul begins this chapter. Don't let your religion get in the way of your spirituality and of your mission to save people for whom your Savior gave His life!

Love, Dignity, and Unity: Strengthening the Church's Public Witness

When do Christians and churches usually make the headlines and the news cycles? Occasionally, it occurs when believers accomplish something good, for people or for society. More often, it's when denominational meetings are supercharged with politics and theological divisions. Local church splits or staff misbehaviors also seem to make the headlines.

In 1 Peter 2:13-17, the apostle provides a few points with powerful wisdom. He begins by focusing on the reality that every day, everything you do as a Christian sends a message to the world around you. He says, "Make the Master proud of you by being a good citizen." This comment raises the question: "What, from the Master's perspective, does a 'good citizen' look like?"

Peter unpacks this concept by beginning and ending this admonition with the powerful subject of *respect*. He writes: "Respect the authorities," who he calls "God's emissaries for keeping order." Then, toward the end of this short teaching, Peter says, "Treat everyone you meet with dignity." He ends with a third emphasis on respect: "Respect the government."

The concept of "respect" is summarized in the idea of civility. Civility reflects people who are civilized. Disrespect reflects behavior that is uncivilized. As a "civilian," you are expected to

be respectful to others. As a Christian, this concept is magnified.

The public reputation of Christians and their churches is very important for the spiritual movement started by Jesus. Peter writes, “It is God’s will that by doing good you might cure the ignorance of the fools who think you’re a danger to society.” He continues, “Exercise your freedom by serving God, not by breaking the rules.”

As Christians, we confess that we are both saints and sinners. We celebrate forgiveness, by God’s grace, through Jesus’ death on the cross. Unbelievers don’t get that. So, when our sins are broadcasted, Christians are labeled as “hypocrites.” This seems to be one of the greatest challenges that Christians and their churches face. Peter challenges Christ-followers to work at good behavior.

As Peter wraps up this powerful wisdom, he makes a very important point: He says, “Love your spiritual family.” Sadly, so many churches struggle with arguments, divisions, and emotional outbursts—some of which gets out to the public. Christians are on notice: If you recognize your mission to reach unbelievers, watch your behavior very carefully.

From Malice to Maturity: Embracing God's Pure Kindness

Among individual Christians and their churches, there is a slippery distinction between kindness and conviction. Conviction is a firm commitment to what you believe is God's truth—and how it shapes your life. Yet, what believers don't realize is that there's a hairline difference—sometimes—between being convicted and being a convict!

What happens? Sometimes believers get confused between form and substance. In every congregation and every different culture, the truth is the same, but the delivery systems are different. It gets more complicated: Language is alive and constantly changing. So, the way our ancestors said it may not work for our grandchildren. You want to communicate faith in the language people dream in. It is their heart language. No one dreams using “thy” and “thou” anymore.

Yet, this issue of “words” gets even worse in the language conundrum of every congregation. Sometimes our behavior gets bent out of shape. Again, our faith is so close to the seat of our emotions. Our “feelings” can steer our hearts into a cesspool of misbehavior. Yeah, Christians can get out of whack and verbally abuse one another. God created us with two ears, but only one mouth—which ought to send a message. Yet, occasionally it seems like we put our mouth in gear before our ears, even before our brain, and often absent of our hearts. It's true: We're simultaneously saints and sinners.

But we are supposed to be on a path of “righteousness,” which is a course of divine correction, growth, and improvement. It’s a struggle with reality this side of eternity.

The Apostle Peter weighs in on this in 1 Peter 2:1-3. He says, “Clean house!” It sounds like housekeeping, but it’s much more personal. He continues, “Make a clean sweep of malice and pretense.” That’s all about bad behavior and judging others. There’s more about the “clean sweep”: “envy and hurtful talk.” Envy is an inside issue. The talk is an outside result.

Then the apostle changes metaphors from “cleaning your house”—your body, your brain, your mouth, your church—to “breasts and infants.” He says, “...like infants at the breast, drink deep of God’s pure kindness.” At first it sounds strange, mixing housecleaning with breastfeeding. Interesting guy, Peter! Yet, it’s really a great image. We will never clean up our act— “malice,” “pretense,” “envy,” or “hurtful talk”—with laying down rules, judging, or organizational strategies. First, we must have the humility to say, “I’m a baby and need God’s help to grow.” Second, we can’t do it ourselves. We need to “drink God’s pure kindness.” That is feeding on God’s Word. That is the way we become mature and whole in God.

Isn’t it strange that so many Christians make the pilgrimage to church Sunday after Sunday but are not living daily in God’s Word? It’s like a baby who desperately needs her mother’s milk but refuses to breastfeed. The result, as Peter says, is spiritual anemia that leads to some nasty behavior. Each of us has a choice: Be part of the challenge or part of the solution. Wouldn’t it be great if your church was filled with people who drink more of God’s pure kindness?

Discussion Questions

Would you agree with the statement: "Civility is the cornerstone of civilization?" Why or why not?

If civility reflects respect, how do you show your respect to others?

Does your mood influence the respect you show to others?

Action: Intentionally show your respect for others three times today.

Conclusion

Civility has a profound impact on the spiritual health of an individual and the corporate health of the body of Christ.

Gossip, speech spoken without care for others, creates mistrust, division, and spiritual disruption.

Civility calls for a commitment to speak words of encouragement, fostering an environment where trust and unity can flourish.

Call a Church Doctor!

Are you frustrated
that your church
isn't growing?

Is it starting to feel
less like a ministry
and more like a
country club?

Do you feel like all
your efforts yield
little fruit?

As a nonprofit Christian ministry, we offer proven strategies to help Christians, pastors, and ministry leaders become more effective at their mission: the Great Commission.

Effect Life Change

Our methods help
your church grow
both deep and wide.

Increase Health & Vitality

Track the improvement
in your church via our
9 measurable metrics.

Reduce Stress & Burnout

Our proven process
takes the stress off of
your leadership and
reduces burnout among
pastors and staff.

Here's how it works

①

Discover

What is working? What is not?
What is God's vision
for your church?

③

Prescribe

We guide you in creating an
implementation plan to break
through the ceilings and roadblocks
and achieve your goals.

②

Diagnose

Identify the ceilings and roadblocks
that are holding you or
your church back.

④

See Results

Reach more people, multiply
disciples, and resource leadership.

**Partner with a Church Doctor and break through the
barriers that have held you back.**



Call a Church Doctor!
(800) 626-8515
CallaChurchDoctor.com

CONSULTING & COACHING

Healthy Churches Thrive!/The SEND Movement:

A Spiritual Adventure for Your Church

True transformational change is a spiritual process. This unique transformational adventure uses our most effective tools, resources, and teachings along with a team of committed consultants and coaches to come alongside you as your guide. Members, leaders, staff, and ministry will experience spiritual change and growth to help your church reach more people for Christ in the 21st century.

Diagnostic Assessment

This is a thorough analysis of your congregation's health, strength, and challenges. Recommendations for more effective ministry are shared to help you achieve more for God's purpose. A report is generated that graphically illustrates the church's views, attitudes, and worldviews. These become the mechanisms to develop a strategic plan for recommendations to move your church to action.

Coaching for Church Leaders

Our coaching approach is simple: We help Christian leaders unleash the capacity to realize their God-inspired best in ministry. Our process is based on asset mapping, leveraging your strengths, creating disciplined action plans, and building momentum through accountability and follow-up to help you achieve success.

Finishing Well

This is transition coaching for retiring ministers, staff members, and churches transitioning toward new leadership. Your Church Doctor will help to develop a plan of succession that works. They will help you develop a transition plan philosophy of ministry document; will structure a timetable that honors the retiring staff, assimilates the successor, and serves your church; and will help you avoid transitional pitfalls.

Call 1-800-626-8515

Email info@churchdoctor.org

Scan the code to schedule a call with a Church Doctor today!



About the Authors



Dr. Kent R. Hunter is the founder of Church Doctor Ministries. He believes that God has called him to help Christians and their churches become more effective for the Great Commission, to reach unbelievers and to make them disciples of Jesus Christ. Dr. Hunter is the author of more than 40 books. He has consulted more than 1,800 churches from 80 denominations, as well as nondenominational and independent churches. He developed the SEND Movement, which trains congregational members to become missionaries to those who are unchurched in their social networks. Kent writes the bimonthly Church Doctor Report, found on www.churchdoctor.org. Kent lives on a tree farm in northeast Indiana with his wife, Janet. Kent and Janet have two grown children, Laura and Jon.



Dr. Rupert Loyd Jr. has a BA in history from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, an MDiv from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston, and a PhD in leadership from Union University in Cincinnati. He has over 40 years of pastoral experience in both urban and suburban churches, including multiethnic, multi-congregational churches. Throughout his career, he has maintained a presence in both the church and the academy. Dr. Loyd currently teaches graduate and undergraduate classes in the College of Business and Leadership at Lourdes University, and he holds the post of lead pastor at Marketplace Community Church in Toledo, Ohio.