



We are the Church **Mar 11: The Imperfect Church**

Series Summary: It is commonly said that students (teenagers) are the future of the church. This is wrong. Students are the current church. They are a part of the body of Christ (the Ekklesia). In this series, we are going to discuss what it means to be a part of the local church.

Big Idea/Question: So many people look at the Church in Acts 2 and want to be a part of what they think is a perfect church. However, those don't exist and unfortunately never will. We are imperfect people living amongst each other, so we need to learn how to be faithful and Godly when the members of the church show their imperfections.

PREFACE TO SMALL GROUPS (LEAD-IN)

As we have discussed throughout this series the church matters deeply. The church is meant to live out several key aspects of faith as we have talked about over the last few weeks. Tonight we will discuss how we can't overlook a key detail about the Church...the Church is imperfect.

The main focus is in Acts 6 where we see division between two religious groups within the church (Hellenistic Jews and Hebraic Jews). Often, I think people will read Acts 2, and see the harmony and high points within the church, and think "why can't it be like that all the time?" The main reason- people are imperfect, and so by default, so is the church.

Since the Church is imperfect we have to come to expect times of conflict, not seeing eye-to-eye with each other, and unfortunately times of church hurt. But how do we

navigate those instances? It's important to know HOW to work through these times when they pop up, and how we don't continue to throw gas on the fire.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Get Them Talking: What do you think are signs of an unhealthy church? What do you think are things that an outsider would see the Church do, or act like, that would keep them away from the church?

Passage Context: In Acts 6 The Hellenistic widows (Greek-speaking Jewish Christians) felt they were being neglected in the daily distribution of food compared to the Hebraic widows (Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians). This disparity led to complaints and a sense of injustice within the community.

Acts 6:1-7 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. **2** So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. **3** Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them **4** and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." **5** This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. **6** They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. **7** So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

1. The church strayed from what God desired for them because they allowed cultural norms to guide their actions.

What cultural norms do we need to be careful not to allow to control or guide us?

Leader Note (Commentary): This was a division that, at its core, was a racial and cultural divide. The cultural divide was seeping into the church and causing them to live and act as if they were not ONE.

2. **(Lead-In)-** This was the same group of believers that had shared everything in common and helped the poor among them just a few chapters prior (Acts 2 & 4). Yet, here they were fighting amongst themselves.

How should this shape our expectations of the Church?

Leader Note: The book of Acts gives us a clear and honest picture into the life of the church, both the lows and the highs. At times, they honored God in what they did; at other times, they got it wrong. Does this mean that we should become apathetic and just accept that people in the church, including us, will make a mess of things? No! God does not ignore sin within the church. If you don't believe me, read Acts 5. But this episode of favoritism and end fighting should remind us that we should not look to the church for the source of perfection. We will be disappointed often. The reality is we, the church, are far from perfect. But our savior and redeemer, Jesus, is.

3. How did the Apostles deal with the messy dispute in the Church of Jerusalem in this passage?

Leader Note: By appointing deacons to oversee the distribution of resources, the apostles addressed this concern and promoted unity and harmony within the church. As churches grow and become more complex, the need for structured leadership and defined roles becomes increasingly essential. Deacons provide a framework for serving the practical needs of the early church, and still, to this day, Deacons are needed and utilized to support the church's mission.

- In short, they appointed those who weren't just nice or trustworthy, but Godly in their nature so that way God would still be glorified even through conflict.

Conflict is Inevitable: The key is not to avoid conflict altogether but to learn how to navigate it in a healthy, constructive way.

DISAGREEMENTS

Transition to Next Section: I want us to focus on a central passage in terms of dealing with disagreements. In this next passage I want us to think about how we get this wrong, but also the godliness that can be found when we do this part right.

Matthew 18:15-20 "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. **16** But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' **17** If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. **18** "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. **19** "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. **20** For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

4. **How do we miss the biblical model of dealing with conflict and sin described to us in Matthew 18:15-20? What will we tend to do that misses the mark of what Jesus just instructed?**

Leader Note: We will acknowledge this passage as important and good... and then ironically try to re-write this passage to make it fit my own personal preferences and feelings. Some things that we will do that go against this passage:

- "I will go point out their faults and talk to them...after I get done 'seeking perspective' from 10 people I 'trust'". We can try and make it sound like we're being diligent in trying to figure out what to do, when in all reality we're gossiping about the other person to those 10 "trustworthy" people. Every time we do this, we play the victim, paint ourselves probably more innocent than what we actually are, and paint the other person as a villain. We're not seeking advice, nearly as much, as we're trying to stack our team and make the other person seem worse than myself. Even if we're 100% innocent, this still isn't following instructions in Matthew 18 regardless.
- We will try and justify talking about our situation with however many other people as "venting", but obviously Matthew 18 says nothing about venting to others before any real step is taken. We will try to use our emotional state as means of justifying our action of "venting", but scripture doesn't give that clearance. Imagine if we talk down of someone to 5 other people, and then those 5 share it with 5 more...and you were wrong about your perception of that individual the entire time. Think of the risk that we're running in terms of community and godliness within the church.
- DO NOT TEXT OUT YOUR ISSUES WITH THE OTHER PERSON. We were never meant to communicate through text. Think about the cons of doing this in terms of healthy community- we can't hear tone of voice, and we will always read the other person's text with a negative tone of voice in our own head. This automatically throws more gas on the fire. We can't see facial expressions. We can't see body language. Chances are, we're going to say something bold rather than loving because we know they can't touch us through a screen. Like vs 15 says, go to them in person. Hear them and let them hear you. Be human and use your words instead of emojis. So many unnecessary issues can be avoided or fixed by doing this and actually following God's word. Thank you for coming to my ted talk.
- Some people will say "I'll just love them from a distance". What this typically means is that we just simply don't want to make the effort. We're fine feeling bitter towards the other person, whether they deserve it or not. But what this does is lead to a potential hardened heart, and a skewed version of love and forgiveness since we're letting bitterness run its course. Imagine if Jesus did this with us. Are there times where we need to walk away from the other

person and go our separate ways? Yes, and even vs 17 refers to this...but not before the previous steps are taken.

5. **Oftentimes we tend to hyperfixate on the person who we may have an issue with, and ignore our own state. Why do we need to evaluate ourselves and give our own heart attention as well?**

6. **(Lead-In)-** A model that we say here at Parkway is “Think the best, say the best, do the best” when talking about someone else.
How can this model lead us towards healthy and godly community, and away from unhealthy and toxic community?