

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

GO therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you” Matt 28:19-20a

MESSAGE:

“Why Conflict Leads to Complacency in Many Churches”

The Rainer Report

Intro: Welcome to the weekly edition of the Rainer Report. My name is Thom Rainer. Thanks again for being here. I say thank you every week because the reality of it is that without listeners, without readers, we have nothing. We are here because you’ve asked us to be here through your participation in the different ministries we have. Hadn’t been that long ago we started the Rainer Report, the video presentation of the material that we have. It’s been a fun ride and we continue to provide a short verse, about 10 minutes each, of the information that we think is powerful and relevant to the church. Now when we say we think it is powerful and relevant, let me give you a reminder. The reason that we know, is because you are asking us or you’re sharing this information with us through the blogs, through the podcast, through revitalize and replant, and through the Rainer Report video presentation. You’re sharing this with us through church answers and church answers.com. We’re hearing from you and so as we hear from you there’s this continuous feedback loop where we tell you and share with you what’s happening at churches particularly across North America and then you provide more feedback, and we then continue the loop. So, as we listen to you, what we are attempting to do is to find those issues that are burning right now in the minds and hearts of church leaders. These are issues that you want us to address. These are issues that you are discussing on an ongoing basis.

So, what is this issue about? This issue is about conflict. Now I understand that any one of you, if you are in any kind of leadership, if you have a family, if you work with people, anything, at times there will be conflict. But something that we don’t often address is why that conflict often times leads to complacency in many churches. Sometimes we look around and we say what’s happened to our church? It just seems like we’ve become lackadaisical, the apathy is pervasive in the church, and it just seems like it just happened. Well, it does not just

happen. It happens from somewhere. And one of the leading reasons for the apathy in church is that there is this undertow, this conflict that is taking place.

In a previous edition of the Rainer Report I talked about my family and all of the time we spent in Panama City, Florida and Panama City Beach. That was the only vacation spot my dad wanted or needed to know. One of the times my mom tried to convince him to go to Houston because the Houston Astrodome had just been built, so you can tell how many years ago that was, and so she wanted to go tour the Astrodome, but my dad went in and looked around and said it just looks like a big building to me. I want to go to the beach. And so, my brother and I said yeah. We were supposed to tour around Houston and have a little more fun in Texas, maybe even go to Dallas, but we drove all the way back to the panhandle because it was time to go back to the beach. And my mom just gave up. We just went every summer to Panama City Beach.

Well, there weren't signs at the beach in those days like there are in most beaches now that talk about the undertow or the rip tide. We always called it the undertow. In fact, for years, I thought my dad was calling it the "undertoad" and I thought there was a frog pulling at my toes. But undertow is what we called it. You know what undertow is, where one direction of the current pulls you from where you think you are. It can literally take you down and drown you. There are examples where you are to swim parallel to the beach in order to escape that current that is pulling you down and that can literally take your life.

There is an undertow that is taking place in many churches today. And that is the undertow of conflict. And as a result, many churches right now are in a period of complacency, and they are trying to identify the why, so they can know the what to get out of it.

Well conflict leads to complacency. What are some of the reasons?

One of the reasons is that conflict makes people tired. They're worn out. Tiredness, weariness, of course, leads to complacency. My wife is always telling me that when I'm tired, she can tell that I have a sense of irritability or even quietness about me. I'm normally quiet but even more so. She's always telling me – you need to get some sleep when I don't have enough sleep and that is just a reality. When you're tired you don't think well, you don't function well, and you can go into modes of irritability, or you can just go into a continuous mode of complacency. If there's been this undertow or undercurrent of conflict in your church your members may just be worn out.

It takes resources to reach out to be the Great Commission and the Great Commandment and to be obedient. If those resources of emotion and time have been spent on conflict, there are none left to fulfill the Great Commission or the Great Commandment.

Another one, the church extends the period of recovery too long. Let me give you an example just to make sure. Let's say that the church has gone through a period of intense conflict, and it may have even been a split or a schism in the church. As a result, they make a

decision, the leaders in the church, the lay leaders, pastors, they make a decision that we're just going to take it easy for a while, we're not going to rock the boat, whatever metaphor you want to use, we're just going to rest. Hear me well. **Go, therefore, and make disciples, does not sound like rest. Go, therefore, and make disciples sounds like going, doing, making, reaching.** And so, therefore, when you go through a period of conflict and you say, uh, we've got to take a breath, let's just not do anything for a while. If you don't do anything for too long, a while, which is not too long at all, that period of conflict can become a long period of recovery that can then lead to dire straits of complacency. The church had extended the period of recovery too long.

Another reason that conflict leads to complacency is that members no longer want to rock the boat. One of the least safe places you can be is not taking risk. Trying to avoid risk or trying to stay away from steps of faith we think is safe, but it ends up killing us and killing churches. When members say, you know we don't want to try anything new or new initiatives and do anything we need to do in this community, what they are doing is they are responding to the conflict, and they just don't want to offend anybody by doing anything. Well, here's the reality of it. If you do anything positive in the church, you're likely to have someone who is not totally aligned with you. You cannot cease and desist the Great Commission because you've had a conflict. You cannot stop trying new things because you've had a conflict. In fact, one of the best ways to get past the conflict is to be a risk taker. I say risk in the terms of the faith stepper, if you will, to be willing to move out of your comfort zone and into something that is a more vibrant and meaningful life within the church.

Fourth, the church members often times when they're in conflict, forget the purpose of their church. Why are we here? We're here to glorify God. How do we glorify God? By making disciples. How do we make disciples? By going. That's what Matthew 28:18 through 20 says. That's what Acts 1:8 is all about, to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth. We are to be going. So, when we try, when we are all about bringing glory to God. We are about doing those things that he has commanded us to do. When conflict comes in and we freeze, and we refuse to do anything for fear of further conflict, we are not taking any risk. We forget why we're a church if we stop doing the things we have been called to do. All churches have some kind of conflict from minor disagreements to splits that just take a church apart. I get that, but my admonition to you, is don't let that conflict lead to complacency. It is one of the subtle but dangerous ways that Satan holds churches back. If you're going through this period of conflict instead of retreating, move forward and as you move forward you will see the blessings that God has instead of the complacency that you have by holding back.

LET US PRAY:

Dear heavenly Father, you know the purposes of our hearts and the will of all creation. Hear with mercy our confession that we have not cared for the things you care about and do the

things you want us to do – We have not cared for one another as you have commanded; we have not loved ourselves with the regard that honors wholeness and peace of mind.

Be our guide, our judge, our joy! Show us the way of your life abundantly and turn us always to the path so that we may live and move in renewed commitment to what is just and good.

We beg this in Jesus' name. Amen.