

"Relationships"
(What We Want the Most)
Monthly Comment – February, 2008

Relationship is the current theme around Christian Assembly these days. Transformed relationships! Relationships are the purpose of life. The alternative to relationships is zero, nada, nothingness, no one! That is bleak! On the other side of that continuum, is the awful pain that relationships often bring us. Such pain that may cause the announcement of some that they are headed for the woods to live as recluses.

That God has made people for relationship with Him and others is an understatement. The fact that we have language systems, mouths and ears to communicate, and hands to touch are frankly all the evidence needed, to confirm the relational rationale of the creature we call human.

In short, sin really messed up man's capacity for relationships both with God and people. We know nothing of human relationships before sin. There have been only three human beings on Earth that have at least some knowledge of what relationship looks like without sin. Jesus related sinlessly to God and people throughout His whole life. Adam and Eve we know had at least some time relating to God and each other prior to their sin, but what that relationship looked like, we have little information. By chapter three of Genesis, we see them both living in shame between each other in fear of God. Their relationship had quickly dissolved to blame-shifting each other, the serpent, and ultimately God.

Prior to the fall of our first parents in the Garden of Eden, there was no one to hide from and nothing to be shameful about. The first man and the first woman would have obviously noticed differences in their human anatomies, but no distinction or distinctiveness of a competitive or destructive nature is demonstrated. Truth is, in their original created state, they were created male and female and it says God "...blessed them and called them mankind in the day they were created" (Genesis 5:1). Eve was not named "Eve" until after they sinned (Genesis 3:20).

It is the sinful nature in mankind that causes the unpredictability in our relationships with God and people. In brief, the simplest point or purpose to the Cross of Christ is right relationships. In Christ all things are made new (2 Cor. 5:17). In Christ, as opposed to in Adam, "one new man...and peace" has been created (Eph. 2:15). In Christ, in the new man he has created, "...there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

Until relationships pass through the death process of Christ's Cross, unholy distinctions, conflicts and unpredictability will continue to be the norm in relationships with God and others. So let's change the norm!

Thank God for the Cross,

Mike

Weekly Comment – February 3, 2008

“What the world needs now is love, sweet love,” or so the lyrics of the song goes. A 60’s bumper sticker bandied the phrase “make love not war.” But all that came of that was AIDS. War hasn’t stopped in the least and the only love that is made is lust.

Truth is, man left to himself doesn’t do very good with this love stuff. Pure motive is sorely lacking in the non-Christian arena, even among the great philanthropists of our day. Take away the tax deduction for charitable giving or newspapers posting their name on the front page singing their praises and see how many gifts are given. Christian people don’t lag too far behind the non-believers in conflicted motives for love either. Pure love is tough to find because when it filters through the nature of man it gets soiled, to say the least.

I don’t know anyone born of Adam that could be unsullied by corrupted forms of love. It is not that mankind doesn’t want to love, because they do. It’s just that aside from God’s truth and assistance, pure love gets checked at the door. It’s not that mankind doesn’t have some pretty special moments of loving acts that warm our hearts, because they do; they just are far and few between and often contaminated by ill-motive.

God on the other hand is defined by love. “God is love,” the apostle says (1 John 4:8, 16). That can’t be said of me; at least I wouldn’t let it and I doubt you would say that of you either. That is pretty emphatic – God IS love! All that word connotes defines God. He is the sum total and flawless operation of love with no shred of “selfish” motive. God’s love, shows us the way!

For love is of God (1 John 4:7),

Mike

“Bringing People Close”
Weekly Comment – February 10, 2008

Wednesday night as I was speaking from John, Chapter 9, I came to the place where the religious leaders “cast out” of the synagogue, the man born blind but was now seeing because Jesus healed him (John 9:34). I began asking myself why people do this and it’s apparent that they do it because they have lost touch with their purpose in life, if in fact; they ever knew what it was in the first place. Casting people out should be the last thing on a believer’s dossier.

A number of supportive reasons played into this “dismissive” response of Pharisees to this man. We know they didn’t believe in who Jesus really was and we also know that they were very jealous of His popularity and obvious healings and miracles He was performing. We know they were fearful that if they didn’t stop Jesus somehow, that they were convinced the Romans would destroy their temple and outlaw their civil and religious forms & authority (John 11:48).

But beyond all that they really had no idea what their mission in life was and it certainly wasn’t to be casting people out. Pharisees for the most part were an arrogant people; proud people are not very teachable (John 9:34). Teachability is a huge element to being a disciple. Pride forbids humility and where there is no humility there will be no softness toward people – which is the mission! Loving God and loving people...not casting them out!

Thought you’d like to know!

Mike

“Common Good”
Weekly Comment – February 17, 2008

Pastor John Ortberg said, "If you want to be your own God, you have to settle for living in a tiny universe where there is only room for one person." Or said another way, "You'll only have room for whomever and whatever you can control."

The Apostle Paul tells us that, "...to each one the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). If we read Chapter 12 of 1st Corinthians correctly we discover that the Holy Spirit is the Divine Choreographer in the church here and all over the world. It is Him who gifts, equips, and places believers in the Body of Christ (the church). He doesn't do this so we are stand alones or stand-outs above everyone else. He gifts, equips, and places for "the common good."

Copernicus did two things in the 16th century that changed his world and ours. First, he discovered that the sun did not revolve around the earth, but the earth revolved around the sun. Secondly, he published those findings and the construct of the universe changed immediately to all who would believe him.

There probably needs to be a revisiting of Copernicus' discovery in all of us who call themselves Christians. Why? Because none would ever say they believe it, but most of us demonstrate we believe the world revolves around us by the way we live. Truth is we exist for Christ. We revolve around Him and He is the center of all we do; beyond that we desperately need each other. "The common good" includes us and excludes no one!

All for one, one for all (that's not original),

Mike

"It Works, Try It"
Weekly Comment – February 24, 2008

"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another" (Romans 12:10).

When it comes to relationships the Bible, has volumes to say. That shouldn't surprise us either. God is a phenomenally relational Being and so are people, since all people are created in His image and likeness.

When Adam went renegade in the Garden of Eden, all his relationships went bad. At the time he had only two, God and his wife. But let's face it, when you think about it...those are two highly significant and prized relationships.

But the Scripture at the top of this page does not have God or spouse specifically in mind; it has people in mind – any people!

Frankly, this is great counsel to employ in every relationship we encounter, even our enemies which come into play at the end of Romans 12. Giving love and affection isn't easy when the subject doesn't deserve it. But this Scripture isn't talking about something given out of debt for something earned, rather something given out of gratitude for what has been freely given us by God. None of us deserve anything good from God, let alone His passionate love for us. We often don't deserve any kindnesses from people either. Nonetheless, being kindly affectionate toward all is the "global warning" effect, to melting hearts that have become iced over.

It works, try it,

Mike