

## Be Different (Part V) – Be Kind

2/7/2010

The notes that follow each question below come from discussions that occurred after the sermon or further consideration of some of the issues raised. They should not be considered the “correct” answers by any means. It is hoped that they will provide a starting point for developing your own discussion of Pastor Steve’s sermons.

1. In this study we consider relationships with antagonists. In previous discussions in this series, we have considered relationships with people we know (brothers & sisters in the church, spouses, and business associates). Now we turn to antagonists (jerks) who we run into without much warning. Is it easier or harder to deal with people you know versus total strangers?

With total strangers you do not enter into the situation with as many preconceived notions. Further, you are unlikely to run into them again, so there are no long-term ramifications from this encounter. It gives one more flexibility in how to handle difficult interactions.

On the other hand, it’s easy to quickly get into an awkward situation because there is no history in either direction, so it is easy to be misinterpreted or to offend.

2. What does 1 John 3:18 have to say about our dealings with others?

This is one of the sources of the admonishment that “actions speak louder than words”. It is more credible for people to see us living a holy life than to hear us talking about it. Thus, we need to remember every day that our primary witness is the way in which we live our lives, not the eloquence with which we speak.

3. Pastor Steve pointed out that the audience for the Sermon on the Mount summarized in Matthew 5 was not the religious leadership. Who was it, and why is that important?

The audience was the common people of the area – peasants, farmers, fishermen, and merchants. Thus, he was giving instruction to people like you and me.

4. Read Matthew 5:38-39. What is wrong with making the punishment fit the crime? Shouldn’t we treat others as they have treated us?

As with the divorce papers discussed a couple of sermons ago, God gave the people a description in Exodus 21 of a fair system of justice to be administered in the courts. However, He has higher expectations for those who would follow Christ. Just living within the rules does not make us salt and light to those around us. It is when we live differently that people notice that difference and find it attractive.

Returning evil for evil puts evil in control. We need to live under grace to reflect the love of Christ. Our need to be in control, to deal out justice, comes from fear. Instead of keeping score and maintaining a long memory, we need to learn to love and forgive.

This is not natural. Only with God's help can we display the grace He has offered to all. Remember the example of Jesus on the cross turning to the admitted criminal who cried out to Jesus with his last breathes. Jesus responded that He would be seeing him in heaven that very day. There was no admonishment that it was just too late, that his crime was too great, that his lack of previous remorse was too significant, or any other criteria. In addition we all have sinned. No one sin is worse than other. Thus, none of us have the right to come into the presence of God, except that Jesus has made an appropriate and sufficient sacrifice to wipe the slate clean. If that's the case for us, it's also the case for everyone else, no matter how lost and despicable they may be this minute. Ten minutes from now, they may be in line for a room in the same mansion in heaven where we will be staying. God loves them and wants them with Him for eternity. It is our role to help plant the seeds that may cause that to happen.

5. Continue reading Matt 5:40-42. Does this sound like the Messiah who is going to free the Jews from Roman rule?

No. And He's not. The problem is that the Jews were looking for a new earthly king and Jesus was preparing them for the coming of the Holy Spirit. We have the benefit of the vantage point between the two comings of Christ.

6. This segment of Matt. 5 has four examples of where we are not to fight back or oppose someone who is an antagonist (a jerk) to us. What are they and can you give an example of each?

- a) When provoked, do retaliate – if slapped, turn the other cheek. Give the other person another chance. Be vulnerable.
- b) When attacked, don't lash out – if someone sues you for your shirt, offer your coat too. We need to be merciful, trying to understand the other person's situation. Be peaceable.
- c) When bullied, do bully back – if asked to carry a burden for a mile, offer to carry it a second mile. Interrupt your schedule; do the act with a kind heart. Be submissive.
- d) If someone annoys you, don't turn away – if they beg for stuff, be careful not to become hardened to their needs. It's easy to become "burned" and then begin judging. Jesus calls us to be generous.

We try to "fix" things through our actions. We value justice, self respect, and honor, but what is within you is more important than your ego or what others think of you or are doing to you.

Having said that, a couple of warnings to discussion leaders:

- a) this may open up some gaping wounds in the group, so be sensitive to hurting people having some pretty strong emotional reactions to this discussion.

b) one does not have to continuously accept evil.  
c) no matter how angry we are, we don't fix the situation by returning anger with anger. In fact, we can lose our life to anger. Anger leads to depression, which can lead to more severe problems. Anger puts evil in control and can possess us. It is like drinking poison hoping someone else will die.

7. So people slap you and you are to turn the other cheek; people beg from you and you are to give; people sue you and you are to offer more than they ask. What are the two principles that Pastor Steve described that keep our witness during these times aimed in the proper direction so that we can be salt and light to those around us?

- a) Your actions are not controlled by their actions, but neither can you control others. We can't make them stop. We can't make them sorry for what they have done to us. Furthermore, you can not control your reputation as it is seen by others. They will interpret you and your words and deeds as they decide to do so.
- b) I do have control over my own actions. I can offer to help, turn the other cheek, carry other's burdens, and display grace in the face of evil. Showing love is more important than achieving justice, retaining honor, or protecting self-respect.

8. So how do we get there? If overcoming evil is better than resisting evil, how do we put ourselves in a position to accomplish this?

- a) We need to remind ourselves that we can be a jerk to others, often without meaning to. We can say things or do things we think will be helpful or kind that are perceived as inappropriate or hurtful. Thus, we should not be too quick to feel attacked ourselves.
- b) We need to renunciate self. Not everything is about good versus evil. We never get ahead by getting even. Love will ultimately cause evil to fail because it runs out of the resistance that causes it to grow. Look at the example of the cross.

9. Read 1Peter 3:8-12 and consider the instructions Peter gives to the new Christians.

Do not return evil for evil or insult for insult, but give blessings instead. Turn away from evil and do good.

This is not natural. Retaliation and judgment come much more naturally to us. It doesn't seem fair that those who harm us would have an opportunity to be forgiven without the need to have been appropriately punished. And for some, hell seems the appropriate final resting place. Only with God's help can we reflect His love so that others will see Him in us. He does not want anyone to spend eternity in hell, no matter what they have done, as long as they still have one more breath to breathe. Our role is to be a help and not a hindrance in that ministry to all.