

Be Different (Part II) – Domestic Dispute

1/17/2010

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 our brothers and sisters, whether in our biological or church families. Why is it that maintaining good relationships with people we know pretty well can be harder than striking up a friendship with a total stranger?

This question may well evoke a pretty broad set of responses, including things like:

We know too much about each other – lots of dirty laundry in both directions
We have a history that might include conflict in the past with family
With family we are “stuck” in the relationship; with strangers, we can leave easily
We have drawn too many conclusions with family (prejudice dominates)
Strangers seem more interesting, novel, exciting

2. Having said all of that, why is it worth it to try to enhance our relationships within our biological or church family?

These are the people with whom we are likely to interact for the rest of our lives. If these relationships are poisoned, our lives and our heart are poisoned. Pastor Steve described relationships as the fabric of life, with significance greater than that of money, success, or even health. They can make us happy or make us miserable.

3. Relationships are all about connecting with others. This activity competes for our time and attention with our pursuit of achievements. Describe key components of “connecting” and “achieving” and where they might complement each other and where they are in obvious conflict.

Connecting can be as simple as making friends, which might be the basis for networking, which might aid in our achievements. That can be a constructive thing unless we are manipulating relationships solely to use people, rather than sincerely trying to establish friendships that would be mutually beneficial.

Connecting can involve falling in love, raising a family, and getting to know our neighbors. Achieving can include working at our job, meeting deadlines on projects at home and at work, attaining a certain status, and receiving recognition. Both require our time, attention, and energy. To the extent that we focus on one to the exclusion of the other, our lives are out of balance. For example, to the extent that we put all our energy into achievements and postpone relationships until we have “arrived”, we may find that relationships are difficult to reinitiate at that point.

4. In light of this tension between connecting and achieving, read Matt. 5:13-16 and try to apply those verses to this discussion.

If we are to be the salt and light of the world (as discussed in more detail in last week's guide), we are the link between the other world (described in the Beatitudes) and the real world (the world around us). People need to see the Kingdom of God through those Christians who exemplify it. If we are focused on achievements and not relationships, they will not see those characteristics in Matt. 5:1-10.

5. Why in Matt. 5: 21 – 26 does Jesus instruct the people to postpone their sacrifices to God until they have resolved their broken relationships?

To hate someone is just as bad as physically hurting them. You are killing their spirit and reputation by poisoning the relationship. Further, you can't love God with all your heart, soul, and mind if part of each of those is tied up in a conflict with a brother or sister. We tend to want to compartmentalize our relationship with God and isolate it from any of our "earthly" activities and relationships, but He created it all, so is involved and interested in it all. That's why there is a connection between our relationship with our brother and our relationship with God.

6. Describe the difference between "tension" and "conflict" and why tension is normal, but conflict is a problem.

- a) Tension is pulling in opposite directions. We always have a variety of views and opinions in our families and churches. Everyone has their point of view and their favorites, the things with which they are most comfortable.
- b) Conflict is when one strikes out against another. In this case, there is intent to inflict our will on someone else. We intend to "win" by beating the other person either physically or psychologically.

We just need to learn to live with tension. To the extent that there is more than one person involved in anything, there will be differences of views and opinions. We need to try to avoid turning it personal, which ignites conflicts. Once anger sets in (Matt. 5:22), then there is a tendency to lash out, as is shown in TV shows all the time.

7. What is wrong with wanting to be heard?

It is only a piece of a conversation. It is more important to listen for understanding. To the extent that we make our statement and then exit, we have cut off any hope of communication, which makes for a dreadful relationship.

8. Jesus says if there is conflict with another person we are to go to them and be reconciled. Whether or not this will be successful depends on a number of characteristics, motives, and attitudes that both parties have. Describe examples of each.

a). Open Mind vs. Closed Mind

Is the intent to make things better, to collaborate on a mutually-acceptable compromise, or to get our own way? Have we already decided what the solution must be? Is our need just to be heard, or are we more interested in listening?

b) Integrity vs. Duplicity

Do we clearly enter the discussion with the interests of everyone in mind, trying to be supportive and understanding, or are we silently waiting for the moment when we can strike? Are we flexible, waiting for the appropriate time to respond, or are we quiet because we are simply waiting for the other party to run out of steam?

c) Constructive Intent vs Destructive Intent

Are we approaching the other party as a peace maker, sympathetic to their feelings and hurts, or are we resolved to pull apart while expressing our disappointment in the behavior of the other party?

d) Soft Answers vs. Harsh Words

What words do we choose to use? Do we attempt to avoid inflammatory language or do we focus on unchangeables (status, heritage, history) and sprinkle lots of derogatory names and words in our statements?

9. So is the solution to avoid all disagreements? Read Luke 17:3-5 to get some guidelines on what is expected. How do we put this into practice?

No, there will always be disagreements, since none of us are exactly alike anyone else. The question is: "What happens next?". Our righteousness is based more on our relationship with others than the rightness of our position.

Luke 17:3-4 talks about forgiving someone seven times a day (even if he doesn't seem to deserve it other than that he continues to ask for forgiveness). That does not seem humanly possible, and that is true. Only with God's help are we able to do something like that. That will take a lot of faith, as expressed in v. 5 by the disciples.