

Relations with Others – 1

Intro:

1. So much of life is affected by our interaction with others. We live in families, work/play/learn with others. We live beside others, depend upon others for supply of earthly needs.
2. Much of the NT addresses our relationships with others. Various epistles such as Galatians, James and 1 Corinthians deal at length with relations with other Christians.
3. In short, much of the question of whether or not we will go to heaven depends upon how we interact with other human beings.

1. Unity in the Local Church

A. What is a local church?

1. It is a collective of individuals who have been redeemed from sin unto God. Saved people living in the same locale join together by mutual consent to fulfill group or collective responsibilities as outlined in God's word.
2. Local churches are thus diverse in constitution: Various cultures, socio-economic levels, family traditions/values, occupations, personality traits, opinions, preferences, intellectual capability, etc. will be found in congregations.
3. Overcoming these differences and creating harmony and peace is a great challenge.

B. Unity is not automatic. It takes focused effort to achieve and maintain.

1. Eph 4:3 – “*Endeavoring ... (spoudazontes)*”. This word suggests making haste, being zealous or earnest about one's objective. It is the opposite of apathy or indifference. Unity is made possible by the Spirit and His provisions; peace is the bond or tie that God desires among His people.
2. Jesus said “*blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*” (Mt 5:9). Barnabas excelled in this trait. The peacemaker has a broad view, is able to minimize differences and find common ground.
3. Jas 3:18 – Righteousness sown in peace by peacemakers creates a harvest of more righteousness. This figure introduces the agricultural concepts of plowing, sowing, cultivating, tending, protecting and harvesting – i.e., *work*.

- C. Congregations of the Lord's people should be enclaves of peace and unity in a world filled with strife, dissension, violence and treachery. The church is itself a result of God's peaceful reconciliation with a sinful world, and it should exemplify peace among men.

2. Emphasizing What Christians Have In Common

A. A common faith.

1. Everyone who has become a Christian has followed a common path. We have had to contemplate our sinfulness, admit our helplessness, accept God's remedy for sin (an atoning sacrifice) and be convinced of the identity of Jesus.
2. Thus, while many differences exist among Christians, *the most important aspects of our existence we agree on.*
3. Our whole focus of life – dependence upon, commitment to and love for our Savior – is the same. Thus even Christians who are unacquainted with each other often feel an immediate sense of familiarity (cf. Col 2:1-3).

B. A common heavenly Father.

1. Fleshly families are often bonded beyond individual differences because of common parentage. Our fellow man bears the image or "similitude" of God by virtue of his physical creation (Jas 3:9-10).
2. Christians, who are children of God via *His* election and *His* provision, are not individually privileged. We enjoy the *same spiritual parentage* and the blessings that flow there from. We are in the same family (Eph 2:19; Ph 2:14-15). "*For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother*" (Mt 12:47-50).
3. The great equalizer among men is our Father. If God loves my brother and has saved him, who am I to condemn him? Cf. 1 Jn 4:20-5:1; Rom 14:4, 10. The rebellious son's brother did not share his father's feelings for him (Lk 15).

C. A common work/purpose.

1. There is a natural camaraderie that flows from common objectives: soldiers, teammates, co-workers, etc. It is no accident that the Lord sent the apostles out in pairs, that Paul always had traveling companions, and that where possible Christians join themselves to a local assembly. The group is stronger than the individual parts considered separately.
2. Paul had a special affinity for fellow workers in the gospel: Rom 16:3; Ph 2:25, 29-30. Our names are in the book of life together (Ph 4:2-3).

3. An inactive church forfeits this sense of camaraderie.

D. A common enemy.

1. Men make treaties, pacts, alliances in order to protect and defend each other against common foes. They are willing to set aside their differences in order to strengthen each other against attack and the loss of their well-being.
2. The sinful man in Corinth (presumably the offender of 1 Cor 5) is to be restored upon his repentance and not considered an enemy (2 Cor 2:9-11; *“Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother”* – 2 Th 3:15).
3. Satan’s “devices” include taking our attention off him and attacking our brethren. When we do this, Satan wins. We must be unified in our opposition to Satan.

E. A common truth.

1. Certain documents we consider to be valid and true stand at the heart of our countries. Our Declaration of Independence includes the words, “We hold these truths to be self evident ...”. Political, environmental, social, humanitarian movements rest upon certain philosophies or ideologies adopted by adherents.
2. What stands at the heart of Christianity is *the Truth*. We recognize the divine origin of the Scriptures and willingly submit to them. We defer to God’s commands, thoughts and assessments of things rather than our own. Thus, there is a unity that comes from conforming to the same standard.
3. Thus, those who deviate from the gospel are “accursed” (Gal 1:6-9). We must *“hold fast the pattern of sound words”* (1 Tim 1:13). We must *“continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and ... not moved away from the hope of the gospel”* (Col 1:23). We must strive to *“speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”* (1 Cor 1:10).

3. Making Allowances Where Possible

- A. When we find ourselves at odds with each other, we must evaluate the basis of our differences. Unjustified division and disharmony is sinful and must be taken very seriously.
- B. It is a matter of opinion, judgment? Is it a doctrinal disagreement? Is a practice that is deemed sinful? Has someone hurt another by sinning against them?
- C. Our goal is not unity at all costs; such is merely union without the degree of spiritual oneness that should characterize the people of God.