

C. Disciples are Called to Relationship with OTHERS

John 13:31-35 ESV - 31 *When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. 32 If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. 33 Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

God has revealed through His Scriptures for millennia that mankind's journey on this earth is summarized by the manner in which two relationships are lived out. God commanded Moses to teach Israel the importance of these two relationships, first in the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai (Leviticus 19:18), and, second, nearly forty years later to the children of those whom God delivered out of Egypt now camped on the east side of the Jordan poised to possess the promised land (Deuteronomy 6:5). Jesus not only restates these commands during his public ministry, he also elevates the centrality of their importance to a proper understanding of all of the Scriptures:

34 But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. 35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:34-40 ESV)

The disciple's vertical relationship with God and horizontal relationships with others is the lynchpin to understanding and applying the truths of God's revelation of Himself in the Scriptures. Jesus is saying that His followers are to assess the fruit of their existence on this earth by the way their love, not only for Him but also for others, grows and matures.

It's not surprising that Christ followers are to view their love for God as their chief pursuit during their pilgrimage on this earth. However, many would not quickly classify our love for others on par with the chief pursuit of loving God. Certainly, our love for God is primary. Any person is in a much healthier spiritual state to extend love to any and all people if they are properly relating to God with a genuine love and passion for Him. But Jesus sees our love on these two planes as inseparable. That is, a true love of God always transforms our love of

others and our love for others points to a vital love for God. Isn't this what Jesus is alluding to when he says, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35)?

We can't rightly say we have a sound biblical understanding of God while our relationship with others is in shambles. In fact, a sound biblical theology ought to be reflected in a sound self-sacrificing love of people. This is so much the case that if you want to examine someone's theology you ought to not only give them an exam, but you also ought to examine their relationships.

For the disciple, they are called to love others on two relational fronts: their relationship to other believers in the CHURCH and their relationship to unbelievers in the WORLD.

5. Relationship to THE CHURCH...to whom they serve the debt of love and the gifts of the Spirit

a) The general stewardship of indebted love

The disciple's love for his or her brothers and sisters in Christ is a mark of their being Christ-followers. Paul likens this relational responsibility as a debt:

8 Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:8-10 ESV)

Paul, like Jesus, sees our love for each other as a summary or fulfillment of the law. To substantiate this point Paul quotes from the summary of the law, the ten commandments. For centuries teachers and scholars have noted that ten commandments are divided into two tables: the first four commandments are the table of our love for God and the last six commandments are the table of our love for others. Paul quotes from four of those six commandments from the second table.

It should be noted that in many of Paul's letters his challenges and commands of Christ centered relationships never stand first in the body of those letters. Instead, Paul reserves his teaching on relationship with others after first providing a thorough summary of God's love for His people by the

redemption purchased by Christ. This is not insignificant. Paul understood that the truths of the Gospel grasped and cherished by His people would transform relationships with one another. In other words, if a Christian's relationship with those in the church is to be redemptive then it is vital that they,

18...have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge...
(Ephesians 3:18-19 ESV)

So, it is no little thing that Paul makes it a habit to tell the church that their love of others ought to be like that of God's love of them through Christ:

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32 ESV)

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
(Ephesians 5:1-2)

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word (Ephesians 5:25-26 ESV)

To the degree a disciple embraces and lives by the redemptive grace of the Gospel is the degree by which he or she is able to extend that same redemptive grace to brothers and sisters in the church.

b) The special stewardship of gifted love

The call to love the saints entails not only a general debt of love to all but also a giving away of special gifts for ministry that God by His Spirit has graced every one of His children with.

10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (1 Peter 4:10-11 ESV)

Peter's teaching on spiritual gifts was brief but Paul's was rather extensive (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4:1-18). God has given spiritual gifts to every Christian (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11; Ephesians 4:7). These spiritual gifts are given not to edify or build up the steward of them, but those whom the steward serves with his or gifts.

So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. (1 Corinthians 14:12 ESV)

What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. (1 Corinthians 14:26 ESV)

7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." ...11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:7-8, 11-12 ESV)

All these gifts within any local community of God's people form a body which becomes a healthy, vital body to the extent that they serve one another with their spiritual gifts.

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free— and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13 ESV)

To the Ephesian church Paul is quite emphatic in pointing out the maturity that is experienced in the local body of believers who execute a faithful stewardship of spiritual gifts. They experience:

- the unity of faith (4:13)
- the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God (4:13)
- mature manhood (4:13)
- the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (4:13)
- no longer children tossed to and fro (4:14)
- bodily growth (4:16)
- build[ing] itself up in love (4:16)

Paul is very clear that only when “each part is working properly” (extending spiritual gifts to build others up) does the “whole body...grow” (Ephesians 4:16).

Is it any wonder that when the church is predominately made up of consumers who rarely, if ever, serve one another with their spiritual gifts it is a body that is sadly immature, disunified and easily swayed by the latest spiritual fad?

Paul identifies two reasons why churches sometime fail in their called stewardship to extend God gifts to one another.

- 1) **Many in the church are paralyzed in serving with their spiritual gifts because they feel “I don’t belong to Christ’s body.”**

15 If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body ...18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 1 Corinthians 12:15-18 ESV)

- 2) **Many in the church are paralyzed in serving with their gifts because others make them feel “You don’t belong to Christ’s body.”**

20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” (1 Corinthians 12:20-21 ESV)

Whatever the cause may be for the poor stewardship of the use of gifts in service to those in the church, the disciple is called to a lifelong journey of employing their spiritual gifts to build up his or her brothers and sisters in Christ.

...strive to excel in building up the church. (1 Corinthians 14:12 ESV)

6. **Relationship to THE WORLD...to whom they serve words and deeds of the gospel of grace**

Matthew 28:18-20 ESV - 18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

A disciple of Christ is not only called to serve the saints but also the lost. Disciples “go” into the world with the gospel that others, like them, would become followers of Christ. To “go” into the world as stewards of the Gospel is go in “word” and “deed”:

And he said to them, ‘What things?’ And they said to him, ‘Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people’ (Luke 24:19 ESV)

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:18 ESV)

a. Serve in Word

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17 ESV)

1) We share repentance and forgiveness of sin

. . . repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (Luke 24:47 NIV)

Q: How will people understand?

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24:45 NIV)

Q: How will people repent?

25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:25-26 NIV)

2) We share trusting in the power of the gospel, not anything in me, to save

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes... (Romans 1:16 NIV)

6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. (1 Corinthians 3:6-7 NIV)

3) We share on the basis of being a slave to our culture that as many as possible might be won

19 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23 NIV)

b. Serve in Deed

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. 14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:8-17 ESV)

Hearts of mercy not only proclaim the gospel, they act the gospel. Acts of mercy reveal the faith we claim to possess.