Developing Positive Relationships

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Our Relationship with God

Our relationship with God is based upon our relationship with Jesus Christ of Nazareth. The New Testament tells us that Jesus Christ of Nazareth was the only begotten Son of God. He is both God and man.

Romans 10:8-12

But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. (NKJV)

The experience we call salvation lays the foundation for an eternal relationship with God. Since we cannot currently see God physically we must accept His existence and actions by faith. However, Jesus gives us an insight into the nature and actions of God.

John 14: 6-7
Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.”

Verse 6 is a familiar verse for many Christians and clearly delineates that a full relationship with Jesus is the only way to have a relationship with God the Father. Verse 7 is often overlooked but holds a key to our relationship with God. When we see Jesus we see the thinking, attitudes, and actions of God.

Why do we take pictures of loved ones and friends? So we can “see” them when we are away from them. The New Testament Gospels paint a word picture of the life and actions of Jesus the Son of God. We cannot currently physically see Jesus, or God the father, or God the Holy Spirit. But through the inspired Word of God in the Gospels we have a picture of God that we can understand.

To build a relationship with someone requires that I spend time understanding who they really are. If I want to develop my relationship with God I must spend time in the word pictures of the Gospels in the Bible.

Our Relationship with Ourselves
Do you think highly of yourself? “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Romans 12:3). This is a commonly used scripture when dealing with self-esteem but it is almost always pulled out of context. Let’s look at the entire idea that Paul is presenting here.

Romans 12: 1-8

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

In verses 1 and 2 Paul sets up what he is about to tell us about spiritual gifts in verses 4 through 8. Verse 1 tells us that it is a reasonable (rational and realistic) decision to give ourselves completely to God. Verse 2 tells us that we are not to pattern (schematic) ourselves after the ideologies and philosophies of the world but engage in a metamorphosis, a transformation
through a renewal of our mind. As we know, the transformation of patterns of thought and understanding can be a powerful experience.

This is, to a great degree, the feeling we should experience as we move from our initial commitment to Christ and on into the sanctification of our life. It is this concept that sets up what Paul is saying in verse 3. What usually gets skipped over in translation is the phrase “…more highly than he ought to think,” It does not mean you cannot think highly of yourself, just don’t get infatuated with who are, “…think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.”

These verses set the context for Paul’s description of the grace gifts. You are to be everything God gifts you to be. In fact, Paul states, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them…” For the Christian, thinking highly of oneself is perfectly fine within the context of service and in the areas that God has gifted you. Just don’t get puffed up.

Our Relationships with Our Coworkers
1 Corinthians 12: 12-27 gives an excellent word picture of how members of the Body of Christ can function effectively and in harmony. This illustration could be applied to any group of people wanting to accomplish common goals. In verses 14 through 18 Paul uses the illustration of various parts of the human body to stress the importance of each member. Each member of the human body is in a sense “respected” for what it provides to the function of the entire body. Likewise each member of an organization should be respected for what they provide.

In verses 20 through 26 Paul describes how we adorn those parts of our human body that seem to be “unpresentable” with clothing that is honorable. While those parts that are presentable by themselves have no need of covering. Our culture influences us to give honor to those individuals who have no need of a “covering”. The focus is on performance in the public eye and physical appearance. There is nothing wrong with performing well or being attractive unless it causes us “to think of himself more highly than he ought to think”.

Generally speaking, in most societies, we cover our private organs, often with several layers of clothing. But is it not true that these are some of our most significant body parts? They are involved in the creation of human life. Yet they remain hidden for most of the time. Can we not see the significance in Paul’s description? Those members of the group that don’t have as much public exposure are just as significant as those that do. In Ephesians 4:1-4 Paul gives us some practical applications to foster unity:

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

What are the Ephesian believers being called to?
• with all lowliness and gentleness,
  o Lowliness refers to an inner virtue of humility brought about by comparing ourselves to Christ and not to others
  o So the believers in Ephesus were being called to humility and gentleness in their relationship with each other
• with longsuffering,
  o Longsuffering refers to could be called “the quality of being 'long-tempered” instead of being short-tempered
  o An ability to exercise control over one’s anger with the goal of letting it dissipate
  o This leads directly to the next statement
• bearing with one another in love,
  o to sustain, to accept with self-control
  o We all have habits or peculiarities that can be irritating to other people. This is not referring to sinful behaviors but the interaction of our different personalities
• endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
  o This spiritual unity can overcome cultural and ethnic differences. One of the most powerful testimonies of the early church was their ability to reach a broad spectrum of the Roman society.

A gentle, patient, understanding spirit leads directly to overall unity. There will be misunderstandings anywhere that humans are called to work together. Our goal should be to endeavor to build unity in our organizations. Not a shallow façade but a true and deep unity that exemplifies a Christ-like spirit.

Our Relationships with Those We Serve
1 Corinthians 9: 19-22

“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

If you look at the body of Paul’s writings and the record we have of his ministry in Acts you know that Paul had a commitment to what he believed and was not afraid to confront those that opposed him. He was not afraid to reprimand those believers whom he felt were drifting from the faith. But here in 1 Corinthians we see a strategy of Paul that served him well among the diverse groups that he ministered to and taught.

Paul adapted his style to cultural, ethnic, and societal influences that affected the people he wanted to reach. Always maintaining his doctrinal commitments he had no problem varying his style and approach to, “by all means save some.”

This is a good example for us as the diversity of the students we teach continues to grow. We need not abandon our commitment to the veracity of our subject by making a shift in our pedagogy. One of the things that I have noticed over the years is the decline of formality in the relationship between students and professors. I still get somewhat uncomfortable with “yo prof” but other than that I can allow for a flexibility in communication style. I still believe in using proper grammar and punctuation but I work to mirror the tone of the student.
Many students now enter our programs of study without a solid background in some subjects. Most of us can remember the days, especially in graduate school, when you were expected to supplement any lack of skills by extra study and research. The online environment offers the ability to move through courses quickly but it also heightens the impact of any academic challenges. Here is where I think that we can differentiate ourselves from other online environments. Paul said, “…to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak.”

Yes, it does take extra effort to walk a student through an assignment. I know they should be able to Google it themselves. However, we are called not simply to teach but to also reach. As with Paul our service becomes a platform from which we can provide both instruction and service. Many students have never experienced a teacher that really cared about them as a student, and more importantly, as an individual. Can we become all things to all men that we might by all means save some?