



The West End Encourager

March 5, 2017

Dealing With Others

Dealing with others is not always easy. What should I say? How much should I believe of what I hear? Is there another side to the story I've been told? Am I being fair in my dealings with others? These and other questions must be answered.

When we deal with others there is always the potential for differences to arise. When those differences come it is easy to forget to use some common sense rules in our conflict. We are not always as fair in dealing with those we disagree with as we are in defending ourselves or those with whom agree.

For some time I have been thinking about how brethren treat one another. I have thought about how many problems are simple misunderstandings. It seems to me that we are not always as careful as we ought to be. As I have thought and talked with others, some basic rules come to mind that we ought to follow.

1. Pray for wisdom (Jas. 1:5). If there is any time we need wisdom it is when we deal with those with whom we disagree. Let us pray that we may have the wisdom to know: (a) how to approach others, (b) what we should say and what we should not reveal, (c) what I should believe and what I should reject of what I hear, (d) the good that is in other people, and (e) how slow or fast I need to be in my conclusions.

2. Be careful what you say. Any of us could easily get carried away and say things that we would later wish had not been said. The proverb writer said, "He who restrains his lips is wise" (Prov. 10:19). We must be careful what we say to and about others. It may be information that others have told us in confidence. It may be that the one to whom we give the information may not honor our request to keep it confidential. Let us be "slow to speak" (Jas. 1:19) knowing that "a tale bearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter" (Prov. 11:13). We don't have to tell all we know. "A fool vents all his feelings, But a wise man holds them back" (Prov. 29:11).

We must be careful how we choose our words. Let's make sure we are conveying the right idea. If we are not cautious, our words can be like the "piercing of a sword" (Prov. 12:18). We must watch what we say and how we say it. Remember, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1).

Let us also be careful lest we say something detrimental to others. "The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor" (Prov. 11:9; cf. v. 13; 20:19). It is possible that I could be telling things about others when I don't have all the facts. What I say could destroy the name and reputation of others.

3. There are two sides to the story. In some situations there is some fault on both sides. Thus, both of the parties at odds have some legitimate points. However, there are some situations where the two sides are the right side and the wrong side. Still, there are two sides.

The questions I must ask myself are: Am I listening to and believing the wrong side? Am I taking the wrong side? Have I considered the other side of the story? There may be more that I need to know before I draw my conclusions and state them. The proverb writer said, "The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him" (Prov. 18:17). Whoever tells his side first makes it sound good.

4. Don't jump to conclusions. Too often we take a little information and fill in more gaps than are there. We can easily assume motives that we have no way of knowing. I wonder how often our talk and criticism about others would change if we deleted everything but the real facts that we know.

The proverb writer warned, "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him" (Prov. 18:13). Let us not be hasty in our words (Prov. 29:20).

5. Give others the benefit of the doubt. Love "believes all things" (1 Cor. 13). It gives a person the benefit of the doubt. That means when a questionable situation arises where you could put more than one construction on it, believe the best. When a problem arises and you can put either a good or bad motive on it believe the best. After all, don't you want others to do that with you (Matt. 7:12)?

Yes, these rules are simple. But, with a little application we can avoid a lot of friction and misunderstanding.

Donnie Rader

As you read this, Jack and I should be about 10 hours from home (likely flying through Russian air space). Thank you for all your prayers, and Lord willing, we'll see you soon!

My People is the Enemy

This is the name of a most challenging book published last summer by Holt, Rinehart and Winston. The author is William Stringfellow, one of the leading Episcopal laymen of the day, and a lawyer with an international reputation in his field. He articulates a question that is coming increasingly to trouble the minds of thoughtful denominational leaders — and which has most serious implications for the churches of Christ.

Mr. Stringfellow examines the whole idea of modern religion's involvement in the "social" questions that trouble our generation. The churches of our day, he opines, are engaged in everything from playgrounds to politics, and from rental housing to racial revolutions. But have they put their eggs in the wrong basket?

He thinks maybe they have.

This book clearly warns the churches against plunging into "all sorts of social work and social action" and thereby neglecting their basic reason for existence, "the proclamation and celebration of the gospel." In their efforts to alleviate man's physical distress, and to relieve his want and hunger, Stringfellow argues that the churches have so "watered down" the gospel as to make it lose its power.

He Writes:

"If the gospel is so fragile that it may not be welcomed by a man who, say, he's hungry, unless he first be fed, then this is no Gospel with any saving power; this is no word of God which has authority over the power of death.

"The Gospel, if it represents the power of God unto salvation, is a word which is exactly addressed to men in this world in their destitution and hunger and sickness and travail and perishing — addressed to them in a way which may be heard and embraced in any of these, or in any other, afflictions."

Stringfellow, who left Harvard Law School several years ago to live and practice his profession in the Harlem ghetto of New York City is particularly critical of what he calls the "urban church concept" of Christianity. "The premise of most urban church work," he declares, "is that in order for the church to minister among the poor, the church has to be rich, that is, to have specially trained personnel, huge funds and many facilities, rummage to distribute and a whole battery of social services. Just the opposite is the case. The church must be free to be poor in order to minister among the poor.

"The church must trust the Gospel enough to come among the poor with nothing to offer the poor except the gospel."

A church rich and affluent can hardly do that; a church poor and humble can. The gospel of Christ, as it is, is adapted to man as he is — miserable, hungry, frustrated, lonely, overburdened with grief, anxiety, and a sense of futility.

The churches of Christ have traditionally understood this. There has been very little of the "social gospel" emphasis among them. Not until lately. But now we are witnessing a significant change. A strong undercurrent of "social gospelism" is becoming quite evident. A tremendous proliferation of "orphan homes" just when the denominational churches and social welfare agencies were turning from them to other and more acceptable forms of child care was but the beginning, and was but a symptom of the real trouble. Vast sums have been spent and are being spent in a wide variety of "social project" efforts among the Churches of Christ. They range all the way from summer camps to homes for unwed mothers to rehabilitation farms for wayward boys and hobby shops for restless housewives. There is a subtle (and probably unrecognized) loss of faith in the power of the gospel. These social projects are not the spontaneous fruit coming from the hearts of dedicated Christians; they are supervised "organizational projects" of congregations. And they are frankly being promoted as "bait" to intrigue the interest and soften up the resistance of the non-Christians! The ill-housed, ill-clad, and ill-fed are not going to be interested in the gospel; we must first see that they are well-housed, well-clothed, and well-fed!

Denominational churches have tried this approach. And now Stringfellow's is only one thoughtful voice among many that are being raised to question the assumption. At the very time when our brethren are turning toward these social projects, the discerning ones in denominational circles are questioning the validity of this entire point of view. It is built on a false premise . . . or so Stringfellow contends.

We believe the conservative congregations will not quickly adopt the "social gospel" approach to win people to Christ. And it is quite possible that many even in the more liberal churches will question it. But for all of them, both conservative and liberal, this new book by William Stringfellow ought to be "required reading."

Fanning Yater Tant, November 19, 1964

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Meeting Times:

Sunday Bible Study: 10:15am
Worship Service: 11:15am
Tuesday Evening Study: 7:30
All Are Very Welcome!

TODAY'S SERVANTS

Song Leader: Den
Reader: James O. (Job 38)
Lord's Table: Charles
Server: Isaac
Opening Prayer: Noli
Closing Prayer: Ethran

NEXT WEEKS SERVANTS

Song Leader: John
Reader: Jack (Job 39)
Lord's Table: James O.
Server: Philip
Opening Prayer: Shawn
Closing Prayer: Abraham