

Simply Christian: The Mystery of Relationships

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We all ache for relationships, and yet we find relationships difficult. We're made for each other, yet making relationships work, let alone making them flourish, is remarkably difficult.

The followers of Jesus are supposed to be known by their love for one another. But it's a rare thing when we find churches that go out of their way to maintain healthy relationships with other Christians in their community and with other churches, and teach their membership to maintain healthy relationships with each other.

We're going to look at some of the things that make for great relationships in the church.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)

What is it that distinguishes the Christian church from the rest of the world? Unity.

Great relationships don't happen automatically. We have to be passionate about unity.

"Make every effort." It is almost as if the apostle Paul was saying, "Spare no expense. Be urgent. Be passionate. Don't settle for just OK in your relationships." Stop settling for a certain amount of relational disharmony.

This is one of the few things that God tells us to keep him waiting for until we accomplish it (Matthew 5). In other words, first make every effort to be at peace and then worship God.

Matthew even ties our forgiveness from God to our forgiving people who have hurt us. (Matthew 6:14-15).

This business of making every effort means that if we want to keep our relationships going with each other, it is going to take work.

You can't live with broken relationships with others unless you're prepared to live with a much less than perfect fellowship with your God.

Maintaining unity doesn't just involve work. It involves wounds (John 20).

If you want unity and healed relationships, if you want to be a peacemaker, you're going to be wounded also.

"Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love."

Pride is behind so much of our discord and our relational breaks with each other. Pride says, "I have to look good. I have to save face." Humility says, "I don't care about that. I value the relationship over me saving face and looking good."

If I want to have good relationships with others, I can't be thin-skinned and easily offended.

If you want to maintain a relationship, you can't focus on people's weaknesses.

If we tolerate broken relationships with each other, if we settle for less than the best, it's because we don't understand who God is and we don't understand what he intends for the church.

RECOMMENDED READING

Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense
by N.T. Wright

Connecting: Healing Ourselves and Our Relationships
by Larry Crabb