

Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love - In Action

Readers Theater -

Our vision statement expresses our desire to live out Jesus' way in our thoughts, feelings & actions. This involves gaining more self control, spiritual growth and being eager to learn better conflict management skills for our own conflicts and to help others in their conflicts. As we agree and disagree in love, people see God's love in us.

Ken Sande, who wrote the book *The Peacemaker* has this to say about conflict. "When I first began to practice law, I was excited about the prospect of helping people solve problems and settle disagreements. Before long, however, I learned that...The adversarial process is designed to resolve legal issues, not to reconcile people or help them change the attitudes and habits that lead to conflict

"So I began to work to not only solve legal issues but also to promote genuine peace by restoring broken relationships and helping people change in constructive ways. I soon discovered the personal aspects of conflict often are more complicated than the legal considerations. Interpreting a contract can be challenging, but it is nothing compared to dealing with the attitudes and emotions that lead to and grow out of conflict."

Ken Sande continues, "As I applied the peace making principles presented in God's Word, I discovered that they are remarkably effective in today's complicated society...(and) they are equally effective in my personal life. I have found this to be the case even when I am dealing with people who do not profess to be Christians."

So what can we learn or relearn today about handling ourselves, our attitudes and emotions when conflict, disagreements, and tensions arise?

Last week we looked at our thought life, today we study our actions. We are using the Action section of the Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love paper. **The first point is, go directly to those with whom we disagree and avoid behind the back criticism.** Very straight forward. Simple right?

Jesus said, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother

or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother or sister; then come and offer your gift." (Mt 5:23-24)

This step is so important that Jesus said, I don't want your money, I don't want your worship, if you haven't done what you can to be in harmony with a brother or sister. Not talking face to face sets up the other steps for failure.

At least, two things occur when we don't talk face to face. One, we often talk to others. This creates air pollution. In the language of triangling, instead of person A talking to person B about an issue, person A talks to person C, to complain, grouse and to get them on their side against B. So the community has to deal with air pollution.

A second result of indirection communication is, we start making assumptions. We start over thinking. We start analyzing. Persons A and B start picking apart every little phrase or facial expression or action each other makes. They both start playing negative mind games.

For example I led a mediation between two men and we started by them describing how their relationship broke down. It started when man A didn't shake man B's hand one morning at church. Then man B started to over think instead of overlook. So man B did something. This caused man A to start being more sensitive. It ended up with both men assuming the worse about each other and then bad mouthing each other to church members and to people in the community.

When we met, in two hours they described how they over thought and over reacted because of a lot of non verbal events and their own assumptions about each other. Then for two more hours they patched up their friendship and crafted a plan to act and think differently. Not speaking directly usually causes more problems. We tend to pollute the air and assume the worst of each other. It's easier to head off or resolve disagreements at the source, right away, before layer after layer of puss and dirt gets built up which adds to the conflict.

Two additional comments about talking face to face. First, If we want to over look what occurred

– make sure we are really over looking it. Also be sure it's not a sin. We are to help others caught in sin. If you keep thinking about it or talk about it or are extra careful around the other person – you are not over looking it. So go face to face.

Second, in the original version of this document, it has a star beside it. It's the only point with an asterisk. That star leads to the following advice. Go directly if you are European North American. In other cultures disagreements are often addressed through a trusted go-between.

I understand the cultural aspect of this advice, but doesn't scripture have precedence over cultural habits? Doesn't biblical advice speak to culture instead of the other way around? Jesus was speaking in a Near Eastern culture that I'm told has a tendency to use go-betweens. So why didn't Jesus say, "Go to the village or clan mediator and ask them to talk with so and so about such and such?" I think Jesus meant what he said about direct face to face conversation. Matthew 18 verse 15. "If your brother or sister sins against you, go and show them their fault, just between the two of you." So I question this asterisk.

On the other side of this issue, I think sometimes, in some situations and for some people, in our culture and in other cultures, it's good to ask someone to help you speak and accompany you in talking with some one else. It's important to feel safe. But don't set it up to be two against one. So there are recognized exceptions but the point still is – deal with issues that come up between you and some one else, quickly and directly, even if you need someone to help you. Don't delay so you can get back to tithing and worship.

Furthermore we are to take the initiative. Even if we believe we have not done anything wrong. In addition, we have the spiritual responsibility if we believe sin is involved. Note that Jesus' command is not limited to situations where the other person has something justifiable against you. Jesus said to be reconciled if your brother or sister has some thing against you. This implies the obligation exists whether or not we believe the complaint is legitimate. This is a command that helps us live in peace and shalom. It also helps us learn about ourselves. Maybe we don't know we are doing

something that's harmful. We need to know that for the sake of fellowship and our own growth.

So when we go, **we are to go in gentleness, patience and humility.** That's the second major point in this sermon and step 5 in the document. If we go to another person with the attitude of straightening them out – conflict will increase.

The advice to be gentle, patient and humble is a good one. It helps keep conflict at a manageable level. In our Galatians verse for this point, notice the emphasis. "If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore them gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

Isn't that great wisdom? Go help restore someone, but be careful because one day you will have to be restored. So don't get high and mighty. Don't be a big head. Carry each other's burdens to stay gentle, patient, & humble. One day you will want someone to be gentle, patient & humble with you.

We can do this by doing the second part of this instruction. "Place the problem between us at neither doorstep and own our part in the conflict instead of pointing out the others." So along with looking at the situation from different angles, we attempt to stand next to each other and work with the problem. Instead of you arguing from your perspective and I argue from mine, we try to see each others perspective together. We especially try to learn Jesus' perspective. Furthermore, this tells us to focus on the issue and not on the person.

Next, **go with a listening spirit.** We probably don't have all the information about the situation. Proverbs 18:13 warns us, "They who answer before listening – this is their folly and shame." James 1:19 advises us, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." Good advice right? Makes sense?

When we go to someone in an impatient, non gentle, non humble spirit, we can't listen well, and often it becomes our folly and shame. Do we get a sense of the spiritual wisdom of the persons who put this document together? They are passing on Jesus' command to solve misunderstandings, sins and disagreements, quickly and directly. Then they give us tools on how to do it so that we are

less likely to end up in full blown conflict. Notice the progression. Go take care of the issue. Get your relationship back on track. But do it in a gentle, patient and humble way, looking together at the issue, with the intent on listening, learning, and carrying the other's burden. What a great method for managing ourselves and helping others to manage themselves.

So why is it so hard to do? It is so easy for us to be quick to be judgmental, disgusted, and take sides. I've done this at least a time or two. "Rose, where did you put the Minister's Manual?" Rose, my wife who is a minister responds, "You had it last." I respond, "No I didn't. Come on – get it from where you put it!" Then after I nag on her a while, I find the manual in my vehicle – not hers. I'm sure no one here has had this kind of encounter. Or maybe it happened an hour ago.

It's interesting to me the writers of this document don't mention log and speck theology. Jesus said take the log out of our own eye instead of focusing on the speck in the other person's eye. They don't mention, judge not that you be not judged here. But that advice is very much a part of this step.

It's common knowledge that we notice things in others that we are dealing with ourselves. This point reminds us to not set ourselves up as accuser, judge and jury. The Galatians verses that back up this advice remind us to grow in the Fruits of the Spirit. The Romans verses remind us to pass on to others the same kind of kindness, tolerance, patience and brimming over blessing we have received from God. Going to each other, being responsible for and to each other, helping each other with these skills, attitudes and actions are to help each person build up the fellowship of the kingdom of God. That's the end goal.

Then the next advice, number 7 in the document, is **suspend judgments, avoid labeling, end name calling, discard threats & act in a nondefensive, nonreactive way**. Notice, like the other steps, this advice is about how we are to act. The responsibility is all on the person going and their self control. It's common knowledge we notice things in others that we are dealing with ourselves. This point reminds us to not set ourselves up as accuser, judge and jury. Going to each other,

being responsible for and to each other, helping each other with these skills, attitudes and actions, help each person build up the fellowship of the kingdom of God. That's the end goal. Jesus is glorified and our Anabaptist witness is clear.

Notice how each of these points help us manage ourselves and others so that conflict stays at a manageable level. Our last point in this section on action is: **work through the disagreements constructively**. Six specific steps are listed in the document as well as in the bulletin insert. The points focus on how to help others in a disagreement. But they also help us manage ourselves when we are in disagreement.

These steps are a road map to guide us in being restored and in helping others be restored. Sales people learn skills on how to sell their product. Many say the toughest part is to get out of the house and go sell. It's not learning about their product or how to sell, it's simply getting started. So just like with evangelism – Jesus says, go. Get started. We are responsible to share and model this way of living, so our lives powerfully demonstrate the values we have and vision statement we developed.

Let's end by reading together the statements under part E that are in our bulletin insert.