

April 24, 2016

Prepared for Works of Service

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" Ephesians 2:10

"...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Ephesians 4:11-13

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." Matthew 5:9

"Live in harmony with one another..." Romans 12:16

"Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:2-3

We have talked before about the importance of unity in our relationships with others. Works of service and unity of the Spirit go hand in hand and conflict is a major obstacle to both. We know that we need to overcome conflicts and be one as Jesus prayed we would be, but the fact of the matter is we live in conflict most of the time.

What is conflict? Simply stated, conflict exists when two or more people who share space and time want, need, or believe different things. Obviously then, we are more likely to be in conflict with those we share space and time with the most, so we tend to be in conflict with family, friends, co-workers and church family members more than anyone else.

How do conflicts work? Every conflict begins in the same place. I want, need, or believe something. You want, need, or believe something different and we are in the same place and time. We are in conflict. Does that mean we have constant fights? Of course not! The truth is; most of our conflicts are easily settled.

Conflicts become destructive when we decide our want, need, or belief is 'right' and must be vindicated, in other words, we must win! More often than not we choose to believe in our 'rights' because in some way we have come to believe that not being 'right' is a threat. Once I wrap my position in "right" we will probably end up in some form of fight.



The first rational realization we need to accept is that we are seldom 'right' in what we want, need, or believe. Only God is 'right' and therefore righteous. We are not 'right' or righteous. Nearly all of our wants, needs, and beliefs are simply a matter of opinion; ours! That does not mean they are not real or correct or valuable, but that doesn't make them right.

Once we have wrapped our wants, needs, and beliefs in a cloak of 'right' we can and usually will go to war to win, which of course, means the others involved must be lose. Since few of us have the self-control to give up our way at this point most of us will let our conflicts end in fights. And, fights nearly always end up in broken relationships.

For a people who are commanded to ***"Make every effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit..."*** this cannot be. The secret of overcoming our conflicts is to give up our 'rights' and instead

work together to build solutions. How? Here is a simple five step plan for building solutions when we are in conflict:

1. Decide what you want, need, or believe and clearly state that as an outcome. "I want to buy a new four wheeler" vs. "I want to buy a new couch." Don't focus on why; focus on what.
2. Decide how important achieving this outcome is to you? Assign it a value: 1=no important; 10=essential to survival.
3. Determine ways in which everyone achieves their desires through mutual effort. Working together can everyone get their want or need or hold their belief?
4. Determine which mechanism for achieving everyone's want or need or belief has the best chance of working.
5. Agree on this mechanism as the solution to the conflict remembering that no one is allowed to sabotage the plan.

When we are trying to solve conflicts the key is to remember that every conflict for which we fail to build a solution will return again and again. Living in unity is no easy task, but failing to do so keeps us from ever effectively serving others and achieving our purpose as children of God. M