



GETTING ALONG

Jesus said in John 13:35 that the world would recognize His disciples because of their love for one another. Apparently our love for the brethren is to be evident. It follows that if we are known for our love for one another, peace and harmony should exist among us. We should get along. But this harmony isn't automatic. We must learn to get along with others in the body of Christ, including those who are different from us. Then we must practice what we have learned. This lesson will help you learn what God says about fitting into the rest of the body of Christ in ways that preserve peace and harmony.

I. WHY A PROBLEM WITH GETTING ALONG?

As the message of the kingdom goes forth across the world, what kinds of people does it gather? (Matthew 13:47)

Within any local congregation there are people with very different backgrounds. There are those who were raised in Christian homes and those who were not. There are those who are outgoing and forceful and those who are shy and quiet. There are young and old, each with differing needs and perceptions. There are beginners and veterans. There are people with opposite political persuasions and varying incomes. Adding to this complexity is the normal potential for misunderstanding and misinterpretation that exists in every other group of people. What a challenge to call upon people with so many differences to get along!

In the New Testament we find evidence that sometimes Christians don't get along as they should. Read Philippians 4:1-3. We know nothing more of these ladies than what is mentioned here, but it is evident that they were having trouble getting along. Paul urged them to solve their problem and live in harmony.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-11. Again we find Christians at odds with one another with Paul exhorting them to be united.

Perhaps you have seen such problems among Christians. Obviously Jesus does not want it to be this way. We must learn to prevent relational rifts and repair them when they appear. The six principles of this lesson will help you learn to get along with others.

II. SIX PRINCIPLES FOR GETTING ALONG.

Although this list doesn't exhaust the subject, many of the situations that come between Christians can be addressed as each principle is mastered and learned. Consider each carefully and try to imagine how it fits into real life.

A. RECOGNIZE THAT GOD REQUIRES US TO GET ALONG.

How important is it that you live peacefully with your brother or sister in Christ?
(Matthew 5:23-24)

From the verse above it appears that God doesn't want our worship until we have made every effort to be reconciled with other Christians. What word is used to describe the kind of effort we must put forth to be at peace? (Ephesians 4:3)

How important is our attitude toward our brethren in Christ? (1 John 2:9; 4:21-22)

What two words are used to describe the kind of love we are to have for our brethren in Christ? (1 Peter 1:22)

God doesn't just *suggest* that we get along. He *requires* it.

B. COMMUNICATE.

We build strong relationships by communication. Consider a young courting couple. When they first meet they are strangers. But as time passes, they draw closer and closer by communication. They find it easy to talk for hours at a time. We draw together through communication.

Likewise, we draw apart when there is no communication. You have probably known the experience of being reunited with an old friend that you haven't seen for many years. You expect it to be like old times, but so often it isn't. Why? No communication.

Here is a problem. When someone hurts us or there is a sharp misunderstanding, the last thing we want to do is communicate with the offender. It is much easier (and more common) to withdraw and lick our wounds. We nurse a grudge in silence. We're hurt. We may even talk to others (the wrong kind of communication in such cases) spreading hard feelings around. This is very dangerous as bitterness can develop into full-blown

hatred. What are Christians to do instead? We are to communicate with the one with whom we are at odds.

Considering what has just been said, how are “many defiled” as described in Hebrews 12:14-15?

If a brother or sister in Christ sins against you (intentionally or not) what are you to do? (Matthew 18:15)

Paul wrote of the urgency of communication when problems arise in Ephesians 4:25-32. Read the verses and answer these questions:

What two things are we told to do with our Christians brother?

Would it be acceptable to pretend all is well while we are really nursing a grudge?

How long should we go before attempting to settle a situation that has provoked our anger? (See verse 26) Sometimes people hold things in for months and even years. Finally they explode in the kind of rage that surprises everyone. Much damage is done. How much better it is to settle things when they are more manageable!

Who has a golden opportunity when we don't communicate? (See verse 27)

How can we follow the command to “*be angry, yet do not sin*”? (See verse 26, 29)

Who is grieved when we don't communicate the truth? (See verse 30)

How are we to approach one another when it is time to communicate the truth? (Ephesians 4:15)

C. DON'T JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS ABOUT OTHERS.

Sometimes rifts develop because people jump to hasty conclusion. For instance, someone concludes, "That person doesn't like me," when actually, if the truth were known, the person is simply shy or doesn't know what to say or how to say it. Clearly this sort of reasoning can cause problems because we can develop opinions of others based on wrong data. The Bible calls this "evil surmising" or "evil suspicions." (See 1 Timothy 6:4)

What should be done before reaching a conclusion about something or someone?
(Proverbs 18:17)

What warning does Proverbs 20:25 give us about hasty conclusions?

If you find that substantial suspicions arise in you about another person, be sure to get the facts before coming to conclusions. You may even need to go to the person face-to-face. This is far better than being wrong.

D. DON'T GOSSIP.

Gossip is to strife what a sneeze is to the common cold. It is the transportation system that carries the infection to others.

Notice the appearance of gossip in Romans 1:29-32. What are those who practice such things worthy of? (See especially verse 32)

Webster's Dictionary says of gossip, "Familiar or idle talk; scandal; to tell idle or useless tales about others."

To eliminate gossip, it has helped some to consider the following questions before repeating a story about another:

1. Will this hurt someone?
2. Does this have a purpose? (Watch out! Proverbs 26:22)
3. Is it true?
4. Would I be willing to repeat this information in the presence of the one it is about?
5. Will this spread strife?

What should a person do if strife is already kindled due to his or her gossip? (Get ready. This is going to be complicated!)

1. Shut up! (Proverbs 26:20)

E. BE WILLING TO OVERLOOK THE FAULTS OF OTHERS.

Read Proverbs 19:11. What is commended here? Must we recompense every wrong done to us?

Who is our Great Example in this? (Colossians 3:12-13)

What can help us overlook the wrongs of others? (1 Peter 4:8)

What can a person do if the wrong is too big to overlook? They must communicate as we have already discussed. At no time does any Christians have the option to nurse a grudge.

F. BE WILLING TO FORGIVE.

Sometimes someone will come to *us* to communicate sorrow for a wrong done. Read Matthew 18:12-25. Can you refuse to forgive them if they ask?

Forgiveness, in the practical, “how-to” sense, amounts to a promise never to bring up the issue of blame again. This promise includes bringing the wrong up to the person who wronged us, to another person, or to ourselves in brooding. One who says, “I forgive” functionally says, “I promised never to bring this up again. If I do, it will be sin on my part.”

What did Paul say we should do in Ephesians 4:31-32 that will help in getting along?

Is there something in this lesson that you need to begin to practice right away? Someone you need to talk to? If so, write it in the space below, then go do it.