

Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church
Sunday School- Spring, 2018
A Life of Relationships

Week 1: Introduction to Biblical Relationships

I. Overview

A. Where are we going? (A life of Spirit-filled relationships- Ephesians 5:18-6:9)

1. Vertical and horizontal
2. Concentric circles

B. How will we get there?

1. Creation of relationships
2. Fall of relationships
3. Redemption of relationships

II. The Unavoidability and Religious Nature of Relationships

A. Relationships are in our DNA (Romans 1:18-32)

1. The vertical
2. The horizontal

B. The myth of neutrality

“I’m just not a religious person...I don’t have or want/need a relationship with God.”

“I’m more of a loner; I’m just not a relational person when it comes down to it.”

“I have no relationship with my parents; I don’t see how I ever could...”

C. The dangers of selfish and prideful approaches to relationships

“I enjoy my relationship with God because it really helps me feel like I am becoming the person I always wanted to be...”

“I am very angry with God; I can’t believe he would take from me what he did.”

“I am pretty a good person; I am not perfect, but yes, I do believe God should love me.”

“I enjoy relationships in which I am in control. I’m just not the kind of person to follow other people’s orders.”

“I don’t know what I would do if I didn’t have the approval of my parents/employers/children, etc. I’ll do anything to prevent that from happening.”

“I’m not the type of person to openly confront others. To be honest, I am more of the passive aggressive type.”

“I stick to myself and my schedule; I find I get a lot more done that way and don’t have to deal with all of the headaches that working with others so often brings.”

“I am scared to death of relationships; if others truly knew me, they would certainly reject me...” or “I am just a closed, private person— that’s all.”

“I know a lot of people well, but really, very few people truly know me;” or “A lot of people know me, but I know very few people.”

“I love to talk about theology, business, sports, movies, etc. with others, even with my closest friends. But I am not sure I have ever invited someone into my inner world.”

“I like spending time with successful people; frankly, it makes me feel successful.”

“I am a very competitive person. Relationships serve as benchmarks to me on how I am doing compared to others.”

“I am a fault-finder in relationships. The least little thing can just set me off. But hey, I don’t think it’s too much to ask to have some expectations in the relationships that I have. Often, that’s the only thing that motivates others to really engage or change.”

“I enjoy people as a general rule, but I have little to no patience for people who treat me unfairly.”

“I love my church; I have just the gifts it needs;” or “I love my church; it has just the gifts I need.”

“I sort of like the people I like; you know, birds of a feather flock together.”

“I am not saying I want to be a prude sexually, but I mean, a society has to have boundaries;” or “Who are you to tell me what I can and cannot be or do sexually?”

“A woman has the right to choose— it’s her body, after all!” or “Euthanasia can be merciful in some situations...”

“Absolute free markets all the way! Those who are motivated will survive...” or “Universal everything all the way! After all, it takes a village.”

“Yeah, I go to church— but are you saying your church practices church discipline?! Didn’t that stop with the Inquisition? Seriously, you guys should wear costumes or something.”

D. Other misconceptions/confusions about relationships

“Relationships, it seems to me, are a sort of necessary evil to hold society together.”

“Sin really prevents true relationships for us as humans. Oh well, it sort of is what it is.”

“I don’t have time for relationships with other humans because I so highly value my relationship with God.”

“I want to love God, but honestly, loving people has a lot more attraction to me. I can see people and read their reactions— it is sometimes like God is not even there.”

E. Common threads to wrongheaded approaches to relationships- Human autonomy

“I need...” “I demand...” “I decide...” “I define...” (Notice the intellectual and moral self-righteousness/pride— *I know, feel and live* better than you based upon a standard I deem obvious.)

III. The Problem (Reality!) of Evil and the Matter of Relationships (UGH!!!)

Excerpt from Greg Bahnsen’s *Always Ready* (pp.137-1838): A well known passage from the pen of the Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoevsky, readily stirs our emotions and makes us insistent about the wickedness of men, for instance men who are cruel to little children. It is found in his novel, *Brothers Karamazov*.

Ivan makes his complaint to Alyosha: “People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that’s a great injustice and insult to the beasts; a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel.... I’ve collected a great, great deal about Russian children, Alyosha. There was a little girl of five who was hated by her father and mother.... You see, I must repeat again, it is a peculiar characteristic of many people, this love of torturing children, and children only... It’s just their defenselessness that tempts the tormentor, just the angelic confidence of the child who has no refuge and no appeal that sets his vile blood on fire....This poor child of five was subjected to every possible torture by those cultivated parents. They beat her, thrashed her, kicked her for no reason till her body was one bruise. Then, they went to greater refinements of cruelty—shut her up all night in the cold and frost in a privy, and because she didn’t ask to be taken up at night... they smeared her face and filled her mouth with excrement, and it was her mother, her mother did this. And that mother could sleep, hearing the poor child’s groans! Can you understand why a little creature, who can’t even understand what’s done to her, should beat her little aching heart with her tiny fist in the dark and cold, and weep her meek unresentful tears to dear, kind God to protect her?... Do you understand why this infamy must be and is permitted?... Why, the whole world of knowledge is not worth that child’s prayer to ‘dear, kind God’!...Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance—and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth.” “No, I wouldn’t consent,” said Alyosha softly.

IV. Conclusions

- A. Our corporate and individual relational baggage and scars (experiences)
- B. *Sola Scriptura* and relationships (Romans 3:4; James 1:19-21; 1 Corinthians 4:6)— Interpreting our experience in light of Scripture and **not** Scripture in light of our experience.
- C. “The abuse of a thing is not an argument against the thing in itself (or against its proper use).”
- D. So, we (relationally!) rejoice with those who rejoice and we (relationally!) mourn with those who mourn (just as we rejoice and mourn in our relationships), but we do so from a standard— THE standard of God’s Word.
- E. GOSPEL!