

In Honor Preferring One Another

Personal relationships are one of man's most significant challenges. Our thoughts, personal preferences, and ideas seem so important to us. We can so easily look down on people who don't see things our way. But if we turn to the Bible for answers to life's perplexities and difficulties, the answer is straightforward and simple. Romans 12:10 calls us to Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another. Furthermore, Philippians 2:3 says, Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

Many things in life are neither right nor wrong. There is more than one right way to do many different jobs. Every culture has its unique foods, flavors, and colors. Families have preferences and practices that vary. But when a group of people must work together closely, these differences can grate and grind at personal relationships. Consider the workplace where one worker must have Eight O'clock coffee while another scorns any coffee but Starbucks. Think about the school where board members each have strong preferences for curriculum and struggle to agree. Think about the congregation that has talked about building on to the church for several years. Some can't see why they wouldn't build on and others can't understand why they would. Ponder the hurt a Central American brother can feel when a North American rants about how distasteful rice and beans are to him.

All of these types of small differences can escalate into major personal relationship issues. Bad attitudes and cliques can develop. Each person can set out to knock the other one down. Intimidation becomes a tempting tool to put our opponent down. We can begin to take sides and solicit people to join our view.

The church is not exempt from facing this challenge even though the Bible is clear about the answer for it. One reason why the struggle can be so intense at times is that we feel called to help the church to be its absolute best. And subconsciously our minds tell us our idea ranks at the top. It can be so clear to us that our idea will be such a blessing to everyone today and in the future. We can be so blind to the value of others' thoughts.

Another reason for this struggle is our tendency to see everything as either right or wrong. It's easy for us to take our family, church, or cultural practices and preferences and pronounce them the only right way to live. It's so easy to see how others' experiences are so inferior to ours. But Proverbs 21:2 says, Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts. This verse reminds us that God ponders the heart and knows our motives and self-interests. We can't hide from His all-seeing eye of judgment.

Another part of this struggle can be seen when it involves a project that requires finances to accomplish. We can feel like it must be our way if we put our hard-earned resources into the project, even though we'd never say it that plain. After all, we are to be good stewards, and if our money is

going to be involved, we should have some say in how it is used. We can offer finances if certain stipulations are met. This puts pressure on others to bow to our wishes to be able to use our money. But the Bible teaches us a loftier path for our lives on these issues where no Biblical principle is at stake. It teaches a path of humility that chooses to put our idea aside and respect and support another's idea. It teaches us a kind of love that lifts our brothers and sisters above our interests and wishes. It calls us to have a spirit that is not condescending toward others. Yes, it's the love that Jesus showed us as He died on the cross!

Why do we miss this simple teaching of the Word so often? We rightfully hold to literal Bible obedience in our practice of feet washing and Christian woman's veiling. We can explain that Bible obedience in daily life is one big difference between Protestant churches and us. But how often do we actively lay down personal preference for our brother's preference? How many times have we voted for someone else's idea in a business meeting? How often have we been a cheerful supporter when a vote went against our wish? How much have we helped to finance church and school projects that aren't perfectly the way we would do them?

What difference would our churches make in reaching out to our communities if this spirit was more common in our congregations? Have we blamed our communities for being Gospel-hardened when maybe we helped to harden them by our inner struggles? How many youth have we stumbled by our strife over issues that are not right or wrong? How often have we turned hearts away from cheerful obedience to easily understood truth by struggles over possessions, ideology, and philosophy? Ironically, churches sometimes split over these kinds of non-Biblical issues while one side pushes something that is proposed to make it easier to evangelize our communities. The strife that can develop and the resulting division will often do much more to damage the testimony and outreach of the church than the original issue.

May God help us each to humble our hearts as we look into the face of Jesus and worship Him. A proper view of God will help humble our hearts before Him and one another. May we be filled with the spirit and mind of Christ daily. He will give us the wisdom to know when to stand for Truth and not compromise and when it's a personal preference that should be laid down for our brethren.

~Luke Bennetch