

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

“Feed My Sheep”*: *First and Second Peter
Lesson 4. Social Relationships

The lesson this week concerns social relationships. Peter is generally considered the most gregarious and impulsive of all the twelve disciples. That impulsiveness is something most of us can relate to, and like Peter, most of us have suffered the consequences of speaking or acting in haste. Our lesson looks at several different kinds of relationships and uses Peter’s instruction to guide us in relating to others. Rather than thinking of Peter’s letters as manuals of conduct, let’s examine the underlying principles that Peter is trying to illustrate.

It is impossible to appreciate the value heaven places on another human being without an understanding of what Jesus accomplished for everyone on His cross, and what it cost Him to do that:

1. He “poured out His soul unto death” (Isa. 53:12).
2. He could not have emptied Himself more. Like when one turns a glass upside down to drain it to its last drop, He made a commitment to drain Himself of everything dear to Him, even life (Phil. 2:5-8).
3. He endured the curse of God, which is Heaven’s total condemnation (Gal. 3:13).
4. He tasted (the second or final) death for everyone (Heb. 2:9).
5. He gave Himself for our sins, holding nothing back (Gal. 1:4).
6. He went to hell in our behalf in order to save us (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:25-27).
7. He showed us genuine love, the self-emptying *agape*, so that it could be manifested in us, so we could demonstrate God’s love to the world (1 John 4:9-14).

The question remains, was this sacrifice sufficient to redeem the human race? Simply showing how unselfish God is does nothing for the human race, because without the shedding of blood there is no remission for sin. In a sense, a demonstration of God’s *agape* love is a collateral effect of the cross. The real purpose of the cross was to redeem the human race from the consequences of our choice to rebel against God’s love. All of the self-sacrifice described above was required in order to qualify Jesus to become our Savior and Redeemer.

There are those who seek to limit the atonement that Christ accomplished. They teach that Christ did not intend to die for all people. They go so far as to say God didn’t mean what Jesus told Nicodemus, “for God so loved the *world*, that He gave His only begotten Son ... (John 3:16), but what was really meant was God loved a certain portion of people. Those people have to be lucky enough to be born into an “elect” class, or have done something special to gain God’s attention.

But, does the Bible support these ideas? Is the gospel good news to those who are not born into the “elect,” or can’t manage to do something notable enough to get God’s attention in order to gain His favor? Let’s look at what the Bible says.

The very last page of the Bible contradicts this distorted view: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). That “whoever” includes you and me! The only condition is that we must “hear” the Spirit and the Bride. The saddest choice on earth is when someone deliberately chooses not to simply hear.

Jesus promised: “The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37). God has actually chosen every human being to be saved, but some are unwilling to receive His incredible gift.

Isaiah 45:22 tells us, “Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!” That means everyone on earth who is willing to look to Jesus will be saved.

Does this sound too good to be true? It sounds like everybody will be saved. We know the Bible doesn’t teach that, so who will be lost? “He who does not believe is condemned ... And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light” (John 3:17-19).

Paul tells us some of the best news in Ephesians chapter 1: “The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, ... having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ... in [whom] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence” (vss. 3-8).

What does all this fabulous good news have to do with social relationships? Everything. Only when we understand that the gospel, full and complete, is freely given to all, can we understand the value of all human beings. Our relationships with everyone from strangers to our most intimate family members must be guided by that knowledge. If heaven values all of us that much, that is the only standard by which we should relate to others.

When Paul used the word “love” in the famous “love chapter” in 1 Corinthians 13, he was using the Greek word *agape*. When we understand the great demonstration of this word that Christ gave to us at His Cross, we understand it is a very specific concept, not to be confused with the general all-purpose English word “love.” We must also realize that *agape* is far too unselfish a concept for us to muster up on our own, because we are born with a self-centered nature that can be overcome only by the power of the Holy Spirit. That applies to the nicest, most unselfish person you have ever known. All good gifts come from above, and greatest of those gifts is genuine *agape*.

No matter how hopeless you might think your case is, the beautiful message given to the church in the 1888 period was that God through His Spirit is able to change a stony heart into softness, tenderness, and love. Once that happens, it will pour out freely as Christ has given to you into all your social relationships, be they government, social, church, or family. God can heal everything. If we remember that, we can be patient and humble in working with those who haven't yet discovered this wonderful truth.

—Arlene Hill

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

https://youtu.be/JZjTpMW_ECg

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