

MESSAGE Holy Conversations – Why?

October 3, 2021

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Why even enter into conversation – when it's just so hard?

A couple weeks ago I mentioned the body's response to stressors: the amygdala floods the body with energy to either fight or flee. Some of us would rather fight and some of us would rather flee. If this is our reaction, why enter into conversation at all?

And for those of us who would rather fight: we might get angry and then act out on that anger? We might move on to contempt for each other or judgment.....

And for those of us who would rather flee: why do something we aren't comfortable with?

I mean, why push it, when we just might just be tempted to leave relationship with each other? Why are we even covering this topic of having holy conversations? Steve and Mary Pruss offer us some reflections on this:

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We are not the first peoples to deal with the bitterness of division and differences. As Paul speaks to the early church in Colossae, he addresses their issues. I believe he addresses ours as well.

Colossians 3:8-17

But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as

you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

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Perhaps you heard an echoing message from the last couple of weeks:

- From two weeks ago: “live by the Spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh”– from Galatians

Today we hear: “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

- From last week: “I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment.”

“rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips”

It’s obviously a common human reality no matter the culture or the time in history. We all are susceptible to division driven by our disagreement, different experiences, different ways of thinking, and out of all that, anger with each other.

For the people of Colossae, some of what drove their division were their disagreements about their differences: they were Gentiles and Jews, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free.

Gentiles and Jews were races of people divided. God distinguished the Jewish peoples to be in a special relationship with God in order for the world to know God. Everyone else was a Gentile. Unfortunately, this difference many times led to separation from one another and treating each other differently.

Slave and free. These signified social classes in which people live in difference social and economic situations and as such, have a hard time relating to each other. Those who have don’t want their circumstances to change and those who don’t have seek to have their circumstances changed. Thus they are opposed to each other....and treat each other differently. Usually this looks like the “haves” treat the “have nots” poorly. Paul spoke to the Corinthians church about this very thing....the poor were being left out and this practice desecrated the Lord’s Supper. Read about this in 1 Corinthians 11.

Barbarian/Scythian: Unlike the "Jews and Gentiles" and "slave and free", these two were not opposed to each other but rather Scythians were a type of barbarian. Their lifestyle, however, would have been opposed to anyone who was settled; those who Paul was writing to. Barbarians were nomads. They didn't live as a settled people. Therefore, they were feared by people who had settled down. The history of civilization has almost always been written by settled peoples. Indeed, the very term "civilization" refers to those who build cities; the nomads around the periphery are at best unimportant and have nothing to contribute; at worst they are an active threat. The Scythians were considered the lowest of the low, despised by both Jews and Greeks. They built no cities and by and large couldn't speak Greek. They were polytheistic spirit-worshippers who had neither Law nor prophets. They were largely illiterate. They were warlike and dangerous. And their culture was so alien that they let women fight and be leaders. So whether you were a Jew or a Gentile, you would have disguised yourself from the barbarians. Whether you were slave or free, you would have distinguished yourself from the barbarians.

In short, people didn't seek to come together; share live together across their differences. They practiced setting themselves a part from each other.

We practice that today; we have our own distinctions that define us today....distinctions we live by; distinctions we divide ourselves by. And we set ourselves apart from each other accordingly.

Black/White

Rich/Poor

American/Mexican or Chinese or Afghani

I believe that it's a dangerous thing for one group to claim that Jesus is theirs over and against another group. For then we deny very beloved words of John 3:16 "whosoever believes in him". We have seen how throughout history, people who follow Christ have elevated their differences and followed them and actually done harm to fellow brothers and sisters in Christ

i.e. *Christians in the North and South during the civil war*

*Christians in Northern Ireland*

Paul declared to the Colossians "Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."

Can we hear Paul's make that same declaration to us down through the ages:

Here there is no Black and White, no Rich and Poor, no American or Chinese.

Here there is no Republican and Democrat.

All that is over - in Christ.

Can we even imagine such a different way of being?

Perhaps as we enter into holy conversations with each other, we just might be able to imagine such a new reality that God has brought us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

I believe that if we want to experience the depth of the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, we do so by being in relationship with those who are different from us

To hear their faith story

To hear how they have experienced Christ in their lives

To experience new community

So why even have holy conversations?

To experience the new thing that Christ has established through his death and resurrection.

Let us pray:

Almighty and merciful God, we are aware that we have often forgotten the gospel message and allowed the shadows of anger and division to cloud our souls. We have forgotten the gospel message when we have said unpleasant and hurtful things to and about each other when they failed to live up to our expectations. Help us to live according to the love that you have shown to us even when we failed you. May that love grow in our community to bring peace and reconciliation among us. Forgive us our sins and help us to forgive those who have sinned against us. Lead us into new life through your Son Jesus Christ who died for the sins of all. Amen.