



Keys to Happy Family Living

Christian Living Series

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Lesson 3 – Peace with Others

"So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." Romans 14:19 NASB

The emphasis in the first two lessons was upon you as a person as you live in your own private world. This lesson has to do with your relationships with others. A sense of being at peace with yourself is, in some measure, a by-product of a proper response on your part to the people in your life.

Outward Behavior

In the first lesson we called attention to the second great commandment, "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF" (Matthew 22:39). Luke relates a similar incident in which a lawyer asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In answer, Jesus told of the good Samaritan. You can read this in Luke 10:30-36. A priest and a Levite passed by a wounded man who had been set upon by bandits and left for dead. Neither one stopped to give help. A despised Samaritan, however, did help him, binding up his wounds and paying for his lodging. Which of the three was neighbor to the wounded man? The answer is obvious as stated by the lawyer, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said unto him, "Go and do the same" (Luke 10:37).

How different was the reaction of a man who tells of an incident that happened to him! As he was standing on the sidewalk, conversing with another man, an elderly woman staggered past.

She was obviously very drunk. The two men watched her weave her way down the sidewalk. A half-block away she leaned up against a car. Then the car drove away, causing her to fall into the street, where she lay in a drunken stupor. The man who told the story said he hurried to a nearby phone to call the police. Just as he was about to dial, he looked again and saw two men carrying the woman out of the street. The thought struck him immediately that these two were showing mercy. His own first reaction had been reluctance to help the unlovely, drunk, dirty woman but to get someone else to do it.

This man went his way with a sense of unworthiness. Why? Because he had not shown mercy toward someone in need. To have a sense of wholesomeness, we must respond to human need. It was Christ Himself who said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

To love your "neighbor as yourself" means to be sensitive to his needs. It means to be disposed to help him meet his needs as readily as you meet your own.

Observing the golden rule

Jesus gave us a rule of thumb to guide us in our relations with others when He said, "Treat others the same way you want them to treat you" (Luke 6:31). This verse is generally referred to as the golden rule.

A college girl was explaining why she was so unhappy. One reason was her relationship to her roommate. Her roommate's curtains hung on the windows. She had the top drawer in the dresser. Her suitcase was easier to reach in the closet. Here was a college girl who was unhappy because her roommate had privileges that only one of them could have. She expected her roommate to be considerate, which is the reverse of the golden rule.

A man was complaining about the way things were going at home. His wife expected him to take her out for dinner more than he did; she wanted more household money; and there were other complaints. It was not that he could not afford to do these things. But he would not give her these things as long as she refused to carry her share of the marriage. She failed to keep his shirts washed the way he wanted them; she always forgot to put his vitamin capsule beside his plate at breakfast. Here, again, are two people who are losing the joy of fellowship because they are reversing the golden rule. Each person fails to give consideration to the other. You will note that the strained relations in both instances were caused by mere trifles.

On the other hand, there is the man who seems entirely unselfish. In his presence you find yourself telling him all about yourself. Whether he is fellowshiping with his wife, children, neighbors, guests, or the people in the church, he is always ministering. He is quick to open the door, to carry something for you, to give you something to read, to run an errand, to be of assistance generally. He is not above being helpful to his wife. I know of no one who thinks of this man as weak, or as one who is being imposed on. He very obviously enjoys serving others. When his name comes up in a conversation, it is used with respect and admiration, with the comment that there ought to be more people like him in the world.

What can you do for your husband, or wife, or children, or friends that you would like them to do for you? To ponder this question and take appropriate action is to live according to the golden rule. Our Lord said, "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men" (Luke 6:35, emphasis added).

Ministering to spiritual and material needs

The Lord Jesus tells you that you are to minister to those who need help. You are to be concerned first of all about spiritual needs. Notice Paul's concern for the spiritual needs of others:

"Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation"
(Romans 10:1).

"Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

You are also to be concerned about the material needs of people. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus described the day when all nations shall be gathered and separated as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. While this passage has a prophetic significance, it also has a practical, spiritual lesson for you. When you stand before "the judgment seat of Christ" to receive your reward, one criterion that will be used is your history of visiting those sick and in prison and giving them meat, drink, and clothing. This you are to do as unto the Lord.

Such service to others must be in combination with the proper attitude, as described by Paul: "And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). Paul then continues in verses 4-8 to describe a better attitude. Your generosity in giving material help to others will surely benefit them; but whether your deed will benefit you depends upon the spirit in which it is given.

Recently the author of this lesson was a speaker at a ministerial meeting. Afterward it was necessary for him to go to Midway Airport in Chicago. As he was calling a cab, a minister who was in attendance offered to take him to the airport. The ride took an hour through heavy traffic, and this man went far out of his way to do this favor. When he was thanked for this sacrificial deed, his reply was: "You needed transportation; I was able to meet your need, and happy to do so." What a refreshing experience! We like to receive such generosity from others.

The time comes in everyone's life, however, when he will be subject to evil treatment. What will your reaction be under such circumstances? To illustrate, a woman speaks of being neglected by her husband. He refused to share in the rearing of the children; he refused to go to church with her; he refused to supply adequate furniture for the house; he spent many nights away from home. In return she refused to cook breakfast for him, refused to visit his relatives, refused to entertain his friends. He agreed that all she said about him was true; but if she would not meet him part way in some of these differences, he would continue treating her as he had been doing. The wife insisted that it was up to him to make the first move.

Such a relationship develops when two people violate the principles of Christian living.

Paul says:

"Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord" (Romans 12:17-19).

Another woman tells of her life with her husband. He came home drunk night after night. At times he would beat her. They quarreled constantly over the training of their child. They quarreled over the use of the car. They quarreled over how to spend the money, over the type of entertainment, over religion. In a moment of remorse he would buy her jewelry and clothing as a peace offering, but in her anger she would refuse to wear these things.

Over a period of time this woman saw her need of the Savior. She needed God's strength if she was to have the attitude that Jesus taught one must have in a situation like hers. She cried out to God for strength to react as she should toward her husband. She ceased resisting him and did everything she could to please him. Soon she discovered that she enjoyed trying to please him and that she did it because she wanted to do it. Her husband's behavior has not changed. She is not treating him well in order to change him but to be an example to him, so that he may see the reality of Christianity and desire it for himself.

Inward Reaction to Others

The woman in the last illustration is acting kindly toward her husband because she submits to the inner strength that God can give through faith in Christ. This is not to say that she does not want her husband to change his ways. She does this because, before God, she has a responsibility toward her husband regardless of his behavior. Peter tells of our Savior, "...and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

Christian love--a test of discipleship

In the upper room, following the last supper that Jesus was to have with His disciples, He gave them instruction in witnessing to others. His was a strange order. He said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). Love is not verbal. It is invisible. The emphasis that Jesus made is not on how you approach people who are strangers to you. The emphasis here is on your inner reaction to the people you do know, to the people who are close and intimate with you. A continuing, consistent, inner relationship with these people will manifest itself so that others will know of your discipleship. In other words, people will know of your discipleship according to your inner relationship toward your mother, father, wife or husband, your children, your in-laws, your relatives, neighbors, friends, and co-workers.

Jesus repeated this thought in the garden of Gethsemane. Read John 17:20-23.

Christian love--a forgiving spirit

An executive who had many men working for him resigned his position. As he was making the rounds, bidding farewell to all his associates, he came to an employee who was ready with a speech that went something like this: "I don't like the way you treated the men; I don't like your policies; I have disliked working for you the four years that you have been my boss. I'm glad to see you go. I despise you."

The executive went back to his office and told an associate of the incident. He said: "I can't believe it. I've worked with that man for four years and didn't know his attitude toward me."

Eventually, poor relations between people will be revealed. In this case, the executive did not suffer; the employee did. For four long years that employee had lived a lie. He had pretended loyalty and friendship. Actually, he was disloyal and unfriendly. Likewise, it is the inner life that determines discipleship. Love toward your neighbor is not the same as tolerance. Love is being, not pretending or tolerating or acting.

The executive, of course, had been unaware of his employee's attitude toward him. Once he became aware of that attitude, there was immediate, spontaneous, inner reaction. You, too, will have such an inner reaction toward the words or actions of others. It is said of the Lord Jesus that He was "kind to ungrateful and evil men" (Luke 6:35). We ought to follow His example.

Peter asked Jesus how he should react to the negative behavior of others, saying:

*"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"
Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven"
(Matthew 18:21-22).*

Once Christ was speaking to His disciples about dealing with those who might trespass against them. He said:

*"If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him"
(Luke 17:3-4).*

When the disciples heard this, their response was the same as ours should be, "Lord, increase our faith."

There are times when someone will approach you, asking you to forgive a trespass. There are also times when you will be subject to another kind of treatment as described by Peter, "For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly" (1 Peter 2:19; compare verses 19-25). There is no thought on the other person's part of asking for forgiveness, or of ceasing the behavior that causes grief. An illustration is the woman mentioned at the beginning of

this part of Lesson 3, dealing with inner reactions.

The Christian life gives promise of victory over the difficult circumstances of every day. When you have the inner resources that enable you both to forgive and to endure grief, you are surely living life on the highest plane.

The Lord Jesus said, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them" (John 13:17). We all want to be happy. We know these things. How can we do them? The next lesson will deal with steps that lead to the strength we need.

Study Assignment for Lesson 3

Spend at least ten minutes thinking about your relationships with other people. Ask yourself:

1. In what ways has my outward behavior been wrong?
2. In what ways are my inner reactions to other people pleasing to God?

Your study of Lesson 4 should help you understand the steps necessary for being at peace with yourself and with others.

Self-Check Test 3

Check up on yourself.

In the space provided, mark the following statements "True" or "False."

- _____ 1. To have a sense of wholesomeness, we must respond to the needs of others.
- _____ 2. Strained relations often arise from very small causes.
- _____ 3. Our first concern for other people should be about their material needs.
- _____ 4. It is possible to minister to others in such a way that all benefit to ourselves is lost.
- _____ 5. A person's reaction to evil treatment is far more important than the evil treatment itself.
- _____ 6. A person's inward reaction to others depends entirely upon his own strength.

- _____ 7. The real test of Christian love is how a person approaches people who are strangers to him.
- _____ 8. True love toward an unfriendly neighbor is shown by manifesting a spirit of tolerance.
- _____ 9. Continued negative behavior on the part of an acquaintance eventually calls for negative behavior in return.
- _____ 10. The Christian life gives promise of victory over the difficult circumstances of every day!

Visit <http://biblicalcounselinginsights.com/keys-to-happy-family-living-series/answers/> for the answers to these questions.

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