

STANDARD C - WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PART OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD?

Lesson 5: How May We Live Together in Peace as Jesus' Disciples?

Introduction

When Jesus and His disciples shared the last Passover together, there was a conflict among the disciples. The disciples began to argue who was the greatest among them. They thought when Jesus' Kingdom was put in place they would all have important roles. They all wanted to have important jobs in Jesus' Kingdom. A heated debate began. Jesus finally told them the greatest of them must become like the one who serves. Jesus told His disciples He had come to be a servant. That was Jesus' desire for His disciples. He wanted them to become servants.

Followers of Jesus sometimes have problems working together. Like everyone else, followers have personal opinions and strong ideas about the way things should be. We discuss and debate. Like a family, we sometimes argue. This is not wrong. But when we lift ourselves up above others, it is wrong. When we fail to cooperate with others in His kingdom, it is wrong. When we do anything that hurts our brothers and sisters, it is wrong. When Christ's Church is divided and hindered, it is wrong.

There are two important ways for followers to live that will help them avoid conflicts. The first way is the way of service and humility. It is the way of the Cross. The second way is the way of righteousness.

Question: What does being a servant of Jesus mean?

Question: What are some behaviors that are wrong for followers of Jesus?

A. We Can Overcome Conflicts by Taking the Way of the Cross.

Jesus was with His disciples at the Last Supper. It was supposed to be a deeply spiritual occasion. They had eaten together often before. But this would be the last meal before Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus had given them the bread and the wine. While He was eating with them, the disciples began to argue. Certain disciples thought they should have higher positions than others in Christ's Kingdom. In these holy moments, they were arguing about who among them was greatest (Luke 22:24).

Instead of focusing on Jesus and what He was saying to them, the disciples were revealing their desire for power and position. They wanted high ranking jobs in His coming Kingdom. Perhaps they argued as to who was best suited for the highest job. Whose parents were more influential? Who was wealthiest? Who came from a better town? Who was better educated? Who was stronger? Who did Jesus trust the most? Perhaps they talked about their qualifications for leadership in the Kingdom. Perhaps

they compared each other's spiritual power. Who had driven out more demons? Who had healed the most people?

This kind of talk caused Jesus to grieve. The disciples were fighting like jealous brothers. They were bickering just like the Gentiles. They were imitating the Romans, the ones they despised for oppressing them. Had they learned nothing from Jesus about His Kingdom and its values?

The disciples did not understand what kind of a Kingdom Jesus would establish. They thought it would be a political Kingdom with Jesus as ruler or king. They did not understand it was to be a Kingdom of the Spirit. His was a Kingdom where spiritual values—the values He had taught, preached, and demonstrated—prevailed.

Jesus had not chosen the rich and powerful. He had not chosen the disciples because of their merits. Jesus began creating a spiritual community that turned the world's values upside down. He had granted "dishonorable ones" great honor in His Kingdom. But now the disciples wanted honor, glory, prestige, power, privilege, and position.

In Christ's Kingdom, those who seek things are least likely to find them from God. Jesus says our attitudes as His followers must be different from those around us. Those in the world "lord" it over people. They like to exercise authority. "But you are not to be like that," Jesus told His disciples (Luke 22:26). Instead, in Christ's Kingdom, the one who rules should be like the one who serves. The one who is truly greatest should be like the youngest. Had not Jesus, by His own humility and willingness to serve, shown that?

The Last Supper was not the first time the disciples had argued about who was the greatest. One time earlier, they had argued about the same thing. On that occasion, Jesus took a little child and stood the child beside Him. "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me," Jesus said. "And whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest" (Luke 9:46-48). (See also Mark 10:35-45.)

Just before this occasion, Jesus had told them that anyone who would follow Him must "deny himself and take up his cross daily." For "what good is it for a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his very self?" (Luke 9:23, 25). If followers of Jesus lived by these teachings, they would seek the will of God together. They would not seek their own will. They would submit to one another. They would not abuse each other. They would lift each other up as they carried the cross of Christ. They would desire the Cross, not a throne. But the disciples had not learned the lesson.

Jesus' own coming to the world was not with honor and power. This is what Jesus expected of His disciples. He did not want them to seek power and authority over each other. He did not want them to have the same values as the world. Therefore, the way to overcome conflicts among us is to remember we belong to Christ. Among each other, we are quick to take up His cross and seek His will, not our own. We are servants of His Kingdom.

Question: What does it mean to take the way of the Cross?

Question: What is the meaning of the scripture: “For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest.”

B. You Can Overcome Conflicts by Taking the Way of Forgiveness.

Another way to overcome conflicts is to quickly forgive. Jesus told His followers, “Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (Luke 6:37). Jesus still tells His followers to “forgive,” not “judge.” The Holy Spirit is the one responsible for convicting people of sin (John 16:7-8). We are not placed in the position of judging others. “Do not judge, and you will not be judged,” is Jesus’ caution. “Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned” (Luke 6:37).

Though we are not called upon to condemn, Jesus gives us the task of rebuking our brothers or sisters if we see them sinning. When we rebuke our fellow Christians, we are, in fact, doing them a favor. If they keep on sinning, they are in danger of losing their spiritual life. But “if he [or she] repents forgive him [or her]. If he [or she] sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him [or her]” (Luke 17:3-4). We should rebuke our brothers and sisters, and then forgive them. We keep forgiving them over and over. An attitude of forgiveness will be planted in us.

In the city of Corinth, the early church punished a member for some unknown sin. The apostle Paul wrote the members that once they had inflicted the punishment, they ought to forgive the person and “comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.” Paul urged them to “reaffirm your love for him” (2 Corinthians 2:7-8). Punishment and rebuke set clear boundaries for churches. To Timothy, a pastor, Paul wrote that those who sin are to be “rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning” (1 Timothy 5:20).

When there is sin in believers within the community, there must be confession and repentance by the one who sins and forgiveness by the community. The community is commanded to forgive and restore those who have truly repented.

We are sent by the Spirit of Christ to forgive others. Forgiving is not condescending. We remember that any of us could fall. After someone was caught in a sin, Paul told the Galatians that those who were “spiritual should restore him gently.” But Paul reminded the Galatians that even the spiritual leaders who were called to restore the person might also be tempted. Paul suggested each one should test his or her own actions “without comparing himself to somebody else” (Galatians 6:1-4). Problems arise when we try to compare ourselves to each other, rather than to Jesus.

Question: What does it mean to forgive someone else?

Question: Why do Jesus’ followers need to rebuke their Christian brothers and sisters when they sin?

Question: Why are followers of Jesus not to judge other people?

Conclusion

Forgiveness is love in action. We are sent out not simply with a message of forgiveness but to demonstrate forgiveness (John 20:21-23). We forgive by extending simple human kindness to brothers and sisters for whom Christ died. By our forgiving spirit, we restore to them grace and basic human dignity. We forgive other people's careless actions or words. Forgiveness, which is love extended, keeps no record of wrongs.

The Church, the forgiven community, must incorporate others into God's forgiveness. The *forgiven* community must always be the *forgiving* community. If we are always ready to forgive, we will keep our eyes on Jesus, the One we are following.

Activity: Pray this week that God will point out anyone or any situation with which you need to take the way of the Cross. Share your thoughts the next time your discipleship group meets.

Activity: Is there anyone you need to forgive? If so, have you truly forgiven them? Pray and ask God to help you extend forgiveness. As God's Spirit directs you, obey Him. Talk with the person who needs your forgiveness.