**“Interpersonal Relationships,” Part 1: General Principles**

Maybe it’s just me, but the term “interpersonal relationships” has always smacked of someone trying to give a decorative name to a ordinary thing. Think about it: Based on the meaning of the words involved, unless a “relationship” is between a person and a non-person, every “relationship” is “interpersonal,” right? Therefore, this (again, *to me* at least) sounds like pseudo-academic psychobabble. It is just a fancy way to describe or analyze how people relate to one another, or at least how they *should* relate to one another. This does not mean, however, that such relationships are necessarily easy. The difficulty lies, as it usually does, when we don’t “do” things the way God intends that we should. But when we *think, feel,* and *treat* each other the way God says we ought, our relations- even the “interpersonal” ones, take on entirely new and better meaning and results.

**So, how should we *think, feel,* and *act* towardone another? Phil.2:1-8**

v.1- Think about the words used: *encouragement, consolation, fellowship, affection,* and *compassion.* Aren’t these the very things each of us craves? Aren’t they exactly what we long to *feel* in and through our relationships with one another? So what does it take to achieve this kind of fulfillment in our relationships?

v.2- Please consider the following ***mental preparations*** of proper interpersonal relationships the way God intended (and expects):

1. *“being of the same mind”-* How can diverse individuals (of age/generation, race, gender, socio-economic, etc.) be *like-minded?* We must have the same *operator’s manual* or *guide-book,* God’s *word.* Only by having the same *standard(s)* can we be *“made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment,”* 1Cor.1:10.
2. *“maintaining the same love”-* In this context, what *“same”* mean? The *same* as what? The *same* that God directs and commands, 1Thess.4:9? The *same* as Christ manifested toward us, Eph.5:2? The *same* as homogeneous- without partiality or disparity, Jas.2:4; 3:17? “Yes” to all of the above!
3. *“united in spirit”-* The word is *sumpsuchos,* andis found only here in the NT; it is a compound word consisting of *sun* (together) and *psuchos* (soul, inner life or seat of the feelings, desires, and affections). Though unfortunately often cheapened and romanticized, it carries the idea of *soul-mates;* being “one” with not just one, but others, cf. Acts 2:43-44a.
4. *“intent on one purpose”-* When we think of *purpose,* we often somewhat “miss the mark” a bit by thinking it means “go to heaven,” which is the *result* rather than the *purpose.* Instead, the *purpose* on which we should be *intent* is to be *exalting Jesus as Lord* be *in Christ,* cf. vv.1,9-11.

vv.3-4- Now note the ***activities*** of proper interpersonal relationships the way God intended (and expects):

1. *“Do nothing from selfishness”-* It’s no secret that I believe “selfishness” to be the single most destructive factor in our relationships, or the cause for the lack of them. Jesus, by both proclamation and example, epitomized *selflessness* rather than *selfishness,* cf. v.6-7. How, do you suppose, it would affect or change all of our relationships if we were to guide our *thoughts, attitudes,* and *actions* by this question: “Am I being *selfish* or *selfless?”* Think seriously about this and give it a try.
2. *“or empty conceit”-* This is translated from *kenodoxia,* which means *groundless self esteem* or *empty pride,* cf. Gal.6:3-4 (which seems to describe it perfectly). It is having an excessively *high* or *proud* view of self that is *unearned.*  In short, it is *unwarranted self-esteem,* or just plain old *thinking too highly of self.* Such a distorted estimation of *self* and what “I deserve” either prohibits or destroys all our relationships- including the interpersonal ones!
3. *“but with humility of mind”-* This is the polar opposite of and is diametrically opposed to *selfishness* and *empty conceit.* One lexicographer defined *tapeinophrosune* as “a deep sense of one’s (moral) littleness,” Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon. Some might even call it “low self-esteem.” But this is not a mental problem, it is the proper frame of mind which even Jesus adopted that enabled Him to *“not regard equality with God a thing to grasped”* (held on to), *“but emptied Himself”* and become an *obedient, humble, man,* vv.6-8! Such is surely not a “mental disorder” but a “spiritual enlightenment” that will surely transform our lives.
4. *“let each of you regard one another as more important than himself”-*  What if everyone in every relationship did this? Do you suppose that every resultant relationship would be transformed? Of course it would! “Well, that’s never going to happen; people don’t think and act that way in the world.” No, they don’t. But that doesn’t mean that we should “respond in kind” in our dealings with them, cf. Rom.12:17-21. Nor does it mean that we shouldn’t *think, feel,* and *treat* one another this way in our spiritual relationships, Rom.12:9-16!
5. *“do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others”-* To have successful and pleasing relationships- interpersonal or otherwise, we have to stop overdosing ourselves with “Vitamin I.” Symptoms include “*I* think, *I* feel, *I* need,” and *“I* want.” Such selfishness will destroy our professional, social, marital, and familial relationships- all of which are interpersonal. But this is not Christ’s way, Rom.15:1-3!

vv.5-8- The ***attitude*** of proper interpersonal relationships the way God intended (and expects):

1. *“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus”- attitude* is translated from *phroneo*, which here seems to mean much more than just a *disposition*. Instead, I think means the deliberate *directing of one’s mind to a thing, to seek, to strive for* the particular *emotions, thoughts,* and *activities* of Jesus…
2. Who *“did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped”-* If Jesus did not think/consider *equality with God* a thing to be *grasped* (*harpagmos-* a thing to be seized upon or to be held fast, retained), what should we be willing to *let go of* to be like Him, and thus adopt His character? Whatever it is we *think* we are, surely it does not equate to the position of *equality with God,* cf. Heb.2:9-11,17. Of what are you willing to *let go* rather than *grasp/hold on to* in order to achieve all that you can *for others* (rather than *for yourself*)?
3. *“but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men”-* Selfishness *prevents* our service to others and instead *requires* it of them to us, cf. Gal.5:13-14. Selflessness *prevents* the *biting, devouring,* and *consuming* aspects of worldly interpersonal relationships, cf. Gal.5:15. Are you willing to *direct your mind to* and *strive for* the position of *bond-servant?* That is what it takes to have the *attitude of Jesus!*
4. *“He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”-*  Do you want, though such certainly shouldn’t be our primary goal, pleasing interpersonal relationships with others? Are you willing to *die* for them, cf. Rom.5:7; Eph.5:25, or at least *empty yourself,* v.7. The kind of interpersonal relationships we often desire, we are simply not willing to give up *ourselves* (*my* wants, needs, and desires) to achieve. Simply put: We want these relationships on *our* rather than *His* terms, which will never work.

**Conclusions:** **How do we achieve *proper* and *pleasing* “interpersonal relationships”?**

1. **Get in the right *frame of mind-* starting *thinking and feeling* right, vv.1-2;**
2. ***Act* right- not *selfishness* or *empty conceit,* but with *humility regard others as more important* and subsequently *seek their interests over your own,* vv.3-4; and,**
3. ***Direct your attitude* (or *marshal* *your mind*)away from *whatever you think you deserve* and in *humility serve* God and others *first,* vv.5-8.**