

## **Freedom in Christ Session #11: Relating to Others**

**Focus Verse:** Matthew 22:37-40: Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind". This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself". All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

**Objective:** To understand our roles and responsibilities in relationships so that we can grow together in Christ.

**Focus Truth:** As disciples of Christ we must assume responsibility for our own character and seek to meet the needs of others, rather than the other way around.

### **I. Understanding Grace**

**A. In Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself". All the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments."**

**B. We are to love others as we love ourselves. How can we love those who seem unlovable? Left to ourselves we cannot, but God would never ask us to do something that is impossible. Now that you have taken hold of your freedom in Christ, you are free to relate to others as God intended.**

**C. Just as knowing who we are in Christ is the foundation for our Christian life and growth in maturity, it also forms the basis for the way we relate to other people. "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We give freely because we have received freely (Matthew 10:8). We are merciful because He has been merciful to us (Luke 6:36), and we forgive in the same way that Jesus has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32).**

**D. We cannot do this if we have not yet understood what His grace means for us. Grace is giving people what they don't deserve: it's undeserved favour. It cannot be earned. Salvation is a free gift and we owe God nothing for it. But when we receive His grace, a strange thing happens. We discover that it really is**

*more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). We find that we want to give it away to others.*

## **II. We Are Responsible For Our Own Character And Others' Needs**

*A. What are our responsibilities to others? And what rights do we have regarding others?*

*B. Have you ever listened to a couple caught in a vicious argument? You will notice that inevitably they start attacking the other person's character ("You're selfish") while looking at their own needs ("You never help me ..."). Nobody can have good relationships with that orientation because it's the exact opposite of how God says our relationships should be. Consider our responsibilities according to the following two passages;*

1. <sup>NIV</sup> Romans 14:4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

a) Someone else's character is not to be our concern. It is the concern of that person and the Lord. We are not to judge. Each person is responsible before God for their own character.

2. <sup>NIV</sup> Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

a) Where we do have a responsibility toward others before God, it is to meet their needs. So we can clearly see that we are responsible for two things: our own character and meeting the needs of others.

b) Imagine what life would be like if everyone assumed their responsibility to become like Christ in their character, and committed themselves to meet the needs of everyone around them. That would be heaven on earth!

## **III. Being Aware Of Our Own Sins**

*A. No one would disagree with that. The big question is why we fail to live it out.*

**B. All too often we are very aware of the character failures of others while appearing blind to our own. Much of this is to do with the condition of our relationship with the Lord.**

**C. Although we look forward to seeing Jesus in His fullness some day (1 John 3:2), the Bible teaches that no human being since the Fall has fully seen God. There are events recorded in the Bible where some special saints were privileged to experience an unusual manifestation of God's presence. Isaiah had such an experience. In Isaiah 6:1 we read, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple." What was the result of this amazing experience? Isaiah didn't fully see God, but he saw more of Him than anyone else had and the result is recorded in verse 5: "Woe to me! I am ruined!" I cried. "For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." If we, like Isaiah, were confronted with an unusual manifestation of God's presence, whose sin would we immediately become aware of? Someone else's? No, our own!**

**D. In Luke 5 Jesus appropriated Peter's boat to speak to the crowd who had gathered. Peter had been fishing all night without success. Jesus said to him (verse 4), "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch". Peter obeys, goes back to the lake and starts pulling in fish after fish. He must have suddenly realised that someone very special was in the boat with him, someone who could command fish. How did he respond? "Go away from me Lord, I'm married to a sinful woman"? No! What Peter did say was, "I am a sinful man" (verse 8).**

**E. When we see God for who He is, we don't become aware of the sin of others, but of our own sin.**

**However, when we are lukewarm in our relationship with God, we tend to overlook our own sin and see the sin of others. When they don't match up to our expectations, we have a tendency to say they are doing wrong and to want to point it out. Our responsibility, however, is not for their character but for our own character.**

#### **IV. Focus On Responsibilities Rather Than Rights**

**A. What right do we have to expect anything from anyone else? Or do we have a responsibility to love one another, care for one another, accept one another and encourage one another? In every relationship we have both rights and responsibilities - but where should we put emphasis? Satan will tempt us to focus on our rights rather than our responsibilities.**

**B. A husband may get angry with his wife because he thinks he has a right to expect her to be submissive.**

**A wife may nag her husband because she expects him to be the spiritual head of the household. Do husbands have a right to expect their wives to be submissive to them? Or do they have a responsibility to love their wives as Christ loved the Church? Do wives have a right to expect their husbands to love them? Or do they have a responsibility to love and respect their husbands who in turn have the responsibility of being the head of the home?**

**C. Husbands, having a submissive wife is not your right; but being a loving, caring husband is your responsibility. Being head of the home is not a right to be demanded but an awesome responsibility to be fulfilled. Wives, having a spiritual husband is not your right; but being a submissive, supportive wife is your responsibility.**

**D. We are each to focus on our own responsibilities. When we stand before Christ, He will not ask us whether we received everything we had coming to us. He will reward us for how well we fulfilled our responsibilities.**

**E. Do parents have a right to expect their children to be obedient? Or do they have a responsibility to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord, and discipline them when they are disobedient?**

**F. Does being a member of a local church give you the right to criticise others? Or does it give you a responsibility to submit to those in authority over you and relate to one another with the same love and acceptance we have received from Christ? Being a member of a local church is an incredible privilege.**

***This privilege comes with the awesome responsibility to behave as God's children and love God and others. G. Of course, we do all have rights. Everybody has a right to be loved and accepted irrespective of race, colour or creed, but we mustn't abdicate our personal responsibilities by demanding our rights. That's what the world wants us to do. When we emphasise our rights above our responsibilities in any relationship, however, we sow the seeds of destruction.***

#### **V. What About When Others Do Wrong?**

***A. All of us find it difficult to own up to sin and say "I did it". Often we can see what the issues are in someone else's life much more clearly than in our own. Should we try to be the conscience of another person and persuade them of their sin? No, that is the role of the Holy Spirit. Playing the role of the Holy Spirit in another person's life won't work. The moment we try, we misdirect their struggle with God onto ourselves, and we are not up to the task. The Holy Spirit is the One who convicts us of our sins. The critic is tempted to protest, "But I have been given the ministry of condemnation!" No, God has given us a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). The critical spirit continues; "But doesn't love expose a multitude of sins?" No. Peter wrote, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins" (1Peter 4:8).***

#### **VI. Discipline Yes, Judgment No**

***A. So if I'm not to be someone else's conscience, what should I do when someone keeps sinning? Christians do sin, of course, and that affects their relationship with God and others. Should I just ignore it? Are there ever occasions when I should confront another Christian?***

***B. Have you ever wondered how two verses such as these go together?***

***1. <sup>NIV</sup> Matthew 7:1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged.***

***2. <sup>NIV</sup> Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.***

**C. How can we reconcile the fact that we are told not to judge, but we are to carry out discipline?**

**Judgment is not the same as discipline. Judgment is always related to character whereas discipline has to be based on something we have seen or heard. If we personally observe another Christian sinning against us, the Bible tells us to confront the person alone for the purpose of winning them back to the Lord. If they don't repent then we are to take along two or three other witnesses who observed the same sin. If they still won't listen, then we are to tell the church (Matthew 18:15-17). The purpose of this process is not to condemn them, but to restore them to Christ. If there are no other witnesses, it's just your word against theirs. Simply leave it at that. God knows all about it and it's His role to bring conviction, not ours. He will deal with it in His perfect wisdom.**

**D. We are so often tempted to judge character, however. Suppose I catch my son telling a lie, and I confront him by saying, "You have just said something untrue." Have I judged him? He may think I have but in fact I have not. I have simply called attention to sinful behaviour that I have personally observed.**

**E. However, if I said, "You are a liar!", that would be judgment. Why? Because I have attacked his character. What some might think is discipline is too often nothing more than character assassination. He is not a liar. He's a child of God who has told a lie. Calling someone "stupid", "clumsy", "proud", or "evil" is an attack on their character and it leaves them with no way forward and no resolution because they can't instantly change their character.**

**F. If on the other hand, you point out someone's sinful behaviour to them, you are giving them something that they can work with: "You are right; what I just said wasn't true, and I am sorry I said it. Will you forgive me?" Saying something like that puts an end to the matter there and then, but attacking another person's character leaves lasting scars.**

**G. If we could memorise and never go against Ephesians 4:29, most of the problems in our homes and churches would disappear: "Do not let any**

*unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen". The next verse says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God". It grieves God when we use words that tear one another down instead of using words to build each other up. If you have taken hold of your freedom in Christ you are free to make the right choice in any situation.*

## **VII. Discipline And Punishment Are Not The Same**

*A. There is also a major difference between discipline and punishment. Punishment is related to the OT concept of "an eye for an eye". Punishment looks backwards to the past, whereas discipline looks forwards to the future. Hebrews 12:5-11 tells us that God's discipline is a proof of His love. If we are not being disciplined by God, the Bible says we are illegitimate children of God (verse 8). In the same way we discipline others because we love them, in order to help them make better choices in the future. God is not punishing us for doing something wrong. The punishment we deserved fell on Christ. He is disciplining us so we don't do it again. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by "it" (Hebrews 12:11). The point of discipline is to help another person become more like Jesus, not to punish them for behaving badly.*

## **VIII. When We Are Attacked**

*A. What about when the boot is on the other foot: how do we respond if someone attacks our character? Should we be defensive? We will certainly be tempted to be. But how did Jesus react when it happened to Him? "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly". (1 Peter 2:23)*  
*B. Now that we are alive in Christ and forgiven, we don't need to defend ourselves any more. If you are*

**wrong you don't have a defence. If you are right, you don't need one. Christ is our defence.**

**C. A woman called her pastor and made an appointment to see him. She had written a list of good and bad points about him that she wanted to discuss. There were just two good points and a whole page of bad ones! As she read each point, the pastor was tempted to defend himself, but he said nothing. When she had finished, he said to her, "It must have taken a lot of courage to share that list with me. What do you suggest I do?" At that point she started crying and said, "Oh, it's not you, it's me!" A helpful discussion followed which led her to a different ministry position that was more suited to her gifting. What if the pastor had defended himself against any one of her allegations? She would have been even more sure that it was her calling in life to convince him that he was not yet qualified to be a member of the Trinity!**

**D. If you can learn not to be defensive when someone exposes your character defects or attacks your performance you may have an opportunity to turn the situation around and minister to that person.**

**E. A Bible-college student heard that story and about six months later reported his own experience. He had been doing a supply-teacher job and had a telephone call from an irate mother. She tore him apart and said, "You are the worst teacher my daughter has ever had." He was desperate to get off the phone but remembered hearing what that pastor had done so he kept quiet. When she finally stopped talking he said, "It must have taken a lot of courage to call and share that with me. What do you suggest I do?" Guess what happened. She started to cry and the relationship was restored! The mother turned out to be a single parent and her rebellious daughter had been saying all sorts of things about the teacher. They then discovered that they were both Christians and committed themselves to pray to win her daughter back to the Lord.**

**F. Nobody tears down another person from a position of strength. Those who are critical of others are either hurting or immature. If we can learn not to be**

*defensive when they attack us, it can lead to an opportunity to minister to them.*

**IX. Authority And Accountability**

*A. God has established lines of authority to avoid anarchy in our society. We also have a great need for accountability. Consider the following four words and ask yourself a question: From which end of the list (top or bottom) did the Lord first come to you?*

- 1. Authority*
- 2. Accountability*
- 3. Affirmation*
- 4. Acceptance*

*B. How you answer that question reveals a lot about how you understand ministry, marriage and parenting. Paul wrote, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Acceptance came first, and then the affirmation: "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Romans 8:16).*

*C. The devil is determined to distort our image of God so that we get this list back to front. How on earth can I approach a consuming fire? How can I go to a holy God as a sinner? But if you know God as your loving Father and you know that He accepts you just as you are and loves you no matter what you have done, you can pour your life out to Him.*

*D. If authority figures demand accountability without giving affirmation and acceptance, they will never get it. People under oppressive authority may comply externally under duress, but they will never share anything on an intimate level. People will, however, voluntarily submit to someone in authority who is first of all accepting and affirming.*

*E. Suppose a teenager comes home late and a parent responds in an overbearing way and asks angrily, "where have you been?" The teenager will probably say just one word: "Out!" At which the parents asks, "What were you doing?" And the teenager will respond by saying, "Nothing!"*

*F. In the Gospels we never read about Jesus saying anything like this: "Now look here! I am the Son of God so get your act together!" He is God, and He is the ultimate authority, but He came to us as a gentle*

*shepherd. Yet after he preached the Sermon on the Mount, "The crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law" (Matthew 7:28b-29). This authority did not come from a position He had been given but from His character. The same could be said for the Apostle Paul when he wrote this:*

1. <sup>NAU</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:5 For we never came <sup>1</sup>with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed-- God is witness-- <sup>6</sup> nor did we <sup>s</sup>seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as <sup>a</sup>postles of Christ <sup>1</sup>we might have <sup>2</sup>asserted our authority. <sup>7</sup> But we <sup>1</sup>proved to be <sup>2a</sup>gentle <sup>3</sup>among you, <sup>b</sup>as a nursing *mother* <sup>4</sup>tenderly cares for her own children. <sup>8</sup> Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to <sup>1</sup>impart to you not only the <sup>9</sup>ospel of God but also our own

*<sup>1</sup>lives, because you had become <sup>2</sup>very dear to us.*  
**G. When we see people who are struggling with sin we need to learn to be like God. Then we will come alongside them with an attitude of acceptance rather than rejection, without a shred of condemnation but filled with love.**

## **X. Should We Express Our Needs?**

**A. If we have needs in a relationship that are not being met, should we suffer in silence or is it OK to express them? Paul wrote, "Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful" (Titus 3:14 NASB). If we have pressing needs that are not being met, it is important that we let people know what they are. It is a form of pride to let others assume that we have no needs, or to refuse to share them. We all have needs, and meeting one another's needs is how we love one another.**

**B. However, we need to be very careful how we express them. The problem is that it can all too easily come out as criticism rather than as a need. A need must be stated as a need, and not a judgment. Suppose a wife doesn't feel loved; she might say to her husband: "You don't love me any more, do you?" You can almost hear the husband respond, "Of course I do!" And that's the end of that. It wasn't stated as a need. It was a judgment of her husband's**

*character. Suppose she said, "I just don't feel loved right now, and I need to be." By turning the "you" judgment to an "I" need, she has expressed her need without blaming anybody. Her husband now has the opportunity to meet that need and the Holy Spirit can bring conviction since we are all under the command to love one another.*

*C. To illustrate further, consider a husband who doesn't feel needed. Instead of saying, "You make me feel useless", he could express his need by saying "I feel so unimportant". By changing from a "you" to an "I" need, the message is received without blame, and the other person is more predisposed to help.*

## **XI. One Of Life's Little Secrets**

*A. What needs do we all have? Every one of us needs to be loved, accepted and affirmed. That's absolutely legitimate. Why not go home after the session, call somebody who is not here and say, "I just want you to know that you are a real encouragement. Every time I am around you, you build me up. I really appreciate you"? Or are you waiting for somebody to call you? It may never happen. That's one of life's interesting principles: you reap what you sow.*

*B. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). It is one of life's great compensations that we cannot sincerely help somebody else without helping ourselves in the process. If you want somebody to love you, love somebody. If you want a friend, be a friend. You get out of life what you put into it. Jesus said in Luke 6:38, "Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." If we do just enough to "get by", the truth is we are robbing ourselves.*

*C. If you wanted to give someone a bushel of wheat, you could slowly fill the bushel basket and scrape off the top with a board. That would be a fair measure. The Lord is suggesting, however, that we fill it until it overflows, and even shake it so that it settles.*

*Whatever we measure out to others comes measuring back to us. Whatever life asks of you, give just a little*

***bit more. If you are supposed to be at work at 9:00am, get there at 8.45am. Do that with everything and you will be amazed at what life has to offer.***

***D. A farmer and a baker had an arrangement to exchange a pound loaf of bread for a pound of butter. It was going well for a while until one day the baker thought he could take one little pinch off every loaf and make a little more profit and nobody would know the difference. His profits started to increase for a while, but he noticed that his butter supply started to dwindle. So he went to the farmer and confronted him, saying, "You are not bringing the same amount of butter you used to bring." The farmer said, "I'm doing what I've always done." "What's that?" asked the baker. "Well, I take my scale and I put your pound load of bread on one side and the same measure of butter on the other."***

***E. Let's close this session with a poem that expresses how we can be the person God created us to be in spite of others and the sad philosophies of this fallen world:***

People are unreasonable, illogical and self-centred.  
Love them anyway.  
If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives.  
Do good anyway.  
If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies.  
Succeed anyway.  
The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.  
Do good anyway.  
Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.  
Be honest and frank anyway.  
The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the  
smallest people with the smallest minds.  
Think big anyway.  
People favour underdogs but follow only top dogs.  
Fight for the underdog anyway.  
What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight  
Build anyway.  
People really need help, but may attack you if you help them.  
Help people anyway.  
Give the world the best you've got and you'll get kicked in the teeth.  
Give the world the best you've got anyway.