

LIFE GROUP LESSON

What Happened to Civility • Week of September 23

We are embarrassed and appalled at the lack of civility in our culture today. Why is so much hatred and animosity surfacing in our nation? The psalmist said, “What joy for the nation whose God is the LORD” (Psalm 33:12a), and yet, our nation is suffering greatly from increasing expressions of hostility. Demanding rights and demonizing others only deepens lines of division. God is not honored by immature behavior. If something doesn’t turn our country around soon, and stop this nonsense—and that’s what it is, lack of civility makes ‘no sense’—these lines of division will soon become impassible chasms.

Sadly, there are ever-deepening divisions in our church today resulting in civil scarcity. Instead of honoring God and maintaining a focus on reaching others with the love of Christ, we fixate on our differences. We forget “The LORD looks down from heaven and sees the whole human race. From His throne He observes all who live on the earth” (Psalm 33:13-14). Often, we think nothing of gossiping about a brother or sister, while attempting to worship God at the same time. We grieve God when we slander one another. In fact, speaking falsely of someone comes from the same root sin as anger and murder (see Genesis 4:6-7 and Matthew 5:21-22).

And what about in our own homes—how do we treat the persons with whom we share the same address? God calls husbands to love the wife just like Christ loved the church! The wife is to respect her husband as the church is to honor Christ. Parents are called to love (but not worship) their kids. Children are to obey their parents. When we come to faith in Christ, the Lord calls us to a higher level of thinking and living. We will begin seeing others through the lens of Christ’s love and putting a ‘10’ on their forehead.

Read Ephesians 2:11-18

1. What is one of your first memories of outright rebellion, or perhaps, when you knowingly demonstrated a lack of civility toward a sibling, friend, or parent?

We are created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27) but we rebelled and lost that perfect relationship with God and one another (Genesis 3:1-19). According to v 13 of Ephesians chapter two, we can be restored to fellowship with the LORD: “But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to Him through the blood of Christ.” Right relationship with others, even those with whom we may disagree, means we are first at peace with God.

Read the Plain Truth:

“Civility cannot reign where hostility remains.”

Throughout the landscape of history, hostility amongst individuals and people-groups have surfaced. History speaks to that, on a national level as well as in families. But the hostility so often expressed toward others—i.e. Jews and Gentiles, as in our text today (Ephesians 2:17-18)—was put to death through Christ’s death on the cross. In other words, once we belong to Christ the hate ends! We no longer have to live that way. What does it mean to you that your relationship with God (and others!) can be restored (or perhaps even *made new*)?

2. From time-to-time we all lack civility. In a weak moment, we may say something out of anger, hold onto a resentment, or bear a grudge over some disagreement. But choosing to remain in that state of hostility overtime is not only miserable, but it will disrupt our fellowship with the Lord (Matthew 5:23-24) and keep us from living into God’s purpose (James 4:1-3). Think for a moment why hostility still flares up in your own life. What can you do proactively to counter that old way of living? Where should our focus be?

If we keep our focus on Christ, many areas we struggle with will be brought into perspective. God cares about every detail of our lives, but He also rules from heaven and one day He will make all things right and new. As His children, we must remember He is holy and He is in ultimate control of all things. And yet, the Lord has given us free-choice. Choosing daily to love, read His Word, pray for others (including our enemies!), worship together, attend a Life Group, serve, and give of our resources—these disciplines are proactive ways to draw near to God (see James 4:8). Peace is not the absence of controversy but a restored relationship with God. Christ brings peace to us (Ephesians 2:14) and He speaks of His peace in John 14:27—

“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.”

- Jesus put hostility to death on the cross and reclaimed God’s image for every soul. Pray and ask the Lord to open your eyes to see the ‘reclaimed image of God’ over your spouse, your neighbor, your child, your co-worker, and your boss.

Now pray for the leaders of this nation and our world. The Bible says we are to pray for all people and “ask God to help them... all who are in authority... I want men to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy” (1 Timothy 2:1-8).

In the space below, write one way you will more intentionally practice civility this week:

There is no reason a follower-of-Christ should ever lack civility when our Lord Jesus Christ through His death on the cross “has brought us peace” (Ephesians 2:14). Thank Him now and choose to listen, love, and with His help *be civil*, even when we disagree.

“Hatred stirs up quarrels, but love makes up for all offenses” (Proverbs 10:12)

One Year Bible Reading

September 23: Isaiah 41:17-43:13, Ephesians 2:1-22, Psalm 67:1-7, Prov. 23:29-35
 September 24: Isaiah 43:14-45:10, Ephesians 3:1-21, Psalm 68:1-18, Prov. 24:1-2
 September 25: Isaiah 45:11-48:11, Ephesians 4:1-16, Psalm 68:19-35, Prov. 24:3-4
 September 26: Isaiah 48:12-50:11, Ephesians 4:17-32, Psalm 69:1-18, Prov. 24:5-6
 September 27: Isaiah 51:1-53:12, Ephesians 5:1-33, Psalm 69:19-36, Proverbs 24:7
 September 28: Isaiah 54:1-57:14, Ephesians 6:1-24, Psalm 70:1-5, Proverbs 24:8
 September 29: Isaiah 57:15-59:21, Philippians 1:1-26, Ps. 71:1-24, Prov. 24:9-10



Text: Ephesians 2:11-18

PLAIN TRUTH:

Civility cannot _____ where hostility _____.

- We are created in _____.
 - Put a ten on the forehead of every person.
 - If you can’t put a ten on the forehead of another person it may be because someone put a two on yours once.
- We lost the image in _____.
 - Controversy sprang up in the first family.
 - God refused Cain’s offering—truth in love.
 - Much of the Old Testament could have been different if Cain would have accepted God’s truth in love—instead Cain killed Abel because he was angry with God.
 - Unresolved hurt and anger usually ends up in either emotional or physical death of some kind.
 - Hurting people hurt people.
- Jesus put _____ to death on the cross and _____ God’s _____ for every soul.
 - _____ was crucified with Christ.
 - Zero toleration for _____ and _____.