

## Dealing with Difficult People

Have you ever had to deal with difficult people? Of course you have. We all do. Behind the conflict are usually dysfunctional attitudes & perceptions that fuel the drama. No resolve is hopeful until one side or the other is willing to concede their personal rights, lay aside their personal agendas and cease asserting their personal demands. The Apostle Paul tells us how in today's Templates of Truth.

There were two women in the church at Philippi who apparently could not get along. Paul urges them to *live in harmony (with each other) in the Lord* (Philippians 4:2). To live in harmony was Paul's way of urging these women to resolve their differences and reconcile their relationship. To do that, their minds would have to be first and foremost focused on the Lord. Paul's counsel is not so general, though. He gave much more specific and practical advice in this letter to the church.

*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 2:3-5). In this passage of Scripture, Paul identifies three aspects of dealing with difficult people.

**Problem** – The two motives that contribute most to conflict are *selfishness* and *empty conceit*. Selfishness translates a Greek word referring to self-serving ambition. It is the same word Paul used in 1:17 in referring to some preachers whose ministry is motivated out of *selfish ambition rather than pure motive*. It describes a person who persistently seeks a personal advantage regardless of how it might affect other people. It is building yourself up while tearing someone else down, often using flattery, deceit, & false accusations in the process. Empty conceit is a word that refers to a highly exaggerated view of self which is void of true reality. Such a person considers himself always to be right and expects others to agree with him. The only unity he seeks is agreement with his opinions and his way. Selfish ambition pursues personal agenda while empty conceit seeks personal glory and acclaim. Both manifest loveless carnality and spiritual immaturity, and contribute to strife, anger, resentment and jealousy.

**Process** – The two actions that contribute most to the resolution are to *regard* and to *look*. To regard means to consider, esteem or to conclude *others as more important* than yourself. It is more than just an opinion. It is a carefully thought-out conclusion based on the accepted truth that they are. Therefore, it is not just pretending that they are. It is genuinely believing it and accommodating that belief through actions & behaviors. The Greek word translated more important uses the suffix “hyper” and means to excel, surpass or be superior to. Paul says we are to regard others as superior to ourselves. Not only that, we are to look out for the interests of others. We are to observe, pay careful attention to, and show special consideration for the needs of others over and above our own.

We cannot do those things with an attitude of selfish ambition and empty conceit. The only way we can regard others as more important than ourselves and place their needs as greater than our own is through *humility of mind*. The humble person is not one who thinks meanly of himself; he simply doesn't think of himself at all. Humility is that grace that, when you think you have it, you just lost it. The humble person lowers his awareness of self, personal desires, rights and expectations, and abandons them in a servant's attitude in favor of others.

**Prototype** – *Christ Jesus* is the model & example for such humility, regard and outlook. Paul said that Jesus *emptied Himself*...(and) *humbled Himself by becoming obedient to...death on a cross* (2:7-8). Where would our salvation be today had Jesus been absorbed in selfish ambition and empty conceit? If there is a single word that summarizes the life and ministry of Jesus, it is the word, servant. He lovingly, willingly and graciously took on the *form of a bond-servant* and met every need of every person around Him, ultimately your need and mine for atonement, forgiveness, love and salvation.

Dealing with difficult people can indeed be a challenge. As long as you insist that the other person is the difficult equation in the factor, you are probably ignoring your own contribution and responsibility as an equal factor. Playing the blame game is not a part of Paul's process of resolve. Jesus didn't blame you for His death, he just died for your sins that required it. Instead of investing so much emotional energy trying to figure out why the other person is being so difficult, compare your stake in the matter to the divine measure of humility as demonstrated in Christ Jesus. When you do so, you will probably discover that you are as much a part of the problem as the other person. Allow God to help you change your perspective and then you can become a major impetus in the solution.

That's today's Templates of Truth. This is your Bible teacher, Rick Smith, reminding you to attend church this Sunday for Bible study and worship, pray for one another, and always strive to abide in Christ. Until next time, have a blessed and glorious day in the Lord Jesus.