

RELATIONSHIPS ALSO MATTER



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Just the other day I heard a panel discussing a couple of “hot” topics in missiology at the North American Mission Leaders Conference, sponsored by Missio Nexus. As they were ending, Steve Moore—who heads this mission network (www.missionexus.org)—told a story about a call he had received from a very concerned missionary. “Joe,” I’ll call him, asked Steve to sanction a particular organization because of things specific global workers were teaching on a certain field. Steve asked him if he had talked with these brothers to be sure he understood the issue(s) and had tried to work it out. Joe said no. Steve told him that he would be glad to connect him with them, so he contacted the agency and forwarded the contact information to both Joe and the field workers.

A few weeks later Joe called again. He had not talked with the workers still, so Steve told him he would not take any action until he did. Joe said he didn’t need to because he had confirmed his suspicions by talking with other people he trusted. Joe called again a month or two later and still had not talked to the field workers. Steve told him that he would not take his call again until he did so, and has refused one more call from Joe.

That may sound unloving or uncaring but it was biblical. As I heard the story, I was impressed again of the importance to follow clear teaching of God’s Word. Here are a few of the core principles that come to mind:

1. **FORGIVENESS is required**, no matter what:

- Matthew 18:22 Jesus answered Peter’s question about how many times we should forgive: “*Not seven times, I tell you, but seventy-seven times!*” (Unlimited.) And, later in the same section, the consequences of not forgiving (v. 35), “*So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if each of you does not forgive your brother from your heart.*”
- In fact, Jesus seems to say that, at some level, the effectiveness of our prayers and our own forgiveness is predicated upon our forgiving in Mark 11:25, “*Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your sins.*”
- Colossians 3:13 “*...bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if someone happens to have a complaint against anyone else.*”

2. **JUDGING is God’s job**, not ours:

- Matthew 7:1-2 “*Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For by the standard you judge you will be judged, and the measure you use will be the measure you receive.*”

3. **When we sin, ALWAYS, FIRST: GO** to our brother:

- a. Our sin against a brother:
 - Matthew 5:23-24, “*So then, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has*

something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother and then come and present your gift.”

b. Our brother in sin:

If “Joe” in our story above, wanted to pursue this biblically, he would go to the brother(s) in question, in a process of Matthew 18:15-18. Summarized: go directly to the brother or sister, if it is not resolved and they will not listen, take another with you, if they will not listen or repent, take it to the church. Then you treat him like a non-believer (whom we still love and seek to restore).

4. **False Teaching is CLEAR in the NT**, other issues are not to divide us:

In 2 Timothy 2, right after Paul described the clear false teaching that the resurrection has already happened (v. 2:18), he warns Timothy to be careful what we argue about: “*But reject foolish and ignorant controversies, because you know they breed infighting. And the Lord’s slave must not engage in heated disputes but be kind toward all, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance and then knowledge of the truth and they will come to their senses and escape the devil’s trap where they are held captive to do his will.*” (2 Tim. 2:23-26)

All too often, we can prioritize a less clear teaching over these very clear biblical truths. How we treat one another is talked about far more often than some treasured theologies. That doesn’t make the theology wrong, but it must guide the way we deal with differences. 