

Back to School: Sociology Class
September 13, 2015
(Ephesians 4:31-5:2)

Welcome/Prayer

Introduction

According to the dictionary, sociology is "the study of the development, structure, and functioning of human society; the study of social problems."

Sociology is a far-reaching scientific discipline that touches virtually every area of human existence. It analyzes both individual contacts and global conflicts; it investigates both interpersonal and international relationships.

Since God created us to be social beings, the world of sociology has a great deal to teach us. From the beginning of time to the present, we have done a pretty good job of messing up most of our social relationships (Cain killed his brother, Abel out of jealousy, etc.).

The key sociological principle is expressed in the first part of Ephesians 4:32 (KJV): "Be ye kind." The Apostle Paul put it this way:

"Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:32 NLT)

1. Why is it so hard for people to "just get along"?
2. Why is it important for Christians to focus on social relationships?

There are three personal characteristics that help us "get along."

- 1.) We are to be "**kind.**"

The Greek word translated "kind" = lit., "good, useful"

Paul is saying, "Be good to each other. Do what is useful or helpful for one another."

Our model is God Himself.

"Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever." (Psalm 106:1)

1. In what ways has God been kind to you in your life?

Being kind is more than an attitude, it involves action.

2. Describe a time when you have either done a random act of kindness, or you have been the recipient of a random act of kindness.

3. How did this act draw you closer to God?

According to the Apostle Paul, one of the best ways to express kindness is through our words.

In the previous verse he tells his readers, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander...” (Ephesians 4:31a NLT)

He makes the same point in a more positive manner in verse 29 (NLT):

“Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.”

4. What are ways people can abide by this rule?
5. What are some challenges people must overcome in order to abide by this rule?
6. What are the effects of Christians not abiding by this rule?

One of the greatest benefits of kindness is that it serves a marvelous witness to others. Why does God act kindly toward everyone? Romans 2:4 gives us the answer:

“Don’t you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can’t you see that His kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?” (Romans 2:4 NLT)

7. Discuss what it means that God’s kindness is intended to turn people from their sin.

As believers, one of primary motives for being kind toward others is to lead them to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

A quick Greek lesson: *christos* = Christ, *chrestos* = kind. Early Church fathers sometimes called Jesus *chrestos* (the Kind One). Likewise, they substituted *chrestoi* (kind ones) for *christoi* (Christians). To be a Christian is to be kind in order to point others to Christ, the Kind One.

John Wesley’s advice to the Early Methodists still applies today:

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can!”

8. Discuss Wesley’s advice and what it might look like in our worship, our community, and our world.

2.) A second characteristic that helps us “get along” is by being “**tenderhearted.**”

The original Greek word = lit., “inward parts, entrails” (i.e. your “innards”). In the ancient world, it was the center of a person’s emotions. It was used extensively to describe the “compassion” of Christ (cf. many translations of Eph. 4:32)

Matthew 9:36- Jesus “had compassion” for the crowds (i.e. harassed & helpless) and sent the Twelve out to minister among them.

Mark 1:41- “Filled with compassion,” Jesus healed a leper.

Luke 7:13- Jesus’ “heart went out” to a woman mourning her son’s death so He raised the boy from the dead.

Compassion is a “gut-level feeling” of concern and a desire to help. Like kindness, it always manifests itself in action.

1. What normally keeps us from following our “gut” (instincts) and taking action?

In 1 Peter 3:8, believers are encouraged to have both “a tender heart and a humble mind.” (ESV)

One of the reasons we are sometimes hardhearted rather than tenderhearted toward those around us is because we view many persons as our adversaries. In the final chapter of this letter, Paul encourages the Ephesians to put on the spiritual armor of God.

“Put on all the armor that God gives, so you can defend yourself against the devil’s tricks. We are not fighting against humans. We are fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world.” (Ephesians 6:11-12 CEV)

Our enemy is not our wife or husband, our rebellious children, our short-fused neighbor, our gossiping co-worker, or even “the liberals who are ruining our country.” The real enemy is Satan who seeks to destroy and devour us. One of the ways he disrupts our lives is by setting us at odds with others. When we realize the Devil is to blame, we are much more likely to be compassionate and tenderhearted toward those around us.

2. How would recognizing an adversary as Satan rather than a person change relationships between people?

It doesn’t mean we overlook their wrong behavior. It means we look past it and consider the source. Even those who harm us are victims themselves in need of God’s care.

3.) We are better able to get along with others when we are **“forgiving.”**

The Greek word most commonly used in the New Testament for forgiveness means to “let go, release from debt.” Instead of using the technical, legal term, Paul chooses one which is more relational in nature (*charizomai*). It comes from the root word (*charis*) which means “grace, undeserved favor.” Here Paul is saying, “Show grace to one another, just as God in Christ has shown grace to you.” This word clearly suggests forgiveness is not earned.

1. How does the Christian view of forgiveness differ from the culture’s view?

Scripture is very clear that all wrongs committed against us pale in comparison to our own sins committed against God. Because He has forgiven us, we are to go & do likewise (i.e. forgive others).

2. Discuss what it means that all wrongs committed against us pale in comparison to our own sins committed against God.

Forgiveness gives us an opportunity to start over in our relationship with Him. When granted to others, it has the same potential to provide a new beginning in a relationship that has gone bad.

Conclusion

God has been kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving toward us, and according to the Apostle Paul, we are to go and do likewise:

“Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ.” (Ephesians 5:1-2a NLT)

1. Give thanks for the kindness, compassion, and forgiveness God has shown you.
2. What is ONE thing you can do this to imitate God’s example by being kind, tenderhearted, and/or forgiving toward someone?

Close in Prayer