

One Another Passages in the New Testament

First Class: Jan. 23, 2022

The class began by me introducing myself and giving some of my history. I then allowed them to ask questions. This took about 20 minutes.

Introduction

Pastor Trevor recently spoke about Aspect Perception and how it creates blind spots in all of us. He said this is part of why we need one another. He spoke of covenants to guard one another. Covenants committing ourselves to remind one another that we are all in this together. I can't think of a better way to begin this series on the *one another* passages in the New Testament than with those words.

Positive Qualities

In each of the *one another* passages, there is a quality or attitude we are to display (not just have) or an action we are to take (not just think about). These qualities and acts are also identifiers. They are either active in our lives, identifying us with Jesus or they are absent, which identifies us with Satan. *“By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.”* 1 John 3:10. The next verse is a “love one another.” There are five such verses in 1 John.

Also, with regard to the qualities God wants us to have, they always involve the **presence** of something, not just an absence.

Here is a common example of defining by what is missing: When you ask people today to define love, you will often hear it defined as “unselfishness”. But real love is not the absence of selfishness. It is the presence of actions that contribute to others in a positive way. It is caring about them as much as we care about ourselves. And spiritual qualities are defined by what they are, not by what they are not.

Here is the problem. When we define these qualities, by what is absent, it is much easier to convince ourselves that we possess them. But when we define them by positive things, it is not as easy to attribute them to ourselves. Let that sink in for a moment, and then consider this question. **How would you define your spiritual qualities?**

Interpersonal Neurobiology

There is an area that we want to include as a part of this study. Over the last few years, I have discovered a field of study known as *Interpersonal Neurobiology*. **Are any of you familiar with that?** It is the study of how the very structure and operation of our brains facilitate personal relationships.

One author, writing about this, describes what each side of the brain specializes in, then emphasizes that these two halves were designed to work in an integrated way. But there are difficulties when one side or the other dominates. He does an excellent job in describing how there has been a continual shift to left hemisphere dominance in Western culture over the last few hundred years. This has strongly affected how our culture views everything, but especially politics and religion. It's a fascinating study. But the most important thing I took away from the book was actually a personal application from how each side deals with what is familiar.

The left hemisphere is very good at deconstructing, at analyzing details, categorizing, labeling, thinking in literal, linear ways and dealing with all things as objects, primarily for use or manipulation. This is not always in a bad way. This is the primary part of the brain Pastor uses when he begins studying a passage to preach. You study the words; you study the grammar. You study the background.

The right hemisphere, on the other hand, contextualizes all things and sees things primarily in relationships. It is good at connecting and can develop the ability to see things through the eyes of others and feel them through their experience. This is the part pastor uses to bring out the results of his study, to put them into a context, and to produce applications to life from them. The two are designed to work together in collaboration.

When it comes to the familiar, the left often sees things as "old hat". In a close relationship, it can see the other person as dull and boring. But since the right sees in context and the context is always changing, it can see what is familiar almost as though with fresh eyes.

That means that God has given us the ability to develop the habit of choosing the attitude through which we see one another each day. We can take others for granted. Or we can see them with fresh eyes each day as a beautiful gift from God, a person with a unique set of gifts, talents, abilities, and personalities. And we can gain a new appreciation of them every time we look at them. Or we can merely take them for granted and disregard them. What an amazing gift God has given us to see in one another what he sees in us.

Necessary Qualities

One author, in describing the qualities of a good therapist, used the acronym PART. After thinking about his descriptions of qualities, my conclusion is that they are great qualities for all of us to develop in relation to one another. Let's look at each one briefly.

Presence

He defines *presence* as being there, in the moment, with someone and for that someone. "For" in this case means concentrating on understanding the other person and ready to contribute to them what they need. You are there without a personal agenda of your own. This requires listening skills, and that means listening with the eyes as well as the ears. Taking in and understanding all the verbal and nonverbal communication that is happening.

When I saw that, I was reminded of something I had read years ago. It was about the news commentator, Dan Rather interviewing Mother Teresa. At one point he asked, "When you pray, what do you say?" She answered, "I don't say anything.... I listen." Dan Rather, not exactly sure how to respond, asked, "Well...what does God say?" She answered, "He doesn't say anything...He listens. And if you don't understand that, I can't explain it to you." Her point, beautifully made, was that all good communication with God (and by extension, with anyone else) begins first with a willingness to pay attention (to listen deeply), then extending all our senses into that listening experience. Listening is an art that can be developed by anyone, because God has given all of us the equipment to do so.

An aside: A major difference between men and women is that women's brains contain about 40 % more connective tissue between the two hemispheres than do Men's brains. Refer to Interview between Dr. James Dobson and Dr. Donald Joy.

When you are around the people in your life, ask yourself, "What am I paying attention to?" "What are my eyes seeing and where are my thoughts going?"

Attunement

This is when you are in tune with the other. Remember what it is like waiting to

see an orchestra perform. As the members arrive and take out their instruments, what happens? The pianist sounds a note on the piano. The rest of the orchestra tunes their individual instruments to that sound. So, if they are all playing the d sharp above middle C, they will all sound the exact same note. They will be attuned with one another, so that they will be able to produce a beautiful symphony together, rather than chaotic dissonance. Let me make a quick application:

Recently, Pastor Trevor preached on a passage in Mark that contains a “one another” command. The NIV we use translated it as “each other”, rather than “one another”, so you might not have recognized it. It’s where Jesus said, “be at peace with one another”. Peace (biblical shalom) is the presence of harmony throughout all of life, not just the absence of conflict. Interact with me for a moment. **How would you define harmony?**

In one sense, harmony results from being attuned to a whole group, not just another person. It is when several notes come together to produce a beautiful chord. Each has its own contribution. We are to live with one another in that kind of harmony—all of us working together, each contributing out of the beauty with which God has gifted him or her to bring out a collective beauty. It’s as though Christ is saying let shalom with one another be what you are known for. **As a congregation, what kind of music do we make?**

Resonance

This gets us more into the area of empathy. Suppose I take a violin and draw the bow across an open string. If there is another violin close by, the same string on that violin will begin to vibrate without being touched. That is resonance. And God has given us the equipment to resonate with one another. This is empathy where we experience feeling what the other person is expressing. When you vibrate, do I vibrate with you? Is there possibly a spiritual vibration that each of us sends out and with which we can resonate? I don’t know whether it is that or simply the ability to read verbal and nonverbal communication. But I do know it is part of the equipment God has created in us to resonate with one another.

There is an important point to make regarding this. Jesus was in heaven with His Father. We don’t know what heaven is like, but we know it is magnificent and beautiful beyond our wildest dreams. That’s what Jesus left to come to earth. He spent nine months in gestation, left his mother’s womb and travelled through her birth canal to be born as an infant. He became a toddler, a young child, an adolescent, an adult, and then a teacher, resonating with all who came into contact

with Him. He later died and was buried. He was resurrected from death. All of us went through the same process of gestation, birth, childhood, adulthood and finally we will die. But for those of us who belong to Jesus, we will be resurrected to life. The important thing is that He had to grow both physically and mentally like us. He has seen life through our eyes. He has experienced life through a body like ours. He knows from experience what we go through. He empathizes with us. He **resonates** with us perfectly. Do you realize that he has also given us the equipment to resonate with him? **What does that mean to you? When God vibrates in your presence, do you vibrate with Him? Are there any experiences you'd like to share?**

Tracking

The author lists several things that T stands for. I'm going to limit it here to one thing, *tracking*. It's like two trains running on the same track, seeing the same sights along the way, experiencing the same things and ending up at the same destination.

These four are all qualities we need to develop in order to have a deep personal relationship with another—be it with God or another person.

All these things are a part of using the equipment we have been given in order to connect with, bond with, communicate with, and contribute to one another. These are all a part of the image of God in which we have been created. Neuroscience is helping us to see that more clearly.

I like these four descriptions because they use pictures that really clarify the concepts and help us to remember them. But I have to add something here.

Mirroring

Let's also consider the concept of mirroring. This means that when you are really connecting, you tend to mirror what the other person is expressing, both in feeling and in gestures.

We'll take this up further next week.