

The Two Faces of Human Relations

Its done all over the world, all the time. And, Christians are very little different than the rest of the world, in their indulgence in the habit. I am speaking of gossiping, of which it seems many people are compulsively involved. The effect is nothing less than a mutual betrayal of love and loyalty among family members (siblings and other relatives), and friends. And, of course, it often extends to other people's lives; i.e., neighbors, local residents, fellow employees, etc.

And this is usually characteristic behavior, not simply occasional. Just think about your own circle of relatives, and friends, and how often you talk wrongly about others (including each other, against each other). We ought to be smart enough to realize that probably nearly all of us do it, so who is fooling who by not admitting it? Are we not, then, living a lie, when those whom we have betrayed don't know that we have? Hence, the "two faced" reference in the title above. What else is it? And it doesn't matter if the gossip subject is true, or not!

And we can't take comfort because one may do it less than another. A hundred times is little consolation compared to two hundred. This is, then, a hidden, contradictory side of our otherwise friendly relationship with each other, and is too prevalent and important to ignore, as has universally been done for ages.

This practice can be summed up in one sentence: things said about others that we wouldn't want them to hear, and that shouldn't be said behind their backs. Nor would we hardly ever say them directly to the one betrayed, even if the gossip was the truth. And yet, that is exactly what Christians should do, if we have a genuine issue with someone.

Why don't we do it, other than a lack of courage, or fear of retaliation? In our old fallen natures, talebearing, gossiping, putting others down to elevate ourselves, etc. is an indulgence we take certain inordinate pleasure in. In fact, we often can't get there with the news fast enough!

So, what may be involved in this backbiting practice? Personal criticism, character assassination, jealousy, lying accusations, misjudgments, malicious comments, betrayal of confidence, etc., etc. The last one noted may be done under the guise of: "I'm not supposed to tell you this, but I wanted you to pray about it". Pray with someone else about something that you were asked to, and probably promised to keep to yourself?

As if the importance of you enlisting prayer overrides your betrayal of a trust! Your word isn't worth much in that case, is it? It is really just an excuse for a compulsive gossiping habit, which cannot be rationalized. A Christian rightly established in his responsibility to maintain truth and integrity, never violates one principle at the expense of another!

So, what should we do with an observed fault of another? Are we not responsible for, and able to admonish one another as the scripture says? Or know, as it says in another place, that an open rebuke is better than secret love!

We know what the typical reaction to telling someone about a wrong they have committed will be. Usually resentment, retaliation, loss of friendship or association, and other possible negative results. Only the rare one will accept rebukes, or criticism graciously, or even tolerantly. Knowing these probabilities is why we seldom do anything about the problem. Fair weather friendship, maintained to avoid controversy, is a poor substitute for an honest relationship. The bible tells us to “make not provision for the flesh (our old fallen natures)”. Neither our own, or anyone else’s!

. So what is the net effect, or result? No attempt to apologize, or to secure forgiveness and reconciliation—but just one more unsettled offense to pile up with all the others that will no doubt occur in a lifetime. So, what difference is there in Christians having dishonest relationships, than unbelievers doing the same thing?

Are we not acting on the same natural, unspiritual principle that they are? They have no alternative, but we have been given a new spiritual nature, and are responsible to God to “walk in the Spirit, if so be that we live in the Spirit”. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death”. Rom. 8:2.

Which means that we can not (may not) do things the old, unregenerated way, any more! Practically speaking, we will fail many times, but that can never be an allowable excuse. My commission of this sin, is not offset by an act of it that you may commit against me. We can’t say, or think: well, the other person does it too, and leave it at that—but that is just about what we do.

If, on occasion, the offending person has a justifiable complaint against you and tells you about it—so what? Can it not be admitted, and proper steps taken to fix it? In other words, deal with every situation, as it requires. After all, we are not saved (born again) to act the same way we always did. But, that is, unfortunately, the typical lifestyle of most Christians!

2. We can’t control the possibility of over-reaction becoming a source of trouble, itself. But, should attempt to help each other handle things as fairly and amicably as possible—so that we could maintain good, honest, relationships.

Of course, it is a difficult thing to do properly, but Christian principles demand it. God demands it! This unChristian behavior is a major stumbling block to, and contradiction of an assumed good testimony. 3. Another telling fault is our willingness to hear criticism of others, and not instead telling the gossip that we don’t want to hear it (because one part of us—our old nature—does). And then we go further by passing it on to somebody else.. All behind the back of the sister, brother, friend, etc., that we are betraying. Remember the scriptural warnings about “the words of a talebearer “, and how they “go down into the innermost parts of the belly.”

Again, our Christian life is often more of a contradiction of spiritual principles, than an

affirmation and testimony of them. At night, or in morning devotions, when we come to the Lord after having had conversation with relatives, or friends, judging and criticizing others (kin, etc.)—do we confess (except occasionally, perhaps) that we have sinned against God in that way, and ask his forgiveness, and agree to make amends for it—both by admitting it to the party talked to, and harder still, the party talked about? No, seldom, if ever!

We go on as if we did nothing wrong. What a mockery we make of God's requirements of us. Do we think we can offset it by some other acts of faith, or service? There is no reciprocity, or moral equivalency principle available to us. Instead of coming to God with unclean hands, lips, etc., God tells us to "leave our gift (or whatever we have come to him with, or for) at the altar, and go and be reconciled to thy brother". If not, may not your prayers, worship, etc., be largely in vain in that instance, and beyond?

Is our profession in that case, or relationship not more talk than walk? So, the pattern usually goes on throughout our Christian life, living a lie vs. the truth. What, with all our busy Christian activity and involvement? Yes, we are guilty as intimated, with little or no restitution being made. Where is the conscience? Whereby we should self-judge our actions, and take steps to correct our wrongdoings—not leave them unrepented from.

I would venture to say that this unChristian activity is a frequent, significant part of our private social conversations within families, and personal associations with others. Yet, we are right out there attending worship and other services, evangelizing, etc., as if we have clean hands, and good testimonies of faithfulness to God, and true brotherly love. And again from the bible, "my brethren, these things ought not so to be". This fault, with rare exception, applies to all of us, and requires that something be done about the past cases—at least, with God—and serious, sincere effort to prevent it in the future

Think, if you would, or dare to face the truth about your professed love and care for others, especially family. If they, or you, were to know everything you have said about each other, would that not severely strain your relationships? I mean, if all of a sudden, it becomes exposed. Even one or two things revealed, could be very damaging, let alone a pattern of offenses stretching over years.

Is anything likely to change this universal breach of the principles of love, loyalty, and honesty among brethren? No, but it may be one of the most important and soul cleansing things that a Christian could do!

Where to start, if one would seriously care and want to stop the perennial mistreatment of others to whom we customarily say "I love you"? Can we agree to pray before the next conversation you have with someone (subject to this bad habit of ours), that you will not betray one person by telling them something about another that God would not approve of (or, in fact, that he would judge you for)

Remember the plaque on the wall that refers to God as “the unseen listener to every conversation”? Its strange how we can read a soul searching reminder like that, and then in no time talk and act like no such admonition exists. Maybe, even often, engage in exchanges, such as sexually explicit remarks, innuendos, or jokes, lies, and other unChristian talk, as if God were not even there!

How much make-believe, unspiritual thinking do we do? If we would be honest, it would be more common by far than we would ever admit. Because we revert from our new, spiritual, Christian nature to our old, carnal, fleshly nature far too easily and often. In fact, it is almost automatic, many times.

So, when are we “acting” the Christian role, and when are we actually walking in the Spirit? I see very little evidence that many Christians even understand the contrasting principles of the old, and new natures that we possess, let alone actually practice walking (acting, thinking) in the Spirit, which is the essence of our new nature.

“By their fruits, ye shall know them”but ironically, much of the time may not even know what kind of fruit they are exhibiting. Are they works of the flesh, under the law of sin and death, or works of the Spirit, products of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus? To follow the Lord, by walking in the Spirit, instead of the flesh, is a deliberate decision we must make constantly throughout our earthly lives. Otherwise, we will continue to do things like we did before we were saved. It is a lifelong battle, wherein the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh! Do we lose that battle, more than we win it? Probably yes, more often than not! But, we have no right to let it continue that way, no matter what the reason is that we fail to do anything about it.