

When Our Boats Meet

A month or two ago someone, (I do not know who wrote it) a very good article title refuting the saying “We are all in the same boat.” The writer made the point we are all in the same storm, i.e. pandemic, but we are not all in the same boat. While some have not missed a day of work during the economic shutdown, others have not worked a day. There are those who have contracted COVID 19 and those who do not know anyone who has. Some people live in the country and can social distance without any problem (those of us in the Neafus area have been socially distancing for a long time) but others live in cities and are confined to their apartments. I wonder, what happens when our boats meet?”

This has been on my mind since the reopening of certain aspects of our economy and church services. I noticed very little friction between people while everyone was quarantining but many “issues” appeared once people started interacting again. These issues have been discussed in various congregations

I realize we are in different boats. Some folks have serious health issues and contracting the virus could be a death sentence for them. Some know those that have the virus and the risks to their continual health.

Let me also point out there are scriptural principles at play with this and any issue can cause brethren to disagree. It is not limited to just one issue, it could be time of services, Bible Class material to use, translations of the Bible, and a host of other issues.

Jesus said the second greatest command of God is to love our fellow man. "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:39). There is no greater commandment in the Law of Moses except for us to love God first. Let me point out the love in our text is the agape love which is the highest form of love, a love that considers the needs of the other person and their good first. A passage closely connected to Matthew 22.39 is recorded in the Sermon on the Mount. "You have heard that it was said, 'You

shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:43-45) I have often pointed out this is a hard thing to do. But I find loving my brethren may be harder. Let me explain. My enemy doesn't go to church with me, he/she doesn't sing with me, they don't pray with me, they don't observe the Lord's supper with me, and they don't sit on the pew next to me. I may not interact with "my enemy" very often. But my brethren, those who I worship with me are not perfect and sometimes they might be hard to get along with. Therefore, loving my enemy may at times be easier than loving my brethren. But Jesus said our love for Him and each other will show the world we are His disciples. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13.35)

We are to think of others first. "And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." (1 Corinthians 12:23-26). The division at Corinth over spiritual gifts was caused by all the other problems at Corinth, being carnally minded and being spiritually immature. Frankly, most of the issues I have seen among brethren in my almost forty years of preaching are from those same two areas. I need to be spiritually minded and mature enough as a Christian that I can do what is best for the cause of Christ. This same point is made in Philippians. "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with

God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. (Philippians 2:3-7) What would Jesus do? He emptied Himself for us should we not have the same mindset.

Another principle is stated in 1 Corinthians 8. Paul states fact 1 “idols do not exist”, and fact 2 “many at Corinth knew idols did not exist”, but this leads to fact 3, “And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.” (1 Corinthians 8:11-13) We should never and I mean never put a stumbling block before a fellow Christian. Maybe they are immature and I am the mature one, I should never cause them to stumble. Maybe I am the immature one and they are the mature, in which case I need to be willing to study and learn more.

Yet another principle is stated in Romans. “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.” (Romans 13:1) I do not agree with every law implemented by our government but I am obligated to obey those laws as long as they do not contradict the law of Christ, Acts 5.39. I have tried to obey the laws and mandates of our government during this time and will continue to do so.

Finally, we should do whatever we can to make everyone feel safe and worship with us.: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psalms 133.1) Jesus prayed for His disciples to have the kind of unity He had with the Father, John 17.22.

These principles need to be applied whenever our boats meet. – Dennis Tucker