

Today we are starting our new message series entitled, "Got Questions?" And boy do you ever have some questions! I love doing this kind of message series because what we are engaging in is very important...we are doing the work of Ethics.

Ethics is where you take a belief or foundational structure and work to find out how we should live in light of our stated beliefs. And the method we are using has been around for millennia.

The Socratic Method, as it has come to be called, is based on the teaching style of the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates; mainly because he is the earliest known to have used it as his primary form of teaching. It is a form of teaching where students ask questions and the teacher teaches based on the questions.

Jesus used two primary methods of teaching: Parable and Question/Answer. Both of these have caused great difficulty for us. Why? Because in neither approach does Jesus ever really give a very clear answer.

Jesus rarely gave a direct answer. Instead he asked questions and told parables to force people to think and work on the answers themselves.

I mean listen to his response when the disciples asked him why he spoke in parables...

Mark 4:10-12

When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that,
"they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,
and ever hearing but never understanding;
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"

And when it comes to questions, Jesus doesn't seem to help out much there either. As you read through the Bible it seems that Jesus is more like the questioner. One author found that Jesus asked 307 different questions, but didn't really give his answer to those questions. People ask him 183 questions...do you know how many he answered? 3

Maybe we should change that bumper sticker that says, "Jesus is the answer!" to something more accurate like: "Jesus is the Questioner!" or "Jesus never gives a straight answer!"

Now we might ask, Why would he do such a thing? Just answer the question! Is Jesus trying to be dodgy, play the politician, what?

I think there are a couple of reasons...

1. Jesus knows that many of our questions come with an agenda.

How often have you asked a question...not because you are interested in searching out an answer, but because you want to make sure the person answering gives you the answer you want to hear?

Luke 5:21-22,

21 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?"

Not to pick on you or your questions, you had some great questions and I give you the benefit of the doubt, but a couple of you asked the question, and then said, But THIS is what I think! Or you started over-explaining...

So many times we don't want to hear the answer Jesus is going to give us because we either don't want to hear it or we think we know it and don't want to live by it.

2. Jesus wants to get to the heart of the issue and sometimes our questions miss it.

A while back I was having a discussion with someone, and they were pushing and prodding a single-footed question, "When would I confront someone from the pulpit about their sin?" Now, if you have been here any length of time, I'm not afraid to tell someone that their sin is separating them from God and from the people around them... in its right time and place. The problem was that wasn't the issue that needed to be addressed if this man was going to be part of our church. I believe that God deals with people, convicts them of their sins, and leads them to find salvation, forgiveness and healing...but people who want to play God and tell other people what sins they need to confess cause more damage than just about anything else in the Church.

So I refused to answer his question directly, and simply asked, "Do you know what it means to lead with love? To sacrificially love others to the point where you can let God work and speak when God tells you to speak and not when you think you ought to speak?"

He wouldn't answer my question, and I wouldn't answer his directly...

Jesus often did the same thing with people. In John 3 Nicodemus comes asking questions about Jesus and his ministry, but Jesus continually redirects him back to the heart of the issue...that Nicodemus needs a rebirth...a new way of thinking.

And then Jesus didn't bother to give a very good answer to Nicodemus...just let him sit and wallow and ponder what had been said...this leads us to our third reason...

3. Jesus wants us to think for ourselves.

Luke 7:20-24

20 When the [John's Disciples] came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'"

21 At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. 22 So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. 23 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

The disciples wanted a clear, precise answer about whether or not Jesus was the messiah. They didn't get a clear answer. What they got was a "Tell John what you see me doing!"

Jesus was doing all the things that the Messiah was supposed to do, but hadn't said whether or not he was the Messiah...so there was still some doubt...maybe he was, maybe he wasn't...

God does the same thing with revealing his existence. Does God exist? Yes/No Can we prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that God exists? Absolutely not. Is there good reason to believe he exists? Yes. I believe, obviously, there is strong reason to believe that God's existence is more than likely. But I can also understand how someone, looking at the exact same stuff as me, can come to a different conclusion.

God gives just enough to interest us but not so much to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt.

I like this about God...He wants us to think for ourselves.

If we are honest,

Jesus' approach to questions is dangerous.

He is open to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. He is open to people getting it wrong. He is open to people getting it wrong and using that against other people. People get angry because he didn't answer directly.

But while it is dangerous...

Jesus' approach to questions is brilliant.

We learn best, we understand best, what we have worked for...so when we get it...we REALLY get it! He also knows our world does not function the way He wants it to function...there are more grey areas in our world than there are black and white. Not because there are no absolutes and not right and wrong...but because rarely does an answer really answer the question for all circumstances.

So for the rest of our time let's look at today's question:

Why can't Christians get along?

Before we get too uptight about the question, let's just admit...everyone has trouble getting along...not just Christians. Democrats and Republicans, East Coast Rappers and West Coast Rappers, Patriot fans and everyone else in the world...

For the Christian, I think the problem boils down to expectation. We serve Jesus Christ who is most famous for saying, "Love your neighbor as yourself" and "Love your enemies." So it would be expected that those who claim to follow him would try really hard to practice those two commands at the very least...and in so doing they would get along better than others.

But from the very beginning of the Church's existence there have been relationship problems among church members.

Paul's famous words in Galatians 3:28,

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

These words were written to a church that was trying to turn the Gentiles, women, and slaves into second class citizens of the Kingdom of God, and Paul wasn't going to stand for it. In fact, a majority of the problems addressed in the New Testament books deal with trying to get the people in the Churches to get along.

And really, all relationship failures boil down to a few problems:

- Anger and Selfishness- I should get my way, and I get angry when I don't.
- Pride-I deserve more than or better than those people over there.
- Unforgiveness- They wronged me, and I refuse to forgive them.
- Mistrust and thinking the worst of others-This happens when someone simply says "Could you please move so I can get through?" But you don't like them so you hear (in a snotty tone of voice) "Could you please move so I can get through?"
- Failure to see our own biases and enculturation-we are blind to our own downfalls and foibles.

When we combine these sinful attitudes with a belief that we have the Truth...we become rather obnoxious. I mean we must be right because We are intelligent,

thoughtful people, who wouldn't have chosen this way to believe if we weren't right...so that makes you completely wrong.

When we combine this passion for our version of truth with an arrogance rightness and a failure to really listen and try to understand the other side...we have relationship problems.

Here is what Paul counsels the church to do...

Philippians 2:1-4

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

The very first thing we need to do in order to get along...

We must humble ourselves.

There is so much wrapped up in that verse, but it all boils down to this singular point... humility. Do we love the other person enough to value them above ourselves...not looking to our own interests but to the interests of others.

Do you know why Christians can't get along? Because we are still tainted by sin and selfishness and we refuse to let the power of this verse sink into our lives.

Just as important, if not more important than humbling ourselves...

We must have a plan.

Here is the reality. We are going to love and humble ourselves. We are going to do practically everything right...and there is still going to be trouble. So we have to have a plan of how to deal with things. And Matthew 18 is our best guide.

Matthew 18:15-20

15 "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If they still refuse

to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

18 “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19 “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Here is the plan...If there is an issue, go and talk to that person privately about the issue and try to work it out. The problem is most of us never, ever do this. We have an issue with someone in the church, and instead of talking with them about it, we talk with our spouse, and complain to our friend, and mention it to someone else. And sit and fume about it for weeks if not months or more. Maybe complain online. Anything and everything except going and talking to the person.

I'm guilty. I don't like confrontation. I have enough of that in my life to last forever...and yet, if we don't take care of it things simply get worse.

If that doesn't resolve the issue, take someone along with you. Not as ammunition or as a biased defender, but as someone to listen and help talk you through things. This needs to be someone who is wise enough and honest enough to tell you if you are getting it wrong and also willing to listen.

If that doesn't work, go to the leadership of the church.

So often we misuse the “where two or three gather in my name...” passage as talking about worship and prayer. It isn't talking about prayer. It is talking about coming to a resolution when two people have a problem.

Because I'm not going to do all your thinking for you...here is your homework for this week. I want you to spend a day or two this week reading and reflecting on Matthew 18:15-35. Jesus tells this amazing parable that is connected to this passage.

Write down a couple of thoughts...pray over this passage.

Conclusion

If you are a part of any regular gathering of people you will discover that you disagree with someone and maybe relationship issues being.

If you are unwilling to contact the person about a misunderstanding and have a cordial sit down to discuss it...then you are the problem.

If you are unwilling to sit down with a person who has misunderstood you...then you are the problem.

But when you sit down, take the time to really listen to them. Seek to find understanding. Something amazing happens in the family relationships in the Kingdom of God.