

## HOW TO GET ALONG WITH OTHERS Mark 9:33-50

How many of you have heard of the book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*? This book by Dale Carnegie was written in 1936 and examines principles of getting along with other people in a positive and successful way. If you look at the various topics he addressed in this book, it will bring to mind many of the teachings of Jesus. For example, in the summary of the section on how to avoid worry, there is only one principle listed and that is to pray.

We have learned a lot in the decades we have lived and observed life and we could list a lot of things that work in getting along with others as well as things to avoid. If you have observed children interacting with other children, you can easily pick out the root causes of success and failure in their interactions. It is sometime more difficult in observing adults since adults do a better job of disguising their motives.

If you had to pick just one characteristic that really turns you off about another person, what would it be? [Arrogance, know-it-all, unbridled ambition, lack of integrity, pride, etc.]

If you were asked to name one characteristic that would cause you to want to help another person, what would it be? [True need, helplessness, humility, appreciation, etc.]

In Mark's Gospel we find some helpful insight into such questions as we examine the teachings of Jesus in the latter part of Chapter nine. Four principles that we will examine are: Show others you care (9:33-37); See others as coworkers (9:38-41); Sacrifice for the sake of others (9:42-48); and Season the lives of others (9:49-50).

### **Show Others You Care**

<sup>33</sup> They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He *began* to question them, “**What were you discussing on the way?**” <sup>34</sup> But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which *of them* was the greatest. <sup>35</sup> Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, “**If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.**” <sup>36</sup> Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, <sup>37</sup> “**Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me.**” Mark 9:33-37 (NASB95)

As football or baseball seasons draw to their respective ends, you will hear sports commentators discussing things such as “most valuable players.” This is a way to recognize that someone had accomplished a lot for their team and this recognition could be a motivation for a person to work hard to receive such an award. My grandson was part of a church-league soccer team and he was all excited about playing. He had a uniform and thought he was the best player on the team and would tell you about it. We had a chance to see the team play one afternoon and the kindness description you could give it was that it was pitiful. All these five-year-olds were out there running around without a clue as to what they were doing except that they were “kicking the ball.” It did not matter if the ball was inbounds or out of bounds, they just kept kicking it. It really did not make any difference which direction they were going.

Jesus disciples were imagining a fantasy life that was their idea of the Kingdom of God that was to come and they envisioned themselves as having great authority and high positions in that new governmental hierarchy. They were about a well informed regarding the reality of the Kingdom that Jesus was preaching as those five-year-olds were about the game of soccer.

If you are part of an organization, do you ever think about such things as who is the most important person in that group? Are you concerned about whether your house is the biggest one on the block or neighborhood in which you live? It could be that you realize that your financial situation is such that you cannot have the biggest house, however, yours could be the best kept

property. Most of us are looking for ways to distinguish ourselves. In high school, your child may not be the best football player or the best basketball player, but he might be able to be the fastest on the track team or the smartest in the classroom. We look for ways to get some sort of validation that our lives really matter. This need may be related to self-esteem issues, but it is a real issue for just about everybody.

If we don't understand the objectives of the game of soccer, then we may find that our objective is simply to kick the ball as many times as we can and as hard as we can. If we don't the objectives of this life, then we may find ourselves trying to accumulate as many "toys" or awards, or high positions, or recognitions as we can before we die. Jesus had a different perspective on this. The obvious point Jesus was making with the illustration in which he used the child was that those who were most humble would be the most exalted in His kingdom. The least shall be the greatest. The last shall be first. The converse of this statement is also true: the first shall be last. Another expression of this truth is that God resists the proud but exalts the humble. At other times when the "discussions" of *greatness* came up, Jesus gave a more thorough discourse on this subject. For example, in the discussion that followed the request of the mother of James and John that her two sons should sit "one on the right and one on the left" of Christ when he came into His kingdom, Jesus told them that "if you will be great, then minister (diakonos) to others and if you will be chief, then be a slave (doulos)." His Kingdom would be a completely different kind of kingdom with radically different values from the kingdoms of this world.

In our culture, children are highly valued and parents make great sacrifices for their children. (You may be thinking that there are many abused children in our city. Trust me, those who abuse their children and do not highly value them are not part of our culture - they are of a different culture.) Many households with young children operate around the perceived needs of the children in the home. That has not always been the case. It was definitely NOT the situation in first century Judea. Children were not highly valued. With that cultural situation in mind, we can better interpret what Jesus was saying with regard to "welcoming or receiving" a child.

First, let's make sure we understand what Jesus meant when he is quoted as saying, "Whoever welcomes (receives) this little child in my name welcomes (receives) me." At first glance, the wording in various translations seems to say that "We (operating in the name or character of Jesus) are to welcome or receive the humble or lowly ones of our society." Considering what He said in the context of the passage, the obvious meaning is that "Those who (in the name of Jesus) come to us, regardless of their status in the eyes of the world, are to be welcomed just as we would welcome or receive Christ Himself." Jesus also made the point that when we receive Him, then we not only receive Him but the Father also.

A practical example: How do you perceive a man like Billy Graham? I would anticipate that the responses would be words such as "highly venerated, worth listening to, due the greatest respect, etc." How do you perceive the apparently financially poor guy in faded blue jeans and ragged plaid shirt who is in the parking lot of the flea market preaching and calling people to repent and turn to God or they will wind up in Hell? Many will think that he is some sort of nut case and that he is not worth hearing and should probably be locked up. Which of these is greatest? You cannot tell from the available information.

How do all of these ideas work out in our lives in ways that we can show others that we really care? Don't criticize, condemn or complain. Show honest and sincere appreciation. Become genuinely interested in other people. Smile. Find ways to show the person you consider him to be someone worthwhile. Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.

Talk in terms of the other person's interests. Show respect for the person as you would like to be respected which would lead us to see others as coworkers.

### See Others as Coworkers

<sup>38</sup> John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us." <sup>39</sup> But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me." <sup>40</sup> "For he who is not against us is for us." <sup>41</sup> "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as *followers* of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward. Mark 9:38-41 (NASB95)

We could title verse 38 something like "Will Baptists Be the Only Ones in Heaven?" Of course, you could use the name of whatever group of which you are a part in the theme question. The situation was that a person (who was not in the immediate group following Jesus) was helping people by driving out demons in the name of Jesus. Apparently, whatever he was doing was working. Who might such a person be who believed that Jesus was the Messiah and realized there was power in His name and yet he was not in the company of those following Jesus from place to place? The Scriptures are silent as to the identity of this person and we (in a moment or two) will look at a likely reason as to why the person and his association with others are not given to us.

What we **can** say is that the man was one who believed in the Messiah and was relying on the power and authority of the Messiah over the spiritual realm. He may have seen Jesus and witnessed the miracles that he did. He was perhaps one who was looking for the coming of the Messiah and had been exposed to teaching about the coming Kingdom. In that time in history, who was proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom saying, "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand?" The obvious answer is John the Baptist. John had disciples and he was preaching, "Prepare the way of the Lord." My guess would be that the person the disciples encountered was likely a disciple of John who believed in Jesus and was ministering in His name even though he did not travel around with the group of the twelve disciples.

So, why didn't the Scriptures just tell us that this man was a disciple of John the Baptist? I believe that the reason is that we would try to draw too many conclusions about others who are not part of our "fellowship" if we knew a lot about the man and his associations. For example, we might say something like, "He may not be a Baptist but that denomination of which he is a part, is very close to being like most Baptist churches." Notice that Jesus did not say, "Well, it is OK since that man was a follower of John the Baptist." What **did** Jesus say? He quoted a proverbial saying of that day, "He who is not against us is for us." (Caution regarding proverbial statements: proverbial statements are "generally true" but there will be exceptions to those proverbs.) Where was the emphasis of the disciples? Associations! Where was the emphasis of Jesus? Actions!

Jesus gave a brief commentary on the proverb He quoted regarding those who would help and assist those who are followers of Christ. Even the slightest act of kindness does not go unnoticed and that person will be rewarded (presumably in the Judgment). This affirmation is contrasted in the very next verse with the outcome for those who would hinder someone (regardless of small or seemingly insignificant he may be) from entering into the Kingdom of God.

### Sacrifice for the Sake of Others

<sup>42</sup> "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea." <sup>43</sup> "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire," <sup>44</sup>

[where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.]<sup>45</sup> “If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell,<sup>46</sup> [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.]<sup>47</sup> “If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell,<sup>48</sup> where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. Mark 9:42-48 (NASB95)

The consequences of hindering someone from finding salvation or hindering a person who is doing the work of the Kingdom of God is quite severe. There is no promise of reward for such a person but unspecified punishment that would be worse than being drowned. The parallel teaching for each person is that if **you** are doing something in **your life** that is hindering you from following the Lord, then you would need to do whatever it takes to remove that stumbling block for the consequences of missing salvation is far worse than whatever sacrifice you need to make to repent and embrace the gospel.

We know that Jesus is speaking metaphorically in talking about cutting off a foot or hand. What kinds of things might hinder a person from repenting and accepting the salvation that God has offered through the atoning death of His Son? We could make a long list of actions and attitudes that are contrary to the principles and teaching of the Kingdom of God. We could summarize a lot of these under the category of political correctness.

### Season the Lives of Others

<sup>49</sup> “For everyone will be salted with fire.<sup>50</sup> “Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty *again*? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.” Mark 9:49-50 (NASB95)

KJV for verse 49: “For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.”

Mark is the only gospel account that includes these two verses which are somewhat hard to understand. One commentator has said there are about 15 different interpretations of what these verses mean. Most of the new translations of the Bible (RSV, Weymouth, NIV, NAS) leave out the second part of verse 49 which speaks of “sacrifices being seasoned with salt.” This is a reference to salt being required to accompany meats and grains that were offered as sacrifices in the Old Testament system.

Since these verses immediately follow the comments on giving up things (that is, making sacrifices) and thus avoiding the fires of hell, there is likely a connection. Part of the uncertainty is related to whom the word “everyone” refers. Is it everyone who winds up in hell or does “everyone” also include those who enter the Kingdom of Heaven?

One possible interpretation is that all people (individually) will experience the fiery trials of life and those who are purified by these trials will escape the fires of hell. Those who wind up in hell will be salted with the fires of hell which they will endure without being consumed by these fires. Salt has a preserving (saving) function. If the “salt” of trials is effective, then we are preserved through such trials which burn away the dross (that which offends or causes us to stumble). On the other hand, if the salt of the trials is ineffective (has lost its saltiness), then the person fails to repent and ends up in hell.

If we handle the trials of this life in a proper way (have salt in ourselves), then the things that hinder getting along with others will be included in the “dross” that is removed in the purification process. In this way, we can be at peace with one another.