

DELIBERATE GODLY FRIENDSHIPS



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Introduction

Followers of Christ at Faith Fellowship Church had a great year in 2007. We experienced God's blessing as we focused on the theme "Deliberate Discipleship". Together, we recognized that knowing how to choose godly friends and be godly friends was a big part of discipleship. Yet, it was something we didn't really know how to do. The problem was that instead of basing our definition of godliness on Scripture, we had defined godliness based on what made us comfortable. So, we began the journey of a Wednesday evening teaching series entitled "Stop, Look & Listen", which you now hold in your hand as "Deliberate Godly Friendships."

Would you agree with us about these two gauges for Christians that can help us recognize whether we truly desire to be involved in deliberate discipleship? First, do we choose to leave sin behind? And second, do we choose godly friends? The people we surround ourselves with are who we'll emulate. I can still hear my Mom's voice echoing with the wisdom of Proverbs, "Tell me who your friends are, and I'll tell you who you are." Do we choose friends so that we remain in our comfort zones? Or, do we choose friends that are busy about the Father's business, who help us grow as disciples of Christ?

Choosing Godly Friends

*1 Corinthians 15:33 "Evil company corrupts good habits."
2 Corinthians 6:14 "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers."*

*"If you don't have friends in the church, you deprive us pastors of some of our best tools for reaching out to you, especially when you're hurt or beginning to stray."
~Mark Dever*

How do we choose our close friends? Do you know that there's a progression involved in choosing close friends, and also in being a close, godly friend? Hebrews 10:19-25 tells us that we must live in confidence that Jesus Christ has cleansed and purified us, and brought us into bold access to the Father. Then, our lives are to be lived in agreement with God's Word and under His authority. We become what we are. When we live that way, we will be empowered to encourage and exhort others in their faith. It takes sacrificial surrender of our lives to follow God's commands and be accountable to God, and then hold another person accountable. Holding another person accountable and being held accountable are two of the hardest aspects of being a Christian, yet it is a command which we must obey.

So, to begin with, we'll identify how to look at another human being in order to decide whether that person should be someone with whom we yoke ourselves together with in a close relationship of accountability. While there are certainly other aspects that could be considered, we'll pinpoint nine characteristics of a godly friend.

1. A godly friend publicly professes faith in Christ. In Luke 9:26 and Mark 8:38, Jesus says that He acknowledges before God those who acknowledge Him before men. Our lives, both public and private, are to line up with Scripture in word and deed.
2. A godly friend studies you, seeking to understand your inner being. You have to enjoy being together, to know another person so well that you know what makes him "tick". Do you know the three biggest fears, the sins your friend struggles with, their dreams and aspirations? We're talking about someone with whom your relationship is intimate, deep and vibrant, with a depth of relating that creates a climate wherein you can hold each other accountable and encourage each other in love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25).
3. A godly friend stimulates you and incites you toward greater love and good works. It takes an intimate and ever-deepening level of relating to gain the perception and understanding necessary to know whether the most effective stimulation would be rebuke or commendation.
4. A godly friend also holds you accountable to your commitment as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Those who claim to have a relationship with Jesus Christ on the basis of His forgiveness through

His blood, will obey the Word of God and walk in fellowship. We don't need "blow smoke" friendships, but true accountability relationships. Let's ask ourselves, "When was the last time I held someone's feet to the fire regarding a commitment they made?" Walking away from a commitment is walking away from God. If we're not holding others to their promises, then we're not truly their friend.

5. With a godly friend, there will be joint participation in the ministry of the church. Just sitting on the sidelines is not being part of the team. Our relationship with God is deepened through fellowship (1 John 1:7). We've got to participate in fellowship in order to be able to grow in genuine love for each other. Genuine love means we hold each other accountable, admonish, and encourage each other, according to the Word of God; it's impossible to do these things apart from the church.
6. A godly friend walks in obedience to the Word of God. Our vertical relationship with God is maintained, strengthened, and deepened only as our horizontal relationships with each other are maintained, strengthened, and deepened. There's no other way to walk in relationship with God and each other, apart from obedience to God's Word.
7. A godly friend confesses their personal sins to you (James 5:16). If we self-righteously deny, justify, or camouflage our sin, we fail to acknowledge truth and give glory to God, and we make it impossible to enjoy true fellowship (Romans 1:22-26; 3:23). To sin is to break fellowship. Sin has no shore, and left unconfessed, it hurts rather than builds up and nurtures relationships. When our fellowship with God is bro-

ken, our fellowship with others will be as well.

8. A godly friend takes proactive steps of change in their lives. It takes active obedience to maintain vertical fellowship with God and horizontal fellowship with each other. Yet, we know that we all sin. The steps of change begin with conviction of and confession of sin. Then, the three part principle to adhere to, is:

- a. Put off sin
- b. Renew the mind with Scripture
- c. Put on godly actions

A change of heart will occur when we choose to put off sin, meditate on Scripture rather than our own thinking, and put on godly thinking, feeling, and behavior patterns. Only then will others be convinced of our change, because of our zeal and passion for the new ways and hatred for the old.

9. A godly friend forgives. Christ's finished work on the cross bears out the triumphant result of restored relationships with God and man. Christ's blood effects forgiveness of sin in our lives and enables us to then forgive others.

Discussion Questions

1. A godly friend: Publicly professes faith in Christ

Hebrews 10:23 "Profess"

Who will Jesus acknowledge before God?

2. A godly friend: Studies you, gets to know your inner being.

Hebrews 10:24 "Consider"

Can you study and get to know someone's inner being with whom you only spend one hour per week?

3. A godly friend: Spurs you on toward love & good deeds

Hebrews 10:24 "Provoke"

How have you stimulated each other on to love and good deeds?

4. A godly friend: Holds you accountable to your commitments

Hebrews 10:25 "Exhort"

What will be the result when people have a relationship with Jesus Christ? Follow the succession in Hebrews 10:19-24.

5. A godly friend: Joint participant in ministry of church

1 John 1:7 “Fellowship”

What does genuine love mean?

6. A godly friend: Walks in obedience to the Word of God

1 John 1:7 “Walk in the light”

How do we know whether we are walking in relationship with God?

7. A godly friend: Confesses their personal sins to you

James 5:16 “Confess”

What is the problem when we don’t confess sin?

8. A godly friend: Takes proactive steps of change in their lives

Ephesians 4:22-24 “Put off, renew, put on”

Explain the three steps of proactive change.

9. A godly friend: Forgives

Hebrews 9:14 & 22 “Blood of Jesus Christ”

What is the only basis on which we can forgive others?

A Godly Friend Confesses Sin

Godly friendships require being forgiven of sin. But, aren’t we as Christians already forgiven for our sins—past, present and future? 1 John 1:9 tells believers that God will forgive their sins if they confess them. Doesn’t this contradict what the Bible reveals about our standing before God? Why do we need to be forgiven again?

The answer to these questions is best seen when we view our forgiveness in two ways: Judicial standing before God and parental state before God. We are forgiven once and for all by God on behalf of Christ’s substitutionary atonement for our sins (Romans 10:9,10; Acts 16:31 and Romans 6:1-10). This is the positional, judicial aspect of our forgiveness which takes place the instant we trust Jesus Christ for our salvation.

There is also a parental aspect to our forgiveness, because let’s face it, we sin! While the union of the relationship with God that was put in place through our positional forgiveness never will be severed, the communion or fellowship that we enjoy with God and others can be. To deny our sin reveals a lack of understanding the truth of what God’s Word says about the universality of man’s sin, and it reveals a lack of understanding about the truth of the gospel.

This chart can help you see the difference between the judicial forgiveness of God (as Judge) when an *unbeliever* acknowledges and confesses sin and becomes a child of God, and the parental forgiveness of God (as Father) when a *child of God* continually confesses sin.

Judicial Forgiveness (positional) This column describes an unbeliever.	Parental Forgiveness (practical, ongoing) This column describes a child of God.
Guilt causes liability to eternal punishment.	Guilt causes liability to temporal punishment.
Punishment is just from God as Judge.	Punishment is remedial and disciplinary from God as Father.
Rebuke comes as condemnation.	Rebuke comes as correction.
Sense of guilt produces fear of judgment.	Sense of guilt produces remorse over offending the Father.
Confession is of an enemy surrendering.	Confession is of a child submitting.
Forgiveness lifts the threat of hell.	Forgiveness lifts the threat of temporal punishment.
Forgiveness establishes a new relationship with God.	Forgiveness improves the previous relationship with God

Consider the story of Tom, a son who has disobeyed his father. As long as Tom refuses to confess and seek forgiveness from the father, fellowship between them isn't being enjoyed. Why? Simply because Tom has broken it by his own decision. Yet, when Tom comes to his father to confess his sin and seek forgiveness for sinning against his father, the fellowship is once again established. As with any fellowship that has been broken, it will take time for that fellowship to be restored to its former level of intimacy.

We can praise the Lord because, in light of 1 John 1:9, He promises to always forgive us for our sins. Tom's earthly father might have a hard time accepting Tom's confession, but this is not so with God our heavenly Father. For fellowship to be restored with God (vertical) & then with man (horizontal), we must confess our sin to Him. When we obey, we can then hold others accountable to confess their own sin to God and get right with Him.

If we ourselves don't confess our sin, how can we expect others to? To do so would be hypocritical or Pharisaical (Matthew 23:4). But to be a close godly friend, we must hold our friends accountable. So, we've got to make sure our own lives are right with God before we can exhort and encourage our friends. If we deny our sin, we reveal a lack of understanding of why we need a Savior.

The question is, how do we guard against denying our sin? Let's look at three key words from 1 John 1:6-10. The first one is *truth* (vs. 8, 10). We must recognize that Jesus is the truth (John 14:6), and that God's Word clearly sets forth the truth concerning man and his state.

The second word is *fellowship* (vs. 7). Fellowship is not merely a relationship, but a level of intimacy that's deeper and more personal. As a believer walks in fellowship with God, he can and will have fellowship with others. Hebrews 10:24 links this idea of fellowship and close communion with the words "consider one another". Both

“consider” and “fellowship” mean more than a casual, amiable relationship, more like an intimacy where both individuals know each other “like the back of their hand”. The more we know the other person and what makes them tick, the more equipped and enabled we are to encourage, exhort, and admonish each other to be more like Christ.

The third word is *confess* (vs. 9). In the context of fellowship that is broken by our sin, the first step of repairing it is to confess (agree with God that it is sin, admit we are guilty of what we are accused of as the result of inward conviction), and then continue to walk in repentance (a change of mind that results in change of conduct). Philippians 4:8-9 make it clear that thinking precedes doing. We have to think right to do right. So we guard against denying our sin when we recognize God’s truth, consider each other in fellowship, and confess our sin.

Discussion Questions

- 1. 1 John 1:9**
What is required before there can be forgiveness of sin?
- 2. Hebrews 10:22; Romans 6:1-10**
What is the basis upon which we are forgiven of our sins?
- 3. 1 John 1:6-10**
When there is denial of our sin, how does it show that we are choosing darkness over light?
- 4. 1 John 1:8 & 10; John 14:6**
What is the truth about our sin?
- 5. 1 John 1:7; Hebrews 10:24**
What is required for fellowship?

6. 1 John 1:9; Philippians 4:8-9

How can we think right about our sin to guard against denying it?

Godly Friends Forgive Others

Godly friendships require both being forgiven of sin and forgiving others. To be godly friends, we must imitate Christ's attitude of forgiveness. If Faith Fellowship Church is to be a biblical counseling church, we must be in a constant attitude of forgiveness. The Anabaptist martyrs emphasized yielding their lives to God in following Jesus' example of forgiveness, even in the face of torture. Retaliation and revenge are not part of the Christian's vocabulary. Rather we echo Jesus in turning the other cheek, loving our enemies, forgiving seventy times seven, and leaving vengeance to the Lord. Don't try to understand or comprehend if it will work, simply obey it. Just do it. Follow the model for forgiveness in God Himself. It's not out of the blue, but rather as Christ has forgiven us that Colossians 3:12-13 tells us to bear with each other, and forgive whatever grievances we have against one another.

Matthew 18:21-35 tells us a sobering parable of an unforgiving servant. If we haven't forgiven, He shakes our shoulders. We have to stop here and ask whether we've truly been forgiven ourselves. Those that know Christ's forgiveness will forgive others.

How has Christ forgiven us? Effectively and permanently according to Hebrews 10:1-18. As a matter of fact, God sees those that are forgiven as clothed in Christ's

righteousness! When God says that He will remember our sins no more, yes, it's a mental act of choosing not to remember. But it's also a choosing of responses appropriate to what He has chosen to not to remember.

When we've been sinned against and don't forgive, bitterness sets in. The antidote to bitterness is choosing to forget. Forgetting is a passive phenomenon, a releasing or letting go. Remember how you studied the dates and locations of the Civil War for your Junior High history test? You passed the test too, didn't you? OK, let's hear you recite those dates and locations. Oh, you've forgotten. Hmm. Isn't it the truth that you just chose not to remember, not to focus on those particulars any more? It's the same thing with bitterness. Proactive remembering and focusing on the pain of the offense rather than on Jesus Christ are the prison bars that hold you captive. Proactive remembering means we believe Jesus' redemption is useless. We need to be proactive in digging up any root of bitterness, promising not to hold someone's sins against them by choosing instead to focus on Christ and the cross (Hebrews 12:12-17).

What else does God's Word say about the procedure of forgiveness? Proverbs 17:9 says that repeating a matter ends a relationship, so part of forgiveness is not repeating the matter. We choose not to talk about the offense.

Also, don't think about how we've been offended. We must be willing not to dwell on the offense in our inner man, because in order to be forgiven, we must forgive (1 Peter 3:7; Malachi 2:10-16; Matthew 6:14-15). Mark 11:25-26 tells us that forgiveness is not a condition of entering the Kingdom of God, but an understanding of our position in it. As forgiven people, we can have a merciful attitude and be eager to forgive, even though the pain of being sinned against is sharp.

Did you know that forgiving others is a way we serve God? Forgiveness is an act of faith in the face of fear.

There's no emotional prerequisite; it's an act of obedient servant-hood, according to Luke 17:1-10. Even in the face of sharp sin that drives pain into us, Christians must live in an attitude of forgiveness.

Let's consider an example of how this can be done through rallying the troops and working together in the process of rebuking, repenting, and forgiving. We'll take the example of Blake, who dishonored his wife Brenda. Based on humility and the paradigm given in 2 Corinthians 7:8-11, he exhibits godly sorrow, the hatred of his sin, not just the hatred of getting caught. Blake wants to change and be proactive in repentance. He changes his mind regarding the sin and confesses agreement with God that it was sin. He doesn't apologize glibly, because apologies are for accidents. An apology is not the same as instituting reconciliation and conducting a relational transaction. Blake states that he has been convicted of sin, has confessed his sin to God and been forgiven, and is now confessing his sin to Brenda and asking her forgiveness. Blake moves on to deliverance of the sin through seeking accountability with another man, and through rebuilding trust with Brenda.

Brenda is the forgiver. Based on humility (notice this common feature) and the paradigm given in Luke 17:1-10, she acts in faith by surrendering to God in the face of fear. She recognizes that the granting of forgiveness is a sacrificial act of service to God, and increases her faith through obedience to God, by serving Blake even when she does not feel like it. She transacts Christ-like forgiveness by first not accepting his dishonorable behavior to her, then by granting forgiveness each time it is requested. Forgiveness means she never speaks of the matter to Blake or others, nor does she dwell on it in her own mind.

Notice how Brenda has worked through each of the steps in the “Act of Forgiveness” chart.

	Act of faith in the face of fear <i>(Heb. 11:27; Luke 17:5-6)</i>	Act of sacrificial service <i>(Galatians 5:13; Luke 17:7-10)</i>	Act of forgiveness <i>(Mark 11:25; Luke 17:1-4)</i>
What Brenda did.	Brenda is afraid for her future, but rather than dwell on possibilities, she chooses to surrender to God.	Brenda recognizes that she must forgive Blake in service to God. The master is the one giving the command to serve. Brenda puts this into practice through bringing Blake his favorite treats while he is watching TV.	Brenda tells Blake that she has been dishonored, then forgives him when he repents. She realizes there are not parameters on how many times this will happen. She does not talk about it after forgiving him, nor dwell on it mentally.

Now, take a few minutes and think about an individual you are resisting to forgive. Use the “Act of Forgiveness” chart to practice the attitudinal steps leading to the act of forgiveness.

	Act of faith in the face of fear <i>(Heb. 11:27; Luke 17:5-6)</i>	Act of sacrificial service <i>(Galatians 5:13; Luke 17:7-10)</i>	Act of forgiveness <i>(Mark 11:25; Luke 17:1-4)</i>
Write down the specific situation, the act of faith that you need to take, how you can sacrificially serve, and the resulting act of forgiveness.			

Discussion Questions

1. Colossians 3:13

How are we to forgive others?

2. Hebrews 10:1-18

How has Christ forgiven us?

3. Matthew 18:21-35

What is the end result of the one who would not forgive?

4. Hebrews 12:12-17

Forgiveness is a promise not to hold the offense against that person. Instead, what are we to focus on?

5. Proverbs 17:9

Why is not repeating the matter an important part of forgiveness?

6. Mark 11:25-26

What is to be our attitude toward those that have sinned against us?

7. Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60

How is attitudinal forgiveness evidenced in these passages?

Friendship & Communication

There are several ways in which communication breaks down. When you say something, and the person you're talking to hears something else, that's called semantic discrepancy. It happens a lot. A wife tells her husband she wants to go shopping, which means to her that she wants to stroll around the mall trying sale items on to see if they are perfect, possibly not purchasing anything. The husband hears that she wants to go into one store, hunt down the item being shopped for, grab it and pay for it quickly, then leave. Semantic discrepancy means that the speaker's words do not carry the same connotation or realities for the listener as they do for the speaker. It leads to communication breakdown.

When you say something, but your body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice communicate a different message, that's channel discrepancy. It's good to be aware that in some cultures eye contact is respectful (such as America), but in others it's a sign of disrespect (such as Asia). We want to be careful about the messages we communicate as we seek to be godly friends.

When there's communication breakdown between you and another person, do you choose a foolish or a wise response? Foolish responses that involve sin must be guarded against in godly friendships. Consider a situation

you've been involved in where there was communication breakdown, or conflict.

Look at this chart, and the Scripture passages given, to notice when your responses involve sin.

Do you communicate as a foolish or wise person?

<i>Fool</i>	<i>Wise</i>
-shows annoyance quickly	-considers a perceived insult and carefully decides how to handle it. <i>Proverbs 12:16</i>
-scorns at making amends	-the upright accept a guilt offering. <i>Proverbs 14:9</i>
-interrupts and expresses own opinion	-takes pleasure in understanding. <i>Proverbs 18:2</i>
-stonewalls, unyielding like a strong city (silent treatment)	-yields to wise rebuke. <i>Proverbs 18:19</i>
-stubborn/set in ways	-changes by putting off sin, renewing the mind, and putting on Christ-likeness. <i>Ephesians 4:22-24</i>
-disregards God	-trusts in the Lord. <i>Proverbs 3:5-6</i>
-self-absorbed, selfish	-considers others. <i>Philippians 2:1-4</i>
-impulsive	-meditates on and speaks God's Word. <i>Joshua 1:8</i>
-rigid, inflexible	-humble, gracious. <i>1 Peter 5:5-6</i>
-short sighted	-recognizes that God will judge. <i>Ecclesiastes 12:13-14</i>
-constant turmoil	-good sense. <i>Proverbs 13:15</i>
-refuses instruction	-obedient and submissive. <i>Hebrews 13:17</i>

Discussion Questions

1. Proverbs 12:16

How does a wise person handle insults?

2. Proverbs 14:9

How does an upright person handle a guilty person?

3. Proverbs 18:2

What does a wise person take pleasure in?

4. Proverbs 3:5,6

What does a wise person trust?

5. 1 Peter 5:5-6

What is our communication supposed to be like?

Friendship & Conflict Resolution

How do conflicts get resolved? Conflict is best resolved by following four simple rules given in Ephesians 4:25-32:

1. Be honest (vs. 25)
2. Keep current (vs. 26-27)
3. Attack the problem, not the person (vs. 29)
4. Act, don't react (vs. 31-32)

Handling anger sinfully often stops these rules from being followed. In Ephesians 4:26, Paul presupposes that believers will become angry and that it may be righteous anger.

When is anger sinful? When it is known at once, reckless, careless, self-confident, quick-tempered, venting of feelings, unthinking response, presumption of always being right, not open to seeing other side, calling person a fool, lacking control, revengeful, keeping a list, getting even, exacting personal justice, desire based, covetous, divisive, or full of strife. Phew. We all see ourselves in that list, don't we? Unrighteous (sinful) anger is impulsive and divisive.

When is anger righteous? When it scatters the enemy of the Lord, defends His people, defends His Word, promotes holiness, brings hope, leads to joy, and is under control and slow to arouse. Hmmm. Righteous anger is

prompted when God (not man) is dishonored, and it seeks to remove the problem.

We need to analyze our anger in terms of both motivation (why am I angry?) and expression (what do I do or say in my anger?). Sinful anger is aroused when we don't get what we think we deserve or we think an injustice has been done to us. We express anger un-righteously when we destroy or hurt people (slander or gossip) or property.

Righteous anger is aroused when God doesn't get what He deserves (John 2). We express anger righteously when we use the energies of anger under control to promote God's honor.

For example, anger against abortion is a righteous reason to be aroused to anger, but it is un-righteously expressed through shouting at or shooting at an abortion provider. It can be righteously expressed by helping those that might otherwise choose abortion through providing for their needs, such as a home for unwed mothers.

Discussion Questions

1. Ephesians 4:25

What is the first rule of communication, and how is it important in conflict resolution?

2. Ephesians 4:26-27

What is the second rule of communication, and how is it important in conflict resolution?

3. Ephesians 4:28-29

What is the third rule of communication, and how is it important in conflict resolution?

4. Ephesians 4:30-32

What is the fourth rule of communication, and how is it important in conflict resolution?

Friendship & Confrontation

Sometimes we decide to confront and sometimes we let love cover a sin. Matthew 18:15-17, Luke 17:3, and Galatians 6:1-5 all talk about confronting. Yet Proverbs 10:12 and 19:11 talk about letting love cover. How do we decide what to do? A big piece is our motivation.

It's appropriate to confront when our goal is reconciliation. Anything that hurts the body by creating division, or damages Christ's reputation by bringing public dishonor to Christ, or represents a pattern in the offender's life that disrupts ongoing fellowship, should be confronted. Why? Because these things lower people's opinion of God.

It's appropriate to let love cover the sin when it's about me and my feelings, and when something has been done without publicly dishonoring Christ. When it's out of the ordinary and we won't be tempted to dwell on it, let's make it our plan to let love cover it.

What is revealed about us when we let love cover the sin? It shows that we think people are more important than problems, that we prioritize relationships over offenses. Jesus said that reconciliation takes precedence over worship. The Bible teaches us to show honor and genuine appreciation for others, not focus on problems and insist on getting our way. We should be like teammates; when an issue isn't addressed by our master, we shouldn't look

down on it. When something is addressed in our playbook (Bible), we should accept it. The only way to approach someone is with Scripture, not with our opinions.

Scripture gives us two grand stories of people in the early New Testament church that needed to choose whether to confront or cover. One situation was between two ladies and one between two men.

Two ladies were having a dispute that Paul confronted openly in a public letter (Philippians). But he didn't just teach the two of them how to get along; he also taught the church how to help them change their focus and learn a new pattern of interaction. Paul laid out two paths that our minds can travel down. The path Paul tells the church to help Euodia and Syntyche stay on is the path of rejoicing, bowing to God's Word, and praying with thankfulness. They are to stay away from complaining, speaking opinion, and anxious worrying. Can you help someone rejoice, bow to God's Word, and pray with thankfulness? Harmony will be promoted and maintained!

In the story about two men, a slave (Onesimus) had run away from his master (Philemon), who happened to be part of a church Paul had previously ministered in. Onesimus ran away to Paul, and became a follower of Christ. He and Paul had become so close that Paul compared him to his own heart. Paul urged Philemon to receive his slave back as a brother, not as one that should be confronted with punishment.

Relational harmony and unity are of great significance to God. Christ has made us one. Satan's great desire is to create division between us. Don't allow Satan to wedge himself between us and other believers.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the importance of asking these six questions prior to confrontation:

1. Proverbs 18:13

Do I have the facts right? Don't address or answer a matter if you may have inaccurate facts.

2. 1 Peter 4:8

Should love hide it? Then, let love hide it. Has the body been harmed? Is it my responsibility, or not? If not, let it go. Too many preferences are elevated to the level of conviction.

3. Proverbs 15:23b

Is the timing right? A good defusing statement is, "Let me think about this for a while."

4. Ephesians 4:15

Is my attitude right? Am I trying to solve a conflict together as teammates or as adversaries?

5. Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-13; 1 Corinthians 13:7

Are my words loving? Am I patient, kind, humble, not insisting on my way, courteous, rejoicing with truth? Do my words reveal that I bear all things, believe all things, and hope all things?

6. Proverbs 3:5

Have I prayed for God's help? Am I leaning on God's wisdom?

Friendship & The Main One

In Romans 14:1-3, we are given instruction about how to respond to each other when there is an issue that isn't addressed specifically in Scripture; something amoral that we are doubtful about. First of all, let's define the person that Paul describes in Romans 14 as a "weaker brother." This is the person who is not liberated from being works oriented and has not learned the freedom of embracing grace. We are to receive these people who are weak, or overly sensitive, by taking them unto ourselves with tenderness.

Here's where "church political correctness" manifests itself. Let's define "church political correctness" as things that are not in the Bible, but strongly held to in the church. In our Wednesday night discussion, we identified issues such as: wearing a shirt and tie on Sunday, how many kids you have, sitting in a certain seat at church, or Bible translations. We noted that worship styles have become been an issue of "church political correctness," where years ago the use of any instruments was questioned. Questions such as how often communion should be served, or how long a service should be, become issues of "church political correctness."

We like to think we can have our act together to come to Christ. No, the truth is that we are all desperately

in need of God and can bring nothing “correct” before Him. We come together to seek Him, to focus on Him, to confess sin before Him and each other, to worship Him, to learn from Him, and to keep Him the Main One.

When “politically correct” or amoral ideas come in that threaten the harmony in the body, there are two wrong attitudes: despising and judging. Paul defines the strong person as the one who is free to do anything not clearly addressed in Scripture. The weak person is defined as the one that limits self. The strong person is not to despise the weak and the weak person is not to judge the strong. Where do we stand on these amoral issues? Do we develop presuppositions from prevailing church culture or traditional backgrounds, or from God’s Word? Do we despise or reject those that don’t take the same stand on amoral issues? If so, shame on us! We are called to unity.

Neither the weaker nor the stronger can gripe. We must avoid attitudes of irritation, ridicule or contempt., for we are called to receive each other with tenderness.

Discussion Questions

1. **Romans 14:1-3; Ephesians 4:1-6**

Discuss the importance of keeping keep the Main One (Jesus Christ) the main thing in our relationships.

Friendship & Freedom

Freedom to the weak

Romans 14:4-13a

*Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason-
I do not accept the authority of the popes & councils, for they
have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the
Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go
against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me.*

~Martin Luther

While Scripture teaches that the believer has freedom to do amoral things, I'm sure you've heard of "legalism". Legalism demands that some thing, act, or deed needs to be added to believing in Christ in order for a person to be saved. Have you heard of "weakerism"? It's when the focus in the church is on the wrong issues, such as traditions or programs. "Weakerism" leads many away from Christ into a false sense of security, into rules without relationship. It means we present ourselves in the strength of the fact that we are keeping rules we have chosen, rather than present ourselves in the strength of Christ.

Romans 14:4 tells us that since we have freedom to do amoral things, the weaker brother, who finds strength in other things than Christ, should refrain from judging the stronger brother for exercising freedom in Christ. You see, the stronger one is the servant of the Lord and accountable to the Lord, not the servant of the weaker one and accountable to the weaker one. Therefore the weaker one has no business exercising judgment because the stronger one is not condemned by God for exercising his freedom. The question of inappropriate judgment is addressed to the weaker one, who finds tradition and program to be important and judges the stronger one for his freedom.

Since the believer has freedom in Christ to do amoral things, one should recognize the relationship to the Lord, and that people of diverse amoral practices are equally acceptable to the Lord because their practices arise out of the same motive: serving the Lord. He's talking about things like observing a holiday, but he's not talking about being part of the body of Christ and faithfully gathering together. Whether and how Christians observe a holiday, such as Christmas, does not matter. Whatever we do, it's our motivation of doing it, "as to the Lord" that matters. Another example is eating. Some choose to eat meat, some only vegetables. The motivation of doing it "as to the Lord" is what matters. We must be fully convinced in our minds that we are pleasing the Lord. It's not the ritual, it's the reason why.

People of diverse amoral practices are equally acceptable to the Lord because they have the same responsibility... obedience to the Lordship of Christ. The principle Christians live by is that we belong to the Lord and are responsible to Him. It's not "the way we've always done things," or "this is how my parents did it," that motivates us. Serving the Lord is both our motivation and our responsibility. Our relationship to the Lord, and our obedience to Him, determine our practice in amoral issues. Do we preach our life or the life of Christ?

Since we have freedom in Christ to do amoral things, we should recognize the right of the Lord to judge us, His servants, in how we handle these issues. We have no right to make fun of,

ridicule, call "unspiritual," or discourage a fellow believer for the amoral decisions being made. At the judgment seat, Christ will reveal the motives behind the conduct, and will reward those whose motives were right. Only the Lord has the right to judge and He will judge the believer's use of his freedom in amoral things. So, we must stop judging each other in amoral issues. It only breaks down harmony in the church by focusing attention on something that is of no importance to God.

Discussion Questions

1. Romans 14:4

Are there areas where you have judged a brother or sister in Christ, that Scripture does not address?

Friendship & Restraint

Restraint to the Strong

Romans 14:13b – 15:3

*Love is found in the things we have given up,
rather than in the things we have kept.*

~Rich Mullins

*Instead of making each other the object of judgment, the believer
is to make his own conduct the object of close scrutiny.*

Three guidelines for the strong one who has freedom to do amoral things are: to refrain from a cause of offense, to recognize the source of defilement, and to relinquish your own rights.

Those with freedom to do amoral things must refrain from being the cause of a problem or from causing shock to another believer because of behavior. If we lead someone into sin because in their mind they are not convinced it is right, then we have taken it beyond the bounds of liberty. If they “feel” in their mind that it is sin, then for them, it is. A tragic example is the one rescued from alcohol, who observes another Christian taking an alcoholic

drink, then reverts back to alcoholism. In order to love the one we might negatively influence, we stay away from alcohol.

Those with freedom, who aren't hung up on amoral issues, must recognize that the defilement isn't in the amoral thing, but in the conscience of the weaker brother who attributes uncleanness to it. If our weaker brother is morally pained to see the exercise of freedom, since to him it is wrong, we could become the reason he dislikes church and repels the faith. So we love the one who causes the amoral issue to be unclean by giving up the amoral issue. Those with freedom must relinquish rights.

The stronger brother says his liberty comes from God, but the weaker brother says it comes from Satan. We don't show how spiritual we are by continuing in the behavior, but by manifesting the unity of the spirit of God. Refraining from the exercise of liberty is pleasing to God when the motivation is the unity of the body. When the stronger brother adheres to his moral obligation to take the initiative and bear with the weaker brother in those things that bother him, we are being like Christ who did what was good for us rather than being selfish.

So, please, even though we have the freedom to be involved in something amoral, if it will disrupt the peace of the body, let's not even talk about it. We don't want to be responsible for disrupting the work of God's ministry, or for leading a weaker brother into sin. Do we have a "like it or lump it" attitude? Are we willing to sacrifice our liberty for the sake of our weaker brothers? Does harmony outweigh our preferences or rights? Let's prove it by relinquishing our rights.

Discussion Questions

1. Romans 14:13b-15:3

Explain the three guidelines for the strong one, who has freedom to do amoral things.

2. In what areas will you closely scrutinize yourself and relinquish your rights to refrain from being a cause of offense?

Friendship & Unity

Believers Glorify God Through Unity

Romans 15:4-20

The basis for our unity as a body is our common hope. The channel of hope is the Word of God, rather than the deification of our ideas. The realization of hope is when Scriptures help us see things as they truly are. Realization of hope is not affected by whether we do or don't do amoral things, rather by how we apply our lives to His Word. Our only chance for unity in this fallen world is the Word of God.

God has given us a great gift: unity. This gift of unity calls for harmony – not simply identifying with a group, or spending time with those who have the same opinions about the way things should be done. Focusing on those amoral practices divides rather than unites. The gift of unity is given by God, the source of both patience and comfort. The gift of unity is given to both “doers” and “abstainers” of amoral things, so it shouldn't make any difference to us whether we practice freedoms or not.

Our common unity is greater than amoral things that divide. When we as a body of believers called Faith Fellowship Church exhibit unity and harmony, God is glorified. Why? Because we are attractive to the world around us by the way we get along and work together. Glorifying God in this way begins with first the way we think, then the

way we talk and interact. We glorify God by praising the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We can't praise God and argue about amoral issues at the same time. When we accept each other as we are with our diverse convictions and practices in amoral issues, we are receiving each other in the same way Christ receives us. If Christ glorifies the Father by receiving both, so can we.

Unity in the midst of a variety of convictions and practices is the work of Christ and a testimony to Him. In Romans 15:8-12, Paul brings in Old Testament Scriptures, to show that unity has always been God's plan for His people. Christ showed us how by giving up His rights for the glory of God, so that He could unite both Jew and Gentile into one body. How dare we cause lack of unity by insisting on the doing the things we are comfortable with!

Romans 15:13 is the verse inscribed over the doors leading to our church library. I hope that every time you leave the building, you'll look at that verse and be encouraged. It will remind you that God wants to fill you with joy and peace – that's the outcome of recognizing the true character of amoral things and the freedom of believers to do them. We will enjoy our salvation, with joy, peace and hope, when we refuse to let the convictions and practices of others disturb or offend us.

God is the source of certain hope which should bind us. That hope cannot be broken by amoral differences. We should receive each other for the glory of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit who enables the strong and weak to see each other's positions and to refuse to let their differences mar the unity we have in Christ. This is true spiritual freedom and maturity. Truly enjoy your salvation!

Discussion Questions

1. Romans 15:8-12

How does this passage show that unity has always been God's plan for His people?

2. Romans 15:4

Where is the only place to find comfort and hope?

Friendship & Warnings

What is a Christian to beware of?

Matthew 7:15-20; Acts 20:17-38

Lips will lie, but lives won't!

Jesus repeatedly emphasizes, “Beware”! In His first sermon, he warned us, “Beware of false prophets”. Beware means to turn one’s mind or attention to a thing by being on one’s guard. So, if we’re on guard about something, we’ll be constantly thinking about the possibility of coming into contact with false prophets. Pay attention! Don’t fall asleep at the wheel! They may look like sheep, but really they are wolves! Individuals who present themselves with the sheep-like attributes of innocence, harmlessness, and sincerity could be donning a façade, putting on a front, and camouflaging inwardly devious and destructive scheming.

Note that you don’t have to go looking for wolves. No, wolves come to you. As a matter of fact, scheming wolves initiate. So, we’re off the hook, right? No again. We each have personal responsibility for allowing a relationship with a wolf to be nurtured. You see, Christ taught

that the wolf can be known by its fruits. So, you watch the track record, what someone has done in the past. If we're talking about a wolf that has attacked in the past, that has been treacherous by deceitfully presenting itself as harmless while producing death, carnage, suffering, panic, destruction or chaos, would you hang around if it approaches and try to befriend it? It would be foolish to associate with the beast, or to allow one of your friends or family members to get near it.

In the Adirondack Mountains near our home there was an open garbage dump. DEC clamped down its rules and closed the dump, effectively closing the pantry for several bears. Word spread fast that the bears were on prowl in the evenings, and children should be protected. It wasn't long before hunters took care of the danger. That's how wolves in sheep's clothing are to be noted and then avoided.

When Jesus said that wolves can be known by their fruits, He was telling us to watch lives and see if they are lining up with God's Word. You see, lips will lie, but lives won't. In Matthew 7:15-20, He mentions "fruit" seven times. It's important to observe, evaluate, examine, discover, and identify the fruit of people. Though we can't see motives or intentions, we can inspect fruit! Jesus makes a contrast between a good tree and a bad tree, and how they cannot produce fruit that is contrary to who they are. So how do we choose our friends? First be watchful, consider and study, know them experientially and be aware.

We must also remember that it will be more difficult for "wolves" to penetrate and destroy the church when there is unbreakable unity among us. Also, when one of us falls away, we are easy prey for a "wolf" to attack to and devastate. Paul warned us in Acts 20 that wolves would come to attack God's flock. We've been warned! Let's heed Jesus' warning and walk in unity and awareness.

What is A Christian To Watch Out For? Deceit!

Jeremiah 17:9; Proverbs 26:26-27

Corporate America teaches lessons on showing consideration and courtesy to others, that sound biblical. Yet the motivation is money, not serving the Lord. When people say all the right things, are friendly and outgoing, and carry themselves with sophistication and class, often they are the first to be chosen as friends. However, we as believers can't choose our friends based on charm.

Charm or deceit is a great foe of unity that we need to beware of. Let's define the term "deceit" as false, feigned, treacherous, fraudulent, crafty. This is a state of iniquity (moral error) that is in direct opposition to Christian fellowship. How is charm connected to deceitfulness? Charm's motivation is to please the observer, using behavior that imitates kindness. Charm is determined by the opinions and judgments of others, rather than beauty that is an objective, set-in-stone fact.

"Oh, so and so? He's a real cool guy." "She's such a nice person." Who wouldn't want to be associated with such individuals? However, charm based judgments are a practice believers must refrain from.

Another mindset based on charm is heard in the statements: "I know his or her heart," or "They have a good heart." Sounds nice, but it's really just charm. The Bible teaches that the heart of man cannot be seen, nor can

motives be judged (1 Corinthians 2:11). As a matter of fact, the heart of man is deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). Remember, Jesus taught us to beware of talk and watch for fruit. Lips will lie, but lives won't.

As a church with many young men, that are in the process of making a decision about a wife, this is a good time to point out the wisdom that Scripture gives about charm and women. Proverbs 31:30 says that “***Charm is deceitful & beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.***” This comes near the end of a twenty one verse passage written to men so they know what to look for in choosing a wife. It's a detailed and specific list of important and essential qualities of a virtuous woman that will be sure to bring public respect to her husband. There is no mention whatsoever of outward perception or physical appearance, other than to say that it is passing. The majority of this chapter is focused on what she does, on the fruit of her daily life. The acts of this woman reveal the true condition of her heart, that she “fears the Lord,” and it is on this basis that those closest to her praise her.

A believer must not follow the world's pattern for friendship, confusing attraction for fellowship. This does not in any way suggest that a person that is courteous, kind, respectful, and graceful is inwardly deceitful. However, on this side of heaven, we all have a sin nature, so we all do struggle with our own sinful desires. Our warning is rather against drawing conclusions based on appearance.

When I played hockey, we did not spend the morning practice looking at a picture of the opposing team or even watching their practice drills. Instead, we watched video footage to see what we were really facing, according to the rules of the game. The believer is commanded to study God's Word, and understand and fully perceive others and situations through the standard of God's Word, taking notice of what someone is producing as opposed to what they are portraying.

What is a Christian to watch out for? Violation of Allegiance

Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 John 1:6-10; Galatians 6:1-5

The devil decided to have a garage sale. On the day of sale, his tools were placed for public inspection, each being marked with its sale price. There were a treacherous lot of implements: hatred, envy, jealousy, deceit, lust, lying, pride, and so on. Set apart from the rest was a harmless-looking tool. It was quite worn and yet priced very high. "What is the name of this tool?" asked one of the customers, pointing to it. "That is discouragement," Satan replied. "Why have you priced it so high?" "Because it is more useful to me than the others. I can pry open and get inside a man's heart with that, even when I cannot get near him with the other tools. It is badly worn because I use it on almost everyone, since so few people know it belongs to me." The devil's price for discouragement was high because it is still his favorite tool, and he is still using it on God's people.

In being aware, we Christians must watch out for violations of allegiance or treachery. Let's define treachery: to act faithlessly, deceitfully, covertly and fraudulently.

We must guard against treachery in leadership. It's not how a person talks, but what the Bible says. Adolph Hitler is proof that people have a strange tendency to accept bramble leadership. When Hitler began his campaign, he was attractive and compelling, and so he won favor with the people through deception. God's people must take great care in selecting leaders.

The idea behind treachery is well illustrated through the breaking of the covenant of marriage. The marriage covenant is a binding, enduring relationship characterized by obligations and sanctions, made before God between a man and a woman, a contract that is legalized and ratified in heaven before being recognized on earth. God honors and views this as a permanent covenant. Divorce breaks this covenant, being diabolically opposed to what God has intended for marriage. This treachery leaves violence in its wake, with both spouses and children having learned tragic lessons about broken trust that will impact the rest of their lives.

Mention of divorce should include an answer to the question of what you do with divorce. We recognize that divorce is diabolically opposed to God's teaching and plan regarding marriage, we confess our sin, and we get on with God. We don't try to justify and excuse.

The broken covenant is not the only treachery involved. Breaking the vow is simply a manifestation of deceitfulness that led to that point. Marital infidelity is not a spur of the moment choice. Many smaller broken promises precede the action of divorce. In the Malachi 2 story, what had the men done? They were intermarrying with heathen women, a strictly forbidden practice. While doing so, they were also divorcing their wives. Both practices were and are treacherous and abominable to God, they were treachery against God.

So, what about treachery? Treachery is acting deceitfully towards another person, with vagueness or coyness regarding details or actions. In other words, it is word games. When we think of the phrase, "It all depends on your definition of is", we become aware that we live in a world of treachery. Treachery is motivated by getting what we want or being able to do what we want to do. "If I act this way, or only tell part of the truth, then I could do what I want." Treachery flies smack dab in the face of allegiance.

When we deal treacherously with a brother or sister in Christ by putting on a "nice" appearance that masks other intentions, we are acting out of a corrupt heart. If we truly love someone as God commands, would we be deceptive? Obviously not. Take it a step further. Would my treachery or deception encourage others to do the same? I think of a pastor friend who spoke of the need to "be on" every time he was at the church. Putting on a "nice face", an "on face" can't be conducive to true fellowship, for it also encourages others to do the same. How about the deception it teaches our children? Scary.

Perhaps sometimes treachery comes as a perverted result of considering other believers, as we are commanded in Hebrews 10:24-25. As we study, understand, and perceive what makes others tick, beware of treacherous thoughts like: "I could put one over on this guy," or "She's weak in this area, she'll never catch on." The possibility for desires being achieved grows and grows in the mind until the person decides to go through with it. The scary thing about this sin is that it is utilized behind a guise of companionship, genuineness, friendship and intimacy. Treachery does not start when a person acts, it begins when they allow underhanded thoughts to go on.

How do we guard against such treachery? Accountability. A lack of accountability opens the door for treachery to creep in. As believers grow in a deepening relationship of accountability with each other, we are protected from treachery.

Discussion Questions

1. Matthew 7:15-20

What is the warning found in this passage? How will you heed it?

2. Jeremiah 17:9

We are not only warned against treachery in others, but also in our hearts. How will you heed the warning in this passage?

3. Hebrews 4:12

Since our hearts are partially hidden from even ourselves, how does this verse bring hope?

4. Hebrews 10:24-25; Galatians 6:1-5

How do these passages guard against treachery?

Question	Passage	Answer
Are there signs of deceit in my life?	<i><u>Psalm 120:2</u> "Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, & from a deceitful tongue." <u>Eph 4:22</u>"That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man, which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;"</i>	
What am I doing to make sure I don't fall into this sin?	<i><u>Proverbs 11:18</u> "The wicked man does deceptive work: but he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward."</i>	
Am I speaking and acting truthfully?	<i><u>Psalm 52:4</u> "You love all devouring words, you deceitful tongue."</i>	
What could be said regarding my heart and its true intents and purposes?	<i><u>Proverbs 14:25</u> "A true witness delivers souls: but a deceitful witness speaks lies."</i>	
Is what I'm portraying on the outside lining up with the way things really are on the inside?	<i><u>1 Corinthians 6:9</u> Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,</i>	
Have I chosen friends that are deceitful?	<i><u>1 Corinthians 15:33</u> Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."</i>	

If you have discovered that your life is characterized by deceit, confess your sin to God and allow your mind to be renewed by the Holy Spirit as you read and study His Word.

Friendship & Discipleship

In 2007, our focus at Faith Fellowship Church was “deliberate discipleship”. How could everyone be involved in discipleship? There was the normal discipleship river—with people attending worship services; being involved in Bible classes studies, small groups and meetings; and pursuing intimate relationships of discipleship. These people were rowing down the swift current of the river of the source of truth, God’s Word. God was glorified by as many people as possible rowing along in this discipleship river, solving problems biblically, growing and becoming more like Jesus Christ.

However, we had to ask where people who were not benefiting from FFC’s normal discipleship methods could go to learn to canoe again. What about the people caught in the branches on the side of the river, or those paddling in circles? What should be done for those caught in sin who could not find their way out, those in need of answers from God’s Word? The source of truth was still the river they need. A way to provide temporary, accelerated discipleship was required. Thus Faith Fellowship’s Biblical Counseling became a ministry to help men, women, or couples who were not maximally benefiting from the normal discipleship means and methods.

As this ministry expanded to the community, it

became obvious that it was a beautiful avenue to win people to Jesus, and touch their human needs with God's truth and love. The same river of God's truth now flows out to reach those in the community willing to come for biblical counseling, affording a great opportunity to apply the truth and love of God, opening a tributary into the river of discipleship that carries new canoes into the stream.

What will the new rowers find when they enter the Faith Fellowship discipleship river? Will they find harmony? As Christ's church, we have a responsibility to present true unity and harmony, promoting God's honor and giving Him glory.

Unity and harmony are fine and good when the going is smooth, but how about when a bomb drops and someone offends us close to home? Remember Paul's instruction to the church that was to help the two ladies in Philippi get along? Present unity by being of the same mind. Never present disunity, separation or disagreement. Rejoice! Bow to God's Word, and pray. Don't criticize or complain, voice opinion, and worry with anxiety.

There's more we can do, at the motivation level, to keep the body unified and harmonious. We can think about only true things, not possibilities and "what-ifs". Think noble thoughts instead of dishonorable ones. Don't focus on the unfair, but rather the just. Is something ruined? Then don't think about it, think about how we can be made pure. Focus on the lovely, the beautiful, not the ugly. Let only good reports run through the mind. Think of virtue instead of evil, and concentrate on the praise worthy news rather than the bad news. Imitate those that are walking in unity and harmony. When our motivational thoughts and resulting actions follow these guidelines, the river of discipleship will flow. We will all be growing to look more like Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. **Matthew 28:18-20**

By what authority does Jesus command us to make disciples?

2. **Matthew 28:18-19**

What are disciple makers to teach the disciples?

3. **Matthew 28:18-20**

Who will be with us to see it through?

Further resources for discipleship:

"Tenacious Training: Seven Steps in Deliberate Discipleship"
available at the FFC Welcome Center, or through
www.faithfellowship.us.