

Defining Things:

Session #1 led by Tim Yates

Describe an object for the group
Describe the possible positive and negative functions of the same object
Describe the object in relation to yourself
Describe this object in relation to God
Describe Christian uses of the object

Process this experience. How difficult was it to think about the last two questions?

Now let's move to defining people. What do you think of when you see people?

"Pain in the neck" "Friend" "Nice" "Pretty" "Old" "Mean"

All these describe people in relation to _____

How do we define people in relation to God?

When we see other Christians, how can we define them biblically? We will look at this topic in our morning session.

"IF YOU LOVE SOMETHING" (one of those junk emails I received)

If you love something, set it free. If it comes back, It will always be yours.
If it doesn't come back, it was never yours to begin with.

But, if it just sits in your living room, messes up your stuff, eats your food, uses your telephone, takes your money, and doesn't appear to realize that you had set it free..... You either married it or gave birth to it.

***Thank you for your patience in this mess:
I'm a Work In Progress!***

Consider a lump of clay. I'm going to make it look just like the perfect image when I'm done. Just wait!

Afraid to marry? Trapped in marriage to a passive "deadbeat" man or a nagging angry woman? Struggling with people in the church who irritate you or have offended you? Dealing with children in an all day draining situation that drives you crazy with the constant resistance to your will and instruction? This session can help you. Got burned by a dating relationship that didn't work out? Feel that your parents don't love you or love a sibling more than you? This session can help you.

Today we are going to learn to think biblically about other Christians. This will help you right now in all your relationships to other Christians.

“The world can do almost anything better than the church . . . build houses, fed the hungry, take care of earthquake victims or heal the sick. There is only one thing the world cannot do. **It cannot offer grace.**” Quote from Gordon MacDonald in *What's So Amazing About Grace* by Philip Yancey (Zondervan 1997).

NIV **Philippians** 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 *I thank my God every time I remember you.*

4 *In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy*

5 *because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,*

6 being confident of this, *that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, *all of you share in God's grace with me.*

8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,

10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,

11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God.

I. DEFINE OTHER CHRISTIANS BY FAITH IN THE TRUTH GOD REVEALS ABOUT THEIR NEW NATURE IN CHRIST

A. **What do you expect people to do or be for you?**

B. **How do you define them?**

C. **Examine a common way of defining other Christians:** according to their old, sinful nature, we often define people according to their failures and sins. Examples: Parents to children: “You’re always lazy and complaining!” Wife to husband: “You don’t love me!” Church member to another church member about a third church member: “He’s a real jerk!”

D. **Consider Paul’s determination to define other believers according to their new nature,** not using their sins to define them anymore: NIV 2 Corinthians 5:16 “So **from now on** *we regard no one from a worldly point of view.* Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;** the old has gone, the new has come!”

E. **Paul defines believers by FAITH!**

II. DEFINE OTHER CHRISTIANS BY HOPE IN THE TRUTH GOD REVEALS ABOUT WHO THEY WILL BECOME IN CHRIST Phil 1:6)

Philippians 1:6 says “that he who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ.”

A. **Paul is describing the church at Philippi biblically.** They are God’s workmanship (Eph 2:10), God’s servants (Rom 14:4), and he will certainly conform the true Christians to the likeness of Christ (Rom 8:29).

B. **Who is “HE” who began a good work in you?** The Triune God.

C. **What is the “good work”?** HE united us to Christ, in fellowship with the Spirit; changes us into the image of Christ (2:1; 3:10-11; 2:20).

D. **How does he complete it?** He first completed this death-resurrection work in Jesus (2:5-11; 3:10-11). He **fills our minds with truth**, the knowledge of Christ, gaining Christ, having his righteousness through faith (4:8; 3:8-9), teaches us to pray (4:6-7), leads others to pray for us

(Phil 1:9-11) and instruct us (1:25; 2:19-21, 28; 3:1), gives us humble servant examples to follow (Jesus, Timothy, Paul: 2:5-8, 20; 4:9-11).

- E. **Why is it completed at the day of Christ Jesus?** When Jesus returns Christ will transform our bodies to be like his glorious body (3:20-21).
- F. **How are you thinking about the other Christians around you right now?** Are you critical, and do you view them as you project to change them by your criticism? If so you are demonstrating unbelief in Philippians 1:6. Trust God to finish the work he has started.

III. THANK GOD FOR HIS IMPERFECT PEOPLE AS YOU PRAY FOR THEIR GROWTH (Phil 1:3-5, 9-11)

- A. **Because Paul believes this promise in Philippians 1:6, he can thank God every time he remembers these believers.** This is in the context of also praying for their growth (Phil 1:9-11). He is both thankful for them while at the same time realizes their need for growth. You see in these verses an example of thankfulness and prayer for irritating Christians.
- B. **Christ prays for his people too** (Heb 7:25). He thanks the Father for his people as he prays for their growth (Luke 10:21; John 17 example for prayer for our growth).
- C. **If you can't learn to thank God for imperfect Christians now, you will never be effective in any relationships or any ministry.** You will develop judgmental attitudes towards everyone and never be able to offer the hope of the gospel from a gentle heart (Heb 5:2; Gal 6:1-2; Matt 7:1-5; Rom 2:4; 14:4). Within months after getting close to other people you will begin to see the faults that at first you covered over or ignored. Then you will have to think biblically about others.

IV. THINK OF IRRITATING CHRISTIANS AS GOD'S PROJECT SO YOU CAN STOP GETTING SO UPSET THAT THEY AREN'T CHANGING AS FAST AS YOU WOULD LIKE

- A. **Much of your frustration at irritating people is the helpless feeling you have** when you realize you can't change them to be like you. Some of these desired changes are biblical, other things are just your preferences.
- B. **Conflict stews & boils when you define yourself as very different (and say "I'm better")** in the area where you have conflict. Conflict dies down when people are humble enough to see their similarities and pray for each other as well as be thankful for them.
- C. **Idol Mirror in relationships** (see diagram on page 8)
- D. **Paul is not ignorant of the problems at Philippi.** He is not trying to smooth over the rough spots. He knows that the church is a hospital for sinners (Mk 2:17- It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick), and Philippi is no exception. The Philippian church seems to be having trouble with fighting, disagreements, selfish ambition, grumbling and complaining against their leaders (Phil 1:15; 2:3, 6, 14; 4:2). Paul is just thinking biblically about the people in Christ's church. He accepts the sovereignty of God in perfecting his church through Jesus Christ as established fact. This is truly faith in action.
- E. **But when we do not believe this promise that God will finish the work, then we tend to be critical of others' sin problems, as if theirs were worse than our sin problem.** We believe that others need a good dose of our correction. We reason, "If they would just do it my way, then their problems would be solved." We need to be rebuked by Matthew 7:1-5. We must learn to remove the log in our own eye; when we learn how to repent and change the very same problems in our own lives, then we will be able to help others repent and change. Besides, "who are you to judge another man's servant? To his own Master he stands or falls, and he will stand for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Rom 14:4).
- F. **God seldom uses your critical attitudes to change others.** Romans 2:4 says that "the kindness of God leads you to repentance," not your criticism, anger or resentment. When

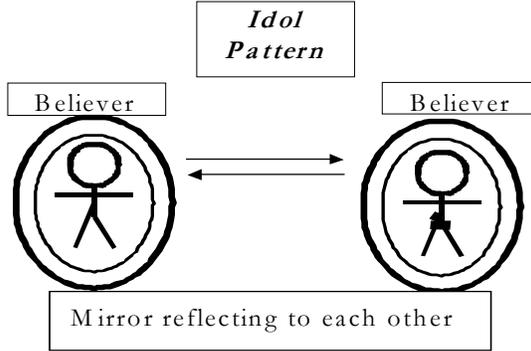
someone sees the kindness of God in Jesus Christ, it breaks and softens his heart to repent. God's kindness, when understood, motivates our repentance.

- G. God has put sinful people in you life to show you your own sin.** Those people you have difficulty loving are the very ones that God wants to use to show you your own selfishness and love of your own agenda. Accept others because you trust that God has designed their involvement in your life, as a gift to chisel away your own selfishness. The sinfulness of others has a divine purpose in your life. God wants you to have more than just the appearance of holiness. God wants to conform you to the image of Christ no matter what people do to you. As this is partly what it means to conform to the death of Christ (3:10-11 *share in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, becoming like him in his death*). This means you will be patient in mistreatment and entrust yourself to God who judged justly (1 Pet 2:21-23). This means your goal in suffering or conflict is to glorify the Father rather than prove you are right.

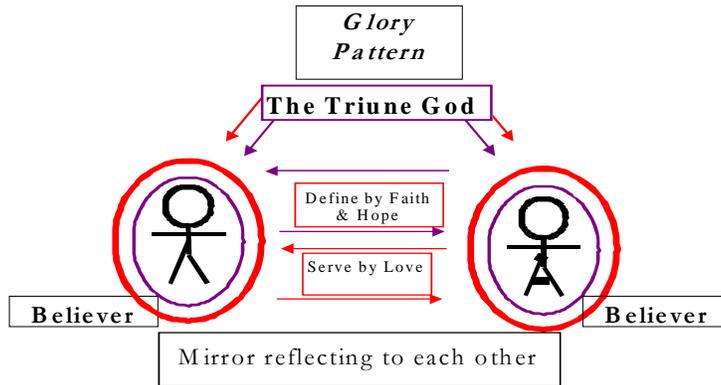
V. MOTIVATE YOUR LOVE FOR THOSE WHO IRRITATE YOU BY STUDYING THE AFFECTION OF CHRIST JESUS (Phil 1:8)

- A. Christ's affections drew him towards people for God the Father's benefit and glory.** You need to be drawn to people for God benefit and glory, not your own. Paul longed for the Philippians with the "affection of Jesus Christ."
- B. Jesus was a friend of sinners:** Peter, Paul, woman caught in adultery. Love Jesus as you see his love for sinners. You need his image in you, the Holy Spirit who also loves sinners because Jesus sends him to love and comfort sinners who believe. Remember his love for Peter, who both tempted & denied Jesus.
- C. Paul commends Timothy for looking out for the interests of others (2:20) as demonstrating the humble mind of Christ** he refers to in Philippians 2:5-8. The opposite of these affections is seen in Phil 3:19—the enemies of the cross who trust in the human works of circumcision (3:2), their god is their stomach and whose glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.
- D. Do you have the humble servant mind of Christ, or the proud, judgmental mind of Satan, the world and the sinful nature?**

Two Patterns in Human Relationships



Mirror of human idolatry (often called “fellowship”): using people for selfish interest alone, rather than as a means to loving and enjoying God. “Satisfy my desires for _____ so we can improve our fellowship.”



Mirror of Christian fellowship: using people as a means to loving and enjoying God. “Let me have some benefit from you *in the Lord*; refresh my heart in Christ, [so we can improve our fellowship],” (Philem 20). The believer leads me to love and enjoy God and reflects God to me. “Define by faith & hope aspects” means to have a vision of who believer will be in Christ. Fellowship is a means to glorify God and see that *from Him, through Him and to Him are all things, to him be the glory forever* (1 Cor 10:31; Rom 11:36).

Private Reflection Time

Five application principles for you to pray about.

1. Write down the name of another Christian who irritates you - maybe someone you live with, or work with, or someone in your church group that really irritates you. Put their initials down on your paper if you don't want anyone else to see it.. How would you describe him or her? Review the truths of the first session thinking about this person or these people.

2. Confess bitterness, anger, rejection, critical attitudes towards other Christians as pride which reasons "I have my life together in this area" and as unbelief in the "new creation" definition of the believer and non-hope in the promise that God will complete the work He has begun. Seek Christ for mercy on your sins (Heb 4:16).
3. Pray for grace to believe the principles of this session for one or two irritating Christians in your life. Forgive that person in your heart as your pray (Mark 11:25) *"And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."*
4. Pray for grace to believe that God has designed your growth by bringing other irritating Christians into your life. Believe that you all equally need God's grace for your sins, as those others need grace for their sins. If this person has actually sinned against you, pray for the right timing and words to confront this person and seek reconciliation. If you have sinned against that person, pray for an opportunity to confess your sin and reconcile. (the private sin of a bad attitude towards someone need not be confessed to that person unless it has affected your relationship in public ways.)
5. Ask God to give you the affection of Christ for other believers, like Jesus had for Peter, like Paul had for the arguing and complaining Philippian church, and like Timothy had for them.

Group Reflection and Sharing Time

In groups of 3-4 people, discuss the following case study:

Jesus' affection for Peter through some major disagreements, Peter's pride thinking he was great and that he would never deny or disown the Lord., Peter's weak faith, Peter's depression and the Lord's restoring him to a position of chief authority in the early Jerusalem church.

Matthew 16:21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. **22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" 23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."**

Luke 22:24 Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. **25** Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. **26** But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. **27** For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. **28** You are those who have stood by me in my trials. **29** And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, **30** so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. **31** "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. **32** But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." **33** But he replied,

"Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." 34 Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

Luke 22:54 Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. **Peter followed at a distance.** 55 But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. 56 A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." 57 **But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him,"** he said. 58 A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." **"Man, I am not!"** Peter replied. 59 About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." 60 Peter replied, **"Man, I don't know what you're talking about!"** Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 **The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times."** 62 **And he went outside and wept bitterly.**

John 21:14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. 15 When they had finished eating, **Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord,"** he said, **"you know that I love you."** Jesus said, **"Feed my lambs."** 16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." 17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" **Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."** Jesus said, **"Feed my sheep.** 18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, **"Follow me!"**
NIV Acts 4:13 **When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. What moved Jesus to such affection for a man who over three year showed little promise as a leader or bold apostle?**
- 2. Why didn't Jesus give up on Peter?**
- 3. Did Jesus ever affirm the "glimpses of glory" he saw in Peter in the verses listed on pages 14-15?**
- 4. Have you ever seen this kind of affection in human relationships before (in real life or in movies or literature)?**
- 5. How have you felt when you were the object of someone's affections?**
- 6. Have you ever felt this kind of affection through the believers at your church?**
- 7. Have you ever loved someone else like this before?**
- 8. What would your church look like if all the believers showed this kind of affection for each other?**
- 9. What would need to change for this to happen?**

10. What would you like to do to promote this kind of loving acceptance of real sins and weaknesses among the members and regular attenders at church? List some specific ways.

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Close with prayer, asking for God's help to love each other at your church.