

Effective Communication By Steven Harper

Many problems that arise and persist in the church are often a matter of communication — either the lack of it or because the communication that exists is simply ineffective. Either way, the communication problem will often lead to more problems, a lack of understanding, and, often, unnecessary strife. To prevent this, we need to be effective communicators. But how? Consider the following factors in good communication:

At Least Two Parties. By definition, communication is “an exchange of thoughts or information.” If there is only one individual, there can be no communication, just talking because communication requires that there be both a speaker and a listener. God has communicated the plan of salvation to man, but unless man hears it, it cannot save him. If we have already heard and obeyed, we need to be the one doing the speaking; if we have not, then we need to do the listening!

In the local church, here is often the beginning point of ineffective communication: We are not talking to one another! Sometimes, members want to know what is going on but the elders are not telling anyone what is happening; sometimes, though, the elders try to communicate to the flock, but no one listens. Is it any wonder such situations lead to troubled churches?

Two Interested Parties. And if the communication is to be effective, both parties must be interested parties; that means the speaker is interested in the concerns of the listener, he will speak in a way that attracts and holds the attention of the listener, and do so in understandable terms that have meaning to the listener. But the listener must also be an interested partner, interested in what the speaker has to say, giving his full attention and investigating what is said, and just as interested in the speaker and his concerns. If the speaker is not interested in the concerns of the listener, or if the listener is not interested in the concerns of the speaker, whatever communication there may be will be ineffective, at the least, and a cause for a severed relationship, at the worst.

God was certainly interested in the concerns of man when He communicated His plan for our salvation to us. He loved us so much He sent His only Son to die for us (John 3:16), but it is not until we listen with interest to what He has revealed that His plan will convict us and we can be saved (Rom. 10:17). Many men have read God's word, but not with any real interest in what God has said, and the result is that they are still not saved.

When it comes to our communication with one another, this is where we often fail. When a dispute arises, we are most interested in getting the other side to listen to us, even as we ignore what they are saying and even show obvious signs that we are not interested in what they have to say. Paul said we must look out not only to our “own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4). This applies even when we do not agree, and will go a long way in resolving differences.

Purpose. For the communication to be effective, the speaker must offer something important, with a predetermined purpose, to the listener. At the same time, the listener must have a purpose: seeking information from the speaker that is important, helpful, and relative to his needs and interests. If there is no purpose for

speaking, or no purpose in listening, the speaker is doing nothing more than talking and the listener has simply filled his head with useless information.

When disputes arise and we go so far as speaking with one another, let us make sure that there is a purpose in it — and the right purpose. We are not speaking just to make our views known, to embarrass another, or to assert our authority; we are seeking the truth, a resolution to differences, and peace.

With these three things in place, our communication with one another will be effective, but problems persist because we often leave out portions. Consider a few examples from God's word that demonstrate this reality:

Understandable Speech, No Desire To Hear. (Jer. 25:3-9; 35:17; Rom. 10:18-21) When God spoke to the Israelites on numerous occasions, it was not that they did not understand what He was saying, but that they had no desire to listen. The result was disobedience and captivity. God's communication was ineffective to them because they had no desire to hear.

Desire To Hear, Unintelligible Speech. (1Cor. 14:9-11) At Corinth, the problem was that many were using the gifts of the Spirit for the wrong reason. Paul's reminder to them was that if they spoke in a tongue and had no one to interpret what was said, you might as well be speaking to the air, for no one would understand and the words, though they desired to hear.

Understandable Speech, Desire To Hear. (Acts 2) On Pentecost, the apostles spoke to the people in their own language and they understood (v. 6). The people listened attentively because they desired to hear what the men had to say. Upon hearing the words, they reacted to what they had heard. They not only had a desire to listen, but also to obey.

Understandable Speech, No Desire To Hear, then No Desire To Listen. (Deut. 1:41-45) When the Israelites were told to enter the land, they refused to hear the word of God and go in, so God then told them they could not enter. Then they said they would, but God forbade them, but they went anyway. They were defeated and then pleaded with the Lord, but then He would not hear them.

In fact, if we want better relationships with one another, we must have better and effective communication. In the local church, it is a necessity to ensure brethren are in agreement on all things and that they have a common desire and aim. Without communication, we lose sight of who our brethren are and what they think and feel, and it will not be long before we really do not know them. Sadly, we can do the same with God. We can stray so far away and communicate so infrequently that it may come to a point that we really do not know Him anymore.

We must strive for effective communication with one another to maintain organization, too. Imagine a church where, through passage of time, brethren fail to communicate and let each other know who is responsible for certain duties. Eventually, there would be much confusion and disorganization and little would be accomplished. Hard feelings would result and relationships would be strained. Open lines of communication ensure we know one another and can grow together, dealing with personal faults with personal communication, communicating promptly, fairly, and with love at all times; when we lack this, the result will be that we “bite and devour one another” (Gal. 5:15) and all involved will self-destruct; brotherly relationships will become strained and instead of talking with one another, brethren will simply create an

image within their minds of who their brethren are and what they are like — and sometimes it will not be a favorable one.

To ensure effective communication, we must choose to speak often with one another. I know; it sounds like a given, but when is the last time you had a simple conversation with one of your fellow believers here? We actually have few conversations with each other! Constant lines of communication are a necessity if we want to accomplish anything as a church. And when we speak to one another, we must do so with love because the attitude that we profess may mean more than the words we say. If we speak, we must say something worthwhile (Eph. 4:29).

Faithfulness

A preacher was asked to define “faithful attendance at worship.” He replied that the best way to understand it was to apply the same standards of faithfulness that we do in other areas of our life. Consider the examples he gave:

“If your car started one out of three times, would you consider it faithful? If the paperboy missed Monday and Thursday, would those papers be missed? If you didn’t show up at work two or three times a month, would your boss call you faithful? If you attend worship only often enough to show some interest but not often enough to get involved are you faithful?” It bears some serious thought.

A Moments Wisdom

Others may ruin your reputation, but only you can damage your character.

If you expect to draw true interest, you should have true principle.

Most knocking is done by people who do not know how to ring the bell.

Keep both feet on the ground and you won’t have far to fall.

No one will know of your honesty and sincerity unless you give out some samples.