

## Appendix

## Dealing with Others

Dealing with others is not always easy. What should I say? How much should I believe of what I hear? Is there another side of the story I've been told? Am I being fair in my dealings with others? These and other questions must be answered.

When we deal with others there is always the potential for differences to arise. When those differences come, it is easy to forget to use some common sense rules in our conflict. We are not always as fair in dealing with those we disagree with as we are in defending ourselves or those with whom we agree.

For some time I have been thinking about how brethren treat one another. I have thought about how many problems are simple misunderstandings. It seems to me that we are not always as careful as we ought to be. As I have thought and talked with others, some basic rules come to mind that we ought to follow.

**1. Pray for wisdom** (Jas. 1:5). If there is any time we need wisdom it is when we deal with those with whom we disagree. Let us pray that we have the wisdom to know: (a) how to approach others, (b) what we should say and what we should not reveal, (c) what I should believe, and what I should reject of what I hear, (d) the good that is in other people, and (e) how slow or fast I need to be in my conclusions.

**2. Be careful what you say.** Any of us could easily get carried away and say things that he would later wish had not been said. The Proverb writer said, "he who restrains his lips is wise" (Prov. 10:19). We must be careful (a) what we say to and about others. It may be information that others have told me in confidence. It may be that the one to whom we give



the information may not honor our request to keep it confidential. Let us be "slow to speak" (Jas. 1:19) knowing that "a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter" (Prov. 11:13). We don't have to tell all we know. "A fool vents all his feelings, But a wise man hold them back" (Prov. 29:11).

We must (b) be careful how we choose our words. Let's make sure we are conveying the right idea. If we are not cautious, our words can be like the "piercing of a sword" (Prov. 12:18). We must watch what we say and how we say it. Remember, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1).

Let us also be careful lest we (c) say something detrimental to others. "The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor" (Prov. 11:9; cf. v. 13; 20:19). It is possible that I could be telling things about others when I don't have all the facts. What I say could destroy the name and reputation of others.

**3. There are two sides to the story.** In some situations there is some fault on both sides. Thus, both of the parties at odds have some legitimate points. However, there are some situations where the two sides are the right side and the wrong side. Still, there are two sides.

The questions I must ask myself are: Am I listening to and believing the wrong side? Am I taking the wrong side? Have I considered the other side of the story? There may be more that I need to know before I draw my conclusions and state them. The proverb writer said, “The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him” (Prov. 18:17). Whoever tells his side first makes it sound good.

**4. Don’t jump to conclusions.** Too often we take a little information and fill in more gaps than are there. We can easily assume motives that we have no way of knowing. I wonder how often our talk and criticism about others would change if we deleted everything but the real facts that we know.

**There may be more that I need to know before I draw my conclusions and state them.**

The proverb writer warned, “He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him” (Prov. 18:13). Let us not be hasty in our words (Prov. 29:20).

**5. Give others the benefit of the doubt.** Love “believes all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). It give a person the benefit of the doubt. That means when a questionable situation arises where you can put more than one construction on it, believe the best. When a problem arises and you can put either a good or bad motive on it, believe the best. After all, don’t you want others to do that with you (Matt. 7:12)?

Yes, these rules are simple. But, with a little application we can avoid a lot of friction and misunderstanding.