

Smoky Mountain Reflections
September 2013, "Sixers" #4

"In a Relationship".....so what does that mean? If you post it on social media, it has a myriad of possibilities ranging from mildly attracted to someone to married. 'Going steady' is no longer in vogue. We are surrounded by people who want to "keep their options open", in the words I once heard from a man who was in his 70's. The word "relationship" gets thrown around in our fast food, disposable culture, not so much in the life long committed biblical model these days but more in the 'this is how it is for now' model. That works until you get bored with how things are and move on to something or someone else. Our society's concept of "relationship" is far removed from the selfless 'love thy neighbor model' that scripture gives us. I am not just talking about marital relationships, but all forms of 'relationship'.

The whole second table of the law is about how we are to act in relationships, and the building block for all relationships is the family. This is the anchor, the solid foundation, on which God decided to build the relational structure of His creation. It started when God noted the first "not good" thing in His very good creation. It is not good for man to be alone, so God created a second person, out of the first, and created, at the same time, the first relationship. That relationship contained all the God pleasing elements of selfless giving. The two would give themselves to each other in sacrificial, complementary ways that would also have creative elements, not the least of which was another relationship, that of parent and child. In this small model we can learn and exercise all of the relational skills we need to lead a God pleasing life.

The lie that our world tells us is that we get to choose our relationships... However, they are a gift from God. Every person you come in contact with is, at some level, in a relationship with you. We do not get to choose our parents, they are a gift from God and this relationship is designed to be life long in nature, though not always the primary relationship. Even the person we marry, regardless of the cultural method that brings us together, is a gift from God that is designed to be lifelong...".till death do us part".

Another lie our world tells us is when we tire of relationships, we can end them. God has designed our relationships to form a web of love, comfort, support and protection. When we choose to end a marriage, the whole web is disrupted. It is not just husband and wife who suffer.... children, siblings, parents, extended family and friends all suffer. When we start to go 'gender bending' it does not just affect the "couple", the whole web of relationships is affected. Though we may agree or disagree with someone's life style, none of these sinful acts; divorce, cohabitation or "friends with benefits" make us any less directed by God to love our neighbor and seek to speak the truth in love.

So as sin continues to break holes in the web of relationships, there is a web repair service of sorts available to us all. We pray in the Lord 's Prayer "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us". Forgiveness and reconciliation are at the core of what it means to be in a God pleasing relationship. Forgiveness is the glue that fixes and holds together broken relationships. True forgiveness does not ignore sin or its consequences. The source of true forgiveness is love. Love does not keep a record of wrongs. Love, in fact, acknowledges the pain and suffering caused by a wrong even if we think no one gets hurt because we do not get to say how other people feel.

Relationships have priorities. Some relationships in our lives are more important than others. When we are children our first relationship is with our parents and this takes priority over all others. If I have to say no to someone because of a conflict of schedule or opinion, my sibling, teacher, friends or employer all take a back seat to my parents. This changes however when we get married and absolutely yes, young adults should not play house, they should get married. The marriage relationship becomes the new primary relationship. Your boss, your friends, your parents, your siblings and your children all take a back seat to your spouse. This is not an opinion up for debate. If we would follow the biblical model for relationships fewer of them would fail. Sin in this category hurts deeply. There is one more issue of priority you want in your relationships. You want them to be God pleasing and by default pleasing to you and all whom you love and are concerned for. All earthly relationships are #2 relationships in a rightly ordered life. The #1 relationship in our lives must always be our relationship with the Son of God who redeemed us and regularly nurtures us in His Word and Sacraments.

In Christ
Pastor Portier