

How Is Relationship One Of God's Invisible Attributes? (Spiral page 51; PB page 93)

In the beginning, God created mankind in His own image (Genesis 1:27). God made us relational beings because He is a relational being. Let's look at how *relationship* is one of God's "invisible attributes" that can be clearly seen (Romans 1:20). There is a lot to be said about this attribute.

Though we are relational beings, this isn't just about the ability to have relationships with God and with other people. It also means that, to one degree or another, we exist in relationship to everything else God created. Because of God's attribute of relationship, all things are connected. Everything and everyone is in relationship to everything and everyone else in one way or another. All things may not be visibly connected, but all things are definitely invisibly connected in that they are or can be related to one another. Sometimes these invisible connections and relationships do not appear to matter. Frequently, they do matter.

KEY CONCEPT:

God is relational and all His creation is relational. When we make choices, certain things will happen in our lives. Things happen because of the choices we make. This is because our choices and free will exist in the context of God's relational world.

Galatians 6:7-8 "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life."

The passage from Galatians is just one of many in the Bible that talk about relationship. It is one of many that reflect God's relational attribute. "Relational" and "relationship" come from the word "relate." We can relate to God, to people and to things because fundamentally we are part of and connected to God's creation. While we can distance ourselves from people or things within God's creation, we cannot be completely unrelated to them. Relationship and connection are NOT optional in God's creation; they are foundational.

Relationship Permitted Sin... And Salvation

Adam and Eve had free will, and with it they sinned. Because God created mankind in relationship to one another, we are all born into sin because of what Adam and Eve did. But, by the same attributes of free will and relationship, Jesus, Who was perfect, was able to exercise His free will to die for mankind's sin. He was able to offer us salvation (Matthew 26:39; John 3:16) because of God's attribute of relationship. The attribute of relationship is wonderful attribute of God. It is woven into God's creation, and it is through relationship that God made Jesus' sacrifice possible even before we sinned.

Relationship Is Sometimes Hard To See In Trials

We make choices to do things or not do things, whether we think that much about them or not. Among those choices are ones that carry spiritual implications. So, one of the results of

free will and the relational nature of God's world is simple, but HUGE. When we exercise our God-given free will, then whether the choice we make is godly or ungodly, certain things will happen. We often call these results, "consequences." Sometimes consequences are ones we want, and sometimes they aren't. Sometimes we experience consequences immediately, sometimes we don't. Because the choices we face in trials carry spiritual implications, all of our actions and inactions in response to trials carry spiritual consequences. And, sometimes it is hard to see how our past actions or inactions are related to various experiences we have.

In the first couple chapters of *Feelings 101*, we looked at passages which tell us that we "sow" into our life experiences in various ways depending on how we use or don't use our hearts and minds during trials. Depending on the content of our heart and mind in a trial, we sow either into righteousness or sin in that trial. From this we see that Galatians 6:7-8 implies that, when we remain unaware of the dynamics of the heart and mind in a trial, most often our actions or inactions lead to sin. These minimize our experience of the presence of God in the trial. On the other hand, when by the Spirit we follow Jesus' example in our trials, we change our hearts and minds, and we alter what we sow. Whether we sow by the flesh or by the Spirit, we will reap certain spiritual consequences in relationship to how we have sown.

From time to time we might look at what is happening to us in a trial and it is really unwanted, uncomfortable or bad. In times like that we might wonder exactly what it was that we sowed which led us to reap the particular trial. Seeing the bigger picture between certain things that happen to us, versus what we've done in the past is often hard. Sometimes it seems like the reason "why" certain trials happen to us is "random" or "for reasons only God knows." Again, it can seem like that because we cannot think of what we sowed which would warrant what is being reaped.

The "Sow And Reap" Relationship

When we forget we are in relationship to everything, to one degree or another, it is easy to misinterpret the "sow and reap" relationship described in the Bible.

Just because the Bible says we reap what we sow does NOT mean that everything we experience is specifically tied to our own personal actions.

In other words, when we experience something, the "sow and reap" relationship does NOT mean that we are "reaping" that experience because of what we personally have "sowed," i.e., because of what we have done or not done in the past.

What we personally sow we will personally reap. This accounts for a good portion of what we "reap," or experience, in life. However, we also reap some experiences simply because we have been created, by God, to in relationship to the world around us. So, for example, we might experience something painful because our nation is reaping what it, as a whole, has sown... not because of something we personally did or did not do.

This is how the bigger context of relationship includes the "sow and reap" relationship.

The "sow and reap" relationship simply states that all of our own personal actions (our sowing) will translate into things we experience (what we reap). Keep in mind that the things we reap aren't just experienced during the earthly phase of our lives. There is life after death. How that is spent will be related to what we sow on earth. Because of this, not everything we reap is

necessarily reaped on earth. It doesn't have to be. Bottom line is the "sow and reap" relationship cannot be grasped by looking for every action's consequence solely in physical terms.

At the same time...

...sometimes we might think the "sow and reap" relationship means we SHOULDN'T experience things that ARE NOT tied to our own personal past actions.

This is not a proper application of the "sow and reap" relationship. When we think we shouldn't experience things that are not tied directly to our own personal past actions, then we start thinking that we are supposed to be "protected" from every bad event that cannot correspond to our own personal past actions. In addition to being a self-focused and spiritually incorrect view, it denies the fact that God made us to be in relationship to the world around us - this was essential for us to live and participate in the spiritual war. Again, we often experience things based on what others around us do, not just our own personal actions. This is not so much due to the "sow and reap" relationship, but rather the greater relationships within the spiritual war.

The concept of relationship itself is bigger than just the personal "sow and reap" relationship. It is more comprehensive. The fact that we are born into sin from the start is proof. Remember, Jesus was able to die for our sins because of God's comprehensive attribute of relationship.

When it rains, there is always going to be someone that experiences it as a blessing. Someone else will experience it as a negative. The two people could very well be neighbors or living in the same town. Both experience the rain. Both fall under the reach of that experience because they live in relationship to the world around them. They live in relationship to the weather, to the area they live in, and to the particular rain event itself.

When it rains on those two people's homes, one of the two people might experience damage to the home. The other might not. If the rain event happens to us, then we might try to connect whether or not we experienced the damage or blessing by our own personal actions in the past. Sometimes the Bible records that people experienced such "natural" events specifically due to their own personal righteousness or unrighteousness. So, there are times when such events are related to one's personal past actions... it is something one reaps. At the same time, this isn't always the case. Trying to relate something to our own actions might not always be a valid application of the "sow and reap" relationship. It is possible to experience one result or another not based on our own personal past actions, but as part of being in a spiritual war.

The "Sow And Reap" Relationship... And Spiritual War

All are born into the spiritual war. As in physical wars, sometimes things happen mainly because we are in it. When this is the case, the most important application of the "sow and reap" relationship is to watch out how we respond to what has happened, whether we felt we deserved it or not. Our response may sometimes involve a physical action (sowing), but it always involves spiritual sowing. Based on what we sow with the heart, we will certainly reap something regardless whether we see reason why the "bad" event happened in the first place.

Say one person does something bad to someone else. Maybe they really don't even know each other. The "sow and reap" relationship does not mean the one person experiences something bad strictly of their own past personal actions. It does mean that the one person experiences something bad because the perpetrator used their God-give free will to sow sinfully. It means

that the perpetrator made choices which led to the relationship between the two people to become sinfully and visibly intertwined in the physical world. The one person experiences the bad thing because they are in relationship to the world around them, including the perpetrator that crossed their path. This is part of the relationships behind the spiritual war. It may or may not be part of the "sow and reap" relationship.

In this example situation, the biggest issue for the one who was wronged is to realize that Satan will try to use the event to lead the person into ungodly spiritual sowing from which they will reap. The advantage for believers who experience this is that they can overcome Satan's attack by transforming the heart and discerning God's guidance to them. This isn't to say it is always easy. It is, however, always possible in Christ. The person who was wronged might or might not activate the "sow and reap" relationship depending on how they handle their heart disturbances. If the peace of Christ is not able to rule in the heart of the one who is wronged, the undesirable spiritual sowing will likely result. So unfortunately, the issue isn't always about justice in this world, but it is always about spiritual war in this world. Remember, there are two worlds; this world is only "part 1" so to speak.

The spiritual war is the context of this world. It is extremely helpful to realize the significance of that. Jesus experienced all sorts of wrongs, none of which would have happened if the "sow and reap" relationship was about the idea that we will only experience things based on what we personally have sown. Jesus knew that sometimes what we experience is based on being in relationship to the spiritual war.

Problems Associated With Not Remembering Relationship

We can pretend, deny, ignore, overlook, disregard or distract ourselves from our inner relationship with our heart disturbances. That will always create problems for us down the road. What we cannot do is make our connection with our heart disturbances disappear or cease to exist on our own. Our heart disturbances can only be transformed in Christ. This is how God designed us so we could participate in the spiritual war.

One of the problems we are conditioned to overlook happens when we look outside of ourselves for answers why, on the inside, our hearts are disturbed. As an example, we might think, "I don't feel this way because there is something in me I must change. I feel this way because of him (her, it, or whatever)." You can see that it is easy to unknowingly look in the wrong direction for solutions when uncomfortable heart disturbances arise.

When we try to distance ourselves from someone, some thing or some place because we view "them" or "it" as the source of our heart disturbances, then we slip into denying or ignoring our own spiritual connection to our heart's disturbance.

Say we do not like someone because when we are around them, we experience some form of heart disturbance. How do we usually handle that? Maybe we stay as far from them as possible. Maybe we simply restrict how close we get to them. Why do we do these kinds of things? Fundamentally it is because we are trying to be at peace by changing our external situation. When we do this, eventually, others come into our lives and "cause" us to feel the same old way again.

Sometimes God might have us distance ourselves from someone. However, that action should come after transforming the heart to peace in Christ. In other words, taking an action is not how we get peace. We get peace by transforming ourselves in Christ first during the trial. Then, we discern the action God would have us take in response to the trial. That action should always be taken with a heart that is at peace. The peace of Christ is the internal gauge that

demonstrates we are in alignment with God's will and not in opposition to it. This is all based on the relationship God designed us to have with our heart disturbances, or with His peace.

Cain's Temptation Reveals Relationship

KEY CONCEPT:

It is good that God designed us to be in direct relationship to our hearts' disturbances. Because of relationship, we know our heart disturbances are warnings to us about Satan's attack on us. But also because of relationship, when Satan attacks us we must change something in us so our hearts can be at peace in the Lord. God and His Spirit speak to this. Recognizing heart disturbances, changing in response to the Lord, and transforming our hearts in the Lord are all part of mastering sin in a given trial.

Genesis 4:4-7 "And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.'"

God's conversation with Cain during his trial indicates that when Satan attacks, he is planting a seed of UNtruth. That seed is not sin, but if it is left untransformed it will lead to sin. That transformation involves changing something within our hearts. The change must happen *before* that evil gives birth to sin (see also James 1:13-15). This spiritual work in response to the Lord's guidance purifies our hearts from Satan's attack, and is one of the principles of mastering sin. This is the relationship God wove between our hearts, Satan's attacks, and mastering sin.

Cain's thinking was that his brother was the cause of his heart disturbance, not a spiritual attack within himself. Cain remained focused on the external. Cain failed to acknowledge and respect the relationship between himself, his heart disturbance and Satan's attack (sin's desire). The connection between them was all inside him. But, Cain didn't want to deal with changing himself. Cain wanted to be "OK" as he was. Similarly, we too are tempted to not want to change when Satan attacks us.

Look at Cain's heart disturbance. He became "angry and his countenance fell." Cain was visibly angry and upset. God could see it on Cain's face. Cain's body (face) was responding to his heart disturbance! Yet God did not say Cain had sinned. God said sin was about to claim Cain, and that Cain had an opportunity. (This is exactly the same counsel the Spirit gives us today!) Cain's example demonstrates that we play a part in mastering sin.

Though Cain was in a trial, God was talking to Cain. God had not abandoned Cain. Cain could not say his heart disturbance was happening because God had left him or because God was not trying to help him. Cain was at a critical moment and God offered His help. Cain had to choose to embrace it. This choice reflects Cain's God-given free will. God told Cain that his heart disturbance indicated that he was about to sin. God explained it to Cain! But, Cain's *thinking* was that Abel was the source of his heart disturbance. Cain's thinking contained the Satan-induced lust within. Cain did not do his part to transform his heart. James described these

dynamics in trials many years later. In trials, our heart's desires seek to conceive and give birth to sin. When it happened in Cain, he killed Abel.

Cain did not recognize his relationship to the disturbances in his heart. While Cain knew what God wanted, he could not obey because in that trial he would not change. Cain's example demonstrates that when Satan attacks us the issue is not about prevention but about transformation.

Unlike Cain, we may not murder in response to our heart disturbances. It is possible, however, to deal with them in ways other than how God intended. We often deal with heart disturbances in ways other than how God intends us to deal with them. Like Cain, our heart disturbances indicate when we are facing critical choices, i.e., spiritual ones. We must hear God speaking to us, and accept the changes He seeks to make in us. When our hearts are disturbed and yet we do not transform our hearts and renew our minds in Christ, then our choice in that trial involves falling to Satan's attack. This leads to sin, even if it isn't about murdering someone. This is due to relationship and how God wove it into us and the world.