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Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry provides on-site pastoral care and Bible discussion groups for the students, faculty, staff, and administration in the collegiate communities in and around Columbia, Missouri.



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The Christian life is all about two things: forgiveness and restoration. What we usually forget is that the forgiveness and restoration happens in two different dimensions which we call “vertical” and “horizontal.” The vertical deals with humans and God. The horizontal is about our human relationship with others and our world; the environment, culture, and anything else we can come up with. Together we enter into this conversation as we look at the realities of our life and culture, react to them, and seek divine wisdom to be instruments of change in our world.

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Next Time:

Am I my brother’s keeper? Is my brother my keeper?

Bring a friend, make a friend!

Biblical Change in a Dysfunctional World Session 1 – Vertical and Horizontal

“Love one another” - how? What does it look like?

Maybe a more important question - “why?”

Is this an exercise in futility? Take a moment to write down a few things that are either right or wrong. Then prepare to explain why.

Now we’ll label the things you wrote down in terms of a vertical or a horizontal relationship.

What difference does it make in your evaluation whether your ideas of right and wrong have to do with horizontal relationships or vertical relationships?

Have we been able to deal with “why” effectively?

The idea of horizontal and vertical relationships is helpful in several different areas of Christian thought. In the horizontal we consider our relations with one another. In the vertical we consider our relationship with God. Both are vital.

Two important Bible passages:

Exodus 20:1-17

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

You may find it useful to study a copy of Martin Luther's Small Catechism, which has a summary of each commandment and a brief explanation of the implications for each.

In Exodus 20:1-17, the passage we usually think of as the Ten Commandments, we find the first three commandments look at the vertical elements of life. They are focused on our relationship with God.

*You shall have no other gods.
You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.*

All the rest of life is normally seen as subject to this vertical relationship. If the vertical is actually in order, the horizontal relationships will probably work out, even by themselves.

How do we evaluate whether the vertical is in order?

Try the remaining commands.

*Honor your father and your mother.
You shall not murder.
You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not steal.
You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
You shall not covet your neighbor's house.
You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*

The implications in the catechism may be helpful in evaluating how well our horizontal relationships are working.

Now let's start looking at 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 to see more detail.

List elements aloud or in writing. Discuss them.

Horizontal relationships are rightly understood in light of our vertical relationship.

For Further Consideration:

The laws of God direct us to our need for forgiveness in Christ (Galatians 3:24).

We are promised forgiveness as we confess our sin and failing (1 John 1:5-10).

As we live in this world as forgiven people, we are able to bring reconciliation to others, the same way we have been restored to a positive relationship with God. It is based on God's standards, which allow us to evaluate our world in a fair and unbiased way.