

Life Together

Series: Sustainable Faith: Vision

Philippians 1:3-6 (1004)

Steve Wood, January 24, 2010

Point #7 We will become a community of believers together.

We will commit to the mutual welfare of one another

We will learn how to resolve our conflicts in a Christ-like spirit and thereby see the kingdom of God come

Point #8 We will give sacrificially of ourselves because we are compelled to do so by the love of Jesus.

Love must motivate us.

This will be evident in our time commitments, our financial life, our recreational pursuits, our willingness to serve others

Philippians 1:3-6 NIV ³*I thank my God every time I remember you.* ⁴*In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy* ⁵*because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,* ⁶*being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

I. The ultimate enemy of community

a. I can handle life without God...

b. I can handle life without other people...

Dallas Willard—*We get just enough of Christianity to immunize us against the real thing.*

c. Selfish ambition blinds me to real life...

II. Dietrich Bonhoeffer—Seven principles for eradicating selfish ambition in the fellowship

a. The ministry of holding one's tongue

Bonhoeffer *Often we combat our evil thoughts most effectively if we absolutely refuse to allow them to be expressed in words... Thus it must be a decisive rule of every Christian fellowship that each individual is prohibited from saying much that occurs to him. This prohibition does not include the personal word of advice and guidance. But to speak about a brother is forbidden, even under the cloak of help and goodwill; for it is precisely in this guise that the spirit of hatred among brothers creeps in when it is seeking to create mischief.*

James 1:26 NLT ²⁶*If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are just fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.*

b. The ministry of meekness

Bonhoeffer *He who would learn to serve must first learn to think little of himself... Only he who lives by the forgiveness of his sin in Jesus Christ will rightly think little of himself. He will know that his own wisdom reached the end of its tether when Jesus forgave him. He will know that it is good for his own will to be broken in the encounter with his neighbor... But not only my neighbor's will, but also his honor is more important than mine. The desire for one's own honor hinders faith. One who seeks his own honor is no longer seeking God and his neighbor.*

Matthew 5:5 TM *You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.*

c. The ministry of listening

Proverbs 18:13 NLT ¹³*What a shame, what folly, to give advice before listening to the facts!*

Bonhoeffer *The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them... Listening can be a greater service than speaking... One who cannot listen long and patiently will presently be talking beside the point and be never really speaking to others. Anyone who thinks his time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have no time for God and his brother, but only for himself and for his own follies... We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God.*

d. The ministry of helpfulness

Bonhoeffer *Active helpfulness means, initially, simple assistance in trifling, external matters. There is a multitude of these things wherever people live together. Nobody is too good for the meanest service... We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions. We may pass them by, preoccupied with our more important tasks, as the priest passed by the man who had fallen among thieves, perhaps -- reading the Bible. When we do that, we pass by the visible sign of the Cross raised across our path to show us that not our way, but God's way must be done.*

Matthew 10:42 TM *Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice.*

e. The ministry of bearing

Bonhoeffer *"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Thus the law of Christ is a law of bearing. Bearing means forbearing and sustaining... The Christian must suffer and endure the brother. It is only when he is a burden that another person is really a brother and not merely an object to be manipulated. It is, first of all, the freedom of the other person that is a burden to the Christian. The freedom of the other person includes all that we mean by a person's nature, individuality, endowment. It also includes his weaknesses and oddities, which are such a trial to our patience, everything that produces frictions, conflicts, and collisions among us. Then, there is the abuse of that freedom that becomes a burden for the Christian. In sin, fellowship with God and with his brother are broken. To cherish no contempt for the sinner but rather to prize the privilege of bearing him means not to have to give him up as lost, to be able to accept him, to preserve fellowship with him through forgiveness... The service of forgiveness is rendered by one to the others daily. It occurs, without words, in the intercessions for one another. He who is bearing others knows that he himself is being borne.*

f. The ministry of proclaiming

Bonhoeffer *Where Christians live together the time must ultimately come when in some crisis one person will have to declare God's Word and will to another. It is inconceivable that the things that are of utmost importance to each individual should not be spoken by one to another. It is unchristian consciously to deprive another of the one decisive service we can render to him... The more we learn to allow others to speak the Word to us, to accept humbly and gratefully even severe reproaches and admonitions, the more free and objective will we be in speaking ourselves. The humble person will stick to truth and love. He will stick to the Word of God and let it lead him to his brother... Reproof is unavoidable. God's Word demands it when a brother falls into open sin. Where defection from God's Word in doctrine or life imperils the fellowship... the word of admonition and rebuke must be ventured. Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin. It is a ministry of mercy, an ultimate offer of genuine fellowship, when we allow nothing but God's Word to stand between us, judging and succoring.*

g. The ministry of authority

Bonhoeffer *Jesus made authority in the fellowship dependent upon brotherly service (Mark 10:43 *Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant.*) Genuine spiritual authority is to be found only where the ministry of hearing, helping, bearing, and proclaiming is carried out. Every cult of personality that emphasizes the distinguished qualities, virtues, and talents of another person, even though these be of an altogether spiritual nature, is worldly and has no place in the Christian community; indeed, it poisons the Christian community... authority realizes that it can exist only in the service of Him who alone has authority... The Genuine Church does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants of Jesus and the brethren... Pastoral authority can be attained only by the servant of Jesus who seeks no power of his own, who himself is a brother among brothers to the authority of the Word.*