

Community Not an Ideal but a Divine Reality

Community – Part 2

Life Together, pp.26-30

Discussion:

1. Have you ever felt disappointed at others, God, or yourself about your experience of Christian community (regardless if you're a Christian or not)? What were you disappointed about?
2. What did you do with those thoughts/feelings of disappointment?

I. Review: Christian community through and in Jesus Christ.

- A. In a survey of our class, many people believed the basis of Christian community is openness, vulnerability, being honest, authentic, sharing and listening to one another.
- B. Bonhoeffer argues the basis is Jesus Christ. That a Christian is someone who knows he is sinful even if he doesn't feel guilty, and knows in Christ he is forgiven even if he does feel guilty. This "external righteousness" must be reminded to Christians. Thus the goal of Christian fellowship is to be "bringers of the gospel" to one another. Thus, the mere physical presence of another Christian should be incomparable joy.

In Christian brotherhood everything depends upon its being clear right from the beginning, first, that Christian brotherhood is not an ideal, but a divine reality. Second, that Christian brotherhood is a spiritual and not a psychic reality... (p.26)

II. Christian Community as d _____

- A. Christian communities have broken down because it sprung from a wish dream.
- B. The serious Christian naturally sets out with definite ideas of Christian community should be and ties to realize it.

Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it had sprung from a wish dream. The serious Christian, set down for the first time in a Christian community, is likely to bring with him a definite idea of what Christian life together should be and to try to realize it. But God's grace speedily shatters such dreams. (p.26)

III. But God's g _____ speedily s _____ the idea of an Ideal (human wish-dream of Christian community).

Just as surely as God desires to lead us to a knowledge of genuine Christian fellowship, so surely must we be overwhelmed by a great disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves (pp.26-7)

By sheer grace, God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream world. He does not abandon us to those rapturous experiences and lofty moods that come over us like a dream. (p.27)

- A. A community must face this disillusionment [individually and corporately] to begin to grasp in faith the promise given to it.

God is not a God of the emotions but the God of truth. Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God's sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it. The sooner this shock of disillusionment comes to an individual and to a community, the better for both. (p.27).

- B. A community which doesn't navigate this crisis well loses the promise of Christian community.

A community which cannot bear and cannot survive such a crisis, which insists upon keeping its illusion when it should be shattered, permanently loses in that moment the promise of Christian community. Sooner or later it will collapse. (p.27)

- C. Every h _____ wish dream injected into Christian community is a h _____ and must be destroyed if Christian community is to survive.

*Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive. **He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.** (p.27)*

- D. **Thus, you can s _____ and intensely long for your vision of Christian community, but it can in the end u _____ the community's growth.**

Discussion:

1. If this is true, how does this change your attitude towards feeling disappointed/disillusioned about Christian community?

IV. **Implications of the Doctrine of Christian Community as a Divine Reality (and not an Ideal)**

- A. God hates visionary dreaming [about Christian community]; it a Christian prideful and judgmental in demanding this vision of community from God and others.

The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God Himself accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of brethren... When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of himself. (pp.27-8)

- B. And when it inevitably goes wrong, we become an a _____ of our brethren, an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of ourselves.
- C. The disillusionment should dissipate, leaving a greater g _____ to God for our salvation. The very disillusionment of a sinning brother is the occasion to give t _____ for the forgiveness of Jesus which allows us to live life together.

Because God has already laid the only foundation of our fellowship... in Jesus Christ, we enter into that common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients... We do not complain of what God does not give us; we rather thank God for what He does give us daily. And is not what has been given enough: brothers, who will go on living with us through sin and need under the blessing of His grace? (p.28)

- D. We must not be complainers, but rather we must be t _____.
- i. If we don't thank God the little (but actually very big) blessings, God will not give us the greater blessings of Christian community.

Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the communal life, is not the sinning brother still a brother, with whom I, too, stand under the Word of Christ? Will not his sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ? (p.28)

Thus the very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes the incomparably salutary, because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us can ever live by our own words and deeds, but only by that one Word and Deed which really binds us together—the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. (p.28)

We think we dare not be satisfied with the small measure of spiritual knowledge, experience, and love that has been given to us, and that we must constantly be looking forward eagerly for the highest good. Then we deplore the fact that we lack the deep certainty, the strong faith, and the rich experience that God has given to others, and we consider this lament to be pious... How can God entrust great things to one who will not thankfully receive from Him the little things? (p.29)

- ii. Warning for pastors, leaders, and “committed” community members: beware of becoming the accuser.

This applies in a special way to the complaints often heard from pastors and zealous members about the congregations. A pastor should not complain about his congregation, certainly never to other people, but also not to God. A congregation has not been entrusted to him in order that he should become the accuser before God and men. (pp.29-30)

V. **Applying the Idea of Christian Community as an Ideal (not a Reality)**

- A. Examine y_____. See if the trouble is not due to your own wish dream about community which should be shattered by God.
- B. B_____ becoming the accuser.

When a person becomes alienated from a Christian community in which he has been placed and begins to raise complaints about it, he had better examine himself first to see whether the trouble is not due to his wish dream that should be shattered by God; and if this be the case, let him thank God for leading him into this predicament. (p.30)

- C. Let him do what he is c_____ to do (i.e., what he wants to complain that others don't do) and thank God.
- D. Christian community like Christian sanctification
- i. **Only God really knows** the true state of Christian sanctification and Christian community.
 - ii. **A person could be deluding himself** about his own sanctification or community. A person could be hiding the truth.
 - iii. **Beware of constantly checking the spiritual p_____**. Guard against the attitude of constantly feeling the spiritual pulse and instead more thankfully receive what is given to us. That will surely and steadily increase fellowship.
 - iv. **Keep God's grace and gratitude in constant view**. To constantly evaluate and check as opposed to constantly thank God for every blessing is to lose sight of God's grace. And when we keep God's grace in sight, sanctification and growth will follow.

Christian community is like the Christian's sanctification. It is a gift of God which we cannot claim. Only God knows the real state of our fellowship... What may appear weak and trifling to us may be great and glorious to God. Just as the Christian should not be constantly feeling his spiritual pulse, so, too, the Christian community has not been given to us by God for us to be constantly taking its temperature. The more thankfully we daily receive what is given to us, the more surely and steadily will fellowship increase and grow from day to day as God pleases. (p.30)

Closing Quotation:

When the morning mists of dreams[of Christian community] vanish, then dawns the bright day of [genuine] Christian fellowship. (pp.28-9)

Questions to Process/Ponder: If there is time, you can individually or discuss with others the following questions...

Name: _____

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you or anyone you know become “overwhelmed by disillusionment” about how their experience of Christian community did not live up to their ideal? In what way(s) did the experience not live up to the ideal?
2. Do you agree that no Christian community lives up to the ideal? What implications might that mean for us?
3. How is this experience of disillusionment a produce of God’s “sheer grace” towards us?
4. Have you ever loved your dream of Christian community more than the community itself? How might that actually destroy the Christian community?
5. What do you start to say/do when you slide into “accuser” mode of judging the surrounding Christian community by your personal ideal? What do you complain about or long for?
6. How does our increasing thankfulness to god for whatever community we have actually lead to the growth and increase of Christian fellowship?