

Life in Ministry Ministry: Part I

Discussion Question:

1. Share an event where you thought you could do better than your friend in something?
2. Share a story where you have regretted saying something shouldn't have? (i.e. open mouth and insert foot)
3. What does it mean that the first shall be last and the last shall be first?

^[10] Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ^[11] Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ^[12] Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ^[13] Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. ^[14] Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ^[15] Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ^[16] Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. (Romans 12:10-16 ESV)

Self-Justification is the seed of discord in Christian community.

An argument started among them as to which of them might be the greatest. Luke 9:46

1. The Christian community is not immune to our sinful nature and actions. Arguments, difference of opinions, insecurities, gossip, and many other ills will affect community in a negative way. Bonhoeffer gives a stern warning regarding one in particular: Self-Justification.
 - a. *But perhaps we do not bear in mind enough that no Christian community ever comes together without this thought immediately emerging as a seed of discord. Thus at the very beginning of Christian fellowship there is engendered an invisible, often unconscious, life and death contest. "There arose a reasoning among them": this is enough to destroy a fellowship. (p. 90)*

^[35] And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." ^[36] And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" ^[37] And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." (Mark 10:35-37 ESV) ^[41] And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. (Mark 10:41 ESV)

2. We are selfish beings. We tend to instinctively look to see where we can press the advantage over someone for our benefit.
 - a. *Hence it is vitally necessary that every Christian community from the very outset face this dangerous enemy squarely, and eradicate it. There is no time to lose here, for from the first moment when a man meets another person he is looking for a strategic position he can assume and hold over against that person. (p. 90)*

[4:1] What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? (James 4:1 ESV)

- b. *There are strong persons and weak ones. If a man is not strong, he immediately claims the right of the weak as his own and uses it against the strong. There are gifted and ungifted persons, simple people and difficult people, devout and less devout, the sociable and the solitary. Does not the ungifted person have to take up a position just as well as the gifted person, the difficult one as well as the simple?...Where is there a person who does not with instinctive sureness find the spot where he can stand and defend himself, but which he will never give up to another, for which he will fight with all the drive of his instinct of self-assertion? (p. 91)*
3. Bonhoeffer warns that self-justification will “sow the seeds of discord” even in a mature, well-established, pious Christian community.

[16] For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. (James 3:16 ESV)

- a. *All this can occur in the most polite or even pious environment. But the important thing is that a Christian community should know that somewhere in it there will certainly be “a reasoning among them, which of them should be the greatest. (p. 91)*
 - b. *It is the struggle of the natural man for self-justification. He finds it only in comparing himself with others, in condemning and judging others. Self-justification and judging others go together, as justification by grace and serving others go together. (p. 91)*
 - c. *It is certain that the spirit of self-justification can be overcome only by the Spirit of grace...(p. 91)*

Disciplining the Tongue

^[1] *Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. (James 4:11 ESV)*

1. One of the ways to fight against evil thoughts and emotions is to not let it be expressed outwardly.
 - a. *Often we combat our evil thoughts most effectively if we absolutely refuse to allow them to be expressed in words. It is certain that the spirit of self-justification can be overcome only by the Spirit of grace; nevertheless, isolated thoughts of judgment can be curbed and smothered by never allowing them the right to be uttered... He who holds his tongue in check controls both mind and body. (pp.91-2)*
 - b. ^[2] *For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. (James 3:2 ESV)*
2. This leads to a clear and bold rule regarding how we speak to one another depending on each circumstance.
 - a. *Thus it must be a decisive rule of every Christian fellowship that each individual is prohibited from saying much that occurs to him. (p.92)*
 - b. *But to speak about a brother covertly is forbidden, even under the cloak of help and good will; for it is precisely in this guise that the spirit of hatred among brothers always creeps in when it is seeking to create mischief. (p. 92)*
3. When our mouth has been tamed by discipline, we discover the joy of God's creative glory in each person and as a result moved to praise God.
 - a. *Where this discipline of the tongue is practiced right from the beginning, each individual will make a matchless discovery. He will be able to cease from constantly scrutinizing the other person, judging him, condemning him, putting him in his particular place where he can gain ascendancy over him and thus doing violence to him as a person. Now he can allow the brother to exist as a completely free person, as God made him to be. (p.93)*

We are humbled by the discovery of how God made the person uniquely and of great worth for his "creative glory".

- b. *His view expands and, to his amazement, for the first time he sees, shining above his brethren, the richness of God's creative glory. God did not make this person as I would have made him. He did not give him to me as a brother for me to dominate and control, but in order that I might find above him the Creator. (p.93)*

- c. *God does not will that I should fashion the other person according to the image that seems good to me, that is, in my own image; rather in his very freedom from me God made this person in His image. (p. 93)*

We discover the joy to of being uniquely created and being freed by the constraints of others in order to serve others. The acknowledgement of God's worth and purpose for that person shatters what we think is the strong and weak.

- d. *Now the other person, in the freedom with which he was created, becomes the occasion of joy, whereas before he was only a nuisance and an affliction. (p.93)*
 - e. *I can never know beforehand how God's image should appear in others. That image always manifests a completely new and unique form that comes solely from God's free and sovereign creation. To me that sight may seem strange, even ungodly. But God creates every man in the likeness of His Son, the Crucified. After all, even that image certainly looked strange and ungodly to be before I grasped it. (p. 93)*
 - f. *Strong and weak, wise and foolish, gifted or ungifted, pious or impious, the diverse individuals in the community are no longer incentives for talking and judging and condemning, and thus excuses for self-justification. They are rather cause for rejoicing in one another and serving one another. (p. 93)*
 - g. *They are rather cause for rejoicing in one another and serving one another. Each member of the community is given his particular place, but this is no longer the place in which he can most successfully assert himself, but the place where he can best perform his service. (p. 93-94)*
4. We move from a life lead by self-justification to a life of justification by grace. The humility learned from grace means that we see each person through God's eyes. Each person no matter their position has worth in God's eyes and in the community.
- a. *Not self-justification, which means the use of domination and force, but justification by grace, and therefore service, should be govern the Christian community. (p. 94)*
 - b. *Once a man has experienced the mercy of God in his life he will henceforth aspire only to serve. The proud throne of the judge no longer lures him; he wants to be down below with the lowly and the needy, because that is where God found him. (p. 94)*

Living a Life of Meekness

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. (Rom 12:3 ESV)

God's justification by grace means we are justified by God with no merit of our own works. In other words, there is nothing for us to prove or earn to be justified with God. Justification by grace leads us to live a life of humility because we realize we do not deserve it based on who we are but who God is.

This is the highest and profitable lesson, truly to know and to despise ourselves. To have no opinion of ourselves, and to think always well and highly of others, is great wisdom and perfection. Thomas a Kempis (p. 94-95)

Justification by Grace leads to:

1. Meekness in our wisdom.

- a. *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. (p. 95)*
- b. *Because the Christian can no longer fancy that he is wise he will also have no high opinion of his own schemes and plans. He will know that it is good for his own will to be broken in the encounter with his neighbor. (p. 95)*
- c. *He will be ready to consider his neighbor's will more important and urgent than his own. Is it not better to serve our neighbor than to have our own way? (p. 95)*

2. How we honor people in meekness

- a. *The desire for one's own honor hinders faith... One who seeks his own honor is no longer seeking God and his neighbor. (p. 95)*

3. Enduring suffering with meekness.

- a. *What does it matter if I suffer injustice? Would I not have deserved even worse punishment from God, if He had not dealt with me according to His mercy? Is it not justice done to me a thousand times even in injustice? Must it not be wholesome and conducive to humility for me to learn to bear such petty evils silently and patiently? (p. 95)*
- b. *One who lives by justification by grace is willing and ready to accept even insults and injuries without protest, taking them from God's punishing and gracious hand. (p. 96)*

- c. *The sin of resentment that flares up so quickly in the fellowship indicates again and again how much false desire for honor, how much unbelief, still smolders in the community. (p. 96)*
4. The proof of true humility is the acknowledgement that I am the worst of all sinners.
- a. *To forego self-conceit and to associate with the lowly means, in all soberness and without mincing the matter, to consider oneself the greatest of sinners. This arouses all the resistance of the natural man, but also the self-confident Christian. (p. 96)*
- b. *There can be no genuine acknowledgement of sin that does not lead to this extremity. If my sinfulness appears to me to be in any way smaller or less detestable in comparison with the sins of others, I am still not recognizing my sinfulness at all. (p. 96)*
5. We will minister to others in humility.
- a. *He who would serve his brother in the fellowship must sink all the way down to these depths of humility. How can I possibly serve another person in unfeigned humility if I seriously regard his sinfulness as worse than my own? Would I not be putting myself above him; could I have any hope for him? Such service would be hypocritical. (p. 97)*
- b. *Never think that thou hast made any progress till thou look upon thyself as inferior to all. Thomas a Kempis (p. 97)*

Reflection Questions:

1. How does the awareness of self-justification affect how we relate with others in community?
2. Where have we been more critical about something where self-justification was the motive?
3. What does “I am the worst of all sinners” mean to you?