

Bonhoeffer's Life Together WAF Series

Session 5: Ministry

September 30, 2015

V. *Life Together* Chapter 4 – Ministry

A. The Ministry of Holding One's Tongue

1. "Often we combat our evil thoughts most effectively if we absolutely refuse to allow them to be expressed in words....never allowing them the right to be uttered, except as a confession of sin." (pp. 91-92)
2. "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. Freedom of the other: "God does not will that I 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)
4. "In a Christian community everything depends upon whether each individual is an indispensable link in a chain...A community which allows unemployed members to exist within it will perish because of them." (p. 94)

B. The Ministry of Meekness

1. "Only he who lives by the forgiveness of his own sin in Jesus Christ will rightly think little of himself....He will be ready to consider his neighbor's will more important and urgent than his own." (p. 95)
2. "consider oneself the greatest of sinners....There can be no genuine acknowledgement of sin that does not lead to this extremity." (p. 96)

C. The Ministry of Listening

1. "Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because Christians are talking where they should be listening." (pp. 97-98)
2. "We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God." (p. 99)

D. The Ministry of [Active] Helpfulness

1. Nothing is too menial. "One who worries about the loss of time that such petty, outward acts of helpfulness entail is usually taking the importance of his own career too solemnly." (p. 99)
2. "We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God." (p. 99)
3. "it is part of our discipline of humility that we must not spare our hand where it can perform a service and that we do not assume that our schedule is our own to manage, but allow it to be arranged by God." (p. 99)

E. The Ministry of Bearing

1. We are burdens to one another.
2. "the Bible can also characterize the whole life of the Christian as bearing the Cross. It is the fellowship of the Cross to experience the burden of the other. If one does not experience it, the fellowship he belongs to is not Christian." (p. 101)
3. The freedom of others, including their peculiarities and sins is a burden to us.
4. "None must seek his own rights." (p. 102)
5. "only in bearing with him [in his sin] that the great grace of God becomes wholly plain." (p. 102)
6. "As Christ bore and received us as sinners so we in his fellowship may bear and receive sinners into the fellowship of Jesus Christ through the forgiving of sins." (p. 102)
7. Forgiveness of others is rendered daily in personal prayers of intercession for one another.

F. The Ministry of Proclaiming

1. NOT speaking of the job of the clergy here!
2. Requires listening, active helpfulness and bearing first.
3. Not to dominate. "We speak to one another on the basis of the help we both need." (p. 106)

4. "The more we 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." (p. 106)

G. The Ministry of Authority

1. "Jesus made authority in the fellowship dependent upon brotherly service." (p. 108)
2. "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." (p. 108)
3. "His authority lies in the exercise of his ministry, In the man himself there is nothing to admire." (p. 109)
4. "The church does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants of Jesus and the brethren. (p. 109)

VI. Live Together Chapter 5 – Confession and Communion

A. The Ministry of Forgiveness

1. "He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone....though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners. The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship." (p. 110)
2. "Therefore, he gave his followers the authority to hear the confession of sin and to forgive in his name....He hears the confession of our sins in Christ's stead and he forgives our sins in Christ's name. He keeps the secret of our confession as God keeps it. When I go to my brother to confess, I am going to God." (p. 111-112)

B. Breaking Through to Community

1. "In confession the break-through to community takes place." (p. 112)
2. Sin isolates. It festers and grows in isolation. But when it is confessed to another it loses its power to isolate.
3. "Now he stands in the fellowship of sinners who live by the grace of God in the Cross of Jesus Christ. Now he can be a sinner and still enjoy the grace of God. He can confess his sins and in this very act find fellowship for the first time." (p. 113)
4. Confession need only be to one other, not to the whole congregation.

C. Breaking Through to the Cross

1. "Confession in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation." (p. 114)
2. "[Jesus] was not ashamed to be crucified for us as an evildoer. It is nothing else but our fellowship with Jesus Christ that leads us to the ignominious dying that comes in confession, in order that we may in truth share in his Cross. The Cross of Jesus Christ destroys all pride. We cannot find the Cross of Jesus if we shrink from going to the place where it is to be found, namely in the public death of a sinner. And we refuse to bear the Cross when we are ashamed to take upon ourselves the shameful death of the sinner in confession." (p. 114)

D. Breaking Through to New Life

1. "In confession the Christian begins to forsake his sins. Their dominion is broken. From now on the Christian wins victory after victory." (p. 115)

E. Breaking Through to Certainty

1. "Why is it that it is often easier for us to confess our sins to God than to a brother?...we must ask ourselves whether we have not often been deceiving ourselves with our confession of sin to God, whether we have not rather been confessing our sins to ourselves and also granting ourselves absolution." (pp. 115-116)
2. "Who can give us certainty that, in the confession and forgiveness of our sins, we are not dealing with ourselves but with the living God? God gives us this certainty through our brother. Our brother breaks the circle of self-deception." (p. 116)
3. "It is a mercy that we can confess our sins to a brother. Such grace spares us the terrors of the last judgement." (p. 116)

4. Confession should be concrete and specific.
5. "Self-examination on the basis of the Ten Commandments will therefore be the right preparation for confession." (p. 117)
6. Confession to another is a help, not a law. "Confession is within the liberty of the Christian. Who can refuse, without suffering loss, a help that God has deemed it necessary to offer?" (p. 118)

F. To Whom Confess?

1. "It is not the experience of life, but the experience of the Cross that makes one a worthy hearer of confessions." (p. 118)

G. Two Dangers

1. "every person should refrain from listening to confession who does not himself practice it. Only the person who has so humbled himself can hear a brother's confession without harm." (p. 120)
2. "Forgiveness of sins is the sole ground and goal of confession." Confession is not for the purpose of making ourselves look or feel pious! (p. 120)

H. The Joyful Sacrament

1. Confession as an act of preparation
2. "Reconciled in their hearts with God and the brethren, the congregation receives the gift of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and, receiving that, it receives forgiveness, new life, and salvation. It is given new fellowship with God and men....The life of Christians together under the Word has reached its perfection in the sacrament." (p. 122)