

GTW Winter 2021

Discipleship According to Bonhoeffer

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Week 6: Life Together

The Communal Nature of Discipleship

Weekly Devo:

1 Peter 4:7-11

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 2:14-22

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Introduction to Life Together

(By the way, happy 115th birthday, Dietrich! February 4, 1906)

- Finkenwalde
 - 110 students, 2 years
 - Underground for 3 years after it was shut down by the Gestapo
- Theology of Christ and the Church
 - Re: 1927 (at age 21!) Doctrinal Thesis "The Communion of Saints"
 - Christ existing "as" Community
- 2 books written at Finkenwalde:
 - Discipleship & Life Together
- Life Together
 - Note these two themes:
 - the **high call** of Christian Community
 - the **gift** of Christian Community
 - Emphasis on service to one another
 - The strong cannot exist without the weak - the elimination of the weak is the death of the community (72) - think of the context
 - Mid 1930s
 - In 1938, Hitler publicly calls for the destruction of the Jewish race, though Bonhoeffer has been pointing at the writing on the wall for years now.

Chapter 1: Community

1: “Life together under the Word...”

(“a gracious extra,” 21)

How good and pleasant it is
when God’s people live together in unity!

Psalm 133:1

- Life lived on the battlefield, “in the midst of enemies” (1) ... “there they find their mission, their work (anthesis of life in a cloister)
 - Thus, we are called (our mission is) to spread the gospel first and foremost. Receiving the gift of Christian community is a grace, not the mission.
 - In the Western church for generations, we have sadly, too often, reversed this.
- Life in Christian community is a **gift**
 - It is by God’s grace that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly around God’s word and sacrament in this world. Not all Christians partake of this grace. The imprisoned, the sick, the lonely who live in the diaspora, the proclaimers of the gospel in heathen lands stand alone.” (2)
 - Yet what is denied them as a visible experience they grasp more ardently in faith. (2)
 - Think on Bonhoeffer’s context.
 - Think on our Covid context.
 - Of course, what is an inexpressible blessing from God for the lonely individual is easily disregarded and trampled under foot by those who receive the gift every day. It is easily forgotten that the community of Christians is a gift of grace from the kingdom of God, a gift that can be taken from us any day—that the time still separating us from the most profound loneliness may be brief indeed. **Therefore, let those who until now have had the privilege of living a Christian life together with other Christians praise God’s grace from the bottom of their hearts. Let them thank God on their knees and realize: it is grace, nothing but grace, that we are still permitted to live in the community of Christians today.** (4)

- What does the believer give and receive to/from her brother in Christ?
 - The physical presence of the other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. (3)
- Other implications:
 - We belong to one another through and in Christ for all eternity. (5)
 - The goal of all Christian community is to encounter one another as bringers of the message of salvation. (6)
 - In Christian community we “commend one another to Christ.” (18)
 - ...we do not live with other Christians for the sake of gaining such *experiences*. It is not the *experience* of Christian community, but firm and certain faith within Christian community that holds us together. (21, emphasis added)

For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.

Galatians 5:5

Brief Overview of Chapters 2 – 5

2: The Day Together

If we were to learn again something of the praise and adoration that is due to the triune God early in the morning, then we would also begin to sense something of the joy that comes when night is past and those who dwell with one another come together early in the morning to praise their God and hear the Word and pray together. (24)

3: The Day Alone

Individuals must be aware that even their hours of being alone reverberate through the community. In their solitude they can shatter and tarnish the community or they can strengthen and sanctify it. Every act of self-discipline by a Christian is also a service to the community... Every member serves the whole body, contributing either to its health or to its ruin, for we are members of one body not only when we want to be, but in our whole existence. (66)

For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. – 1 Corinthians 12:13

4: Service

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. – Romans 12:16

Wherever the service of listening, active helpfulness, and bearing with others is being faithfully preformed, the ultimate and highest ministry can also be offered, the service of the Word of God. (80)

5: Confession and the Lord's Supper

Confession as Breakthrough: to community (89), to the cross (90), and to new life (91).
...confession serves the Christian community especially as a preparation for participation together in the Lord's Supper. (96)

The day of the Lord's Supper is a joyous occasion for the Christian community. Reconciled in their hearts with God and one another, the community of faith receives the gift of Jesus Christ's body and blood, therein receiving forgiveness, new life, and salvation. (97)

Reflection & Growth (Small Group Prompts)¹

- What is the purpose of Christian community?
- When have you most been blessed by God to be placed into a deep season of Christian community? What did it look like? What did it feel like?

Personal Application: Every week we will have a question(s) aimed directly at helping you grow toward Christ both immediately in the “now,” as well as into the future.

- How might God be leading you to press into Christian community for the sake of extending God’s blessing to another brother or sister in Christ?

End your time in prayer, praying that the very Spirit of God would lead each of us in our walk, making us clear light and useful salt to everyone we meet.

Final Reminders

After this call: Do you have a small group video call to join?

- Next Wednesday is **Ash Wednesday**
 - No Class, please join the rest of the church family for worship as we enter into Lent (in-person and online opportunities for worship)
- In Two Weeks: Ethics, An Introduction
 - See Syllabus for plenty of reading opportunities

¹ Strive to square all your main findings with Scripture. In other words, do Bonhoeffer’s conclusions square with the “Kingdom Principles” laid to God’s People throughout all Scripture?