

Opener

Have you ever been part of a small group where there were at least one or two to whom you could turn any time, under any circumstance and know without a doubt that they would be ready to assist, help, encourage, support or provide? If so, tell something about it. If not, discuss why this is not more common in the church? Isn't this something that ought to be common among Christians?

Big Issue

The New Testament regularly calls us to develop relationships in the church to the level of authentic Christian community. Paul describes some of the characteristics of authentic community in Romans 12:9-21. Many of the teachings here parallel and flesh out the kind of community described by Pastor Les Sunday AM, when he preached from Acts 2:36-47. Dig in and let's challenge ourselves with the essential characteristics

READ Romans 12:9-13 - Attitudes Toward Those Within the Body of Christ

Sincere love? Hate evil? Cling to the good? Be devoted to one another? Honor others above self? Keep zealous/fervent? Serve the Lord? Be joyful in hope? Be patient in affliction? Be faithful in prayer? Share with each other? Practice hospitality?

Which of these 12 are hardest for you? Why? Which of these 12 are easiest for you? Why?

There is an implication that we should talk about: We probably cannot regularly express or implement these attitudes until we are together enough and honest enough to develop authentic community. So, let's talk about being an authentic community? What characterizes an authentic Christian community?

READ Romans 12:14-21 - Attitudes Toward Those Outside the Body of Christ

1. Do bless your persecutors. This is NOT easy. Check out Matthew 5:10-12. What is required of you to be able to obey these scriptures? Have you been able to obey? Do you have a story of a time when you were able? Share it. If you/we have never really had persecution for being followers of Jesus, what might that say about the depth or quality of our following?
2. Do associate with people of low position. Pride leads us to cut ourselves off from those who are in low positions (the poor? the ethnic? the illegal? The ordinary? the homeless?). This probably means that whenever we are put together in the normal situations of life, that we will talk with them, respect them as God's creation, look them in the eye, and treat them as we would want to be treated (Golden Rule). Talk about these relationships and how God has helped you to be like Jesus towards those of low position.
3. Do not repay evil for evil. Rather, do what is right! Live at peace. If we are tempted to get even with someone (eye for an eye) or even go further than that by taking revenge (making them pay MORE than we had to pay or lose), what does this tell us about our own heart?
4. If you were to write a letter to the church of Rome (like Paul did/the one you are discussing now), what would you tell them about HOW to be able to fulfill 12:20? This is NOT easy or natural. What has to happen in our heart to be able to obey these verses?

Pray Together:

Ask God to keep on doing the work of changing your heart, setting you free from self, sins, attitudes, prejudices, difficult habits, and even any fear about being open, transparent and committed to the group.

