

**November 1, 2009**

**Vision Series: Build Community**

Alright good morning. I'm glad that you are here today. Take your Bibles and turn to Philippians chapter 2. We have much to cover today but it won't make sense unless we are on the same page to start with. So remember, what God is doing is showing us how we as the church – as His church – are to go about living out the vision He has given us – the vision of being and making disciples – specifically of moving people to life in Christ one step at a time. That and that alone will determine our success in the eyes of our Father.

Accordingly we have spent the past 7 weeks seeing that those steps include first of all worshipping Jesus and then learning truth. And while that may sound benign in those simple words, you know if you've been here for those studies how deep and crucial – in fact non-negotiable those steps are.

Then the past two weeks we have focused in on the third step. That life in Christ was never meant to be done alone. That if we are going to be disciples – if we are going to move people to life in Christ one step at a time together, we must build community. And we've spent two weeks looking at what community is. Today we'll get to the "build" part of the step. And this is where it gets practical. So let me in way of review get us started by remembering **three things that biblical community is not**.

First, **community is not a CHOICE**. Remember? It is not an option. We saw in **Hebrews 10:24-25** that God never intended connection, community as the church to fall into the "if I have time" category. That passage in combination with all the times God's Word gives us directions about how to relate to one another – love, forgive, encourage, teach, confront, pray for, and on and on one another – commands us do not abandon being the body of Christ. Do not try and be in the church but not of the church.

Then we saw that **community is not just HANGING OUT**. Being with a group of people doing the same thing – even being with someone who is like-minded in that moment – people think we are experiencing communion. That's not the picture the Bible paints. In **Acts 2:42** remember we saw last week that they continually were devoting themselves to one another. In Greek wording is synonymous with enduring. They were continually enduring together.

Going out to dinner with a couple of couples a couple times a month does not constitute community. Because there is not necessarily any endurance there. There's no endurance of life there. These people in Acts were enduring persecution – enduring difficulty – enduring ups and downs and worship and God moving among them together – and when God painted that picture he wove into it this idea of enduring in life over time and growth and good and bad together as what community is – so we can't just assume because we are hanging out together over a softball season or even a summer dinner club that we are experiencing community. That may be a jumping off point, but it is more.

And finally by way of review, **biblical community is not just for YOU**. It is not just for ourselves. Saying – ok I'll connect – I want to choose people who I want to be with and will want me because we're looking at it like we do so many things – as a place to meet our needs. And don't get me wrong, community when it is happening will be a place where your needs are met by the grace of God, but the picture we've seen God paint is so much more. Not just to get your needs met, but where you get to go meet needs. A place where you get to be the body. Where you get to live biblically as you come alongside people in this room and you bear up their burdens like God told us to do.

Which means this is going to be the hardest one. When you really get into each others' lives, not in a surface way, but in a full on biblical way – it is going to be hard and messy and it is going to be beautiful. So how do we build that reality? If building community is basic and intrinsic to life in Christ – as disciples, how do we do it?

There are all kinds of options of passages for us to look at this morning. But several years ago we studied through Philippians together, so let me use it to build on today. Look at **Philippians 2 beginning in verse 1**. We'll see God through Paul lay out the basis for it, what it looks like, and then practically how to build it. We'll take each verse by itself – beginning in verse 1.

*"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,..."*

We are reminded here that **the foundation of why and how we build community is being IN CHRIST**. Let me put it this way – being in Christ is like being in a volcano. If you are in a volcano, you will most definitely have certain experiences. So that we could say "If there is any fire, any burning, any heat in a volcano, then..." That's what Paul is saying. In Christ you will have encouragement, in Christ you will have

comfort from his love, you will have fellowship with the Spirit, you will be shown compassion and tenderness. And from the reality of being in Christ and the experiences that go with that reality, Paul then makes an appeal for community and even gives us a basic how to lesson. Go on to **verse 2**.

*“then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”*

Here we find the unity of community. The basis for our connection – **the foundation of our experience and pursuit of biblical community is the TRUTH of Jesus Christ that unifies us**. Here is that unity stepped out for us.

**Be like-minded.** In other words – of the same mind. Have the same way of looking at things. It means **having a mindset and a PERSPECTIVE that is the same because it is defined by the truth of Christ**. It isn't good when some of us see the glass half empty and some of us see it half full when it comes to God's perspective. **The truth of GOD'S WORD must be the lens through which we see and understand our lives, our church, our world.**

You see why the step before this is to learn truth? We can't experience community without it. But when we are making sure that God's Word – the teachings of Jesus – the truth of God's perspective is defining our mindset rather than our personal likes or dislikes – rather than our personal opinions or emotions – rather than actual or possible circumstance – then we are on the way to the unity of biblical community.

He says, be likeminded, and then **“having the same love.”** In other words we **have AFFECTIONS for and value the same things. Not only do we think the same, we LOVE the same.** And again scripture defines that love for us. Very quickly:

- **Loving God is with your ALL.** Mark 12:30 – *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.*
- **Loving God is OBEYING God.** 1 John 5:3 - *This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.*
- **Loving God is not loving THE WORLD.** 1 John 2:15-16 - *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*
- **Loving God is USING your life for Christ's sake.** Matt 10:37-39 - *Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

As long as we have many different and acceptable definitions for the love of God we will not be unified. As long as one person can say loving God means being at church Sunday but living how you want the rest of the time. As long as another person can say loving God includes everything but how I spend my money. As long as another student can say that loving God doesn't mean the music I listen to or the athletic field or my dating. There is no unity there – no “same love.” But when we understand the first step God showed us in this process – the step of worshipping Jesus – that worship is our response to who God is and what He has done all the time – in what we say, what we do – everywhere – then having the same love for God yields a unity on which to build community.

Then finally in verse 2 Paul says – **“being one in spirit and purpose.”** And that's what we are talking about in this series – that's why we're looking at this – that's what God is showing us. That since we are the church – not some organization or institution or staff or set of leaders – but every single one of us whom God has led to connect in life and commitment and to worship corporately here – **we are the church together so the vision God has for Fairway is the PURPOSE He has given to you: to be moving people to life in Christ one step at a time together.**

But not only must we be one in purpose, Paul says we need to be one in spirit. **Not only are we as individuals directed toward the same single goal together, we are united also in HOW TO DO SO. The steps are taken individually but are understood and owned corporately.** Our community is not defined only by what the goal is but by how to reach it. Which is exactly what we are learning together – the steps to life in Christ together.

So Paul gives us a picture of community here – a picture of a people who because they are in Christ and are seeking to do life in Christ are a people striving towards being like minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. And then in the next two verses he gives us what I wanted us to get to today –

how to do it. How to build community. Obviously we are taking a broad view of it, but here we have the negative and the positive. Let me show you.

**Verses 3-4.** *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*

Here we have **the don't and the do of biblical community in a nutshell.**

**The first 'don't' is SELFISH AMBITION.** This word originally referred to a wage earner. It had to do with the how a worker benefited his employer and the employer paid the worker for it. It then came to denote the attitude of self-seekers who would demean themselves for self gain. This is the person who only does what benefits them. It also denotes an unwillingness to see any higher purpose as a motive for actions other than instant gratification.

Obviously this kind of selfish ambition can be incredibly factious. **When what we do or don't do in the body of Christ is to accomplish our own way, our own COMFORT, our own importance, or just so that others might praise us, then those actions will become divisive in the church.**

The partner in crime to selfish ambition is vain conceit or vain glory in some translations. **The second 'don't' is VAIN CONCEIT.** That is vain thinking about yourself or having a vain opinion about yourself. It is a state of pride that is without basis or justification. And folks, all the pride of mankind is vain and empty – it is without basis in light of God.

The irony of this vain glory that Paul is warning us about is that it is even more evident today in what you can call weak pride. When pride can't get what it wants, it begins to flounder in weakness and it shows up as self pity.

Think about it. Boasting is the response of pride to success. Self-pity is the response of pride to suffering. Boasting says “I deserve admiration because I have achieved so much.” Self pity says “I deserve admiration because I've endured or sacrificed so much.”

The reason that self pity doesn't look like vain conceit is that it appears to be needy. But that need arises from a wounded ego. The need of self-pity does not come from a sense of unworthiness but from a sense of unrecognized worthiness. It is the response of unapplauded pride. **When how we think or are motivated in the body of Christ is PRIDE or SELF PITY, even when well masked or rationalized, those actions will be divisive in the church.**

That human tendency – to assert our own interests over those of others – is deeply ingrained in the modern psyche. Americans, for example, are taught from our youth the famous words of Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence that we are “endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Much of the modern social and psychological theory is indebted to the notion that members of the human species, like other animals, are involved in a relentless quest to dominate others in order to survive. So we not only enter the church controlled by the belief that we deserve to be made happy but often with the notion that our pursuit of that happiness at the expense of others is inevitable.

The result of all of that is the creation of the "me church." Let me show you what I mean. Take a look at this commercial coming soon to a church near you.

VIDEO

In some ways that is an obvious extreme, but in too many others it is too close to home.

See all these things we've been talking about – all this selfish ambition and vain conceit or vain glory – are the realities of the human heart. Our failure to recognize them or our refusal to admit them condemns us to live chained to them. And they make the community that God commands and that disciples need impossible. Why?

Because from these come the very things that are all community killers. Things that we have seen condemned in almost every book of the Bible we have studied through. Gossip. Slander. Selfishness. Complaining. Arguing. Quarreling. Discontent. Greed. Idolatry. Anger. Rage. Malice. Filthy language.

Favoritism. Boasting. Fighting. Lies. **The first part of building community is refusing to practice, give ear to, or tolerate those things in OURSELVES or ONE ANOTHER.**

But that's just half the picture. Against all of this Paul commands "in humility consider or regard others as better than yourselves. Each of you should look not just at your own interests, but also to the interests of others." **We have to not only avoid that which destroys community, we have to ACTIVELY build community as well.**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer listed 7 principles for eradicating selfish ambition from Christian communities but actively pursuing biblical community. You'll get his statements in your LINKs tonight, but let me sum them up for us. We should:

- 1) Cultivate the humility that comes from understanding that you can live in God's sight only by the grace of God. When you know in God's eyes you are the worst of sinners, like Paul says, then vain conceit really isn't a problem. In other words, we have to **THINK humbly**.
- 2) Hold your tongues, refusing to speak uncharitably about a Christian brother or sister. Most of our ambition and conceit is expressed in the way we talk – so if we guard our words, then selfish ambition at the cost of others is impossible. In other words, **speak kindly**.
- 3) Listen long and patiently so that you will understand their fellow Christian's need. Instead of coming up to someone and talking about your day and your job and your problems and just dumping all your stuff on them, ask questions – how was your day? How was work? How's stuff at home? In other words, **LISTEN carefully**.
- 4) Refuse to consider your time and calling so valuable that you cannot be interrupted to help with unexpected needs, no matter how small or menial. In other words, **respond gracefully**. As crucial as your list is to you, so is the whatever that someone else needs your help with to them.
- 5) Bear the burden of your brothers and sisters in the Lord by both preserving their freedom and by forgiving their sinful abuse of that freedom. In other words **FORGIVE freely**. When you are holding a grudge it is impossible to focus on any one else's needs.
- 6) Declare God's word to your fellow believers when they need to hear it. In other words, **share truthfully**. This might be in encouragement – it might be in confrontation – it might be in guidance. But be willing to share God's truth – not just your opinion.
- 7) Understand that Christian community is characterized by service and does not call attention to the person who performs the service. So **SERVE namelessly**. When the applause you care about come from heaven, then the applause down here aren't so important.

And I truly appreciate Bonhoeffer's inclusion of number 7. Because there is another crucial element of community that most of us have disconnected from what God is showing us. **Community is not just about the breadth or the depth of RELATIONSHIPS, it is built by looking to the needs of others practically through SERVICE in, to, and as the church.**

God designed and Jesus intended life in Christ to be done together – for the church to live in community. And so God designed a plan within the confines of the church, His body, in order to enable that to happen. **God designed EVERY single member of His body, every believer, every Christian to have a certain function or functions within that body.** I'm not going to read them this morning, but seriously read **1 Corinthians chapters 12 and 13** and see God's heart for creating community just come alive.

What you see there is that we are the body of Christ. The human body is the analogy and the human body has all kinds of organs that interact. All kinds of limbs and nerves and systems and cells that interact. If you have just one of your organs that doesn't function, then the whole body to one degree or another is sick. And the same thing is true of the body of Christ. Every organ has a function that results in the health or the sickness of the whole body – that results in this case in the community or lack of biblical community of the church.

People I know you've heard this before. I know we've been looking at this for a while today – but listen to me – this church, Fairway Baptist Church, nor any church will ever be what it could be – what Jesus prayed that we would be – **we will never really find biblical community until we begin to understand and see ourselves as ONE body and until we begin to believe we have and must be active with our SPIRITUAL GIFTS.**

See not only has God designed us as a church to be the body of Christ, the day you were born into the family of God – the day you became a part of that body by receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit of God indwelt you with a certain spiritual gift or gifts – listen – through which He wants to minister not just to you but to the rest of the body.

Do you get that? **A spiritual gift is not an end unto itself; it is simply the channel through which GOD uses YOU to build community.** So every believer has a vital ministry as a vital organ of the body. If God brought you here as a part of this local expression of the body of Christ, then that means you.

And if we are going to move people to life in Christ one step at a time together – if we are going to live in community – then every believer must actively and intensely involve him or herself in the function which God has given you. Your service and your ministry make the body healthy because it carries strength to the other parts of the body.

Your failure to serve on the other hand – your unfaithfulness – your carnality – your self-centeredness – your divisive spirit – your laziness spiritually are all non-functions that make the body sick, crippled, and retard our growth – our community – our ability to make disciples.

But when we – you and me – **when we individually do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but instead look to the needs of others in how we RELATE and how we SERVE as God has enabled us – then we build biblical community.**

I heard a pastor friend of mine share some time ago about an article he read about climbing Mt. Everest. On any given year, 250 people die climbing Mt. Everest. That's a lot of people. The article said it is not uncommon on any day to see a person dying. It said that the cost to climb Mt. Everest if you want a guide – which is highly recommended – is \$60,000. You write a check for 60 grand – give it to the guy – and he'll take you to the top. And what you hear is that it is a very worthy goal. That when you get to the top of Everest it's like nothing you have ever seen in your whole life- just beautiful – it's worth every penny of that check.

But the article said something else – something that just makes you wonder where our society has come. It talks about how on any given day it is very common to see groups of people climbing the trails to the top of Everest and to look over to the left or right side of the trail and see people dying.

For some reason they have fallen out and they couldn't go any more and they are dying. And more often than not, the groups will go right past them and just let them die.

Folks that's evil. There's just something evil about that.

I'm on my \$60,000 goal here and I'm sorry that you're on the side over there and that you can't hang and are going to die. I apologize to your family that you're going to die but I don't have time for you. I've got a goal here.

Sounds horrible. And yet what I realize and we've got to realize is that we do that every single day in the church. That exact same thing.

I'm on my way to heaven. Doing my thing here. I've got my worthy goal and I'm cruising forward. I'm on the path to life in Christ.

And on our right and on our left there are – literally in this room – people that are just falling out and we are passing them by.

I'm sorry but don't have time for you.

And I think Jesus has a word to that today.

I think Jesus might say **Galatians 6:2** where he tells us to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

I think Jesus might say **Galatians 5:14** that the whole law is fulfilled in this one word – love your neighbor as yourself.

I think he might say to us **1 John 1:6-7** *"If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, (listen) we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."*

There is an intrinsic connection between the blood of Jesus Christ and being cleansed by his blood and us living together in biblical community.

I think Jesus might say to us what we saw in **Philippians 2:1-4**:

*"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility*

*consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*

See if I'm doing life in Christ then that means I'm going to regard that guy whose dying off the trail as just as important as me. And I'm going to come along beside him and I'm going to bear him up as hard as it is and we're going to do life in Christ together.

Folks, we shouldn't be able to have a church meal or fellowship and not notice it when people are sitting by themselves. We shouldn't be able to not notice individuals and families sitting alone in a Bible study class or sitting isolated in this room. People shouldn't be able to just not show up for weeks and not be noticed and pursued – not in judgment but in love. People shouldn't be able to face by themselves parenting, marriage, financial, or spiritual struggles that are just taking them out with being noticed. And all that is true not because those things are community, but because if we are building community those things won't go unnoticed.

Living together is hard. Biblical community is a long road and it is something that we are going to have to want. But it is worth it. It is God's best for your life and mine. And **if we are going to be a church that moves people to life in Christ one step at a time together**, not only must we give opportunities to worship Jesus – not only must we give opportunities to learn truth – **we must also prioritize, pray for, fight for, and give opportunities to BUILD COMMUNITY through the breadth and depth of our relationships and our service to the body of Christ.**

Let's pray.