

Sheep and Shepherds

by Anton Bosch

The sermon emphasizes the dangers of selfish ambition and the importance of mutual submission within the church body to foster unity and obedience to God's Word.

Scripture: Isaiah 14:14

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Church Unity"

Description

Anton Bosch preaches on the destructive nature of selfish ambition, highlighting its presence in churches and its roots in Satan's sin and the temptation faced by Eve. He emphasizes the importance of submission to one another, to leaders, and to the Word of God, pointing out that true unity and spiritual growth come from humility and obedience. Bosch stresses the need for believers to recognize and address their own weaknesses and sins, and to embrace their unique gifts for the benefit of the church body.

Transcript

Selfish Ambition

Probably the most destructive force at work in churches is selfish ambition. This sin is listed among the deeds of the flesh of Galatians 5:20 and was at the heart of Satan's sin - "...I will be like the most high...." (Isaiah 14:14). This also formed one of the three legs of the temptation put to Eve - "you will be like God...." (Genesis 3:5). It is possibly more destructive than doctrinal error because it is often camouflaged more successfully, and is more difficult to see or prove.

The KJV translates the Greek word *eritheia* as strife or contention. Thayers says it means: "[E]lectioneering or intriguing for office. Apparently, in the NT a courting distinction, a desire to put one's self forward, a partisan and fractious spirit which does not disdain low arts." It is almost inconceivable that such a spirit could exist in the church, and yet it does all too often. Was this not at the heart of the refusal of the disciples to wash one another's feet? Was this not why Diotrephes (3John 1:9) became exclusive and closed the assembly to outside ministries? All too often selfish ambition is hidden under the "righteous" cloak of "wanting God's best," and finds fruitful soil in the modern-day self-esteem heresy.

James says that wisdom born out of selfish ambition (self-seeking) is not from above, but is earthly, sensual and demonic. (James 3:14-17). The fruit of this evil is "confusion and every evil thing." (James 3:16). It is exactly opposite to true wisdom which is "...first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." (James 3:17)

Submission to One Another

Paul addresses the issues of pride and selfish ambition in his letter to the Philippians: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." (Philippians 2:3). Here lies the key to true unity in the church as well as the proper functioning of the various members and ministries. He continues to say that we need the mind of Christ who was willing to become a servant and obey even to the death of the cross. When the mind of Christ is present among believers there are no questions of inferiority or superiority, or of whose gift is more important, or when each should speak or be silent.

In Ephesians 5:21, Paul links submission to one another to the fullness of the Spirit. At the same time he gives an explicit command to all believers to submit to one another. When we think of ourselves more highly than we ought, and when we have not come face to face with the reality of our own weaknesses and sinfulness, submission is hard and strife follows. If we have seen ourselves as we really are, but also acknowledge that He has gifted us in some unique way to play our part in the fellowship, each will mesh perfectly with the other without trying to force his own way.

Peter confirms the need for mutual submission: "...Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." 1Peter 5:5 None are excluded: shepherd must submit to the flock, sheep to one another, sheep to shepherds and shepherds to shepherds. This brings God's elevation and blessing upon the individual as well as to the group.

Submission to Leaders

Although it has been established that leaders are not told to take authority, believers are required to submit to leaders. This submission must be willing, and cannot be forced or brought about by manipulation. True leaders will gain the confidence and respect of true believers. Arrogant and rebellious believers will not submit to any authority no matter how godly the leaders. To force such people into submission is a total waste of time, as the real problems will still not have been addressed in people's hearts. Aitchison speaks of the problem of those who know too little to lead and too much to be led.

Their nuisance value in local church life is immense. They are sometimes responsible for the rise of factions, when they can get a following, and they can become instigators of critical and derogatory talk about the character and authority of those who are already elders in the church. (Atchison, Raymond. Rule and Responsibility. The Witness. England. 1964. p207)

Peter contains the proof-text on the subject of submission to leadership.

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17)

This verse is often used to show that there are those who have the rule over the church. Kittel says that the Greek word *Hegeomai*, here translated as rule, "means to lead, to think, believe, regard as." (Kittel. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. p303) Thayer and Vine both confirm that the emphasis is on leading. The word translated as rule in Romans 12:8 and 1Timothy 3:4,5,12 is *Proistemi* which literally means "to stand before." Thus we are admonished to obey and to be submissive to those who lead. Paul confirms the need for submission to godly leaders in 1Corinthians 16:16.

As much as it is wrong for leaders to dominate and control by vigor, it is wrong for believers to be in rebellion of leaders raised up by God. God's plan is clear. Leaders must lead, not drive and believers must obey and submit to those leaders.

Submission to the Word

Christians must not only submit to one another and to leaders, they must also submit to the Word. (2Thessalonians 3:14, 1Peter 1:22) At times believers will feel that they have reason to disobey the Word because they have a problem with the preacher. Even worse are the occasions when people will attempt to discredit the leader because they did not like the message he brought. Even if they have reason to disqualify the messenger they are still required to obey the Word of God. The Word of God is not dependent on the messenger for its authority but is its own authority and will stand for ever. (1Peter 1:25, Matthew 5:18). This does not excuse leaders who do not live godly lives or apply themselves in a godly manner. Yet, the Word has its own authority - even if spoken through a dumb donkey. (2Peter 2:16)

This article is taken from Anton's book Building Blocks of the Church. P89ff

(To Be Continued)

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