

BaptistWay Bible Series for October 10: Living faith in Christian community

September 29, 2010

Faith isn't only a personal matter. It's an act of community as well.

If you think about it, we were created for fellowship, both with God and with other Christians. This week, James underscores the importance of living in Christian fellowship by giving us some basic rules for how to treat one another.

In our reading, he outlines five basic rules:

- Don't grumble.
- Persevere in trials.
- Don't speak unholy words.
- Pray about and praise God for everything.
- Hold one another accountable.

By focusing on the first rule, we'll touch on all the others.

Unity is the goal

The goal (and the testimony) of Christian community is unity. Nowhere outside the church do so many people of different backgrounds, socioeconomic status, talents and interests come together in one purpose—to glorify God. When we are able to achieve this purpose, we testify to the power of our faith.

Within the Christian community, our aim should be to help one another mature in our faith, not tear one another down. We should hold one another

accountable, but this should be an act of love, not judgment. Sadly, we're more likely to grumble than encourage one another.

James tells us, "Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged" (v. 9). This connection between grumbling and judging is important.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines judgment as "the formation of an opinion after consideration or deliberation." In context of this passage, judgment is the formation of a negative opinion. Grumbling is the act of sharing that negative opinion, spreading ill will and causing division.

If unity is the goal, grumbling is one of the primary ways to prevent and/or disrupt it.

Jesus says when we judge, we will be judged by the same standard we use. "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:2). James says, "The Judge is standing at the door!" (v. 9). Let's remember the Lord weighs every thought and word. Let's extend grace to one another, just as he extends grace to us.

The example of Christ

Now let's talk about grumbling from another angle. Yes, we should be careful not to grumble about others. But we also should take care about how we respond when someone grumbles about us.

Let's take Jesus' example. Although he was perfect, the Pharisees found fault with him. Not only did they grumble about Jesus, they tortured him and put him to death. He even warns us we should expect the same. "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first" (John 15:18).

But we're not supposed to respond in an unholy way when others mistreat

us. Peter says: “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:21-23).

When we suffer at the hands of others, no unholy words should come out of our mouths. We shouldn’t grumble in return, and we shouldn’t allow it to get us down. Instead, we should persevere, taking the matter to God in prayer. “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” (1 Peter 3:9).

Stay focused on our purpose

Our reading begins with a reminder that the Lord is coming. “Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near” (James 5:7-8).

While we wait, we must remain faithful to Jesus’ teachings. We shouldn’t grumble against one another, but take everything to God in prayer. We should speak encouragingly and hold one another accountable in love. And when times get tough, we must patiently wait for God’s answer.

Church is the one place where we can develop and share our faith. In order for this community of faith to develop, however, we must achieve unity. This was Jesus’ prayer in John 17:21: “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

The goal of unity is that the world will know our faith is real. When we

achieve unity, our faith becomes a testimony. Let's be careful to protect our testimony by avoiding behaviors, such as grumbling, that break unity.

Food for thought

James 3:9-10 says: "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be."

How does this relate to today's lesson?

When we feel tempted to complain about someone, what would be a more godly way to respond?