

LIVING AN AUTHENTIC FAITH, PART 6

Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25, NASB)

MAYBE THE MOST CRITICAL COMPONENT OF GOLF’S HANDICAP SYSTEM is peer review, for by it the USGA attempts to maintain authenticity among the golfing community—which is a polite way of saying, “We don’t want no stinkin’ sandbaggers!”

The integrity of competing across the handicaps is entirely dependent on the honesty of those who play the game. Of course, there are many casual golfers who have no great need for such fairness. They play the game occasionally or without participating any competition other than bragging rights among friends. We’re not concerned in such cases that these golfers make up whatever rules they want.

Unfortunately, however, in the context of the faith, there are many who take up their Christian fellowship cavalierly. And here the lack of authenticity makes for the unwanted practices of hiddenness, proud individualism, and even falsehood.

Perhaps we would do well to establish this first: the people we are before God are the people we should be before one another, and vice versa.

If I am contrite before God, I should be contrite before others. This is called humility. It opens the door for increasing honesty among us.

If I extol God for his virtues, I should extol others when I see the work of God being done in and through them. This is called honor and encouragement. It opens the door for increasing ministry among us.

If I honor God by serving him, then I should honor others by serving them. This is called deference. It opens the door for increasing love among us.

Authentic community involves risk. I must be contrite and humble and honoring and encouraging and deferential—all without knowing for sure how others will respond. Will I be seen as weak? I might. Or I may be seen as the first one strong enough in my group to open those doors to characteristics of Jesus among us. Being the first is not easy. But if each of us commits to doing the right thing, all of us gain from the establishment of true, Christ-centered community.

Opening questions When have you seen the handicap system work poorly or well? Is this one of those cases where a quality of character in golf translates into a quality of character in life?

READING 1 John 1:1-7; James 5:16; 1 Corinthians 11:17-32

The fellowship of believers (1 John 1)
 What specifically unites believers in fellowship? How does the idea of “walking in the light” meld with our theme of authenticity?

Confession (James 5)
 Confession of sin to others and prayers for healing both reveal one’s weaknesses. Why is this important in authentic fellowship? How does it allow us to properly minister to one another?

Healthy and healthy community (1 Corinthians 11)
 What depictions of healthy and unhealthy community show up in this passage? How does vulnerability and judgment from with the fellowship of believers contribute to a better witness before the world?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2015 Links Players International. A 6-minute video accompanies today’s study at <https://youtu.be/4SHaC42vdeo>