

31 August 2014
7 Habits for Christians - 8

“Habit #6: Synergize”

Seven habits for Christians. Habit #1: Be proactive rather than reactive. #2: Begin with the end in mind. 3: Put first things first. 4. Think Win/Win. 5: Seek first to understand, then to be understood. And now habit #6: Synergize.

The chief Scripture behind this habit is I Cor. 12. I'll get to that. But first I'd like you to think about the Beatles. Together and separately. Yeah, I know this goes way back. But in my defense, let me say that at one time the Beatles were the favorite musical group of each of my four children. They were that good. Why?

They each had solo careers after the band broke up. They each had some hits and did some good stuff. But I wouldn't be the first person to say that the sum was much greater than the parts. Why? I'm pretty sure it's because they were all different. John was serious and troubled, and brought some depth to their music. Paul had an amazing vocal range, and he has a great gift for melody. George became a world class guitarist, learned the sitar, and provided some pretty creative vocal harmonies. Ringo's drumming was steady, precise, at times quite creative, and he provided some much needed self-deprecating humor.

But separately their warts showed. John could be mean. George didn't have the writing talent that Lennon and McCartney had together. Ringo is a bit limited vocally. And Paul can be a bit silly in his music and lyrics. Separately they did some good work and some not so great work. But together they were great.

One example: Paul's working title for what became “Yesterday” was “Scramble Eggs.” “Yesterday” is the most covered of the Beatles' songs. But I can't imagine many people wanting to cover, (*sing*) “Scramble eggs, what I had for breakfast was scrambled eggs.” Doesn't work for me. The Beatles were great because they were different from each other, and they valued and took advantage of those differences.

Ever been part of group like that? A group where one idea led to another led to another, where the weakness of one is compensated for by the strength of another in a process that sometimes borders on chaos and leads to surprising and creative things that no one could have predicted ahead of time? That synergy.

Habit #6: Synergize. That means valuing the differences. Not tolerating the differences, but *valuing* them. When someone disagrees with me, my first reaction might be to argue with them because, obviously, if they disagree with me, they are wrong. That's not a good way to react. What I *should* be saying to myself is, “Ooh, they disagree. That means they might know something I don't, Or they might see things from a perspective I haven't thought about. Or their experiences are different from mine. I have things to learn from them.”

That's how I *should* react. That's how *you* should react. Often, I don't, and need to catch myself and intentionally practice this habit until it becomes natural.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he was writing to a church that was deeply divided on all kinds of fronts. There were factional parties: some said I belong to Paul; others I belong to Apollos; others I belong to Peter. They were divided on economic lines: when they came together for worship and Eucharist and a meal, some had plenty to eat and some had very little. They were divided into factions over spiritual gifts. They were divided on matters of doctrine and morals. It was a mess. And instead of embracing diversity and learning from it, the diverse groups segregated themselves into competing camps. There was no synergy. The whole of the Corinthian congregation was *less* than the sum of its parts. Ever been part of a group like that? Not very pleasant, is it? No trust, no creativity.

In three different ways, Paul asks the Corinthians to synergize. One, he reminds them that the Spirit gives different gifts to different people. Together, they lack nothing. In their own little groups they lack a lot. Is that what you want? Two, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are part of the body of Christ. Do you really want to start lopping off parts of your body? Very rarely is that a god idea. Three, while all that makes sense—or should make sense—there is a more excellent way. “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”

If you want to synergize, you're going to have find a way to love people who are different and who think differently than you. And the best way I know of to do that is to get yourself filled up with love so that you've got plenty to spare, so much that you couldn't keep it in even if you wanted to, and you don't want to because you know better. You know that love kept in withers and dies and the love given away expands and grows.

Get yourself filled up with love. The Bible can help; it's God's love letter to us. Music can help; at least it helps me. Remembering the past, remembering God's grace and love and gifts and goodness, remembering them with thanksgiving helps. The Eucharist helps. Baptismal waters help. And being in the flesh and blood body of Christ—you know, the Church—so that love can move from a word and a concept to something with skin on it helps.

Get yourself filled up with love. And then immediately get rid of it. Give it away. Pretend it's a hot potato and you're desperately hungry. You're desperately hungry, so you take hold of every piece of love that comes your way. And it's a potato. It fills you up. But it's also a hot potato so you have to pass it on right away. And yes, this analogy has completely broken down, but you get the idea.

Love people, love people who are different from you enough to listen to them, learn from them, work with them and synergize with them. Synergize. That's what the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, does.