

The Community of Love

Family is a vital concept to understand; indeed, the basis of all church life is that it is a family. I have expounded this aspect of community in my paper, *'The local Biblical church is a family'*, which you ought to read first. Here I want to tie together some thoughts about the nature of community as an eternal concept.

If you analyse many stories, such as evidenced in movies, books, plays, folklore etc. you find that one central theme that generates appreciation is a sense of community. When a story can communicate feelings associated with community, it connects with an audience. Sometimes that community is reduced to its smallest unit – a couple, either two friends or a man and woman, but still the audience connects with it and is moved. Thus you have the 'Buddy movies' or romantic films. When there is no sense of community, stories often generate alienation or disturbance.

A sense of community is so powerful that it can bring healing. It is now scientifically proven that people with depression are better helped by talking to trusted friends than by taking anti-depressants and mood controlling drugs. The various principles of psychiatry are contradictory and not founded in any proven science yet people who visit psychiatrists are often helped because they enter a community – they interact with a proxy friend.

When people lived in squalid conditions in Victorian slums they had a better quality of life than when they were moved to high rise flats with all mod cons. The reason is that they lost their sense of community, becoming lonely, isolated and alienated. Indeed, crime in many poor slums was controlled by the moral empowerment of the community but crime soared in the ghettos created by high rise flats.

A sense of community is incredibly important to human social life. Indeed, without community there is no social life. As Christians we not only need to appreciate this but we need to understand where this comes from. Then we can seek to bring a sense of loving community wherever we go.

The Godhead

Christianity alone has a concept of God that is a pure, equal community. No other religion has a Trinity of Persons that form the Godhead. God is one but subsists in three individual persons who are all equally God. Not only is this concept hard to understand with finite minds but it is unique. God is three yet one.

No other monotheistic religions have any sense of community in their god. No polytheistic religions have a community of gods that subsist in unity. In fact, most polytheistic religions have gods that contest, subvert and fight with one another – which is supposed to explain the vicissitudes of life. The Greek pantheon is the classic example of this, with different gods aiding different sides even within the same war, such as the Trojan War.

Some cults and religions have a group of gods that are more unified but there is almost always a chief god above all the others to create a certain unanimity of strategy. There are also religions that have a chief god with multiple lesser gods; in fact Hinduism has

approaching three million minor gods under a triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.¹ By some Brahma² is regarded as the supreme god while others regard Vishnu as supreme. Lesser gods that are universally worshipped tend to be incarnations of Vishnu,³ such as Krishna, Rama or Buddha. Thus some gods formulate destruction and evil while other gods balance that with reproduction and life, usually under the control of a supreme god.

The God of the Bible is completely different to all these. While each person in the Trinity has a certain task in salvation, all are completely united in purpose to achieve a single end. There is harmony of intent, equality of status, unanimity of purpose, and commitment to each other. Because they are one God, not different modes of God,⁴ they are utterly united in essence and purpose.

Now we can analyse the theological aspects of the Trinity, and libraries of books have been devoted to this, but the basic reality of the Godhead is that it is a loving community. God is a community of love and this is the reason why creation is enthralled by a sense of community and why men write stories based upon community. Loving community is deeply entrenched within the heart of man because man himself comes from a God who is a community of love.

Even within the material creation apart from man we see community designed into every area of nature. One of the delightful facets of the natural order is that it is interdependent and exists in complete harmony. The ecology⁵ of the geosphere is determined by interdependence of purpose and disturbance to one aspect of the geosphere damages other related aspects. Thus for instance the situation today where harmful pesticides and herbicides, coupled with genetically modified organisms in agriculture, are killing off the bee population. Without bees two thirds of plants cannot reproduce. In America millions of bees are imported to the east coast every year to pollinate vital crops, such as almonds.

The harmony of nature is a balance within a community. Disturb one part of that system and everything goes out of balance. Chop down too many trees and you will end up with a dustbowl. Introduce a foreign animal into a local population and certain native species will be destroyed.⁶

All this interdependence stems from the fact that the Creator-designer is a divine person that lives in eternal, constant community. It is natural that the Creator will build interdependence into nature because the universe is a reflection of the divine glory of God.

The point of creation

The whole universe was created in order to be the glory of the divine Creator. It is a manifestation of the beauty, character and purpose of the God that created it. Every aspect

¹ Shiva (also Siva): a god associated with the powers of reproduction, destruction and dissolution.

² Brahma: the creator god in Hinduism, who forms a triad with Vishnu and Shiva. Brahma was an important god of late Vedic religion, but has been little worshipped since the 5th century AD.

³ Vishnu: a god, originally a minor Vedic god, now regarded by his worshippers as the supreme deity and saviour, by others as the preserver of the cosmos in a triad with Brahma and Shiva.

⁴ Modalism produced a number of early heresies about the nature of God, such as: Sabellianism or Modalistic Monarchianism. Thus God is a single person with different modes of existence and expression. Swedenborgianism is a modern version of this.

⁵ Ecology: the branch of biology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings.

⁶ Such as the US crayfish which is wiping out entire species of UK freshwater arthropods.

from the macro to the micro is a reflection of the personality of God. Because God is a community of love, then the principles of community and love will be found everywhere we search in the universe.

The very heavens are connected in a loving community and serve the purposes of God on earth. Since earth is the centre of God's eternal plan, everything in the universe is directed towards assisting that plan; thus stars are for the earth, the moon is for the earth (Gen 1:16-17). Without the moon we would have no tides. Without the tides the life cycles of certain plants and animals could not exist. The nuclear cycles within the sun determine the weather on earth, particularly cloud formations and winds. Without the motion of the sun, earth and moon there would be no seasons. Without seasons there would be no agriculture.

The centre of creation is man – the only animal with a moral purpose. The point of man is to be a moral reflection of the character of God. Nature is a manifestation of the wisdom and power of God but only man is an expression of the moral virtues of God.

Consequently, mankind is founded upon principles of a community of love because God is a community of love and mankind represents God in the universe.

Thus the central feature of the basis of mankind is family and tribes. Mankind is divided into families and collections of families (tribes), then collection of tribes into nations. In order to strengthen the expression of families and tribes after the entrance of sin in the world,⁷ God separated the tribes of man at Babel into nations with different languages. God intends man to subsist as families and tribes. Thus the nations of the world are often described as tribes.⁸ Families are small units of community; tribes are larger units of community.

It is, therefore, interesting to note that direct attacks on the manifestation of God on the earth by the devil will target community life, whether families or tribes. Many political factions intended to subvert humanity targeted family life (e.g. Communism). The recent development of multiculturalism by Socialists in the west was a direct attack on subverting Christian families and Christian moral values in the infrastructure of society. Globalism seeks to override national identity, tribes and families. If you attack community, you attack God.

It is vital that Christians understand the importance of traditional family life as a means of establishing the principles of lawful society and the expression of the character of God on earth. It is a high privilege. Sadly, modern life in the west is centred on destroying every possible aspect of communal family life. The nuclear society hardly even gathers round the dinner table together anymore; note the social stability of Mediterranean countries that still feature family dinners as important structures of the family.

So, the natural orders of creation manifest the community of God materially but the expression of the loving character and moral virtues of God are shown only in man.

⁷ And to prevent a devilish plan to unify the race in sinful rebellion.

⁸ Rev 1:7, 'And all the tribes of the earth will mourn'. Also Matt 24:30.

The point of the church

As we narrow down the purpose of God from natural orders of creation to man and then to the church we see a more finite expression of the perfections of God.

Nature demonstrates the community of God materially. Mankind expresses the communal character of God morally. But only the church expresses the communal character of God spiritually. These reflect the nature of life: the materialistic expression (the body), the moral expression (the soul), and the spiritual expression (the spirit).

Only the church is the spiritual expression of the communal life of the Godhead.

It is vital to understand the huge importance of this privilege.

Everything in the church must express the character of God – everything. Nothing must exhibit the nature of man, which is sinful. This not only means that all doctrines and practices must be absolutely Biblical (the regulative principle) but the character and nature of the church must be utterly godly also.

The church must manifest loving community.

This is why the only churches prescribed in the Bible are home churches where family life can be expressed. For example:

- Local church meetings are only ever held in homes.
- Local churches are small in number, say less than 40.
- Local churches have no significant organisation.
- Local churches have no formal administration.
- Local churches have no hierarchical leadership.
- Local churches are led by elders who act like fathers to a family or shepherds to a small flock of sheep. They are equal in authority. There is no senior, single leader.
- Churches own no property or have dedicated names.
- When churches grow they sub-divide and spread; they never grow big.
- Meetings are based upon open fellowship, mutual edification, group discussion and encouragement.
- Teaching is group instruction by dialogue, question and answer, discussion. It is never a formal, uninterrupted sermon by a single individual to a silent audience.
- All members have spiritual gifts that are expected to be shared as God leads.
- All ministry is devoted to perfecting and equipping the saints, whether spiritually or materially.
- The essence of church life is called ‘one-anothering’.

Now it can be seen that virtually all forms of modern church life are diametrically opposed to all these principles. This shows how far the enemy has deceived the church and perverted it to fail to express community love. Thus churches today are formal organisations, social clubs, talking shops, entertainment centres, political activist centres, cults, authoritarian regimes and so on. These are not based on the Biblical principles of church life that exhibit loving community.

Now there have been some church groups that were based upon the commune system which is more like a Communist or Socialist system than a Biblical church. All these

experiments throughout history have failed, sometimes very dramatically. They usually fall into some kind of totalitarianism where one man despotically controls a cult for his own use. In bad examples, the commune was killed (such as Jonestown).

This is not what is meant by the loving community of God. To be godly we must follow Biblical instructions and these are clear in the NT. We do not leave our families, leave our homes and live in some sort of commune. The original sharing of goods in the early church was an act of loving sacrifice to help the poor in Jerusalem; it was not to set up a commune.

Families are an important feature of godly community and these tend to get lost within communes where everything is shared in a collective.

Communes are not the answer.

Then there are modern church movements that claim to be community based (some Emergent churches are even called 'Community churches'); however, these are human-based institutions with very little adherence to Biblical principles or God's law; many are mystical or Charismatic Gnosticism. As such they fail to manifest the divine community but are merely a post-modernistic expression of human ideas with no doctrinal basis – therefore no spiritual value.

All we have to do is obey what the apostles taught us in bringing the final words of Christ to our eyes. The principles outlined above are not difficult to see in the NT or even difficult to obey. What is necessary is to abandon the reliance upon men and human tradition. Yet so few have the courage to do this.

The church must be a spiritual expression of God within the local community.

Conclusion

There is far more to plumb in the analysis of what the loving community of God is and how it is expressed on earth. However, I have shared enough here to show that there is a great deal of work to be done before we can get past what is outlined here. We cannot delve into the depths of God as community if we cannot even get the local church right.

Let us press on to know the Lord.

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