

BECOMING LIKE JESUS

The Communal Dimension

Rev Dr Clive Chin
ORPC SoCM Sunday 2019 March 10

Introduction

- Scientists at Harvard started track 268 sophomores in 1938 on clues leading to healthy and happy life
- The study has proved that embracing community helps us live longer, and be happier
- “The surprising finding is that our relationships and how happy we are in our relationships has a powerful influence on our health,” said [Robert Waldinger](#), director of the study, a psychiatrist at [Massachusetts General Hospital](#) and a professor of psychiatry at [Harvard Medical School](#). “Taking care of your body is important, but tending to your relationships is a form of self-care too. That, I think, is the revelation.”

Common Objections to the Church

- “Why can’t I just stay at home, sing praise songs, listen to good sermons on the web, and not go to church?”
- “Is it enough that I love Jesus but not the church?”
- “Why are there so many denominations? How does that show the unity of the church?”
- “The sole purpose of the church is to help me in my growth as a Christian!”

Christian Community Life

- Jesus' form of discipleship included a complex balance of individualism and community
- We need to count the cost and make a personal decision to follow him
- Yet the concept of community is evident in the promise of the church
- "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it"
(Matt 16:18)

The Family as Key to Discipleship

- From the OT to the NT, the earthly family played a major role in God's plan for humanity
- The family was the channel through which succeeding generations of individuals were raised to know God and the importance of community

The Family as Key to Discipleship

- “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deut 6:4-9)
- “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple” (Lu 14:26)

The Family as Key to Discipleship

- ³⁴ “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to turn
 - “a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—
³⁶ a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household’ (Micah 7:6)
- ³⁷ “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it” (Matt 10:34-39)

The Family as Key to Discipleship

- When Jesus challenged his disciples to leave family and even to “hate” father and mother, wife and children (Lu 14:26), he was not calling for the disruption of the family
- Rather, he was declaring that *he* must be the primary focus of allegiance, not the family
- In Jesus day, the people confused the means with the ends. The family was designed to bring succeeding generations to God, yet family loyalties became so strong that they usurped the will of God

The Church as the People of God

- “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are **the people of God**; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Pt 2:9-10)

The Church as the Body of Christ

- “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form **one body, so it is with Christ**. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor 12:12-13)

The Church as the Fellowship of the Spirit

- “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, **the promised Holy Spirit**” (Eph 1:13)
- “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Eph 1:22-23)

Marks of the Reformed Church

- John Calvin declares, “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists” (*Inst.*, 4.1.9)

Presbyterian Confession of Faith

- We confess that “the catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (WCF 25.1)
- We also confess that “the visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel, consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children” (WCF 25.2)

Nature of Spiritual Gifts

- “Spirituals” or *pneumatikon* (1 Cor 12:1, 4-11)
- Definition: that which is related to or produced by the Spirit
- In relation to spiritual gifts, the word signifies an activity which is empowered by the Spirit
- Performed not by natural abilities

Nature of Spiritual Gifts

- “Gifts” or *charisma* (1 Cor 12:4)
- Definition: refers to a gift of grace freely given, or denotes the result of *charis* viewed as an action
- In relation to spiritual gifts, it is the operation of grace for a particular function in the body of Christ
- Gifts are not earned or merited

Nature of Spiritual Gifts

- “Ministries” or *diakonia* (1 Cor 12:5)
- Definition: a personal service rendered to another, a ministry or a concrete act done freely out of love
- In relation to spiritual gifts, a grace gift becomes real in practice, or an act oriented to helping others

Nature of Spiritual Gifts

- “Effects” or *energema* (1 Cor 12:6)
- Definition: an outworking or the result of activities
(grace → diakonia → effect)
- In relation to spiritual gift, the term means the effect of the ministry of a grace gift

Nature of Spiritual Gifts

- “Manifestation of the Spirit” or *phanerosis* (1 Cor 12:7)
- Definition: the display or edification of the Spirit of God
- Conclusion: Spiritual gifts refer to abilities given by grace through the work of the Spirit for ministry for the church to accomplish God’s purpose in the world

In Relation to Abilities

- Spiritual gifts should be distinguished from natural abilities
- Preparation for the ministry of spiritual gifts is made before salvation (Jer 1:5; Gal 1:15)
- The parable of the talents suggests that God distributes gifts according to natural abilities (Matt 25:15)
- Gifts may be expressed through talents or acquired skills

Recognition of Gifts

- Consecration (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Tim 4:14)
- Assessment (Rom 12:3)
- Be informed about gifts (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10; 12:28-30; Eph 4:11; 1 Pt 4:11)
- Explore
- Feedback
- Manifestation
- Be faithful

Discussion Questions

- If disciples are to follow Jesus in today's world, what are some challenges facing the family today?
- What can the church do to minister to singles?
- What can the church do to help cultivate communal life?