

Disparate Unity

By Carrie Cavanaugh

Although Western culture emphasizes individualism, the Biblical model is one of community. Cain tried to deny it, but we are our brother's keeper; we are called to both "spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Heb 10:24) and "if a brother sins against you, you are to go and show him his fault" (Mat 18:15). Another indication of our relationship to each other in Christ is the Biblical example of collective prayer, for Jesus taught his disciples to pray to, "Our Father" (Mat 6:9). Further, believers are collectively described as the "body of Christ" (Rom 12:5) and "living stones" being built into a "spiritual house" (1 Pet 2:5). We are to be "perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Cor 1:10) as we are now "sons of God" (Rom 8:14) and therefore all part of one family, God's family. We cannot deceive ourselves into thinking that we can rightly live out our faith and "give up meeting together" (Heb 10:25) – we are called to work out our faith in community.

The importance of Christian Community would be hard to over emphasize as the way we treat one another is often the expression of our love for God. Jesus explained that the world will know we are his disciples "if we love one another" (John 13:35). And although when asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus replied, "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind", He immediately followed it up by saying, "and the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mat 22:37-39).

Perhaps the reason community is so important is that it teaches us something of who God is in that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in flawless communion. What better model do we have to look to than this, the perfect relationship of the Trinity. There is only one God (Deut 6:4) and yet there are clearly three persons in the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The three are equal in substance and glory, just as we are equal before God, but they each have very different roles. For example, we pray to the Father through Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit. In the same way, in Christ we are each called to different roles (1 Cor 12:12-31). Rather than trying to shape every Christian into a leader it is good that some will lead and others will help them carry out the vision. In the Godhead, we see that although each person performs a different function, they are all striving towards the same goal – they are unified in effort. So too, we ought to work together towards our common goal – to bring glory to God.

In summary, we are to see ourselves and our faith in the context of community since this is what the Bible teaches. Community is vital to our faith for many reasons, not the least of which is that our vertical relationship with Christ is often lived out in our horizontal relationships with other believers. And finally, the Trinity reveals that Christian community is a unification of uniquely created saints. Therefore, let us be faithful to our brothers and sisters in Christ at work, leveraging our diversity while united in our common vision.

Bruce Ware's sermon "The Trinity" at the 2005 Desiring God Conference for Pastors was consulted for this article.



Suggested Application

- Weekly staff devotionals that focus both on study of the Word and prayer for each other.
- Chapel times that everyone, including leaders, humbly attend.
- Leaders develop goals/vision in line with the common faith of the staff.
- Morning prayer meetings.
- Deal with conflict; seek reconciliation and unity.
- Don't overlook sin, but spur one another on towards holiness.
- Encourage God-honoring balance; make allowances for staff to do all things for the glory of God, including family obligations and ministry.
- Have courage to resolve disunity, especially if it is with the star of the team.
- Institute good hiring practices that bring in people who live out their faith.
- Ensure that staff know their work is meaningful and contributing to the organization's overarching goals.
- Measure success so that staff can see the results of their efforts.
- Focus on leadership to establish culture; govern diligently, thoughtfully and proactively to create Christian community.
- Encourage different strengths to aid in learning and innovation.