

THE DEAREST PLACE ON EARTH (19)

A Real Community

A. Introduction

1. The local church is a community of God's people.

2. What kind of community should we be?

When people look at this local church what should they see?

3. They should see a real community.

B. We are created and saved to be a real community

1. We are created in the image of a God in community.

"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:26-27)

2. We are created to be in community.

"The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Genesis 2:18)

3. God is restoring the community destroyed by the entry of sin.

Sin destroyed the community the man and woman enjoyed in the Garden.

"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves." (Genesis 3:7)

Sin destroyed the community mankind enjoyed on the earth.

"The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." (Genesis 11:6-7)

God saves us one by one and then brings us into community with other people He has saved.

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." (Ephesians 2:14-16)

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9)

"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3)

"Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devote themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:41-42)

4. Community is expressed in local churches.

In the New Testament there are lots of 'one another' commands given that show how we express this new community.

These 'one another' commands were given to local churches.

5. We will one day enjoy life as a perfect community.

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9)

C. A real community is loving

1. We are commanded to love everyone.

"But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." (Luke 6:35)

2. We are especially instructed to love other Christians.

"This is my command: Love each other." (John 15:17)

"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law." (Romans 13:8)

"Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other." (1 Thessalonians 4:9)

"Keep on loving each other as brothers." (Hebrews 13:1)

"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart." (1 Peter 1:22)

"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." (1 Peter 4:8)

"This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another." (1 John 3:11)

"And he has given us the command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother." (1 John 4:21)

3. Our love for one another is evidence of our love for God.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

4. Our love for one another reflects the love that God has for us.

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John 4:11)

Our love for one another therefore is practical.

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" (1 John 3:16-17)

D. A real community is united

1. Jesus has brought peace between us and God and removed the walls that divide us from one another.

He has brought peace between us and God.

"Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men) – remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:11-13)

He has brought peace between Jew and Gentile.

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." (Ephesians 2:14-16)

He has made us one united community – one nation, one family, one temple, one body.

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." (Ephesians 2:19-22)

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

2. God has united us in Christ so we should maintain this unity.

We are to keep the unity not make the unity.

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:3-6)

We are to keep the unity without losing our diversity.

"Now the body is not made up of one part but of many." (1 Corinthians 12:14)

3. We maintain this unity by accepting one another.

God has accepted us in Christ.

"The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him." (Romans 14:3)

Don't put back the dividing wall of hostility – don't exclude other believers.

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." (Romans 15:7)

"so that there should be no divisions in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other." (1 Corinthians 12:25)

The opposite of division is equal concern for one another.

"Each and every member is to have fully the same concern, care, and love for every other member of the body." (Thabiti Anyabwile)

4. We maintain this unity by forgiving one another.

Forgiveness is critical to the unity of the church.

God has forgiven us so we should forgive others.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

An unforgiving heart may be a sign that we are not really part of this united community.

"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (Matthew 6:14-15)

E. A real community corrects and restores

1. There will be times when people in the community fall into sin.

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." (Galatians 6:1)

2. Other people in the community are gifts from God to help us see our faults and encourage us to repent and turn from our sin.

3. We have already been corrected and restored when we put our trust in Jesus.

F. Conclusion

1. Being a real community is difficult.

2. We live in a culture of independence.

The idea of heaven to many is a desert island where there are no people around.

We are not used to make ourselves dependent upon others.

3. We are still sinners.

Being joined to God's people is painful at times.

People will annoy us.

People will let us down.

But we need each other.

4. Real community deep down is what people crave because people still retain the image of God.

We need to show them what a real community looks like.

We need to tell them how to become part of it.