

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SONS

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“Like Father, Like Sons” describes the aim of Biblical community. God the Father is conforming us to the image of His Son, Jesus. Not merely you or merely me; He is conforming *us* into the likeness of Christ. Jesus Christ is bringing “*many sons to glory.*”

Biblical community is not simply an ideal, it is a functional reality.

We’re going to spend a few weeks discovering together what the Scriptures say about community—why it is valuable, and how to promote and sustain it.

Today, I’ll set the scene for our discovery—looking into the distant past, to learn of the design of this fabric—as well as the future, to glimpse the garment God is preparing.

A Functional Reality

Biblical community is not simply an ideal, it is a functional reality.

The concept of biblical community is rooted in the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who made us. He is three, yet one—the original (and essential) Community. He is “...[God] *the Father, from whom the whole family, in heaven and in earth, derives its name* (it’s character)” (Ephesians 3:14-15).

That’s why family values are so important in life (not only for the nuclear household, but for the Church, as a whole). Family values are simply the values that create and sustain community. Without them...anarchy.

By One Man

God created a man, Adam, then made a family. God said, “*It is not good for man to be alone*” (Genesis 2:18), yet he was not referring to a single male, for He already had it in mind to make them “male and female” (Genesis 1:27). The earth was not created for a single couple but for generations of family, for He said, “*Be fruitful and multiply*” (Genesis 1:28). His plan was to fill the earth with a great family, a community.

God called a man, Abraham, and though he was advanced in age, and he and his wife, Sarah, were beyond child-bearing years, it was God’s intention to make from them a great family that would bless the people of the earth.

By another man, Moses, God delivered His chosen people, Israel, from slavery to the nation of Egypt, in order to make of them the blessed family He had promised to Abraham.

It was then, as they obtained their freedom, on the awful night of the death of all Egypt’s firstborn, that God made them a nation, the people of God, and established them as such with rituals and regulations.

The word, “community,” first occurs in the instructions of that first Passover (Exodus 12:1-4a). It comes from a Hebrew noun, *edah*, which is translated 124 times as “congregation,” and another 25 times as similar words, like “company” or “assembly” or “people.”

Producing community—the community of the faithful—has always been God’s plan. It is His way of producing fullness of life.

And then God sent the Man, Jesus, to redeem and raise up a glorious, everlasting Family. Christ loved THE CHURCH and gave up His life for her (Ephesians 5:25).

It is true that salvation is an individual choice and a personal gift, but Christ saves us from isolation and insulation; He brings us into His Family. He “loved *us* and offered Himself as a sacrifice for *us*” (Ephesians 5:2). It’s not about me, or about you; it’s all about *us*.

By One Man, Many

God saves individuals, but “sets the [alone ones] in families” (Psalm 68:6).

The Book of Numbers is fascinating reading. Most Christians derive a great impact from reading it at bedtime!

Actually, it bores us mostly because we cannot see the forest for the trees—long lists of names of people with whom we are unfamiliar. Our effort to try and derive some value by focusing on those details may cause us to miss the big picture.

The Book of Numbers emphasizes the family connections of the Jewish people—the importance of those connections, the importance of community.

During their pilgrimage through the Sinai wilderness, Israel disassembled, transported, and erected the Tabernacle *by families*.

When the Jewish exiles returned from Babylon, they rebuilt the wall *by families*. These are instructive symbols of community, worthy of further meditation.

This was not by accident, but by design.

“For if the many died by the trespass of the one man (Adam), how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!” (Romans 5:15; NIV)

“So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

“And so a whole nation came from this one man (Abraham) who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.” (Hebrews 11:12)

This last picture is for us today, for in a similar way a whole nation (the Church, the people of God) came from one Man, Jesus, who was as good as dead—but He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father and, today, is the Head of the Church.

A Witness

Paul describes the Church as a Holy Temple, built of *living* stones, fitted together by the Holy Spirit over the course of time (1 Peter 2:5). The church is not brick or wood or plaster, not buildings or grounds; it is people who have received God's grace through Christ. It is a holy community. (By the way, "holy" here does not describe our demeanor or our behavior t all times and in all places—I know some may want to argue with this—it describes our calling, our purpose, our destiny.

You see, the very same Hebrew noun, *edah*, is elsewhere translated 26 times as "testimonies" or "witnesses"—always plural, and always referring to God's laws as divine testimonies (as in Psalm 119).

The divine purpose of community is bound up in its impact on outsiders—its witness or testimony.

Jesus said, "*By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*" (John 13:35). That is our purpose: that all may know. The community itself is a witness.

Faith's Perception

Consider the image of the Bride of Christ. I am not the bride of Christ, nor are you; *WE* are (the Church of all time). No *one* of us could ever be a suitable match for Jesus; only together—combining all our faith, all our love, all our gifts, in unity—could we begin to measure up to "*the stature of the fullness of Christ*" (Ephesians 4:13).

If you look at the visible church on the earth today (or any single day), she is undeniably weak and sickly and broken—scarcely a bride fit for the King of kings. But this is that "forest and trees" thing again. We're too inclined to focus on the painful shortcomings of today's (and yesterday's) church (and of fellow Christians) and lose sight (or miss it altogether) of the bigger picture of the Church, as only the Bible can present it—throughout time past and stretching into the glorious and eternal future.

But look again at what she has become today—swelled to one-third of the world's population in just 2,000 years!—and realize that she came from nothing!

Apostle Peter reflected on Hosea's prophecy: "*Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy*" (1 Peter 2:10).

And this is just the beginning! What she is still becoming is beyond comparison and without equal. As Peter concluded: "*You are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light*" (1 Peter 2:9). Note, again, the "witness" of the "congregation."

Trees may *become* a forest. Individuals may *become* a family, a nation. This is God's plan.

Next week we shall see how this community is built up, how it *becomes* what God has designed it to be.

Do you sit among the trees today, but are not yet part of the forest? Are you not yet deeply connected to Christ? You can be. Ask Him to take you in, to give you a place in which to serve. Set your sights on the community He is building.