

THE CHURCH: ITS PEOPLE AND ITS COMMUNITY – Living in Christ’s Church

The Christian Faith is not something lived out in isolation but in the context of the Church. Redeemer is both an organization of people and a living organism or community called the body of Christ. For this reason, we value the People or the Church- her men, women and children. Each of God’s people are uniquely blessed and called to exercise their gifts for the common good of the Church. Our service to others is not based on a guilt-motivation, but comes from the ‘overflow’ of knowing Christ and his ministry to us. We seek to help our membership identify and utilize their gifts so that all believers are ‘equipped’ to do the work of ministry.

Ephesians 5.1-2 – ‘Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Read Ephesians 4.25-5.2

Context & Meaning

There is no such thing as ‘island Christianity’ – the idea that individual Christians can remain insulated, isolated, and impersonal with respect to others who belong to the community saved by Jesus. The reason: Jesus did not give himself up for us in order to simply enhance our individual selves. Rather, he was crucified and raised in order to restore and bring into being a people, a community, who belong to one another because, through him, they belong to God (Titus 2.14).

The church is that community - a community that’s, above all else, to be characterized by love, love for God and love for one another. God created us in love. He redeemed us through an amazing display of love. And as a result, he now commands us to live lives of love, love that is Jesus-centered and cross-shaped. Paul says as much in Ephesians 5.2 when he writes, “Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” This community which has been established in love is to learn to reciprocate love in the way it has received God’s love in Christ. It’s to be a community that seeks to cultivate genuine love among its members – love that sees others not as objects to be used, but as persons for whom Christ died.

Each of us has a natural tendency, as a result of sin, to want to escape the truth that we were made for community, that we were made to love in the way we have been loved. We seek to escape this truth through various methods such as 1) **maintaining a sense of superiority** over others; 2) **living in insecurity** for fear of it being revealed that we really don’t have it altogether; 3) **gossiping** about how great we are and terrible others are; and 4) **constructing a ‘façade of righteousness’** in hopes of convincing others that we’re really not that bad. Each of these ‘methods’ discredit and destroy the community Christ came to save for each method gives the impression that we can forgo our need for participation in the very thing we were created for – imitating God in the way we love one another in community (5.2).

Now the only way to be on guard and deal with these various methods is through the God-given gifts of repentance and forgiveness. Being a community of love means being a people who are ready and willing to personally confess (‘own up

to') those sins that they've committed against another (hurtful words, lying, robbing another of their reputation, coveting another's abilities or possessions, using another simply for what they can provide you etc...). But it also means being a people who are ready and willing to personally forgive those who've sinned against you (4.32). Without repentance and confession the community will cease to experience and live out it's very reason for being – loving God and one another.

Apply Here at Redeemer we place a high value on living out the Christian Life in community, in loving and dwelling with others for whom Christ gave his life. We truly believe that God transforms us as we fellowship **together** in prayer, in listening and submitting to God's Word, in our service and in our play (hanging out together, community events like Redeemer in the Country and the Fall Festival etc...). It is for this reason that we place such a high priority on our community groups. As we are fond of saying, we hope our community groups are the first place our people will turn for applying the Gospel to their lives. They are the heart of building community at Redeemer. They aren't simply Bible studies or prayer groups; rather they're the place where God matures us and transforms us in our relationships with one another.

For Reflection and Discussion – *Living in Christ's Church (Ephesians 4.25-5.2)*

1. What are your initial thoughts concerning this passage and its description of living in Christ's community?
2. How does the culture around us define love? Where and in what ways is this seen?
3. How does this definition measure up to the love of God revealed in Jesus?
4. In light of the context, how would explain to another person that Christians are called to 'be imitators of God'? What does this have to do with living in Christ's community?
5. Name some things or attitudes that hinder true community? Which of these do you struggle with? How does this gospel enable us to overcome these hindrances?
6. Is it easy for you to be honest concerning your sin and brokenness with those you love? What about with regard to doing this in this group?

Prayer *Triune God, because I've been accepted through Jesus, may I be open-faced with my brothers and sisters in the Lord so that true Christ-centered community may be happening in Redeemer.*