

CHRISTLIKENESS & COMMUNITY

Ephesians 4:1-16

The concept of “community” reached a popular level when I was in graduate school in the late 1990s. It had become a way of casually defining people based on their assumed sociological needs. While the idea certainly possessed rigor, I often saw it uncritically used to reduce the impulse to be part of a group to no more than a longing for belonging. In reference to religion, for example, some would offhandedly comment that it offered like-minded people a community without seriously considering the ideas that formed the community and motivated individuals to want to belong to such a group.

Even though some might misuse it, community nevertheless occupies a vitally important role in Christianity. Rather than merely being the result of the desire for belonging, God designed the church as a community built on the foundation of Jesus. It requires participants to understand and believe in Jesus’ authoritative identity and submit themselves to the purposes he sets for the church. As we continue to explore our effort to be like Jesus, we will use Paul’s comments about the church in Ephesians to consider the relationship between Christlikeness and community.

“We are to grow up in every way into...Christ”¹

Paul, in Ephesians chapters one through three, describes God’s plan to “unite things in heaven and things on earth” through Jesus, a purpose He established “before the foundation of the world” (*Ephesians 1:1-10*). Most of Paul’s discussion centers on the people God chose to populate his plan (*Ephesians 1:4*). God formed those people into a new humanity in whose united presence He dwells and whose unity reveals His wisdom to the world (*Ephesians 2:1-3:13*).

In the last half of his letter, Paul directed his attention to the people who belong to God’s chosen people (*Ephesians 4-6*). Nestled in his opening comments to those people, Paul includes an important teaching:

God intends Christlikeness to be a community project.
(Ephesians 4:1-16)

Consider:

- Because He forms Christians into a new, united humanity (*Ephesians 2:11-22*), God expects them to be “eager to maintain the unity” He gives them (*Ephesians 4:1-3*).

¹ Ephesians 4:15. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- To help them protect their unity, Jesus gives “gifts” to the church in the form of leaders (*Ephesians 4:7-11*).
 - Jesus entrusts his leaders have the responsibility of “equip[ing] the saints for the work of ministry” (*Ephesians 4:12*).
 - The leaders’ equipping mission intends to help the church “attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (*Ephesians 4:13*).
 - The unity facilitated by Jesus’ leaders serves two purposes:
 - Their teaching and direction prevent the church from being “tossed to and fro” by false teachings and corrupting influences (*Ephesians 4:14*).
 - Freed from the world’s distractions, the church can focus on Jesus and “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (*Ephesians 4:15*).
- We should notice two things in Paul’s description of the church in Ephesians 4:1-16:

The Church’s mission is to become like Jesus.
(*Ephesians 4:15*)

The church accomplishes its mission only when every member commits to working towards that goal within the context of the church.
(*Ephesians 4:16*)

Applications

- Christlikeness is not a privatized project.
- Identity is not found in uniqueness but is submitting one’s identity and will to Jesus’ sovereignty.
- Christianity - as designed by God - is a community project that must be done in partnership with other Christians.
- Reject the allure of our culture’s emphasis on individuality - it belongs to the “deceitful schemes” about which Paul warned his readers in Ephesians 4:14.

May God help us grow closer together as a church family and may He help us all become more and more like His son.

