

Rebuild



Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins, They will raise up the former devastations, And they will repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. (Isaiah 61:4)

Paradigm Makes a

Difference (Part 3)

Community: Reality or Resemblance?

Many have very low expectations for the Church. For most, the Church is nothing more than an audience of "spiritual" spectators who come to hear something - but rarely to represent anything. Generally speaking, each is anonymous to one another, and most share little more than a pew.

The Church, however, was birthed by the Spirit to be something quite different. God poured out His Spirit on all flesh so that the People of God will manifest God's rule on the earth (Ephesians 1:21-23). The Church was to be a city set on a hill, enabled to disperse black satanic powers with its light (Matthew 16:18), a people who love so deeply and sincerely that the world will see God Himself through them (John 2:19; 17:20-26). So why the discrepancy? Why is the church today so much less than the Biblical vision?

There are many reasons, but chief among them all is our failure to understand that Covenant with Christ demands that we live in Covenant with our brothers and sisters in Christ. As a consequence, we have lost all sense of what it means to be a People, a Family, a society reflective of the Community that our God Himself shares as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To be the Church of God is to be representatives and re-presenters of this divine, loving Community.

Darkness has no chance against such a beacon.

Titanium Oxide is Not a Diamond

Christian Community - the Community of the Scriptures - radiates with God's power and presence. The first Christians were a People who were serious about loving one another the way the Lord commanded them to love. As a result, they were able to proclaim the Gospel with a hard, sharp edge, and were enabled to slice through cinder-block walls of darkness like a buzz saw through crepe paper.

If we are to be such a people today, we must rediscover the focus and intensity of the early Church, and be deliberate in paying the personal price required to love with a God-kind of love. Anything easier, more comfortable, or less costly will only produce an imitation that will break apart when pressed hard against the jagged edges of this impersonal culture.

As I think of this image, I am reminded of a diamond when compared to its technological counterfeit, titanium oxide. Titanium oxide is the product of a synthetic process that can create something that actually looks brighter and more brilliant than a real diamond. Better still, it is more than ten times cheaper! Its only weakness is that, unlike the true gem it imitates, it is not nearly as impenetrable. Take a shard of broken glass and rub it against the pretender's surface, and you will quickly see a scratch. But so what? It looks beautiful, and it is

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economical. Overall, it seems like a great deal.

But do you think a guy's girlfriend would be impressed with a marriage proposal that ended with a titanium oxide engagement ring? I don't think so.

"Look honey! It even dazzles brighter than a real diamond!"

"Keep it, and dazzle someone else... cheapskate!"

Genuine love is not something that just looks good. It is something that costs us deeply. Kind words and gifts may look like love, but without the sacrifice of commitment that represents real love, these attempts are really ploys to get by "on the cheap."

A great price gap exists between Covenant love and the economic imitation. God's love led Him to give no less than the best, and most - Himself. If we are to love like Him, we must be willing to pay the same price. Cheap, easy substitutes are unacceptable.

What Community Is and Is Not

When it comes to love and Community, people are often confused between the reality and the resemblance. In almost every case when I first begin to speak about Community, someone will come up to me and say, "I know exactly what you mean," and then go on to describe a titanium oxide replica.

A Community of people committed in loyalty to one another is the true diamond. Christians who share thoughts and deep emotions, yet refrain to commit themselves, are the diamond look-a-like.

I am quite sure the presence of genuine Christian Community exists in a number of fellowship groups and churches. But, unfortunately, in most cases when the temptations and trials set in, people scatter. What was once thought of as "loving Community" is shown to be nothing more than an imitation.

How is one to tell the difference between the real McCoy and a glittery imitation? Let's turn to the diamond analogy once again. A real diamond can both cut a grove in glass as well as remain virtually impenetrable to any sharp object. The fake fails on both counts. Similarly, genuine Christian Community can cut through a thicket of evil as well as stand strong against the point of satanic

attack in a way the counterfeit will always fail. Keeping this analogy in mind, here are three tests that will reveal whether the "community" you are a part of is the real one, or one that is "almost real."

- *Ask someone for money.* Most people would not dare turn to the person in the pew and say, "I have a medical bill I could not have planned for. I need a hundred dollars. Can you give it to me?" Does that seem too much to ask? How about something like, "I know you have a spare car; may I use it to take my kids to the dentist next Wednesday?"

If you have real community, these requests should neither shock the one making the request, nor the one hearing it. Certainly the Biblical teaching is clear: "Whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:17,18).

- *Turn down a job.* The Christian Community portrayed in the New Testament "devoted themselves to one another and to fellowship (Acts 2:42). Today, our "love" is more conditional - "I really do love you brother (that is, as long as it does not directly alter my life-style or career plans)."

Now here is the test. The next time you get an offer for a job that demands a move make this announcement to your community, "Since God's Covenant demands the priority be on God's people over career, I have declined a job that would compromise that commitment." Then quickly look at people's faces. At that moment, you'll know if you have the real thing or merely an imitation.

- *Watch what happens when there is persecution.* What does Christian Community look like? Look at the communities of believers that stand together despite threat to life, reputation, or seizure (such as the house churches of Red China).

The test? Ask the Lord to reveal to you what would happen to your community if it faced severe persecution. If you can see those in your community still standing though such fidelity has demanded her members to give up job, reputation, family ties, and in some cases, even life itself, you can be fairly certain - you have the real thing.

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