



Study 5

THE

COMMUNITY

JESUS COMMANDED

that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

John 17:21

Community sounds like *common* + *unity*. To be in community is to be united and have certain things in common. This is a great concept of the church. Being a follower of Jesus automatically grants us membership into His Church - which means that we become a member of a spiritual community.

1. Based on John 17:21-23, what imperatives (“*crucially important reasons*”) did Jesus place on His followers being in unity?



But unity among followers of Christ does not come naturally. In fact, our most natural tendencies are opposed to being submitted to a community.

2. Why do you think some followers of Jesus find it so difficult to live as a community with other believers?

3. Building the community of the local church seems to be a constant battle in the epistles of the New Testament. What appeal did Paul the Apostle make to the Corinthians in 1Corinthians 1:10 and in what particular ways did he want them to do this?

The Corinthian Church was riddled with disunity and sin. Yet Paul believed they could change. There was hope that despite their seemingly “hopeless” position, they could become a godly community of Christ-followers.

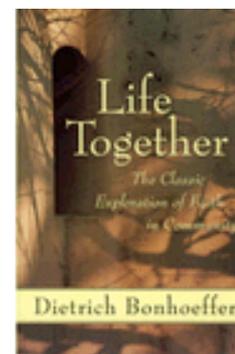
4. In fact, what remarkable statement did Paul make to them which may have given some Corinthians hope that they could change? (2Corinthians 7:16)

We might think that the idea of achieving a Biblical New Testament community of believers is not achievable. But consider Paul’s epistles to the Corinthians. The goal of these epistles was to produce the kind of community of believers that Christ commanded.



Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who withstood Adolf Hitler during the 1930s and 40s. He fled Germany just prior to World War 2 breaking out – but then returned to his beloved Germany to help comfort the believers there who were struggling to endure the trials of being a *German* Christian. Faced with a rampaging, maniacal, dictator who was daily executing

Christians and Jews, Bonhoeffer changed his theology to accommodate a doctrine of *justified assassination*. He then became party to a plot to assassinate Hitler. This plot failed. Bonhoeffer was jailed. In prison Bonhoeffer wrote books and pastored a prison fellowship. He came to deeply appreciate what real Christian fellowship was. His book on this subject, *Life Together*, is now considered to be one of the greatest classics on true Christian community. If I could sum up one of his main points in that book it would be this: *Christians do not fellowship directly with each other* (to Bonhoeffer this should be more appropriately called *socialising*, not “fellowship”). Instead, true Christian fellowship is where *believers relate to another believer through Christ*.



5. According to Ephesians 2:21-22 what is necessary for the believer to grow, and what will have to happen to demonstrate this growth in Christ? (Eph 4:16)
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Resolving Conflicts In The Church Community

The test of a community, whether it be a church, a family, or a marriage, is not the absence of conflicts but the way in which these conflicts are dealt with.

6. Is the absence of conflict in a church a sign of the church’s good health?
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7. What does Philippians 4:3 tell you about conflict within a church?
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8. In what way is Colossians 3:12-17 to be taken to indicate that conflict within a church is inevitable and that the Bible has a strategy to approach this?

9. Is the increasing number of conflicts in a church an indication of its ill-health?

Professional relationship counsellors tell us that there are 5 levels of communication intimacy- (i) **Level 1- Clichés** (“How are you?” “Good thanks.”); (ii) **Level 2 – Facts** (“How are you?” “I’ve got a sore back!”); (iii) **Level 3 - Opinions** (“What do you think about women drivers?” “I think women drivers are dangerous!”); (iv) **Level 4 – Feelings** (“How did you feel when that happened to you?” “I felt very let down and humiliated by that person!”); (v) **Level 5 - Needs** (“What do you need from me?” “Right now I need you to stop criticising me and my lack of faith, and to be patient with me as I probably fail to live up to your expectations of what a Christian should be- because I am really struggling at the moment with the loss of my legs.”)

10. At which communication level might conflict be more likely to arise?

11. Can all conflicts within a church be resolved?

12. How might Romans 12:16 alleviate conflict within a church?

In building a church community we must learn to navigate the following Cs: *Conflict*, *Care*, *Correcting*, and *Cooperation*. This is what we will examine in the New Testament commands to garner as much help as we can so that we can build the type of Christian Community the New Testament describes.

Amen.