

The Church: A Spiritual Community (Part 3)

A Subversive Community

Jerry Cisar — March 19, 2017

Text: Ephesians 3:7-13

Introduction

Paul declares that the goal of the Gospel preached and made known is that the church walks out life together under a value system marked by the cross, so much so that we become a subversive agency displaying the power and wisdom of our God and King before the rulers and authorities of the spiritual forces of darkness that rule the fallen world.

Are we that new community leading a radically new kind of life?

The greatest challenge of discipleship is not gaining adherents who profess the name of Christ, but adherence to the teaching of Christ.

F. The ultimate call to *shove weakness in the face of power* and say, “I told you so!” by calling us to stand strong in the weakest of ways...by the world's criterion. (6:10-18)

i. The sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God)

ii. Praying at all times

O. Hallesby: “*Be not anxious because of your helplessness....Helplessness is the real secret and the impelling power of prayer.*” (p. 23)

Karl Barth: “*To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.*”

G. Paul says these things elsewhere. (Romans 12:17-21)

LIVE THE STORY

The Gospel is intended to be learned and lived in community. The following questions are designed for use in our Community Groups as an aid to growth in the Gospel and Community.

- Who are “*the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms*” Paul is speaking about in Ephesians 3:10? (See 6:12.)
- How is the manifold wisdom of God going to be made known to them? How might 1 Corinthians 2:8 help us understand this?
- How is living “*worthy of our calling*” or “*worthy of the Gospel*” subversive to the powers of this dark world?
- Explain: *The greatest challenge of discipleship is not gaining adherents who profess the name of Christ, but adherence to the teaching of Christ.*
- In Ephesians 4—6, what are some of the ways Paul calls the church to walk out the wisdom of the cross (folly to the world)? Which of these ways speaks most to you about how you can grow in Christ?

I. A New Community

A. What has Paul just said about *the church*? (3:6)

i. The Mystery of Christ: Israel has been redefined.

ii. Both Gentile and Jew become members of one body through Jesus Christ.

➤ 2:11-13

➤ 2:19-21

B. If we think the greatest thing that happens is that Gentiles are allowed in, we may miss the greater point!

II. A Subversive Community

A. To whom will this manifold wisdom be displayed?

K. Snodgrass: *"Ephesians 3:10 assigns a lofty and cosmic role to the church. It is the channel by which God's wisdom is demonstrated 'to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.' As before, 'heavenly realms' points not so much to a place as to a spiritual reality, the reality beyond what we see."*

- i. Ephesians 6:12
- ii. Ephesians 1:20-21

B. The Cross as a Display of Wisdom

- i. 1 Corinthians 2:8
- ii. Philippians 1:27-29
- iii. The cross, whether Christ's or the one we are called to carry behind Him, is God's way of displaying His glorious Wisdom!

C. Subversive

- i. The church is not called to be subversive in the sense of rebellion against law. We are to be subversive in the sense that we are rebelling against the idea that power is to the powerful, that power is to the strong, that power is in the hands of those who rule and oppress.
- ii. When the church lives in this Gospel subversiveness, it threatens the spiritual forces of darkness by displaying how much wiser God is than them!

III. A Transformed Community

A. Paul digressed from what he began in 3:1 and finishes in 3:14-21.

3:18 *...may have the ability to make your own (with all the saints) what is the breadth and length and height and depth of¹⁹ – and so to learn – the love of Christ, that love which surpasses understanding, in order that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

B. Live up to this calling with all humility! (4:1-2)

E. Peterson: *"Americans are good at forming clubs and gathering crowds. But clubs and crowds, even when—especially when—they are religious clubs and crowds, are not communities. The formation of community is the intricate, patient, painful work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot buy or make community; we can only offer ourselves to become community."*

C. We are to live as if we belong to one another. (4:25)

- i. We can no longer live in falsehood with each other but are to speak truthfully to our neighbor. (ref. James 5:16)
- ii. Because we are members of one another, the needs of others are to replace our selfish-desires. (4:28)
 - a) This changes the very purpose of our labors.
 - b) This subversiveness is the audacity to believe that God knows what we need and will take care of that as we seek first His kingdom justice and mercy.

D. Reconciliation becomes central to who we are. (4:31-5:2)

Mary White: *"Forgiveness is never easy. It is difficult even with mild offenses.... Forgiveness... requires attitudes and behavior in direct opposition to our human inclinations."*

E. Paul turns power structures on their head speaking first to wives, children, and slaves. (Ephesians 5:21 – 6:9)