A CHURCH IN GOD'S IMAGE?

Posted on September 23, 2019 by Eddie

Imitating God in our church life certainly involves being good, generous and truthful, but it means more than this; much more.
Category: Observations

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus says these words to his followers (Mat 5:48):

> *But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

There are plenty of other passages which urge Christians to be mature, Christlike and so on; the clear picture is that the Church should grow to be more like God. In practice, this is generally unpacked in terms of "morality". Christians are to be honest, generous, faithful to their spouses of impeachable character and so on. Now, I'm not knocking this. These are all good things that Christians should live up to, and more besides. However, I think that there is a whole area of this "being like God" issue that we tend to ignore.

I would argue that the most fundamental thing that the Bible teaches us about God is that he is triune; one God in three persons. No doubt some people might want to argue that it is more important to recognise that God is love. However, the statement God is love only finds full expression in the eternal, loving relationship of the Trinity that existed before creation. If God is not triune, he could not become love until he created an object for his love - think about it.

So, God is triune, what does that mean for the church? Well, clearly we cannot imitate being Trinity on an individual level. Try as I might, I cannot become three persons in one. However, and this is key almost all commands to the church are given to the ensemble, not to individuals. As a body, we can model the unity and diversity of the Trinity. Jesus prayer in John 17 can find an outworking in the lives of our church fellowships.

> *â€œI am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are oneâ€”as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.*

Jesus prays that we will be one, just asÂ he and the Father are one and then makes the astounding statement that he will be "in us so that the world will believe you sent me". Our unity involves unity with the Father and the Son, but it also proves Jesus message. There are a couple of things here that I'd like to note:

- The Trinity has a welcoming relationship. There is space for us, in some way, to be grafted into the Father and Son. We will never be divine, but in some way, we will be one with them. This is a challenge for our church fellowships, how open are we?
- Secondly, this unity thing is important and we ignore it at our peril. Yes, it is important to recognise that there are false teachers, but we shouldn't be so busy sniffing out heresy that we have no time to be in fellowship with others who differ from us in small ways. There are more important things at stake here than our views on the gifts of the Spirit, the five points of

Calvinism or what-have-you.

There is another little phrase from John 17 that I'd like to highlight: the world will believe **you sent me**. The Father sent the Son into the world and the Father and Son sent the Spirit. The triune God did not sit around in eternity in self-sufficient glory (though he could have). Our God is a sending God and first of all, the Son and the Spirit are sent out into the world and in turn, the Son sends the church, equipped by the Spirit (John 20:21, 22). As we imitate God, our church fellowships are to be sending bodies. This doesn't just involve sending people around the world to be full-time missionaries. Week by week, we send people out into schools, offices, homes and factories to be witnesses to Jesus. Some of these environments are hostile, some less so, but all of us - without exception - are sent out every week. A key part of our gathering together is to equip us to be sent and this needs to be a conscious part of church life. When Jesus gathered together his disciples he did so in order to equip them for the mission that he would give to them and we need to be equipping people in the same way. We cannot assume that people know how to be missionaries in their work situation without training and support.

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