

Independence vs Interdependence

Living in Biblical Community

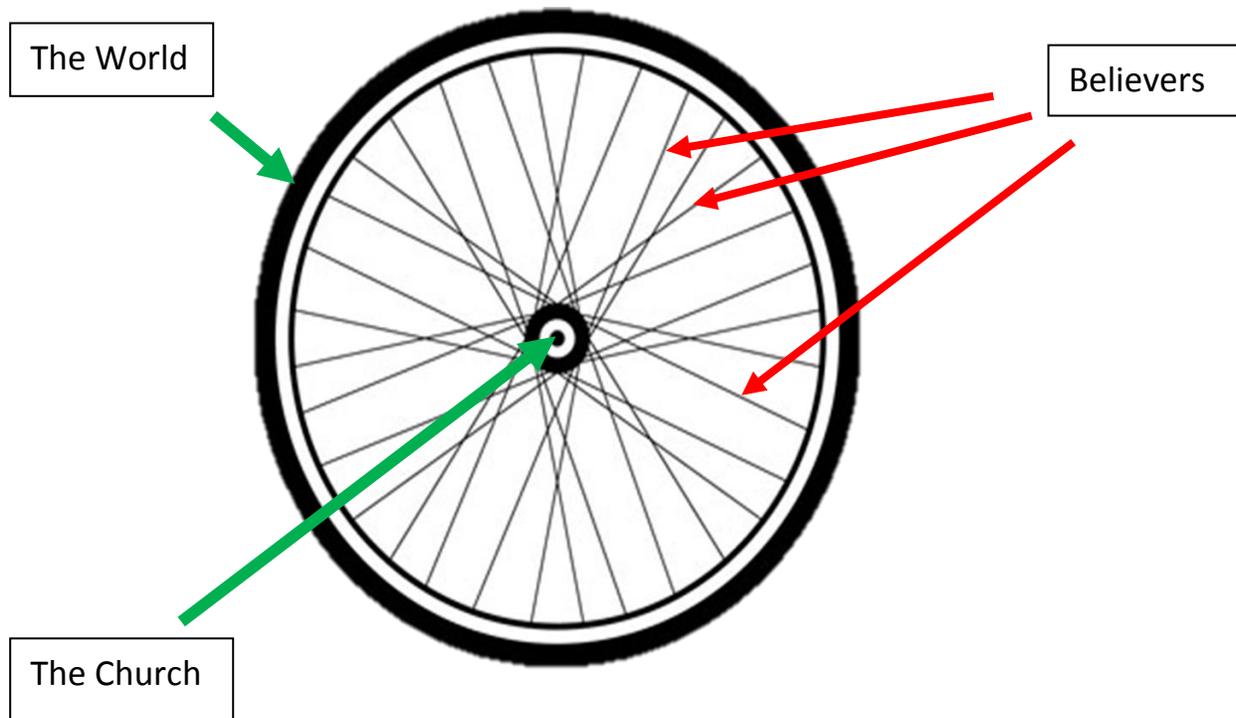
When you hear the words “Biblical Community” what comes to mind?

The Acts 4:32 Believers?

“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.”

A Church Body?

A Bicycle Wheel?



Believe it or Not

Our concept of Biblical Community is heavily weighted by our cultural view of community.

Example:

Two young women, fellow students at a Christian University, found themselves comparing the marriage strategies of their respective cultures.

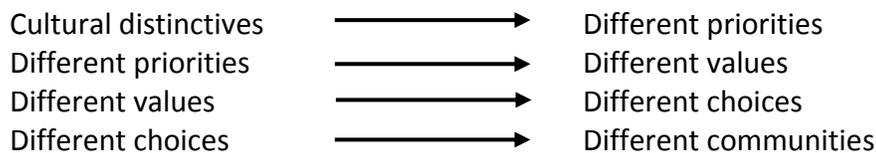
One was American, the other was a student from Iran. The discussion was hardly academic since the Iranian student was looking ahead to an upcoming summer wedding when she would marry a man whom her parents had picked out for her many years before.

The young Iranian bride barely knows her future husband.

The American girl is astounded and asks, "How can you let your parents marry you to a man you do not even know?" She then proceeded to extol Western marriage strategies and the freedom she has to choose her own spouse.

The young Iranian woman was equally amazed and asked, "How can you act independently of your parents and contract a marriage which may not contribute to the long-term well-being of your extended family?"

Do you see the influence of culture?



In Choosing a Spouse

- Western Culture says:
 - Highest value is on personal fulfillment and happiness.
 - Marriage is the place, first and foremost, to meet the relational needs of the individuals involved.
 - Only with freedom of choice can this be obtained.
 - Individualism is king.
- **Iranian and traditional Cultures:**
 - Highest value is on the honor and health of the community (family, clan, or village).
 - Marriage is where the relational needs of groups are met along with the need of the individual.
 - Only with group consensus can this be obtained.
 - Group is king.

So who will be happier?

(A western culture question)

The one who chooses their own spouse?

Or the one whose family chooses the spouse?

Statistics show it will be close to the same

Which will build stronger community

(A traditional culture question)

The one who chooses their own spouse?

Or the one whose family chooses the spouse?

No question about it, the latter!

So back to Independence vs Interdependence

The question is:

What is the Biblical model for believers, independence or interdependence?
Does it really matter?

Let's look at it.

We know the Old Testament had the model of the Children of Israel and of the tribes of the sons of Jacob. But we need to look at the New Testament to see God's plan for the community of believers today.

The best place to start is with the nascent church in the book of Acts.

Let's look at Characteristics of the Community of Believers in Acts 4:32

1. One Heart

What does this mean?
(One practice)

2. One Soul

How is this different from 1?
(One doctrine)

3. No Selfishness

Did any have personal possessions?

4. All things in Common

What did they have in common? Spouses?
Children?

SO WAS THIS COMMUNISM?

NOT ONE BIT!!

In Communism:

- State owns everything
- State controls the people
- Party members get a bigger piece of the pie
- Everyone must work according to ability
- Everyone gets according to government's determination of need
- A far cry from the community of believers

Look what else characterized the Community of Believers in Acts 4:34-35?

5. No Lack

Of basics or everything?

6. Sold land and houses

So where did they live?

7. Gave away proceeds

Who cared for the money?

8. Distribution by need

Who determined need?

And in Acts 2:46-47?

9. With one accord

No issues with one another!

10. From house to house

Primary residences were kept!

11. With Gladness

It was not burdensome but joyful!

12. With simplicity

They didn't make things complicated!

What drove the believers in Acts to live in community?

1. Changed Hearts

Acts 2:44 “Now all who believed...”

They believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and were radically changed. They died to themselves and were joined to the body of Christ as a community of believers.

2. Continued Steadfastly

Acts 2:42 “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and in prayers...”

They firmly desired to stay committed to the Lord and each other and maintained worship and fellowship.

3. Hung Together

Acts 2:44 “...Were together...”

They had new loyalties and new priorities toward each other. They wanted to live out the “family of Christ” on earth and exemplify what it was to leave the world and cleave to the body of Christ.

Question: How is this like marriage?

4. Shared Everything

Acts 2:44-45 “They had all things in common...and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.”

They had a radical change of attitude toward possessions and how to use them, knowing that no longer were they owners, but stewards!

QUESTION: How far should this go?

People have a variety of notions of Christian community. Some people picture Christian community as 20 or 30 people living together in a large house or on a farm. Other people consider Christian community to be a group of Christians who pool their finances, putting their checkbooks and bank accounts into a common pot. Others think of community as a monastic community or religious order.

But to be a Christian community, a group of people do not have to live in one building or handle all their money in a centralized way. These are possible forms of Christian community. They may be good for some Christians and inappropriate for others. Fundamentally, Christian community means a way Christians relate to one another. The Scriptures regard a community relationship of love, commitment, and interdependence among Christians as normative, not optional.
Steve Clark – Mere Christian Community

Interdependence

Normative, not optional

What scriptures indicate that Acts 2 & 4 are not one-off illustrations of a group of new believers, but rather are **NORMATIVE FOR ALL BELIEVERS**?

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
 - Believers are the Body of Christ
 - All members of one body v.12
 - Each members has a unique function to contribute vss 14-24
 - God has set the members v. 18 And composed the body v. 24
 - No believer can say “I have no need of you!” v. 21
 - There is to be NO schism in the body, but rather care for one another v. 25
- 1 Corinthians 10:24
 - Believers are NOT to seek their own, but the well-being of others in the family
- Galatians 6:10
 - Have a higher standard of good works toward fellow believers
- 1 Corinthians 6:19
 - You are not your own. You are not an island or a self-pollinator!
 - Believers are told to Confess their sins one to another and pray for one another
- Ephesians 5:19-21
 - We are to encourage one another with spiritual things v. 19
 - We are to maintain a thankful spirit in the body v.20
 - We are to submit to one another v.21
- Roman 12:4-16
 - We are interwoven (members of one another) v.5
 - We each have different gifts we are to use vss.6-8
 - We are to love each other without hypocrisy v. 9
 - We are to love each other with a familial love (brotherly) v.10
 - We are to give preferential honor to each other v. 10
 - Be diligent, generous, and hospitable toward the saints vss 11,13
 - Don’t have double standards in your treatment of believers v. 16

- Ephesians 4:31-32
 - Don't be bitter toward one another. Resolve your differences.
 - Be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving each other just like Christ
- Colossian 3:9
 - Don't ever lie to each other. Be transparent!
- James 5:16
 - We are to actively confess our faults on to another (in the close proximity of a family this is easier and more natural)
 - We are to pray for one another (NB. this impact our health!)
- 1 Peter 4:9-10
 - We are to be hospitable toward each other, sharing what we have as if each believer were a family member (allowing each one to rummage through my refrigerator looking for something to eat)
 - We are not to act grudgingly toward each other.
 - We are to use our skills and gifts to minister to each other.
- 1 Corinthians 4:6
 - Don't get puffed up against each other (inflated personalities and attitudes)
- 1 Corinthians 6:1-5
 - Don't ever sue one another, but settle differences in the family! Do the courts know God's standards for the church?

This is by no means comprehensive, but IS REPRESENTATIVE.

It gives us the clear truth of God's mandate for our INTERDEPENDENCE

But our tendency as believers is to make wrong-headed life-impacting decisions in isolation from the broad church family. Our Western culture encourages this propensity to abandon, rather than work through, the awkward and painful relationships we so often find ourselves in. This difficulty in staying connected and growing together in community with one another has been labeled by social scientists as "radical individualism."

Radical Individualism has infected the church!

See the attitudes of individualism?

It's my problem	————→	It's none of your business
I answer to God	————→	Not to people or elders
I don't need you	————→	I can care for myself
I'll go somewhere else	——→	It's a free country

Look in your own heart and see how this radical individualism has infected you!

Phillipians 2:3

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition...

--- “To self, for self, by self” ---

Don't be deceived!

If you are living an independent Christian life you are not only selfish, but you have circumcised yourself from the body of Christ

An important implication for the church and for all of us as individuals is that we must begin to give up our hard-won independence and become interdependent; we must become people who depend on each other. This does not mean becoming weak or less capable of doing things. We become interdependent in order to become stronger — to do even greater things than Jesus did.

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Jesus redeemed us to be His in **Interdependence**

To be fully attached to Him!

To be fully functioning for Him!

To be cooperating harmoniously with every part of his body!

Full of life and vigor and beauty

A healthy body that is functioning properly in all its faculties...

So it may be presented as the amazing, unblemished, spotless...

Bride of Christ

Where are you today?

Attached or Detached?

Independent or Interdependent ?

May God help us to repent of our selfish individualism
To become tightly knitted together in interdependence
So that the world will see Christ through our love and oneness!

The Beginning...