



Our Scattered Lives

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More than 800 million of the world's seven billion people are connected via Facebook. When you also consider mobile phones, e-mail, Skype, and other social media, the world is exponentially more connected than it was even a generation ago. And yet our lives are more fragmented and scattered than ever. People hang out together, but doing different things in different worlds on their handheld devices. Even children don't play together anymore. After school they retreat into their separate electronic worlds of gaming, sexual prurience, and social media networks. Even our thought lives are scattered. Between emails, incoming texts, and Facebook alerts, a train of thought has become an antique.

This follows the scattering brought on by the automobile and the isolation that air conditioning gave us. Who sits out on the front porch anymore or talks over the back fence? We drive to far-flung superstores where we shop with strangers if we don't shop online. Families scatter upon graduation from college. My father-in-law's four girls now live in Massachusetts, New York, Wyoming, and California. And we are scattered even in death. How is a family plot possible under these conditions? My grandparents were cremated and their ashes thrown to the wind—the ultimate scattering.

But God created us to live in community with one another, to occupy and cultivate a place, face-to-face in real bonds of love. God Himself, whose image we bear, is a loving community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in perfect ontological unity. In this way, "God is love" (1 John 4:16), and we can be fully human only in a shared life of love. He redeems us not just to be separately saved individuals, but an intimately connected body with Christ as the head (1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 1:22-23).

Sin shatters those relationships—man and God, man and neighbor—which are essential to being human and to human happiness. That shattering brought the curse of scattering. After his sin, Cain became "a wanderer on the earth" (Genesis 4:14). God "scattered" the proud builders of Babel "over all the face of the earth" (Genesis 11:9). In A.D. 70, in the second generation after the cross, God scattered ethnic Israel, dispersing them around the globe. But at the same time He commenced gathering His people, both Jew and Gentile, into the church of his beloved Son (Mark 13:27).

Whatever isolates us is destroying us, not only personally but also as a people. The answer to the modern scattered life is Christ's church, God's new society. For example, the more we depend on government services, the less we have to do with each other. But the church is all about having to do with each other—bearing one another's burdens: the poor, the sick, the aged, the young, the stressed marriage.

But people confine "church" to Sunday, even Sunday morning, perhaps even between the second hymn and the benediction ... if there's nothing better to do that day. We love Jesus, but we don't love the people Jesus loves: His church. And we move from church to church the way we change our Internet service providers—except Verizon has you tied up in a two-year contract. If we are serious about preserving a good, free, and human life in this century, we must start by taking seriously the blessing of life in Christ's covenant community, what it means to be a Christian in the body and church of Christ. ~

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