

## | Church as Family |

*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him*

*Romans 8:14-17*

As followers of Jesus, we are adopted into a new family as sons and daughters of God. This fact revolutionizes the way we view God and the way we relate to one another.

### **Children of the King**

Because of Christ's death and resurrection, we are completely justified in a legal sense. But we are also *reconciled*. Jesus pays the penalty for sin *and* gives us his standing with the Father. We are adopted as sons. The relationship that was broken in Genesis 3 gets to be restored, and God's original design to fill the earth with a family that worships Him can be fulfilled. See how this changes our view of God? God's grace would be abundant if we only got to call on him as King, but in Christ, we also get to call on him as Dad. That means we can approach His throne with all our problems and that he delights in being our counselor and defender. He is not an impartial judge but a loving Father. The reconciliation we experience through Christ is so much richer than we can ever imagine on this side of eternity. The chasm that exists between sinful man and righteous God is more vast than we can comprehend. Jesus bridges the gap and makes us not only justified before God but also reconciled to God.

### **Brothers and Sisters in Christ**

The overflow of our reconciled relationship with God is that Christ makes us into a family with other believers. Not a genetic family or something weird where we all have to live together on a commune, but an eternal family that is united in spirit and spreads out across time and space to reflect the glory of God. God makes us into a family of believers conformed to the image of the Son so that Jesus may be the firstborn among many brothers. This is to bring glory and honor and praise to the one who is deserving. Moreover, existing in community is the only way we can truly reflect the image of a personal, relational, triune God. It is God's grace on us that we get to be a part of that family. We get to be fellow heirs with Christ, being conformed into his image and therefore sharing in the glory that he has had for all eternity.

### **Love One Another**

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

*1 Peter 2:9-10*

In Christ, we have been made into a people. We have a communal identity. Much of the New Testament was written to teach us how to follow Jesus in this new family. The context is plural. Much of the Bible wasn't written to "you" but "y'all." Only in this context can we live out all the "one anothers" of the New Testament. More times than any other "one another" in the New Testament comes the phrase "love one another" or some variation. Really, everything else about the way we relate to fellow believers flows out of this command. John Piper says this on why Christians must love one another:

*God takes very seriously the truth that all his children are brothers and sisters...And God says, there is a way that my children should feel about each other. Not just act toward each other, but feel about each other. They are to be tenderly affectionate toward each other. Why? Because this testifies to the reality of the family of God. To feel hard toward each other, to feel indifferent or narrow, not to mention bitter and resentful, toward each other, contradicts who God is and who we are. God is our father and we are his children and we are brothers and sisters in one family with the deepest common values in the universe. [1](#)*

### **Be Around**

All this is part of the reason Community Groups are so important. Some time in the last 120 years or so, we invented this idea that we can follow Jesus while simultaneously isolating ourselves from others, but solo Christianity is nowhere to be found in the Bible. We want to replace this form of westernized Christianity by returning to how the Bible describes the gospel being lived out - in the context of community. Clearly, we cannot be a part of God's family without being around God's family. We need to spend time with our brothers and sisters in order to love them. Far away love is easy and empty. Love needs company to be fully expressed. You need other people to apply the gospel. You need people to get under your skin to practice love and forbearance. If no one ever hurts you, you never get to apply the gospel of reconciliation. If no one ever needs you, you do not get to sacrifice for them the way Christ sacrificed for you. In order to practice the "one anothers" we have to consistently live our lives alongside one another.

### **Be Invested**

The primary picture given in the Scriptures for how we are to relate to one another is family: sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. So it follows that people who are brought into God's family through the blood of Christ should relate to one another like an earthly family. We are to be intentionally invested in one another's lives and committed to one another as a new family in Christ. Families are around each other a lot. They share meals, car rides, chores, errands, vacations - the list goes on and on. And, because families are around each other a lot, they fight. Good families stick it out and make up. God's family is a good family. We don't hold grudges or allow bitterness to creep in. When there is sin or relational conflict, we address it head on because we know we are committed to one another. We don't have to worry about someone disappearing because we made them uncomfortable. We're committed to each other,

whether it's good or bad, because we have been given to one another as a new eternal family.

### **Be Unique**

Our groups are not affinity-based. We do not ever intend to have singles groups or young married groups or groups for kids. You don't get to choose your family. And what more spectacular display of the gospel is there than 12 people with absolutely nothing in common becoming as close as siblings because of the one thing they share - Jesus. When we talk about loving each other as family and being close like siblings, we mean like families in those gushy Hallmark movies that go on holiday together and learn the true meaning of Thanksgiving or Hanukkah or Flag Day. We know that a lot of people have had lousy earthly families, and even great ones do not hold a candle to God's design, but in Christ we all get to have a new, better family. Jesus redeems our picture of the family as we are reconciled to one another through his blood. God's family has members from every nation, tribe, people, and language, and we want our groups to reflect that.

### **Be Mundane and Spectacular**

It's in the midst of normal, everyday life that God does some of his best work in and through his people. Group members care for each other, share life, love like family, confess sin to one another, point each other to Jesus, invite others in, welcome strangers, and join together on mission. Being a part of a group means giving up your time and resources for the sake of others. It means loving each other like Christ loves us; pouring yourself out for those who can never pay you back. When another member of your group is needy, you're there for them. When one person just can't seem to get their life together, you help over and over again. Because of the gospel, you do it joyfully, not with complaints or judgment. You can serve and sacrifice because Jesus has already served and sacrificed for you. The gospel gets to be at work in us in miraculous ways through the normal, everyday stuff of life.

### **Implications**

As a family, we...

- ...do life together
- ...know important things before official group meeting time
- ...intentionally set aside time and organically/spontaneously hang out
- ...call each other when life hits the fan
- ...pay bills for each other
- ...buy meals for each other
- ...when there is sin and conflict - talk to each other rather than about each other
- ...practice confession, repentance, and vulnerability
- ...celebrate highs and mourn lows together
- ...make major life decisions in the context of community
- ...promote an atmosphere of comfort and safety
- ...chase our brothers down when we see them wandering away from Jesus
- ...are counter-cultural but attractive light in darkness