

God lives in His Family

"He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." Eph 1:5

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household." Eph 2:19

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:34-35

“True Christians are called a "family" — because they have all *one Father*. They are all *children of God by faith* in Christ Jesus. They are all born of one Spirit. They are all sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. They have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, 'Abba Father!' (Galatians 3:26; John 3:8; 2 Corinthians 4:18; Romans 8:15.) J.C. Ryle 1878

Ephesians 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. The Greek actually reads:

Be therefore imitators of God as children loved
Ginesthe our mimētai tou Theou hōs tekna agapēta

“*As I have loved you*” As children begotten by the God of love. Born to love by the Father of love.

‘The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all’ 2 Cor 13:14

1 Family is about God in each other

‘The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.’

Rom 8:16

“For to say that we are God's children, to call upon Him, to pretend the name of Christians, and yet to hold God in contempt, and to make as though we would despise Him, by showing that we have withdrawn far from Him, is it not contrary to nature?

therefore let no man deceive himself, but let us consider that we are not only hypocritical, but also impudent, if we have no conformity with God, and yet all along wish to be held and reputed to be of the number of his children. It is true that to be conformed to God, to say that we resemble Him as one man resembles another, is impossible. But yet we must not lose heart for all that. And indeed we must call to mind how the Scripture says that if we tend towards God, although we may be far from the mark we aim at, yet He accepts that willingness of ours, when we keep our way and endeavour continually to keep on going forward. Although we are slow and weak, and although we stumble, yet God imputes none of those faults to us, when we are desirous of fashioning ourselves like Him.”

John Calvin. Sermons on Ephesians

‘What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.’
1 John 1:3

Our fellowship with the Father and the Son of love should be replicated in our loving fellowship with one another. The vertical aspect of fellowship should determine the horizontal commitment to one another. Doesn't it follow that the quality of the horizontal life tells us about the quality of the vertical life we have with God?

This is how scripture defines a Christian family.

"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus have been baptised into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,
Rom 6:3-5

"For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might

no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. 2 Cor 5:14-15

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

Gal 2:20

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

1 Cor 6:19-20

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.”

1 Cor 12:4-7,11-14

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.”

1 John 3:13-14

“Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbour... Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

1 Cor 10:24, 31

We are made to Glorify God in all we do. When we don't love and honour the brethren in whom He dwells by the Spirit, we don't glorify God.

Since we are made to reveal the love of the glory of God in all He is and does, shouldn't we be willing to acknowledge those who live for Christ to be the dwelling place of God? Why is this not so clear to the world? It would seem that we don't know very much about having intimate loving

communion with God if we don't know much about having intimate loving communion with one another according to the holiness of the Father and the Son.

“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognise no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

2 Cor 5:14-17

“We recognise no one according to the flesh.” True fellowship means we stop relating to one another according to the flesh. When was the last time we recognised a fellow Christian as the dwelling place of God? But it would seem that we still recognise one another according to the flesh. True fellowship in holiness and truth has escaped the majority. According to 2 Cor 5, if we still live for ourselves, we are not a new creation in Christ, and we still recognise others according to the flesh.

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

Rom 8:9

If the horizontal is still fleshly, we may still be living according to the flesh with the vertical as with God.

2 Family is where God calls us to know Him intimately

“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

John 17:3

First, we must know God personally in our inner being, and if so, we will know His children and love them as He loves us.

To know God is to love God. To claim to be a Christian without an affectual love acting on the feelings and emotions that is binding us to a local Church, is inconsistent with what God teaches us about the unity of God's communing family.

True faith lives in the faith giver, and is dependent on His life to love and live. *"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."* John 15:4-5

3 The family of God is where He cherishes His children

God cherished us enough to die for us.

If we are in Christ, we have a holy relationship with God and we are knitted together in love, and therefore God is ministered to each one for the benefit of loving each other for the common good.

"The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Rom 5:5

so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.' 1 Cor 12:25

'But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.' 1 Cor 13:13

Being loved by God means we are immensely cherished by God just as His Son is cherished. Cherishing is first of all love, but we can love without cherishing. This cherishing love is the love that is willing to die for the beloved. Koinonia is fellowship in the knowledge of God's love. Knowledge without a sensitive heart to obey God is learning without doing. Knowing and loving is true family fellowship. Loving knowledge impacts our inner being with devoted service to Christ and His Church. True faith is open to His incomprehensible love.

What love we freely receive from God we freely give to His children. We are to be a living loving sacrifice. Giving the things God has given us in service to others is how we actually find meaning in family life.

4 The Christian family is a corporate fellowship with God

We are not called to live as if we are independent and isolated from the only body that gives life to the world. We are called to know the fullness of joy in intimacy with God and one another because we are hidden together in God with Christ. Col 3:3

Fellowship is *koinonia* and requires real love, agape love. What does Agape love really mean in the Bible? When the word “agape” is used, it refers to a pure, sacrificial love that intentionally desires another’s highest good. *“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”* John 15:13

John Piper explains: “In the New Testament, “*koinonía*” signifies having a share in something, or sharing with someone in something, or you could say participation in something or with someone.”

Family is fellowship is communion, and communion is a function of the informed heart that loves God. Communion requires true knowledge of Christ to give us the right connection of the heart with each other. *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.”* The filling of the head with knowledge without a loving connection with the heart makes the gaining of doctrine an end in itself.

Our loving connection with God is to be replicated in our love for man made in His image and likeness; especially with those of His family He has given to serve Christ who gave Himself in love for us. This is the work of God in His family, that we are imitators of God.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” 2 Cor 13:14

5 Family life is a Spirit led life

This faith life in Christ cannot be for a singular individual, but is only possible through a committed spiritual congregation working together cooperatively. *The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.* Rom 8:16

"God's truth is not fragmented and divided against itself, and when His people are fragmented and divided it simply means they are to that degree apart from His truth, apart from the faith of right knowledge and understanding. Only a biblically equipped, faithfully serving, and spiritually maturing church can attain to the unity the faith. Any other unity will be on a purely

human level and not only will be apart from but in constant conflict with the unity of the faith. There can never be unity in the church apart from doctrinal integrity." John MacArthur

True life comes from God by the Holy Spirit and produces the qualities of His nature in the family who are born again by the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit list in Galatians is only a general indication that those in Christ will have available the life qualities of their God. *'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.'*
Gal 5:22-23

The full fruit of the Spirit is seen in the life of Christ who is our life. The whole outcome of salvation is that we are made holy as family and begin to live in the presence of God together. We are to understand that the church is the presence of Christ that we share as believers in Christ. So faith is living in the promised presence of God as His loved family.

Instead of isolating ourselves we should be eagerly seeking the gifts the Spirit has provided in each member, according to His determination, both for our benefit, and even more so, that we can all be built up by one another in Christ. This is the family life of faith where we are gifted for each other.

The only way God's children can reflect God's family life of love is by daily walking according to the new life we have in God by the powerful working of His Spirit. There is no doubt that whoever has died with Christ to sinful flesh now lives together with Christ in common communion with God and one another.

'Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.'
Rom 6:4-5

For our faith to be effective in living and loving with Christ, the indwelling Lord needs to be more real to us than all the pleasures and comforts of the world. He needs to be more real to us than all the trials

and disagreeable discomforts of the world. We need to abide together in Christ as family and Christ must live in us. *‘Christ in you, the hope of glory.’* Col 1: 27

We are in Christ’s family together, this means we have one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one life, one truth, one hope, one love, one purpose, and one body. So we are one bride for Christ, one family in His love. This truth is what draws us together in Christ, and we cannot perceive it to be true without the Spirit.

so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.’ Rom 8:4

When we experience unrealised oneness in His family it is because all of us have not yet fully accepted our one Life in Christ Jesus that joins us to His family. When we call God our Father we are acknowledging we are one family in Christ.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.’ Rom 8:11

We who are in Christ are still fallible creatures in a fallen world. We tend to measure others by ourselves. And our reactions to what we don’t understand are often consistent with the nature of our personal brokenness from our past life in the flesh.

True family fellowship means God’s love has no limits on transparency and erects no barriers to intimacy. Personal transparency is the door frame to closeness with God and family, and this intimacy is the door to heaven. Transparency enables intimacy and fellowship with the Father and the Son by the Spirit who invites the people of God to be intimate with God.

6 Family is life together in divine communion

Our word for fellowship is also translated communion, and it comes from the Greek, *‘koinonia’* which is *‘one another’* love in Christ. It should not be surprising that the most repeated command we have from God is to love one another, and this is our holy communion together.

God calls us into family in order for us to commune with Him and us with each other. To commune God's way means to focus on God with deep intimate sincerity while sharing our heart and mind with God and with each other who share in our family with God.

The family of God is so closely knit together it is described as a spiritual body with Jesus Christ as the head. In His family He is the centre of life for the commune we call the Church. As His body, we are His tongue, we speak for Him, as His hands we work for Him, and as His feet we go into the world for Him. As His heart we love for Him.

We are His means of working together for the administration of His kingdom as we remain in commune with Him for the glory of God; we call this communing abiding in Him. *"And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them."* Acts 4:32

To be of one heart and soul means we are essentially of one mind, venerable together and transparent before God and one another. This means nothing will be hidden that could damage our love for God and each other. We would be the same to each other as we are to God.

The family is a plural affair, we can't family alone. The family of Christ lives in communion together as an ordinary, common place, every day family under God. The members who live in this family are one in Christ who love one another as He has loved us.

"We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him."

1 John 3:16-19

7 The family of faith serves the Church with Christ

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." John 15:4-5

Living in His presence by the enabling of the Spirit insures we don't become useless. Without Christ living in us we are useless, because we are disconnected from God. We are saved to serve the Church with Christ. The family of God serves the interest of God.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

Eph 2:10

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gifts....for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

Eph 4:7, 12-13

The Church is Christ working through us according to His word. When the truth of the redeemed family of God is found in the members, they are living as the holiness of His flesh, the bone of His bone, with one life in the Spirit.

"but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is, Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

Eph 4: 15-16

When this genuineness of God’s will for the family becomes no more than a figment of our imagination, then the spiritual unity of our one life in Christ disappears like a mist in the hot sun.

Therefore, if we are not loving and living for Christ, *building up of the body of Christ*, we are still living for ourselves. He died for all that we would be one life in Him, living His life by the power of the Spirit as the children of obedience.

If we live day by day as anything less than actuality being joined together with Christ in our hearts, and being renewed in our minds, to be of the same mind in Christ to serve Him in all things, then the claims of the

church to be a family unified in Christ as His life on earth for the effective work of God no longer has the authentication needed to be seen to be true in practice.

The church family is to display the transparent beauty of holiness found in the intimacy experienced with God our heavenly Father and His beloved only Son, because we are called to this life and equipped for His family by our rebirth through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

8 The family of God is a witness to God's fellowship

“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”
John 13:35

The communion of the children is to have no discernible difference between what is experienced of love between the Father and Son.

The fellowship of the saints is to be a mutual hungering and thirsting after God together as a deer pants for water so our souls long for communion with God and each other, with no divisions or barriers to divide and destroy the divinely created intimacy. There is one body of Christ; and One Spirit of God revealing the truth of God to the world through the intimate love each one of us has with one another, so the world may know we are disciples of Jesus Christ. This means we are of one mind with God. The apostle Paul: *'Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.'*
Phil 2:2

Only when we are a committed family with God and each other in the same way Jesus Christ was committed to His communion with the Father, will we see God's will manifest in the lives of all who claim Christ as Lord and Saviour. Then all of us will humble ourselves before God and each other in the likeness of Christ for the work of the Gospel in the world.

We often profess to live as a witness to the glory of God in Christ, but we are equally as often living a separated life by choice. Our words of unity in Christ don't always match our actions because the life of the flesh has not been completely eradicated from our minds. If the practice of our faith doesn't include knowing and being known in relation to the inner

man, then we have religion without a heart, and we have sidestepped the purpose of love to transform the fabric of the soul.

9 God's family is tied to the living presence of God

Knowing the presence of God has enormous implications for the way we understand life in the church family.

Since Christ is our head to obey, and our very life to live, everything we do, we do unto Him. If our hearts are expressing love for the brethren, we are loving our Lord. If there is division and dissension towards others, then we are in conflict with the Lord.

It is Christ who enables us to love, because He first loved us. He gives us His Spirit who delights to impart His heavenly customs into our hearts, so that we can love as God would have us love.

When the Spirit is not working in us we have form without power. Faces without intimacy. Law without grace. Religious structure without the blood and bones that get results. Organisation without the organisms. Disjointed limbs without support. Knowledge without a heart. Private religion without connectedness. We conduct church as a business in the world without God. We lose the core of our mission to make and train discipline from all nations to put in Christ.

We can't make disciples for Christ if Christ is not living through us personally to be like Him through our commitment to His family. We can go on learning doctrine and never really knowing the doctor and His medicine for our sickness, because we don't understand that death of self is the only way to life in Christ.

Family divisions means we haven't understood that repentance is dying daily, because we sin daily. True repentance results in the Life of Christ. What is not like Christ is sin. If Jesus Christ was alive in each member of His family, His love wouldn't be denied the power to transform dead bones into living tissue.

10 True family excludes anything that is not in Christ

'Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On

account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.’ Col 3:5-10

We are to be committed to Christ alone.

“Do you love Me more than these?” John 21:15

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

Matt 10:37

“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.”

Luke 4:26

Hating father and mother is not to be taken as literal, it is in comparison to everyone else, including family, our love for Christ must exceed our earthly relationships.

Is it not reasonable then to conclude, that the evil forces in the heavenly places are working day and night to delude and deceive the majority into thinking that they must work on the outward functions of religion by keeping the rules and regulations specified by the demonstration of choice as the only means of pleasing God?

Changing denominations in the hope of finding true fellowship with others in Christ would then be no more than changing hats.

11 God’s family is gifted to overcome individualism

In the spiritual realm, when we are blind, we don't know we are blind, so we need God to arrange something or someone outside of ourselves to disturb our complacency. Our God uses the members of His family to deal with what is foreign to the family bought at the price of His Son. Family devotion and diligence is meant to keep us on track by the illumination of light given to each one according to the Spirit.

But when God introduces a means to disturb us from complacency, instead of examining ourselves, we will insist we can see and want to remove the disturbance to maintain the status quo, and reject the Spirit working in others for our common good.

How ironic, man hasn't changed since the Pharisees.

When we think we have arrived at the truth we become comfortable with church as it is according to our preference. And this is ample evidence we don't know where we are in our sanctification. If we knew all the truth, our sanctification would be complete, and we would naturally reflect the fullness of the holiness of Christ's family in God.

We desperately need to humble ourselves and open our eyes to be able to see what God is doing to correct our wayward course. But we have a natural inclination to find the cause of our discomfort in others.

The stone in our shoe that is a disturbing irritation should tell us we have been walking in the dirt, and the answer to our disturbance isn't getting rid of the stone, the stone is pointing to the dirt, we have to get out of the dirt.

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." John 8:31-32

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." John 15:10-11

All the earthly ways that remain in us haven't been discovered by us yet. So self examination and diligence in putting on Christ in our interactions with His family is still our daily responsibility.

"We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." Col 1:28

Anyone who thinks they have arrived at the right place on their own efforts are stuck in the elevator shaft between floors.

Therefore, it doesn't matter what church we attend, or what country we live in, wherever we are, if we are sincere about seeking first the kingdom of God we will be faced with opposition to our witness, and we will experience difficulties in our desire for true fellowship if we are not going to compromise the truth of God and give up because it hurts. Stones exist because none of us have arrived at the fullness of God.

Even when the goal of true spiritual family of the saints seems to have elude us, we must not leave the cherries of patience and kindness off the cake of our spiritual sacrifice of worship. We are all a mixed bag of spirit and flesh. We are now in Christ, but not yet like Christ. We are like pieces of iron in the hands of God, and He uses iron to sharpen iron.

“Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” Proverbs 27:17

When we take the stone in the shoe to be a gift from God for the good of all those who are in the family of Christ, we might start looking to how we glorify God by honouring others before ourselves.

Spiritual gifts are given to each one to build up one another to strengthen us in our faith. Our faith is always lacking when the spiritual insights others are not received as provided by God for our good.

"For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine."

Rom 1:11-12

However, as we are not all we will be in Christ, we mostly don't seek the spiritual gifting of others so we can grow together in Christ. Naturally according to the flesh that remains, everyone does what's right in their own eyes, and we don't give our preference to what others may have received for our common good.

Since God lives in His people, shouldn't we be seeking to hear from Him as He works His miracle of life in the brethren who live for Christ? God dwells in His people. His people are His temple. His people are His priests giving service together according to the Spirit.

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Ephesians 2:19-22

We are built together in the temple of God. Each believer indwelt as a temple, and collectively making up the complete temple as the house of the living God. God lives in His people or we are not His Church.

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