

# WE ARE FAMILY

The Church: More Than an Institution



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## INTRODUCTION: HOW METAPHORS SHAPE OUR SPIRITUAL IMAGINATIONS

- What is your *dominant* way of thinking about the church?
- Biblical metaphors
  - Army/soldiers
  - Building/temple
  - Groom/bride
  - King/subjects
  - Master/slaves
  - Teacher/students
- Institution/member - dominant modern idea; an organization founded for social, religious, political, or educational purpose
  - This, mixed with consumerist mentality, leads to dealing with one another as projects, focusing on plans, goals, outcomes, and personal preferences over relationships

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## Assertion: The dominant and core metaphor for the people of God in Scripture is the Family

- While other metaphors communicate some facet of the truth regarding who we are, they can only be understood in a healthy way under this view of the church as family

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THE OT STORY OF GOD IS PRIMARILY ABOUT FAMILIES

- A priority of physical family, tribes, and a nation of people of the same bloodline
  - Adam/Even and their descendants
    - Abraham**, Isaac, Jacob
      - 12 Tribes of Israel
        - Frequency of genealogies - "who's your daddy"
        - Seed/offspring
- The matter of Gentile proselytes (varying ideas and practices in Judaism)

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BROTHER STORIES ARE COMMON, BUT AMONG THE WORST STORIES IN THE BIBLE

- Cain and Able
- Isaac and Ishmael
- Jacob and Esau
  - Joseph and brothers
    - Moses, Aaron, and Miriam
    - David and brothers
      - Israel's treatment of those in their nation-family
- It is only with this weight of understanding can we appreciate and marvel at what happens in the NT

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IN THE NT, THERE IS A **RADICAL** REDEFINITION AND BREAK FROM THIS OT EMPHASIS

- Matthew 3:9 - children from stones
- Matthew 6:9 - our Father
  - Matthew 10:35-39 - natural family dissension
    - Matthew 12:46-50 - Jesus' re-definition
- John 4:23-24 - the Father seeking true worshippers
  - John 8:39-42 - relationship of the Father to His children
- Romans 2:28-29 - the true Jew (Philipians 3:3)
  - Romans 4:13-18 - offspring of Abraham
    - Romans 8:15 - Spirit of adoption as children
    - Romans 8:29 - Jesus the firstborn among many siblings

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- Galatians 3:25-29 - children of God..no distinction
- Ephesians 2:18-19 - members of the household of God
- 1 Timothy 5:1-2 - family treatment
- Hebrews 2:11-13 - Jesus not ashamed to call us siblings
- The NT letters are *saturated* with sibling terminology
  - The priority of sibling love (Gk. philadelphia) - Romans 12:10; 1Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22, 3:8, 4:8
    - The “one-another” passages cast as family relationships
    - Household - Galatians 6:10; 1 Timothy 3:15

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The community of believers in the NT is alluded to more by the plural word brethren (which clearly includes women) than by any other figurative language, certainly more than by the "called-out ones" (ekklēsia), or church. Brotherhood is based on similarity of belief and on the equality of believers. Christ underscores both points when he tells his disciples they should not desire to be called master or teacher, "for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers" (Mt 23:8).

In sum, the language of brotherhood means something more than simply believers. It is the most common and familiar appellation within the analogy of the family of God. For that reason, perhaps, it has become a buried metaphor that we no longer regard. But it is indeed an image for the ideal of closeness, like-mindedness and unity that should exist among fellow believers.

(Dictionary of Biblical Imagery)

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#### RESPONSE

- A true love for the Father and Son necessarily entails love for their family
  - Like it or not, this includes all those who believe in Jesus
    - Loving brothers and sisters - faithful and unfaithful, different personalities, mature and immature, those with whom we agree and disagree (about a plethora of issues), those who love us, and those who don't, interesting and mundane, varying intellectual capacities, good and bad upbringings, rude and polite
      - Paul is more tolerant of confusion about God/gods than division in the church (a case study in 1 Corinthians 8:4-13)
  - Our greatest *motive* - love because of the Father's love (1Jn5:1)
    - Our greatest *challenge* - abundance of forgiveness (Mt6:14-15)
      - Our greatest *danger* - division by relational breakdown

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So the question is not "Am I going to be a part of a community of faith?" but "How am I going to live in this community of faith?"

God's children do different things. Some run away from it and pretend that the family doesn't exist. Some move out and get an apartment of their own... And some would never dream of leaving but cause others to dream it for them, for they are always criticizing what is served at the meals, quarreling with the way the housekeeping is done and complaining that the others in the family are either ignoring or taking advantage of them.

And some determine to find out what God has in mind by placing them in this community called the church, learn how to function in it harmoniously and joyously, and develop maturity that is able to share and exchange God's grace with those who might otherwise be viewed as nuisances.

(Eugene Peterson)

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