

Thicker than Blood

Our Church, God's Home Part 4

1 Peter 2:5 8-11-2012 & 8-12-2012

Summary: Jesus promised those who lose family 100 times as much in the Church. House of God means both temple and family. Our mission is to function as God's family, which includes relating to God as Father (showing honor, praying, and trusting); and relating to one another as siblings (and mothers and fathers). Be a better brother by becoming more like our Elder Brother.

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1 Peter 2:4 As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-- 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 7 Now the honor is to you who believe, but to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, 8 and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for. 9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Introduction

100 Families

Imagine there were a machine that could measure joy – the overall amount of joy that exists throughout the whole country at any given moment. It would have two meters on it – one would show how much joy there is on the positive side, and another meter would show how much sorrow and sadness and depression and despair there is on the negative side. So if everyone is happy, the first meter is pegged, and the second meter registers nothing. If everyone is miserable, it's the other way around. What would happen if you turned that thing on at Christmas time? Isn't it true that both meters would register high levels? Christmas is a time of joy and celebration where families and loved ones

get together and have a great time together. And that creates a lot of joy – mainly because of family. But it also creates a whole lot of sorrow and depression. My guess is that sorrow and depression meter would register its highest readings of the year around Christmas time. Why? Again – mainly because of family. For many people Christmas is nothing but a time that reminds them of all the family joys that they don't have. Their family doesn't get along. Or maybe they don't have any family. Maybe they have been abandoned by their family. Maybe they are single and they desire nothing more than to be married, and when they see all the family get-togethers at Christmas, and then they go home to their lonely, empty, quiet house with their little Charlie Brown Christmas tree, it's a degree of loneliness that pierces the soul. Or maybe someone in their family has died, and times like Christmas are when they feel the pain of that the most.

What does God have to say to those people? Is the message of God's Word for them something like this: "Don't despair – I realize you don't have family, but you have Me. Find your joy and satisfaction in Me alone. You don't need family because you have Me"? Is that the comfort God offers to people whose hearts peg the depression meter at Christmas and Thanksgiving?

Not really. Of course we are to look to God alone for our joy – family or no family we are to look to Him as our only joy source, otherwise we are guilty of idolatry. So in that sense it's accurate. But when someone asked Jesus about the fact that they had lost family, Jesus did not respond by saying, "It's OK – you don't need family as long as you have Me." Here's what He said:

Mark 10:28 Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!" 29 "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel 30 will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.

The way that Jesus comforted those who had lost family was not by saying, "Don't worry, you don't need family." He said that if you have lost family because of Him and because of the gospel – your commitment to Christianity caused them to turn against you, or maybe your commitment to Christ is the reason you aren't married (because as a believer you can only marry a fellow believer, and that's a much small pool of potential spouses to pick from) – if for whatever reason you don't have a wife or husband or children or parents – you will receive 100 times as much. If you lost a mother you will be compensated for that by God with 100 mothers. Same goes for children or any other family members. "Is that talking about in heaven?" No – Jesus explicitly says, "You will receive 100 times as much *in this life*." And that even applies to possessions. Lost your house? Jesus will give you 100 houses, or 100 cars or 100 retirement accounts or 100 times as much as whatever you lost, and He will do it in this life.

What was Jesus talking about? The Church. We have been studying verse by verse through the book of 1 Peter, and the past few weeks we have been in this wonderful section in chapter 2 on the nature of the Church. We are learning here about ourselves – what God designed us as a church to be. And one of the functions of the church that we haven't talked about yet is the fact the church is a family. We're going to see that functioning as a family is a key component of our mission as a church.

Review

But first let me refresh your memory with a little review. And the center of this whole section on the Church lies the Cornerstone of the Church – the Lord Jesus Christ. We see that in vv.6-8 – right in the middle of this whole section, which is fitting, because Jesus is the centerpiece of the Church. Everything depends on Him.

Never be Ashamed

Last week we saw that He is the dividing line of humanity. Reject Him and you will fall. Trust in Him and you will never be disappointed. The Lord Jesus Christ will never let you down. Everything

else will. All the pleasures and securities and pursuits in this world that we run so hard after and spend ourselves to get – ultimately they all leave us empty.

Isaiah 55:2 Why spend your labor on what does not satisfy?

Compared to the true God the things people pursue in this world are powerless, deaf, dumb, lame, blind, ignorant, dormant, helpless, and needy. They pretend to offer great rewards. But in the end they are just wind.

But Jesus Christ is substance, not wind. What He gives will satisfy your soul and leave no regret. No earthly treasure can make that claim. Have you ever made some sacrifice to pursue money and ended up regretting it? Have you ever given up something precious in order to pursue success in your job and ended up regretting it? How many times have you made a decision to run after physical pleasure, or the pleasures of sin, and ended up plagued with sorry and regret? How many times have you put your hope in another person and ended up disappointed? There is nothing in this world that you can count on to always come through for you when you seek joy from it. There is nothing and no one that won't frequently leave you devastated with sorrow and regret, except Jesus Christ. Has anyone in this room ever sought hard after God- made some sacrifice in order to pursue intimacy with God, and ended up wishing they hadn't? Have you ever in your entire lifetime found yourself weeping and kicking yourself and saying, "Oh I wish I hadn't decided to seek my joy from God last night!!!"

The only time anyone has regret after seeking God is when they weren't really seeking God – they were just trying to use God to get something else they were seeking, and it didn't work. But when you seek the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, you will never regret it.

And as we do that – as we come to Him, God builds us up to become His Church. And this passage – from v.4 through v.9, is one of the most glorious descriptions of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ anywhere in the Holy Scriptures.

Household of God

House = Family

In vv.4-5 we learned that we are bricks in the house of God, we are the new Temple, which means we are the headquarters for His presence in the world), and we are a priesthood within that Temple. Then in vv.6-8 Peter zooms in on the Cornerstone, and shows us that even when people reject Him, He is still triumphant. And now, in vv.9-10, Peter is just going to explode with spectacular truths about what the Church is. But before we get in to vv.9-10, there's one more thing we need to understand about our role as God's house.

Scholars debate about what it means exactly when Peter calls us God's house in v.5. On the one hand, we know that everywhere in the OT where you see the phrase "house of God" it always refers to the Temple. That, plus the imagery of the stones and the reference to the priesthood all point to the fact that Peter is calling us the new Temple. But some people have said, "If Peter wanted us to think 'temple,' he could have easily just used the word *temple*. He didn't. Instead of calling us a *naos*, which is the word for the holy place, or a *hieron*, which is the word for the entire temple complex; Peter just calls us God's house. And so some scholars argue that Peter doesn't have a temple in mind, but rather God's household – His family. In Gn.7:1, when it was time to get into the ark, God said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole house." That's a very, very common way to refer to a man's family.

Ephesians 2:19 So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's house (same word)

So many times in Scripture the word "house" means household – referring not to the building, but to the family. And so some argue that what Peter is saying here is not that we are the Temple, but that we are God's family.

And as I've studied this I've become convinced that the reason Peter chose the language he chose was to present us with both pictures. We are the new Temple and we are God's household, or family. And that makes perfect sense, because what is the temple? It's the dwelling place of God. It's His house, and so the people in it are His family.

That's one of the ways the church is referred to in Scripture. In fact, of all the metaphors in the Bible to describe what the Church is supposed to be, this is one of the most common. We see it about a half dozen times. There's even an entire book of the Bible that was written for the express purpose of teaching us how we are to behave ourselves as family members - sons and daughters and siblings - in this family.

1 Timothy 3:14 I am writing you these instructions so that, 15 ... you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's house.¹

So if you were to write a purpose statement for the church, and you had nothing in there about our responsibility to function as God's household/family, I think it's fair to say that purpose statement would be incomplete.

A major aspect of what it means to function as a church has to do with relationships – the way we relate to God and the way we relate to one another. If we go out and make disciples of all nations and do all kinds of ministry, but in the process we are failing to function as siblings in a family, we are falling short of our calling as a church.

One of the ways we can measure our success as a church is by asking, “Does the promise of Mark 10 come true for people when they come here? Or do we make God look like a liar?” In Mark 10 Jesus promised that people without family will receive 100 times as much in the church. You don't have the joys that are supposed to come from having a great relationship with your mom and dad? Or maybe they have passed away? If you come to the church, you will be access to that joy – the warmth of being loved by a mother figure or father figure, the security of knowing they will take care of you, the confidence of knowing you can get good counsel from their wisdom – you can have 100 of those relationships in the church.

Same thing with children. The Lord hasn't blessed you with a spouse or the ability to have children – come here and you can have 100 children. All these kids running around here on Sundays – they are yours. If we are functioning as properly as a church, you can know the fulfillment and joy that comes from loving a little baby and watching her grow up to become a young woman, and teaching her and protecting her, and being thrilled by her joys and victories – you can know the deepest joys of parenting through the love you have for the children in this church.

If you don't have that unique kind of friendship that exists between two sisters or two brothers in a loving family – you can have that here – if we are fulfilling our mission as a church. If you lost your house or your car or retirement for Christ, if we are functioning as a church you don't have to worry. We'll take care of you. Maybe your husband abandoned you and you feel all alone in this world with no one to take care of you. But if you're a member here, you're not on your own in this world. You have 100 husbands to care for your wellbeing.

That's what Jesus promised people. Do you feel the pressure of that? Jesus is out there telling people, “Lost your family? No problem – just go to Agape and you'll have 100 times what you lost.” Jesus is out there promising people that – do you feel the pressure of how important it is that we not make Him out to be a liar? What an important part of our mission it is to love one another in *family* ways!

As an aside – this is one argument that could be made for the value of large churches. Usually when we think of our family function we think small churches are better, because it's so much easier to have a close, family feel in a small church. And that's true – it really is. But it's also true that it's tough to tell people that they can come to your church and find 100 mothers and 100 sisters and 100

¹ See also 1 Pe.4:17, Heb.3:2,6, 10:21.

children, etc... when you're a house church of 12 people. The larger the pool of people, the easier it is to fulfill the promise that Jesus made. When someone has a deep financial need, what a joy it is to be able to reach into our benevolence fund and have enough money in there to help them in times when \$100 or \$500 just won't cut it. Jesus said if you lost your fields for Christ (which means, for a farmer, you have no income now), in the church you'll receive 100 times as much. That doesn't mean the church will give you 100 fields, but it does mean you'll have a large family to help you out. And that's tough to do when the family is just a handful of people. So yes, there are some great benefits to being a small church, but there is also a lot of value in large numbers within the church as well – even in the very area that's normally thought of as a weakness in large churches – our responsibility to function as a family.

And this is why it's not wrong to have kindness ministries directed inward for the body. So many people think that the church exists to have soup kitchens and hand out food and money and clothes to the needy. And if we don't do that, and we just help our own members, that's to inward and selfish. That's not true. Should we show kindness to outsiders? Of course! We are to be like the Good Samaritan. We are to love our neighbor, and neighbor means anyone in need that comes across your path. And we are to love strangers and love our enemies. So yes, we do kindness ministries for outsiders.

But we have a far greater responsibility to care for one another as a family. You have more responsibility before God to feed your own kids than the kids down the street, right? That's not selfish – it's your God-given responsibility. People call all the time and want us to help them with their rent or give them money for gas or whatever. And we always tell them the same thing – our benevolence fund is for members. If they need food, we will provide that. But when it comes to the kind of care that you can't provide for everyone in the world – just your family, that's reserved for family – for members. We're not interested in financing people's rebellion against God, or to make them more comfortable in their rejection of Christ.

If you're not part of a church – just living out there on your own because you don't want to risk being hurt by people, or you're too lazy to get out of bed on Sundays, or you are so full of pride that you don't think you need a church family, or you have too much guilt over the sin in your life, or whatever – and so you remain way out there on the fringes, that's foolish, because the day will come when you will need family – not just financial assistance, but the kind of deep, loving, accepting relationships that require a lot of investment and effort on your part, and if you wait until the day you really need that, it will be too late to start building it. Not to mention the fact that other people also need it, and it's your responsibility to be here for them. Jesus is promising that to them! Jesus is writing checks that He expects you to cover.

So it is essential for our mission as a church that we function as a family. But what does it look like? What does the Bible say about how we are to function as a family?

Relating to God as Father

The most important part of functioning as family members in God's household is in the way we relate to God. If we are going to be a family, we must relate to God as Father. There are a lot of aspects to our relationship with God – we are to look to Him as our Lord, Master, King, Creator, Owner, Savior – lots of complexities in the way we are to interact with Him. But none of them are emphasized as much as the fact that we are to look to Him as our Father. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father, who is in heaven..."

Unique to Believers

He is our Father, and He is uniquely so. The concept of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man is not a biblical idea. Non Christians are not the children of God. Not

even the Old Testament saints related to God as father. David had about as close and intimates a relationship with God as an OT saint could have, and yet you see him calling God His King, Master, Savior, Lord, Shepherd – but never Father.

The promise of God relating to a man as father was never given to David. But it was giving to one of David's decedents.

2 Samuel 7:12-14 I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, ...¹⁴ I will be his father, and he will be my son.

That's talking about the Messiah. In OT times the people of God, no matter how godly they were or how much they walked with God, were not the sons and daughters of God. The only son of God was the promised Messiah. Only the Son of God Himself can call God Father. And yet, amazingly, we can call God Father!

1 John 3:1 Behold! how great a love the Father has given us, that we should be called God's children. And we are!

How can we do that? If David couldn't, and Abraham couldn't, and Enoch or Job or Moses couldn't call Him Father – how is it that we can? We can because we are in Christ. "In Christ" means that God has placed us in such close relationship with Jesus Christ that we have the exact same standing before God that Jesus, the Son of God has. And God loves us with the same love with which He loves Jesus.

That's part of our identity, and so if we are going to function as a legitimate church in God's eyes, we're going to take our responsibility as His children very seriously. We must behave as children or we are not functioning as a church. So how is that done? What does it look like for a person to behave as a child of God? We could spend weeks exploring that, but let me just quickly mention three things that really stand out.

Our Responsibilities as Children

1) Honor

The most fundamental responsibility a child has toward his father is to honor him. That's the most basic duty of a child: "Honor your father and mother." And so we should revere God with the utmost honor and respect – and even fear. And the most basic expression of that is willing, eager, glad obedience. That's why in Eph.5 "Honor your father and mother" and "Children obey your parents" are equated as one command. They are not two separate things. The most basic way you express honor for your father is by respectfully obeying him. And so relating to God as Father means we, as a church, must be obedient to Him.

Submitting to Providence

Obviously that means obeying His Word. If we start doing things as a church that contradict what God has commanded in His Word, and we don't repent, we fail as a church. Any church that elevates tradition or human wisdom or books or denomination or anything else above God's Word is an unfaithful church and is in serious trouble. Obeying God's Word is crucial.

But that's not the only kind of obedience there is. Most of the time when the NT talks about obeying God the *Father* specifically, the emphasis is on submission to His sovereign plan – providence. God the Father controls all things,² and so the measure of our submission to Him is seen in

² God the Father controls all things – all events, all actions, everything that everyone does – everything that happens. He is in no way the author of sin or any kind of evil, but does maintain total sovereign control over everything.

Isa.46:10-11 I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done, saying: My plan will take place, and I will do all that I please. 11 ...What I have spoken, that will I also bring it about. What I have said, that will I do.

Ps.33:11 the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

how we respond to the events that take place in our lives. When we reject those events by complaining or grumbling or through discontent- or we reject His plan in advance by worrying, we are not being submissive to God's perfect plan. When we reject the suffering that God sends our way for our good, and regard that suffering as our enemy, we are resisting God's providence.

Obedying God the Father means gladly submitting to His perfect plan.

Gratitude

And the most important indicator of whether you are doing that is gratitude. This is why gratitude is almost always directed to the Father in Scripture. I counted over 40 times in the NT when thanksgiving is mentioned, and in all but 2 it is the Father who is thanked.³

Ephesians 5:20 giving thanks always for everything to God the Father

So what does it mean to function as the family of God? It means looking to God as Father, and that begins with honor. We honor Him as Father by submitting to His will, which means obeying Him in reverent fear, and joyfully and accepting His plan with gratitude.

2) Ask

The second part of relating to God as father is prayer. Children look to their father for provision, protection, guidance and care. If we are going to fulfill our responsibility as God's family – His household, we are going to have to be a church devoted to prayer – a church characterized not only by thanksgiving, but by asking for things. Honor God as Father by joyfully accepting and being thankful for the outworking of His sovereign plan in all that happens, and by asking Him to provide for us and to give us grace through His Spirit.

3) Trust

And one more way that children relate to their fathers – trust. We are treating Him as a father when we trust Him. Most of the time when we read about faith in the NT the object of that faith is Jesus. When God the Father is the object of faith in the NT, the emphasis is usually on one specific aspect of trust- and that is, trusting Him to love us as a father. When the Trinity is spoken of in Scripture, what is emphasized most about the Father is love. God wants us to think of His love for us mainly in terms of the way a father loves his little ones.

Matthew 7:9-11 Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

When we think about how God thinks and feels when we have a need, God wants us to think in terms of the way a loving father feels toward his little child. God the Father wants you to trust Him to love you like a dad. Trusting Him means trusting that He will feel those same emotions that a good dad feels toward his little boy. When you have a crisis and are in distress, God wants you to think of

Ps.135:6 The LORD does whatever He pleases in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all the depths.

Pr.19:21 Many plans are in a man's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail

Dan.4:35 He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

Acts 17:26 he determined the times set for them and the exact places where [every person] should live.

Eph.1:11 In Him we were also made His inheritance, predestined according to the purpose of the One who works out everything in agreement with the decision of His will

Pr.16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

Pr.21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

³ One of the 10 lepers in Lk.17 thanked Jesus, and Paul thanked Him for his calling.

Him as being like a human father feels when he sees that his little 2-year-old's finger have been slammed in a door and the child is screaming in pain.

This is what it means to function as God's household. If Agape is going to be what God wants a church to be, we are going to have to be a group of people who take our role as children in this household very seriously. We must be a people who honor, obey and thank God as Father, ask for grace from God our Father, and trust Him to love us as a father.

Relating to One Another as Siblings

All of that is one part of what it means to be a family – relating to God as Father. But there is another very important part – relating to one another as siblings. That's why throughout the book Peter keeps reminding us, in every chapter, to love one another as brothers. If we are going to function as a church – as the family of God, we need to be a family. And that means close, warm relationships. Four times in Scripture we are commanded to greet one another with a holy kiss. Even in NT times that was a greeting reserved only for family members and the most intimate of friends.⁴

Brothers and Sisters

And so in order to accomplish our mission as a church we are going to have to do some things to make sure we maintain warm, close, family relationships. And the bigger the church gets, the harder that is to maintain. That's one of the disadvantages of a large church. It's hard to maintain that as we get more people, but we must find a way to maintain it, because the moment we become just a crowd, we cease to be a church. Not every crowd of Christians is a church. A church must function as a family.

That's another reason why the prayer groups are so important. They are designed to cultivate intimacy and relational, family warmth. And we realize there won't be intimacy and warmth and family love just because you show up for prayer group each week. Nothing is automatic. It won't happen unless we all pursue it. It requires intentional development of friendships through authenticity, transparency, enjoyment of one another, and commitment to one another.

There is a special kind of love between brothers and sisters. Maybe you haven't experienced it, because you're an only child, or you had bad relationships in your home growing up, but when a family functions as God designed, there is a love between siblings (especially adult siblings) that just isn't matched even by close friendships. And that kind of love is to be our guide in the church.

2 Thessalonians 3:14 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. 15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

There is a special kind of warning that you give your brother. It's not a throw-away kind of relationship. He'll always be your brother, and so even when you're at odds, there is a long-term kind of feel to the way you interact. A friendship is held together by nothing but the friendship. The friendship dies; the relationship is over. But in a family there is something greater holding you together even when your relationship hits rocky times. That's why they say blood is thicker than water. And we could add to that – the Spirit is thicker than blood. You are more closely related to one another than you are to your own blood relatives (Lk.8:20-21). Natural family relationships are temporary; relationships in the church are eternal.

Fathers and Mothers

And our family relationships in the church go beyond just brotherly love.

⁴ Craig Keener, Bible Background Commentary, 448.

1 Timothy 5:1 Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

If we do a great job preaching the Word, we excel in outreach ministries, we have amazing worship, the best discipleship and training ministry in Denver – if we do all that, but we do not treat the older men and women as fathers and mothers, and others and brothers and sisters, we are failing to be a true church.

Do you treat older people in the church with special honor and respect – like you treat your mom or your dad? Are older people treated especially well in churches? Are they the ones who get the most honor? That’s another thing that gets lost in the whole missional approach. If all we care about is transforming the culture – if that’s the only mission of the church, the old people will just get in the way. If you want the movers and shakers and the trend-setters, you have to go after the young people. And in a lot of that missional literature they just come right out and say, if the old people in your church resist these changes, they need to move on. Once again this shows how important it is to understand what our identity is as a church. If we think our only goal is to transform the culture, then why bother treating elderly people as mothers and fathers? What does that accomplish? How does that help us reach our goal of transforming the culture? If honoring the elderly doesn’t help us reach our goal, why do it? And the answer is, honoring the elderly doesn’t help us reach our goal; it IS our goal. That’s one of our objectives – to become like a family. We don’t behave like a family to reach some pragmatic goal. We behave like a family because the Head of this household likes it when we behave as a family. We do it for no other reason than to bring a smile to His face when He looks at Agape Bible Church.

Now, are there some pragmatic reasons why it would be good for us to interact this way? Of course. I’m sure it wouldn’t be hard at all to identify all kinds of ways that having family-type relationships within the church would help with various ministries. You could argue that it would improve our counseling ministry or our greeting ministry or our kindness ministries or a host of others. But the point I want to make is that even if we couldn’t see how it would help any particular ministry it would still be worth doing because it is an end in itself. It makes the Head of the household happy, and that’s all the reason we need. There is no higher goal than that.

Acceptance

Another mark of family type love is acceptance. In Romans 14 and 15 there is a lot of discussion about how to love one another as brothers, and one of the strongest points of emphasis is on the importance of accepting one another. When you run into people who make different judgment calls than you make on moral issues that are not directly addressed in Scripture – whether they are more strict than you or less strict – either way, Paul says, don’t look down on them. Why? Because it’s your brother!

Romans 14:10 You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother?

15:7 Therefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted you, to the glory of God

The word **accept** literally means to pull someone in toward you. You give him a place in your life and in your heart. You don’t have to prove yourself to be a full-fledged, accepted, welcomed member of your family. You don’t look at one of your kids and say, “Once you learn how to do this, and you overcome this, and you grow to this level of maturity – then you can have a place in this family.” They automatically have a place. Just by being born, he has a place.

And the goal is to get to the point where we have that kind of acceptance of one another in the church. We’re striving to build those kinds of relationships. Anything that moves us along toward that

goal fits within the boundaries of our purpose statement. If it makes us more of a family, then it is aligned with our mission.

Some of you might be thinking, “I don’t feel like I fit in here.” If that’s the case, your feelings are wrong. If you think you need to break into some in group, or become a part of some inner circle, or gain some particular status in order to belong – you’re wrong. That might be true at work or in a club or in your neighborhood, but in your family you have a place and you belong whether you feel like you belong or not. No matter who you are, or what your gifts are or what your past is like – you can walk into this church like your Dad owns the place.

How to be a Better Brother

So our Lord, who shed His blood to make us a church, fully expects us to fulfill our family responsibility. And He fully expects you to do your part in that. So how are you doing? And how can we improve? So what can you do to become a better brother (or sister)? The way to become a better brother is simple – become more like our Elder Brother – Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Think through the logic of that verse. God the Father wanted Jesus to have many brothers, and so He predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son. That means the more conformed we are to the image of Christ, the more we fulfill our role as His brothers.

The more Christ-like you are the more of a brother you are in this family, and the more Agape fulfills our role as a household of God.

Benediction

Romans 15:5,6 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1:25 Questions

1. Jesus promised His people that if they lost family or possessions, they could come to Agape and get 100 times what they lost. Which aspect of fulfilling that promise are you best at (Being a father to people, being a sister, providing security and protection, etc.)? In which area of fulfilling the family promise do you most need to improve? What steps can you take to make that improvement?