

Living in God's Family – Part 1

- The first distinct mention of the church in the New Testament is in Matthew 16 where Jesus says, "I will build my church."
- The church is the only thing in the world that cannot be shaken:
 - The earth is to be shaken (Isaiah 2:19-21)
 - The nation of Israel is to be shaken (Ezekiel 38:19-20)
 - The heavens and nations are to be shaken (Haggai 2:6-7)
 - Everything that can be shaken will be shaken (Heb. 12:26-29)
- The church (Gentiles coming into God's Kingdom) was prophesied throughout the Bible, even in the Old Testament:
 - All nations were to be blessed by Abraham's seed (Gen. 22:18)
 - All the families of the earth were to be blessed by Abraham's seed (Genesis 26:4)
 - All kindreds of the nations would worship the Lord (Psalms 22:27-28)
 - In the last days all nations would flow to the house of God (Isaiah 2:2-3)
 - The Gentiles would seek the Root of Jesse (Isaiah 11:10)
 - Many nations would be sprinkled with the blood of the Messiah (Isaiah 52:15)
 - Many nations would be joined to the Lord in that day (Zech. 2:11)
 - The Name of the Lord would be great among the Gentiles (Malachi 1:11)
 - In His Name the Gentiles would trust (Matthew 12:21)
- The original Greek word for church is EKKLESIA.
 - For secular Greek society, EKKLESIA meant "an assembly of free citizens who were called out of their homes or places of business to assemble together to give consideration to matters of public interest"
 - The church is not just "called out," but "called out to assemble together"!
 - EKKLESIA in the NT is used 114 times, 110 of these speak of the church
 - The church is the free citizens of the heavenly community, summoned by the gospel from their places in the world to assemble together to hear from God!
 - We are not just a select few who are "picked out." The church is not EXCLUSIVE, but INCLUSIVE. The summons is to everyone to come and shoulder his responsibilities.
 - We are called out of every kindred, tribe and nation (Rev. 5:9), and called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).
- However, the word "church" has lost most of its original meaning today. The Church is definitely not just a material building!
 - The word is never used in Scripture to refer to a material building (140 times in NT)
 - The language used of the Church could not be applied to a building: The Lord added to the church. Herod vexed the church. The church was persecuted. Paul saluted the church. The churches had rest.
 - Only in the traditions of men can people "go to church."
 - Jesus did not mean "church buildings" when he said "I will build my church."
- So what is the church? **THE CHURCH IS GOD'S FAMILY.** Today it exists on earth, but some day it will exist in Heaven forever. And the greatest privilege we could ever have is to belong in His family!
- **1 John 3:1 (KJV)** Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.
1 John 3:1 (Msg) What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we're called children of God! That's who we really are. But that's also why the world doesn't recognize us or take us seriously, because it has no idea who he is or what he's up to.
- The Bible is the story of God building a family who will love Him, honor Him, and reign with Him forever. God didn't NEED a family, but He DESIRED one. Because God is love, He treasures relationships – and if we are truly His children, we will also treasure relationships!
- Every human being was CREATED by God but not everyone is a CHILD of God. The only way to get into God's family is by being born into it. You became part of the human family by your first birth, but you become a member of God's family by your second birth.
- In reality, your spiritual family is even more important than your physical family because it will last forever.
- **1 Peter 1:3b (LB)** It is his boundless mercy that has given us the privilege of being born again so that we are now members of God's own family.
- The moment you were born into God's family, you were given some astounding birthday gifts: the family name, the family likeness, family privileges, and the family inheritance!

- **Galatians 4:6-7 (KJV)** And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Galatians 4:6-7 (Msg) You can tell for sure that you are now fully adopted as his own children because God sent the Spirit of his Son into our lives crying out, "Papa! Father!" Doesn't that privilege of intimate conversation with God make it plain that you are not a slave, but a child? And if you are a child, you're also an heir, with complete access to the inheritance.

Galatians 4:7 (NLT) Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, everything he has belongs to you.

- Whenever you feel unimportant, unloved or insecure, remember to whom you belong. You are a member of God's family!
- **Ephesians 2:19 (LB)** Now you are no longer strangers to God and foreigners to heaven, but you are members of God's very own family, citizens of God's country, and you belong in God's household with every other Christian.
- The Bible knows nothing of Lone Ranger Christians, bunny (hopping) believers, solitary saints or spiritual hermits who are isolated from other believers. Instead, it says we are put together, joined together, built together, members together, heirs together, fitted together and held together ... and at the Rapture, we will be caught up together!
- Over fifty times in the New Testament the phrase "one another" or "each other" is used. We are commanded to LOVE one another, PRAY FOR one another, ENCOURAGE one another, ADMONISH one another, GREET one another, SERVE one another, TEACH one another, ACCEPT one another, HONOR one another, FORGIVE one another, SUBMIT TO one another, BE DEVOTED TO one another, BEAR BURDENS FOR one another, and many other mutual tasks. These are the "family responsibilities" God expects you to fulfill!
- The word "membership" is of Christian origin, but the world has emptied it of its original meaning. Today, membership is often reduced to simply adding your name to a roll, with no requirements or expectations. But to the Apostle Paul, being a "member" of the church meant being a vital organ of a living body, an indispensable, interconnected part of the Body of Christ!
- **Romans 12:4-5 (NLT)** Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.

- **1 Corinthians 12:25-26 (Msg)** The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.

- We need to recover and practice the Biblical meaning of membership. The church is a body, not a building. The church is an organism, not an organization. (That doesn't mean we're against buildings or organizations, it just means that we understand things!)
 - If an organ is somehow severed from its body, it will shrivel and die. It cannot exist on its own, and neither can you. Disconnected and cut off from the lifeblood of a local body, your spiritual life will wither and eventually cease to exist. This is why the first symptom of spiritual decline is usually inconsistent attendance at worship services.
 - Membership in the family of God is not something to be casually ignored. The church is God's agenda for the world. The church is indestructible and will exist for eternity. It will outlive this universe, and so will your role in it! The person who says, "I don't need the church" is either arrogant or ignorant. The church is so significant that Jesus died on the cross for it!
 - The Bible calls the church "the Bride of Christ" and "the body of Christ." Imagine saying to someone, "I love you but I hate your wife" or "I love you but your body disgusts me." But that's what we're doing to Jesus whenever we complain about the church!
 - God commands us to love the church as much as Jesus does. Sadly, many Christians USE the church but don't LOVE the church. Many Christians who know John 3:16 are unaware of 1 John 3:16.
- John 3:16** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
- 1 John 3:16** Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.
- It may seem easier to be holy when no one else is around to frustrate your preferences, but that is a false, untested holiness. Isolation breeds deceitfulness; it is easy to fool ourselves into thinking we are mature if there is no one to challenge us. However, REAL MATURITY SHOWS UP IN RELATIONSHIPS.
 - "Mind your own business" is definitely not a Christian phrase! Rather, we are commanded to be involved in each other's lives.

- **Hebrews 3:13 (NJB)** Every day, as long as this today lasts, keep encouraging one another so that none of you is hardened by the lure of sin,
- **Hebrews 10:25 (LB)** Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.
- Satan loves detached believers, unplugged from the life of the Body, isolated from God's family, and unaccountable to spiritual leaders, because he knows they are defenseless and powerless against him.
- That is why we cannot just be church attenders. The difference between being a church ATTENDER and a church MEMBER is found in one word: COMMITMENT.
 - Attenders are spectators from the sidelines; members get involved in the ministry.
 - Attenders are consumers; members are contributors.
 - Attenders want the benefits of a church without sharing the responsibility; members put church at the center of their lives.
 - Attenders are like couples who want to live together without committing to a marriage; members wholeheartedly say, I DO!
- The local church is so important to God because it proves you are committed to His family in reality, not just in theory. God wants you to love REAL people, not IDEAL people. You can spend a lifetime searching for the perfect church, but you will never find it. You are called to love imperfect people, just like God does!
- First century Christians were very specific in their commitment to each other, according to Acts 2:42 (only four verses from Acts 2:38!).
 - **Acts 2:42 (KJV)** And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.
 - **Acts 2:42 (CEV)** They spent their time learning from the apostles, and they were like family to each other. They also broke bread and prayed together.
- The Christian life is more than just commitment to the Lord; it includes a commitment to other Christians as well! The First Century Christians in Macedonia understood this well:
- **2 Corinthians 8:5b (TEV)** First they gave themselves to the Lord; and then, by God's will they gave themselves to us as well.