

Living in God's Family – Part 2

- 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 word "church" has lost most of its original meaning today. The Church is definitely not just a material building; in fact, the word is never used in Scripture to refer to a material building (140X in NT). Only in the traditions of men can people "go to church."
- So what is the church? **THE CHURCH IS 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!
- The word "membership" is of Christian origin, but the world has emptied it of its original meaning. Today, membership is simply adding your name to a roll, with no requirements or expectations. But Paul says a "member" of the church is 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 12:25a (MSG)** The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church.
- An organ severed from its body shrivels and dies. It cannot exist on its own, and neither can you. That's why the first symptom of spiritual decline is usually inconsistent attendance at worship services.
- **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.
- 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.
To live above with saints we love, oh that will be glory.
To live below with saints we know, well that's another story!
- 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!
- **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.
- Just like we have robbed the words "church" and "membership" of their Biblical meaning, we've also done the same to "fellowship." It now usually refers to casual conversation, socializing, food and fun. ("Stay after for fellowship" is code for "wait around for refreshments!")
- But real fellowship is so much more than just showing up at services. It is **EXPERIENCING LIFE TOGETHER**. It includes more than fifty "one another" commands in the New Testament: 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.
- Just how important is FELLOWSHIP? It's absolutely crucial! If you don't have it, the Bible says you are not walking in the light at all!
- **1 John 1:7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

- **1 John 4:20-21 (MSG)** If anyone boasts, "I love God," and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both.

HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE EXPERIENCING REAL FELLOWSHIP?

1. In real fellowship people experience AUTHENTICITY.

- Authentic fellowship is not superficial, surface-level chit-chat. It is genuine, heart-to-heart sharing. It only happens when people get honest about who they are and what is happening in their lives.
- Real fellowship only happens when people share their hurts, reveal their feelings, confess their failures, disclose their doubts, admit their fears, acknowledge their weaknesses, and then ask for help and prayer.
- Sadly, that's the exact opposite of what you find in many churches. Instead of an atmosphere of honesty and humility, there is only pretending, politicking, and mask-wearing. People act as if everything is rosy in their own lives, living out a lie!
- The world thinks intimacy happens in the dark, but God says it happens when we walk in the light!
- Being authentic requires both courage and humility; it means facing our fear of exposure, rejection, and being hurt again. Why would anyone take such a risk? Because it is the only way to grow spiritually and be emotionally healthy!
- **James 5:16a (MSG)** Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed.
- The biggest risk of all is to be honest with ourselves and others!
- What is the biggest enemy of authenticity? PRIDE.

2. In real fellowship people experience MUTUALITY.

- Mutuality is the art of depending on each other, giving and receiving, sharing and helping. God designed His body this way because all of us are more consistent when others walk with us.
- **Romans 1:12 (LB)** I need your help, for I want not only to share my faith with you but to be encouraged by yours: Each of us will be a blessing to the other.

- You are not responsible FOR everyone in the Body of Christ, but you are responsible TO them!
- What is the biggest enemy of mutuality? INDEPENDENCE.

3. In real fellowship people experience SYMPATHY.

- Sympathy is not giving advice, quick answers or thoughtless clichés. Sympathy is simply sharing in the pain of others.
- Every time you understand and affirm someone's feelings, you build real fellowship. But most of the time we're in such a hurry to fix things that we don't have time to sympathize with people.
- The deepest level of fellowship is the "fellowship of suffering" (Phil. 3:10) where we enter into each other's pain and carry each other's burdens. This is when we need each other the most!
- **Galatians 6:2 (NLT)** Share each other's troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ.
- What is the biggest enemy of sympathy? SELF-PITY.

4. In real fellowship people experience MERCY.

- Real fellowship is a place of grace, where mistakes are rubbed in, but rubbed out. Real fellowship only happens when mercy wins over justice. And we all need mercy, because we all stumble and fall!
- Because we're imperfect people, we inevitably hurt each other when we're together for a long enough time. Sometimes it's intentional, sometimes it's unintentional, but either way it takes a lot of grace and mercy to maintain real fellowship.
- Many people are reluctant to show mercy because they don't understand the difference between trust and forgiveness. Forgiveness is letting go of the past. Trust has to do with future behavior. Forgiveness must be immediate (whether or not they ask for it!). Trust must be rebuilt over time.
- You will never be asked to forgive someone else more than God has already forgiven you. Whenever you are hurt by someone, you are faced with a choice: Will I use my energy and emotions for RETALIATION or for RESOLUTION? You can't do both!
- **Colossians 3:13 (NLT)** You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.
- What is the biggest enemy of mercy? UNFORGIVENESS.
YOU CAN'T HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITHOUT FORGIVENESS!