

Family

David Flatt

Family is among the great blessings God has given us. The happiest memories we have are often connected to our families. When my grandpa was living, he would sometimes reminisce about his childhood. He grew up on Flynn's Creek in Jackson County, Tennessee. His aunts, uncles, and cousins lived on the creek too. As he thought about those early days of his life, he would recall his family gathering at an uncle's house on Saturday nights to listen to the Grand Ole Opry. That happy scene was forever etched into his mind.

Without question, family enriches our lives. We find joy and comfort in our loved ones. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the Bible describes our relationships in Christ in familial terms. Notice the following passages:

Rom. 8:15-17: *"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."*

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

1 Tim. 5:1-2: *"Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity."*

Heb. 13:1: *"Let brotherly love continue."*

As Christians, we are the family of God. God is our Father. Jesus is our older brother. We are younger brothers and sisters. But, what does being a family mean?

Being Family Means...

1. Sharing the same blood. The entire human family shares the same blood. Paul explained this to the Athenians (Acts 17:26). Of course, this is why we owe our fellow man love, dignity, and respect regardless of race or ethnicity. We all have been made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27).

Sadly, our image is ruined by sin. Our relationship with God our Father is broken. Thankfully, by the blood of Jesus, we can be reunited with God and His family. Peter explained, *"...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot"* (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

When believers in Jesus are baptized, Jesus' blood cleanses them from sin and unites them as God's family. Paul wrote, *"For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal. 3:26-28). The blood of Jesus creates unity from diversity.

2. Having differences. While we share the same blood as God's family, we remain a diverse group. While sin is to be sacrificed and left behind, there are some qualities that we bring with us to God's family. We have different life experiences that give each family member a valuable perspective on life. Varying perspectives enable God's family to make a thoughtful appeal to a diverse world. The appeal of the Gospel is that everyone can join God's family faith. God's family is for everyone who will believe and obey the Gospel (Rom. 1:16-17).

Also, as members of God's family, we all have different personalities and abilities. There are different ways in which we can reflect the glory of God. God has given each of us grace or gifts to be used to His glory in the world (Eph. 4:7). Whatever our gift is, we are to refine our skill and use it to the best of our ability (Rom. 12:3-8).

3. Making peace. Where there is a family there will be a disagreement. Some disagreements within families are trivial: an argument over what to eat for dinner. Others are more consequential: relocating the family for a new job. Regardless of the seriousness of the issue in question, families must find ways to make peace for the sake of keeping the family together.

The same is true regarding the family of God. Due to different backgrounds, life experiences, and spiritual maturity, there are bound to be disagreements among us. Reaching peaceable solutions will require a combination of sacrificing self-interest, yielding to one another, and deference to authority. If our actions are not encouraging to our siblings in Christ, we must change our behavior: *"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another"* (Rom. 14:19 KJV).

If and when we hurt one of our siblings in Christ, we must seek reconciliation: *"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful"* (Col. 3:12-15). In all of our relationships, let us remember, *"Whoever troubles his own household will inherit the wind..."* (Prov. 11:29).

Conclusion

God created the family to reflect His glory in the world and provide support for mankind. When we live in love with our families, our lives are enriched by the goodness of God. Likewise,

God's family, the Church, was created to reflect His glory in the world and to provide support to Christians. When we live in love as the family of God, our lives are enriched by the goodness of God. But this is not all.

The love and goodness we can experience as the family of God in this life foreshadow what will be experienced by God's family in Heaven. God's family today lives in the hope of a family reunion. God's family of all time will gather with Jesus and experience inexpressible joy.

My grandpa loved to sing. He only knew how to sing one way: with all his heart. I can still hear him singing, *"Beyond this land of parting, losing and leaving. Far beyond the losses, darkening this. And far beyond the taking and the bereaving, lies the summer land of bliss!"*

Like so many others of God's family, my grandpa has been gone for a while now. Sadly, death breaks the circle of family. But, I look forward to our reunion. By faith, I hope to join him and the rest of God's family beyond this land of parting.

*Land beyond, so fair and bright!
Land beyond, where is no night!
Summer land, God is its light!
Oh, happy summer land of bliss!*