

Who Is My Brother?

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While teaching one day, Jesus' family came looking for Him. When Jesus was told that His family wanted to see Him, Jesus took the opportunity to teach about the true nature of His family. Notice the following:

While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matt. 12:46-50).

There are two important implications for this brief teaching of Jesus. First, Jesus' family is broader than His biological relatives. The family of Jesus is welcoming of anyone who does the will of His Father. Second, Jesus narrows His family. Those who do not follow the will of His Father are excluded from His family. In summary, our reception into Jesus' family is contingent on us doing His Father's will.

As Christians and churches, we have the responsibility of urging people to do the will of God to share in the blessings of His family. As churches, we must do our best determine who is part of God's family. When people express an interest in becoming part of the church, we must determine if they are part of God's family. This can be challenging; however, the Bible gives several principles that can be used to help us.

Principles of Fellowship

1). Fellowship with God. Fellowship simply means sharing. Biblically, the term describes sharing in a relationship. Fellowship begins on an individual level. By the Gospel, we can determine the status of our relationship with God. If we have not obeyed the Gospel, we are not part of God's family. The Christians at Colossae were brought into fellowship with God through their obedience to the Gospel. God had qualified them "to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:12-14).

After we obey the Gospel, we must continue to do the will of the Father. Otherwise, our relationship with Him and His family will become estranged. This can happen to Christians individually and churches collectively. For example, the church at Ephesus was urged to repent or face having their fellowship with the Lord extinguished (Rev. 2:5-6).

2). James, Peter, John, and Paul. When Paul went to Jerusalem, he met with James, Peter, and John. These men had questions about Paul. They had received reports about Paul's alleged teaching. After getting answers about what Paul taught in his ministry, they determined they were all in agreement regarding the Gospel. James, Peter, and John extended the right hand of fellowship to Paul (Gal. 2:1-10).

This encounter serves as an example of how we can determine if someone is part of God's family. James, Peter, and John had heard rumors about Paul's teaching. After discussion, all these Christians concluded that they believed and taught the same doctrine. The Gospel united them into the family of God. Therefore, the right hand of fellowship was extended to Paul. They were brothers in Christ.

Receiving one as a member of God's family demands agreement on the Gospel. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the foundation of our fellowship with God and God's family. The Gospel is non-negotiable. Our fellowship with God and His family is contingent on our faith in the Gospel.

3). The church at Corinth. In Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, he rebuked them for fellowshiping a man living in sin. This man was in an ungodly relationship with his stepmother (1 Cor. 5). The church was aware of the situation but did not rebuke the man for his sin. Instead, they accepted him as a Christian in good standing with the Lord. They shared in this Christian's sin.

Paul commanded the church to note this man as not being in fellowship with the Lord. Based on what is written in Paul's second letter, the church at Corinth rebuked this man and he repented. Paul instructed the church to forgive him and receive him back into fellowship with the church (2 Cor. 2:5-11). When Christians live in harmony with the Gospel, there will be peace in the church.

4). Elders taking the lead. In a local church, the eldership is to take the lead in matters of fellowship. They are to encourage the faithfulness of the church membership. They are to warn, rebuke, and discipline when necessary. If a church member is living openly in sin, elders are to seek his or her restoration.

Also, elders are to determine if prospective church members can be received into fellowship with the local church. This can be learned through conversation. If prospective members are found to be Christians in good standing with the Lord, the right hand of fellowship can be extended.

Conclusion

Doing the Father's will is the trait of Jesus' true brothers and sisters. In the New Testament, this trait is called faith. We can know if we are part of God's family. We can identify our other brothers and sisters.

We have a responsibility to ourselves and one another to obey the will of the Father. The Father's will is for everyone to follow His Son. He is the only Way to salvation (John 14:6). We cannot endorse any other path or lifestyle. Are you part of Jesus' family?