

Chapter 10

THE CHURCH AS THE FAMILY OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

God himself instituted the family. He uses the family as a pattern that we can see and understand to teach us truths in His ways. God works through families. The truths of God that we are taught and that we learn are meant to be passed on through families. The church is not obsolete. It can and should be relevant in the world today. It is what Jesus said He would build. The church is pictured in a variety of ways in scripture, but as the family of God the church can and should offer to those that are a part of it a sense of love, acceptance and forgiveness, training in the ways of God, and fellowship with other family members. (Luke 8:20-21; 2 Corinthians 6:18; Ephesians 2:11-13, 19)

- I. When we begin to look at the church as the family of God, we see God as the Father and those that have believed in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior as His children. As in all family situations there is the need to learn how we are to behave ourselves as part of that family. Being part of the family of God, the church carries with it responsibilities as well as privileges. (2 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Timothy 3:14-15)
- II. Within the life of the church as the family of God it is important that we all receive nurturing. Nurture means to bring up, to care for, and to train. It will involve growing together as a family; learning to work with one another, learning our responsibilities as well as our privileges. (Ephesians 6:4)
 - A. The world will look at the church and would really like to be able to see Jesus. The world would like to believe that there is a God and that He is real enough to be seen in the lives of His children.
 - B. The church and its leaders role to the church as the family of God should be to offer nurturing. The church, the family of God is people, individuals with real needs, faults, and desires. The church should not be seen as just an organization or a place where programs are run. In order to grow and function as the family of God the church will have to learn to nurture people...God's children, not just run an organization.
- III. In our natural families we told in scripture to give or provide for proper shelter, proper food, and proper clothing for our family. There should also be the sense of togetherness, unity, and closeness within the family. We need to be able to know that this unity and closeness will be there in the fun and joyous times, in the sad times, and the hard times. We will look at these various areas of family life and see how they might relate to us as the church, the family of God.
- IV. When we consider providing proper shelter for the church, the family of God, what are we to see as necessary provision? The world that people live in every day can be quite difficult and hard. The church, the family of God can and should offer shelter from the storms of life, disappointments, and hurts. It should be a place of refuge; not a place of condemnation, ridicule, or criticism. We all need to belong to something that gives us a sense of identity and belonging. The church, the family of God can offer this in a safe, secure way. Just as in the natural family we really need a home more than a house.

- V. Without food, both natural and spiritual, we will become malnourished. The food that we are to provide for the family of God is the spiritual food that is necessary for us to grow as a child of God. This spiritual food needs to be nutritional and well balanced as it is offered to the family. That will mean that we will not always hear preached from God's Word easy things or things that we personally like to hear. It will be the responsibility of those serving the Word of God to the family to be careful in the handling of it so that it will not be spoiled or hurtful.

How natural food is presented can be important. With spiritual food, the Word of God, how it is presented or said can affect how it is taken in and used productively in our lives. Sometimes when we prepare food for our families we are careful to give them what is good for them even when it is not their favorite. The church, the family of God should be careful to give a balanced diet of the Word of God.

What about leftovers (something that has been served, preached before)? We would all be unhappy if that is what we were served all the time. When you do serve leftovers, make sure it is given in an attractive way and that you serve something extra to go with what has been preached before. If God's people don't find what they want or need at home (church), they will go to the convenience store or fast food restaurant (TV, radio, cassettes, videos) for something. A steady diet of these things outside the life of the family can be harmful. (Matthew 4:4; Matthew 6:11; Acts 20:27)

- VI. We care about how we dress and how we dress our family in the natural. We want them to be clean even to be dressed appropriately. When children are younger, they have to be helped with learning the way to do this. The same is true in the church, the family of God. We are not so concerned here with appropriate natural dress as with the things that God tells us we need to be dressed in spiritually. Some of the things God very specifically tells us to put on are compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, forgiveness, love, and patience. We are to have love and faithfulness as a necklace. God also talks to us about preparing ourselves for battle by putting on the armor of God. The Bible tells us as well that at the very beginning of our life as part of the family God put on us the robes of righteousness in exchange for the filthy rags we had. We also have the garments of praise that are available to us. (Proverbs 4:9; Proverbs 3:3; Proverbs 3:22; Isaiah 61:3; Isaiah 61:10; Ephesians 6:13-17; Colossians 3:12-15)

- VII. *"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven..."*

What a privilege we have as the family of God to share our experiences together as we all go through the different seasons of life. During the lifetime we share we will all have both good times and bad times. How much better it is though when we have those of our church family to share those times with us. (Ecclesiastes. 3:1-8)

- A. Let's look first at the fun times or joyous times. The times that we can celebrate and rejoice together. Some of the ways we can do this are to make birthdays and anniversaries special occasions. Christmas and Easter can also be good times as the family of God as well as opportunities for reaching out to those around us. As the family of God we develop traditions through the years that are very meaningful to us. It may be a yearly celebration, a monthly meal together, or an occasional singspiration. Remember for some in the family of God this is the only real sense of family that they have.

- B. We also need to learn to share the sad times with those in the church who are facing

disappointments, deaths, illness, or break-up of a relationship. To really share this time with them is not to try to figure it out or to rationalize why it has happened. It is important just to be there for them and to be with them. We can learn to be compassionate, encouraging, and caring during the sad times. When we face hard times, it is sometimes hard to be loyal to each other. It seems we often more easily believe the worst before the best. As we build close relationships and the trust between us grows we will learn to believe the good and not the bad. (Psalms 103:13; Romans 12:15; 1 Thessalonians. 5:11)

- VIII. Being part of the family of God costs us something, but it also pays high dividends. Some of the costs we can be aware of are the giving of ourselves and opening up to others. When we do this we may be hurt, but if we are hurt, we must not give up. Giving of ourselves is the only way to experience true love. In doing that we learn about trusting and being trustworthy. It will cost us some of our rights. We have the privilege of yielding our rights for the privilege of belonging to something larger than ourselves. It will cost us some time and effort. The reality of the church as the family of God will not happen unless we are willing to give some time and some effort. It will require prayer and faithfulness. Sometimes confrontation will be necessary. Proper and good communication within the family is also important. The dividends we will receive are the love and fellowship of our brothers and sisters and a very real sense of belonging; of being part of something bigger than ourselves. There is joy in being involved together as a family in the purpose of God.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 10 The Church as the Lamb of God

1. Do you believe that it is easier for a church to function as an organization with programs or as a family of God? Give some reasons for your answers.
2. As stated in the lesson, to be an active member of a church that functions as a family of God will cost us something. What are some of the "costs" of real church involvement? Do you believe that the costs are worth the dividends we receive? Why?