

Title: We Are Family
Date: August 2, 2020
Subject: Pictures of the church – the family of God
Scripture: Ephesians 1:1 - 10

Our reason for living is rooted in who we are. Who we are is rooted in the work of God and his proclamations about who we are. People who've renounced their sins, turned from following the wicked ways of the world and turned to Jesus to rescue them from their sins are identified as believers, followers, Christians, the church.

To some, the last one sounds like a generic group or amorphous blob. Sometimes it's treated as an enterprise, business, organization or used to refer to a building. It's much more than that. It's an organism, a living, dynamic entity. The word *church* means *called out ones*—people who are called out of the world system opposed to God and called to Christ. It's not used of a building in the Bible.

Throughout the New Testament there are word pictures to help us understand what it means to be part of this special bunch of people known as the church. The most extensive collection compiled in one place is in the book of Ephesians.

Read Ephesians 1:1 - 10.

There's a wealth of teaching material and insight to be gleaned from these verses. Our phrase of focus comes in v. 5 -- "adopted as sons." The word picture is that of a family. We call ourselves a son or daughter of God and that's what we are because we're part of the collective group.

The group came about by God's choice. People don't become part of the family of God by their personal choice or their effort. They can't earn the right to enter the family. The Bible expressly tells us "To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (John 1:12, 13). God is the one who chose people not the other way around.

This leads us to the word adopted. This past Thursday this building was used by our District of churches as the licensing committee met to interview men for ordination. By the way, the committee and district superintendent were enthralled with the decorations and amazed with what we're doing for VBS.

One of the interviewees revealed he and his wife are foster parents. He shared that they decided to become foster parents in response to what God has done for them and that it seemed like a natural way for them to live out their faith in Christ. They're in the process of adopting the two girls who live with them.

The thing about adoption is parents choose who they'll welcome into their family. That isn't the case for natural born children, although there are some gruesome things about genetic engineering and selection where people try to create so-called "designer babies" or aborting those they don't want. There's an old saying that you can choose your friends but you don't get to choose who's in your family because you're born into it.

The text further states that the adoption by God is as sons. The ancient world had a liberal policy of adoption because they were heir crazy. In order to maintain their name and their legacy they would adopt a young man to become another heir or replace an actual son who was supposed to be the heir because they were viewed as better. The adoptee would be granted the rights of not just belonging to the family, but full rights including inheritance.

Let's bring this into the spiritual realm. The God of the universe, God the Father, has one Son by nature -- Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity. To expand his family God chose people as the ones who could be adopted into the family of God. God wasn't just willing to do it, He was pleased to do it. The angels didn't have to twist his arm behind his back and beg him to act.

The mechanism for adoption is love. The tail end of v. 4 in the New International has two words *in love*. This is echoed in 1 John 3:1: "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God." This love reached out to those who had no right to be in God's family and no inclination to be in God's family. It happened while we were still sinners, enemies who were in rebellion against him, that God demonstrated his love for us (Romans 5:8).

One of the most familiar stories Jesus told is that of the prodigal son. Sometimes it's called the prodigal father as the word *prodigal* can be understood as being lavish. The younger son demands his inheritance early so he can leave home and enjoy life. He wastes it on wild parties and riotous living. When all his money and the friends he bought with it are gone, his foolishness smacks him upside the head and he comes to his senses. Brokenheartedly, he returns home to confess to his father that he was wrong. He's had a change of heart and mind and desires to live under his dad's roof as a lowly servant. The dad will have nothing of it but welcomes him fully and completely back into the family. It's a picture of the love of God.

When we apply the story to ourselves, we find that the instrument of God's love which allows us to be reconciled to the heavenly Father is the death of the one who is the Son by nature. Jesus Christ died so we could become part of the family. God operates by grace because he knows adopting people into his family is the only way to prevent them from being condemned to be tormented eternally in hell.

The privileges involved in being part of the family. It kind of sounds like some of those gangster movies about the Mafia -- "part of the family." Family speaks to relationship. Our earthly families are all over the place as to the quality and quantity of relationship. That's not the case with the God and his family. The Lord grants us the privilege of being in his incomparable forever family that has out of this world perks.

Skip ahead to 2:19 where we find a paragraph with loads of word pictures including the phrase at the very end of the verse *members of God's household*. This could be understood as extended family -- aunts, uncles, cousins twice or three times removed. It's best if we merge this imagery with being adopted as sons. It's reinforces the idea that we belong to God. It's in contrast to the idea of slaves. God didn't bring us into his house to serve in the capacity as a slave, one without any rights. He's elevated us from being slaves to the world who served a horrible master to the position of being children of God.

Being in a family means we're in a place of relatability. The specific one, the main one, we can relate to is the Father. We have access to him. We can even address him by the most comforting and reassuring ways as daddy. That's what the word *abba* means (Romans 8:15). Intimacy. Close connection. The person on the other end of our conversation cares and listens. He doesn't blow us off, or not hear us.

Ephesians 1 details some of what God gives his family. One element that stands out comes in verse 7. We have redemption through Christ's blood, the forgiveness of sins. This harmonizes with the riches of God's grace. Since he is perfect, everything he provides matches his character. The redemption and forgiveness are perfect and complete. There are no gaps or missing pieces.

Our adoption comes with the full rights of sonship. We have the same rights and inheritance as the person who might be naturally born into the family. However, since no human had that opportunity and only Jesus did, we look at the rights Jesus has. Jesus enjoys being in the presence of God and having an intimate relationship with him and enjoying all of what heaven is. It will be the same for us. There's much more in store in the future inheritance that will be fully realized when we get to heaven.

Being in the family isn't all about what we get but what we give, how we contribute to the family. What is our role, our function? Since we're the King's kids, what's expected? We're to be imitators of God as beloved children (Ephesians 5:1).

Behaving like a child of the King means being obedient. On a busy day Jesus was teaching at a house when He was informed his mother and brothers were there to see him (Mark 3:20 - 35). It was more than coming for a visit. They'd come to take charge of him because they thought he was out of his mind. When the Savior was informed they were outside, he looked at those around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." Jesus considers his family as the ones who hear God's word and put it into practice.

We also are in relationship with others in the family of God. Russell Moore writes about this in *Adopted for Life*: "Our adoption means...we find a different kind of unity. In Christ, we find Christ. We don't have our old identities based on race or class or life situation. The Spirit drives us from Babel to Pentecost, which is why "the works of the flesh" Paul warns about include "enmity, strife, jealousy. . . ." When we find our identity anywhere other than Christ, our churches will be made up of warring partisans rather than loving siblings. What would it mean, though, if we took the radical notion of being brothers and sisters seriously? What would happen if your church saw an elderly woman no one would ever confuse with "cool" on her knees at the front of the church praying with a body-pierced fifteen-year-old anorexic girl? What would happen if your church saw a white millionaire corporate vice president being mentored by a Latino minimum wage-earning janitor because both know the janitor is more mature in the things of Christ?"

Another Scripture expands on the family relationship. "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). Just prior to this verse we're told that one of the ways to do good is to carry each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2).

As with all families, the family of God goes through difficult times, trials, temptations, struggles. We are to be there for each other. We are to do good, carry each other's burdens and flesh out the other one another commands like love, accept, comfort, encourage and help each other. In this way we can make a difference in each other's lives.

Author Wes Seelinger witnessed scenes that give a picture of what we're to be like as the family of God. "I have spent long hours in the intensive care waiting room...watching anguished people...listening to urgent questions...The intensive care waiting room is different from any other place in the world. And the people who wait are different. No one is rude. The distinctions of race and class melt away. Each person pulls for everyone else. In the intensive care waiting room, the world changes and people there can't do enough for one another."

Unfortunately, sometimes we don't always act that way as act unlovingly, judgmentally. Sometimes the Lord gives us a wake-up call. An RN named P. T. Miller shares her story: "While at work in the emergency room, I learned to...become insensitive to people and their needs. Five years of emergency room exposure had taken its toll until God intervened. I was taking information for registering a young woman who had overdosed on drugs and had attempted suicide. Her mother sat before me as I typed the information into the computer. She was unkempt and bleary eyed, having been awakened in the middle of the night by the police and she could only speak to me in a whisper. Hurry up, I said to myself, as she slowly gave me information. My impatience was raw as I finished the report and went to copy the medical card. That's when God stopped me - at the copy machine. He spoke to my heart so clearly: 'You didn't even look at her.' He repeated it gently: 'You didn't even look at her.' I felt His grief for her and her daughter and I bowed my head. 'I'm sorry, Lord, I am so sorry.' I sat down in front of the distraught woman and covered her hands with mine. I looked into her eyes with all the love that God could flood through me and said, 'I care. Don't give up.' She wept and wept. She poured her heart out to me about years of dealing with a rebellious daughter as a single mom Finally, she looked up and thanked me. Me...the coldhearted one with no feelings; my attitude changed that night. My Jesus came right into the workplace in spite of rules that tried to keep Him out. He came in to set me free again. He gave Himself to that woman through me. My God, who so loved the world, broke that self-imposed barrier around my heart. Now he could reach out, not only to me in my pain, but to a lost and hurting woman" (sermoncentral.com/sermons/the-family-of-god-david-swensen).

We also are to seek to expand the family of God. I heard of a man who became a follower of Jesus Christ. He was excited to share his newfound faith. He was a Barber and the next morning when his first client came in he was poised to talk about Jesus. He had been sharpening his old-fashioned straight edge razor blade and then lathered up the man. With the blade close to the man's throat he said, "Are you ready to go to heaven?"

I'm sure he had the man's attention but maybe it wasn't the best way to present the gospel. It reminds us there are people that need to hear how they can join the family of God our responsibility to share. May we take that opportunity.