

☛ Back to the Basics - Fellowship

Just for fun... Family vacations are wonderful times, but they do have their tedious moments. Dad, Mom, and the two boys were about 200 miles into their trip, when Dad had enough! "Ever since we left home," he said, "you boys have been picking on each other, yelling names and tearing up the back seat of the car. I am putting an end to this now!" He slammed on the brakes, pulled the car off to the side of the road, jerked his sons out and spanked them both soundly. "I don't want to hear one word out of either of you for 30 minutes," he shouted, "not one word!" The two boys sat still and quiet for at least 30 minutes until the youngest one meekly said, "Daddy, do you remember when you spanked me? Well, one of my shoes came off...!"

Fellowship

--Corrie ten Boom... Be united with other Christians. A wall with loose bricks is not good. The bricks must be cemented together.

We need each other as we walk out our faith. When I think of Christian fellowship in the context of a local church, it's more than just getting together once a week. In fact, in Acts 2:42 it says the early church devoted themselves to fellowship, which in the Greek is "koinonia." It means to share in something. We share this Christian life with each other. We share the same Lord; we share the same guide for life with the bible; we share the same love for God; we share the same struggles in life; we share the same victories; etc. The biblical idea of fellowship is more than just a friendly association; it's family.

☛ The church is... **we are... the Family of God.** "brothers" is used around **180** times in the NT to refer to believers. The word "**father**" is used over **1600** times in the bible. And several times in the New Testament the followers of Christ were referred to as **family**. (Galatians 6:9; Ephesians 3:15; Hebrews 2:11; 1 Peter 4:17)

"Family." What rushes through your mind? Often, we think of examples of families on TV, whether good or bad, like the Walton's, the Brady's, the Huxtable's, the Barone's and so on. So, what really is a family?

The Family is designed by God. It's an environment where the art of nurturing takes place. Where children are born and raised. Where love takes place on a daily basis. Where encouragement is dished out in large doses and, where discipline is found and respect is taught. (This could equally describe the Church.)

Ephesians 3:14-19 *Fundamentals for Families: Love and Respect*

For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

☞ **Rooted in love.** Love is a fundamental aspect of family, whether biological or spiritual. This is the self-sacrificing kind of love. Here in chapter 3 it talks about how extensive God's love for us is. He lowered himself to become a human and he died on a cross for us. He is our example and we should be loving each other deeply and self-sacrificially as well.

There's a story of a little who was afraid during a stormy night and she cried for daddy to be with her. Her dad comforted her and reminded her that she didn't need to be afraid because God was always with her and would take care of her. "I know God will take care of me and love me," she replied. "But right now, Daddy, I want someone with skin on to love me." We are to be God's love, with skin on!

☞ **Built with respect.** Show love and respect because it's right and God is pleased by it.

☞ Another word for respect is "**honor.**" **Romans 12:10** states that as Christ followers we are to take delight in honoring each other. Did you catch that? We are to "delight" in honoring another person. It is not supposed to be a hassle or something to dread. When we delight in honoring another person it boosts their feeling of value.

Respect is something you choose to give to your spouse and family, including your church family, whether you think it has been earned or not.

Love and respect are shown in kind words and actions. It's shown in being helpful, encouraging, and expressing gratitude. True/False: On Respect...

- I treat other people the way I want to be treated.
- I am considerate of other people.
- I treat people with civility, courtesy, and dignity.
- I accept personal differences.
- I work to solve problems without violence.
- I never intentionally ridicule, embarrass, or hurt people.

More Fundamentals for both home family and church family:

☞ Ephesians 4:2-3

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

☞ We've talked before about needing to **"put up with" each other**. A little **humility** and **gentleness** goes a long ways.

☞ What we need is to **"make every effort" to keep the unity**. Family ties require hard work. Church unity requires hard work. We need to have patience with each other. Unity requires hard work...

Some may think, "That's easy for you to say. Your family didn't have any issues." Wrong. I fought with my sisters just like you did. I didn't always think Dad and Mom treated me fairly. I wasn't always the perfect child that you might imagine. But we hung in there. We learned to put up with each other and keep the unity in spite of our differences from time to time. And that's still true today. When we get together it's a lot of fun, but there are some instances of rubbing each wrong, too. But we work through it.

Practical steps...

Ephesians 5:21

☞ **submit to one another** out of reverence for Christ.

On different occasions and for varying reasons, each one in the family will need to let the other family members take precedence. It's the same in church. In fact, it's a sign of maturity to allow others to have precedence. When you demand everything to be your way, and in your time, that's childish. That's what toddlers with temper-tantrums do!

☞ **James 1:19** helps us here... "be **quick to listen**, slow to speak and slow to become angry." (NLT)

☞ Part of this listening is to be careful **not to jump to conclusions**. When something gets under your skin, if you can't simply be okay with it, then you need to have a face to face conversation with the intent of listening and understanding the other person.

Perhaps the easiest way to grow a healthy relationship is to offer encouragement.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

☞ **encourage one another** and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

How can we encourage one another in our homes and in the church? Two simple ideas:

☞ **By smiling**

Job, a man acquainted with grief and sorrow, in chapter 29, was recalling the days before he was visited with calamity. He said that when people around him were discouraged, *I smiled at them. My look of approval was precious to them v. 24.* (NLT) Never underestimate the power of a smile. A smile not only increases your face value, but it warms the heart of those you give it to. I know it helps me when I'm preaching!

☞ **By pointing out the positive**

Someone noted, "Man doesn't live by bread alone. He also needs buttering up." Words are powerful in that they can do enormous harm or amazing good.

Andrew Carnegie, the great entrepreneur, once said that people are developed the same way gold is mined. When gold is mined, several tons of dirt must be moved to get an ounce of gold; but you don't go into the mine looking for dirt – you go in looking for gold!

Start today to look for gold in your child, in your spouse, in your parents and in your church family. Jesus certainly must have seen the gold in the disciples he chose.

☞ One more fundamental: **Ask for and offer forgiveness**

Anyone who lives in a family of any kind knows that people will disappoint and hurt you. One gem of wisdom from people who have been married for many decades is this: "you overlook at lot of little things and you forgive each other." It's the same in the church...

Colossians 3:13

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. **Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** (NLT)

Forgiveness is not natural. It seems to be more natural to carry a grudge; to record all wrongs in red on a legal pad in our minds; to think of ways of getting back at those who hurt us. Yet the Bible is clear in its instruction. As we have experienced forgiveness from God we are to forgive others.

The Spanish have a story about a father and son who became estranged. The son left home, and the father later set out to find him. He searched for months with no success. Finally, in desperation, the father turned to the newspaper for help. His ad simply read, "Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven.

I love you. Your father." On Saturday, eight hundred young men named Paco showed up looking for forgiveness and love from their estranged fathers.

Families today are filled with people who desperately long for reconciliation. Some of you need to experience that kind of forgiveness from God. You can. Perhaps you need to ask for forgiveness for something you said or did, and then change your behavior so it doesn't continue happening.

Church, we are the family of God. He is our father who loves us more than we can imagine. We follow his example and show love and respect to each other. We put up with each other; we submit to each other; we work to understand each other; we encourage each other and we forgive each other.

Church, we are family. Like it or not, we'll be in close proximity for all of eternity. We may as well learn to get along now. Think of the ideal family... God's family is the ultimate family. We are each part of it. We belong. Remember who you are! **You are part of the family of God!**

I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God- I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood! Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod, For I'm part of the family, the family of God.

Before you go, put a smile on your face; offer some encouraging words to a few people; ask for forgiveness if needed; listen; be the family of God. **Let's devote ourselves to this kind of fellowship.**