

Amazing Kinship

Although I have not traced your genealogy, I can say assuredly that your kinship is with an amazingly long list of people both past and present. This has been impressed upon me more recently as I reviewed findings of a cousin, Tommy Jack Moore of Gordonville, Texas. He was a very successful business man until he was stricken down with MS. By use of a computer, with his very limited bodily movement, he began to explore family genealogy and to share his extensive findings with his kin.

One of my great-grandmothers was Ollive Alice Hanks. Her genealogy was traced back to Thomas Hanks who was born in England before 1630 and died in Virginia. His list of descendants is like a telephone directory. There I saw my name listed as an "eighth great-grandson," which would mean I am twelve generations later, if I understand correctly. My children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen generations later.

Listed as a "second great-granddaughter" is a Nancy Hanks (b.1784 - d. 1818). Does that name seem familiar to you? She was the mother of Abraham Lincoln who himself is listed as a "third great-grandson." Now that I mention it, you had noticed our resemblance, had't you? {:-) That is interesting as trivia, but it hardly made us "kissin' cousins." We would need Einstein to determine our relativity.

This led me to begin thinking of the vast number of persons from whom I am descended - or maybe preferably ascended! Each person has or has had four grandparents. Each of those grandparents had four, and their grandparents each had four going back beyond historical record. Counting back ten generations, each of us has had 1,048,576 grandparents. At fifteen generations ago the number would be over one billion! And that is just a start! Obviously, that number would exceed the population of England or Western Europe, so it would involve the inter-marriage through the generations of those whose degree of kinship was lost.

With other of my kin originating in Western Europe, it is staggering to think that I may have remote kinship with the greater part of the population. Since my father's father was an immigrant of German descent from Switzerland, I have the same kinship with all the Germanic people. And if I could trace my ancestry back through the centuries deriving from my great-great-grandmother who was a Cherokee Indian, that might make me kin to most American Indians. If they originally migrated across the Aleutian Islands, that would relate me to an almost infinite number of Asians.

If we could see the intricate fabric of our kinship, we might see that each of us descended from an assortment of potentates and princes, peasants and peons, and pagans and priests.

Of course, we are all aware of the common ancestry detailed in the Bible through Adam and Noah, and of Paul's declaration that "*he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth*" (Acts 17:26). Yet, viewing from more recent history, we can realize that each of you readers and I may be of much closer actual physical kinship to each other than we ever thought.

Contemplating this encourages us to look beneath the outward distinctions of race, color, culture, education, and ignorance to recognize the common nature of all. All babies cry in the same language. Tears have no color. Well-being feels the same on any continent for all desire comfort, health, food, shelter, and security. In every period of history all have wanted love, acceptance, and fulfilling social relationships. Under every sky all reach out to understand and connect with the Supernatural. All become protective of their familiar society and distrust others of different cultures. And both individuals and societies may become greedy and insensitive of other individuals and societies. You may comment on this sociological aspect better than I. My point is that we should begin with our kinship and commonality and try to peel off the elements that hinder our living together in peace and helpfulness. This cannot be fully accomplished unilaterally but it can be initiated by each of us.

Surely, I do not know all these kinfolk and I may not like many that I do know, and they may not know and like me. But we are called upon to love all people, even those we do not know and those we may dislike. That means that we have positive concern for their physical and spiritual needs even though we cannot approve of all their conduct.

The foregoing thoughts, however, are not the main thrust of this discourse.

God has another family. It is built on spiritual kinship. This kinship is not inherited from spiritual parents and grandparents. We are not spiritual cousins. We are closely kin because we have the same Father. "Where God has a son or daughter, I have a brother or sister." Most of them have already passed through this life, and I know only a few of those currently living. Of those that I have known, I sadly confess, I have questioned the pedigree of many and have denied that they were my brothers when I should have left that determination between God and them. And I have had plenty of company in denying our commonality with the Father.

That is why Paul's circumvented message to the church in Corinth pierces us so painfully when we do acknowledge it. He addressed a congregation whose strong leaders were pulling in different directions and sponsoring dissenting groups who were disrespectful of each other. They would not even wait for each other in eating their fellowship meals in which the Lord's Supper was included. Their fellowship meals excluded fellowship with others in Christ. They sought to protect the purity of their relationship with the Father by rejecting others of his children. What a travesty!

As Paul dealt with various issues in his epistle, he continued to press his point about unity that was being disrupted. In giving corrective information about the question of eating

meats offered to idols, he saw fit to ask some probing questions about the communion: *“Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf”* (1 Cor. 10:16-17 NIV). The words and metaphors Paul used here are especially meaningful. The Supper is a communion-fellowship-sharing-participation in the body of Christ. Oneness is further emphasized by the fact that the many who share the one loaf-bread are one body-loaf-bread. Everything about it points to the unity and mutual acceptance of disciples. They are all children of the same Father.

They were not meeting as denominations such as “Church of Christ,” “Church of God,” and “Assembly of God,” but they were distinguishing themselves by segregating under the leadership of their divisive leaders while still meeting as one congregation. But meeting in the same building did not make them one. Meeting as separate congregations of like scruples would not be divisive as such. It is the rejection of others in Christ, whether they meet in the same location or different buildings or under distinguishing names, that destroys the unity of the one body. Disrespect toward other of God’s children is always destructive of the oneness of God’s family.

We usually have little problem with accepting those who meet with us under our banner proclaiming us as “anti this or that.” But we reject others like us except that their banner identifies them as “pro this or that.” In making such distinctions, we lose sight of Christ as the basis of our unity and substitute a peripheral doctrine or practice as the center. In dealing with the problems in Corinth, Paul did not recommend the rejection of others on the basis of doctrinal differences. He never advised those holding to the “true” doctrine to separate and start another “one-true church.”

It is likely that each of you may agree with what I have written above. You are dismayed by the division among disciples, but it is not your fault! Division is always caused by others! Others deviate from your doctrinal stance, and you have to reject them in order to show you do not endorse or fellowship them. So you put them through your own formulated DNA test to determine if they are really your brothers with whom you may share-commune-fellowship in the one body-loaf. All along, however, you have known that Paul wrote, *“A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup,”* but he did not write, *“A man ought to examine others before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup with them.”*

In any assembly of a hundred or a thousand with whom you commune, there are those with all sorts of different beliefs and scruples and who struggle with all sorts of sins in their lives, yet you commune-participate-fellowship-share with them because they wear your distinctive name as a group. Is the church name by which you denominate yourselves the basis of acceptance? To where does that relegate Christ and the fatherhood of God? I am not being harsh in asking these questions. I am familiar with all of our defenses for our rejection of others for I made a career of teaching them. I evaded these questions and may still not be facing them squarely, I confess.

True, we must reject the flagrantly impenitent, those who deny the basis of our salvation, and divisive persons, but those are not the usual reasons for our separations and rejections.

“Therefore, whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:27). From my youth I was tutored that this meant that we should examine ourselves to make sure we were worthy to partake, as though we could ever be worthy. But Paul was referring to the manner in which they were partaking. They were communing-partaking-participating-sharing in the very symbol of oneness while divisively rejecting one another! What a contradiction! What a sham! Is self-examination in order for you?

Do you refuse communion-fellowship with other disciples meeting down the street or across town? Am I indicating that the church is composed of all the denominations? No, but it is composed of the saved in those divisions, else there is no church, for there is no “one true undenominated church” composed of all the saved and only the saved in visible or organized form. Such a group is not listed in the Yellow Pages.

Although there were dissenting groups in Corinth, Paul addressed them as *“the church of God which is at Corinth* (1:2). Though they were in rejecting groups, there was still only one church. There is still only one church for it cannot by its nature be divided so that there are two or more churches. It is God’s congregation of those he has saved. Thomas Campbell stated it clearly: “The Church of Christ on earth is essentially, intentionally and constitutionally one...” We seem not to have grasped that profound truth.

There is much more, but I have tested your patience. We will conclude with this observation: The diversity among the infinite number of our physical relatives does not negate our kinship and our obligation to love and work with them for the common welfare. This applies more emphatically to our relationship with our vast number of spiritual kin, all of whom fall short in understanding and practice.

(Cecil Hook; January 2003) []