

In The Family of God, Continued

Our collective spiritual relationship is illustrated by comparing it with a physical family. We are depicted as sons of God, children of God, and the household (family) of faith. Many applications emphasizing fellowship can be made from this comparison in harmony with the Scriptures. Some points being made here may be familiar and repetitious. Because we have not yet really accepted the concepts and put them into practice, much repetition can be of value.

A great number of the good people of my heritage are quick to repudiate any proposed concept of unity in diversity. Because there has never been a successful demonstration of unity by conformity, either in Biblical times or in modern times, the alternate route has been chosen. That alternate route is division – separation from and rejection of all who disagree with us. And in order for the separating group to have any appearance of total agreement, a few major issues are made the basis of the unity. Even in the smallest of groups, outside of those few identifying issues on which they are agreed, there are always other individual differences on a wider spectrum of belief and conviction. So, unity in diversity is the only kind of unity possible.

Your family was probably like the one I was born into. In a line-up, one might not have picked any two of the five siblings as being of the same family. We were each different from the other four. Two were boys; three were girls. Two had brown eyes and three had blue eyes. Body structure and complexion varied. There being no multiple births, we were all of different ages with the oldest and youngest separated by ten years. Some learned more easily and some matured socially before the others. We did not all like the same colors, food, people, or recreation.

None of these differing qualities were the determining factors in our being brothers and sisters. The basis of our relationship is so evident that it seems platitudinous to repeat it. The reason we were siblings is that we had the same parents. No one would be so foolish as to contend that, in addition to having the same parents, we should all be blue-eyed or all be girls or be identical.

The alteration of features or characteristics would not negate brotherhood – adding glasses or dentures, cutting hair, excising an appendix, wearing styled clothing and jewelry, tattoos, becoming diabetic, gaining education, becoming addicted to drugs, change of name, marrying, divorcing, re-marrying, renouncing religion. Some of these things may be undesirable and others totally unacceptable, but the five would still be siblings. The acceptance or rejection among the five does not determine their brotherhood as children of the same father.

Because one loses his temper at times, another disdains black people, another cheats on payment of income tax, another has homosexual tendencies, and another drinks too much, must they disclaim each other as siblings and refuse to associate with them in

family gatherings? Must only the flawless associate with each other? If so, there can be no association at all!

In applying these earthly family associations to the spiritual family, am I saying that none of these sinful traits or practices is of importance? No, by no means. I am saying that there is no group of sinless people in the family of God with whom we can live in fellowship. All are in error! All are sinners! When will we ever admit that? "*Where two or three are gathered together in my name*" there are sinners there! Even though you and I may be too proud or too filled with self-conceit to admit that we are sinners, inspired writers like Paul and John "confess" that we are sinners! I do not have to list those scripture references; you know them and have known them all along. It is a false sense of comfort to think God overlooks our faults but not the sins of those who are not aligned with "our group." Fellowship in the family of God must not be reduced to partisan approval of those who are children of God.

There is no indication that on Pentecost Peter defined every sin on the menu to turn away from and informed them of every detail expected in their future service as disciples before they were accepted for baptism or included in the fellowship after their baptism. It is absurd to contend that they were required to organize themselves in a specific manner lest they lose their salvation by any variation of it. Before baptism, they were not called upon to promise to perform certain rituals of acceptable worship at specified intervals and to limit their corporate worship to those particular activities under threat of hell. There is no indication that any convert was catechized in such a manner before he could be accepted in fellowship. Why not? Simply because none of those things is the basis of fellowship.

What makes us think that we in our partisan, misguided zeal should divert the basis of fellowship from Christ to doctrine, from being children of the same Father to a set of scruples, from unity and acceptance in one body to division and rejection over issues we create, to divide rather than to forbear, or to divide from those who differ in practical and moral issues instead of working for reformation?

Fellowship is created by God in Christ. To refuse fellowship with any person in Christ is to remove yourself from Christ, for you cannot remove your brother from Christ! We are not, however, to associate approvingly with the brother who is impenitently immoral, one who is divisive, or one who denies the basis of our salvation (See 1 Cor. 5; Rom. 16:17-18; 2 John 8-11).

Fellowship is a relationship of individuals rather than churches. Individuals, not congregations, are born into the family of God. Congregations are organized systems. No organization can act for the individual child of God in determining with whom he shares in brotherhood.

Having been nurtured in restorationism, patternism, and legalism and having wrestled with it for years, I fully understand the difficulty that you may have with these lessons. I can only plead you consider fresh concepts patiently and without being defensive of your

long-held concepts. You and I are in no contest over these things. I do not even know who is on my mailing list except as you tell me. Please read my book, *Free In Christ*, before reading my essays. I trust that God will be as patient with you as he has been with me. []

(Cecil Hook; January 2005)

Talkin' Texas: In the 1930s Texas was the first state to develop a plan to use native trees, shrubs, vines, and flowers along its roadsides. Today the Texas Department of Transportation is one of the world's largest "gardeners." They plant 60,000 pounds of wildflower seed annually along our highways.