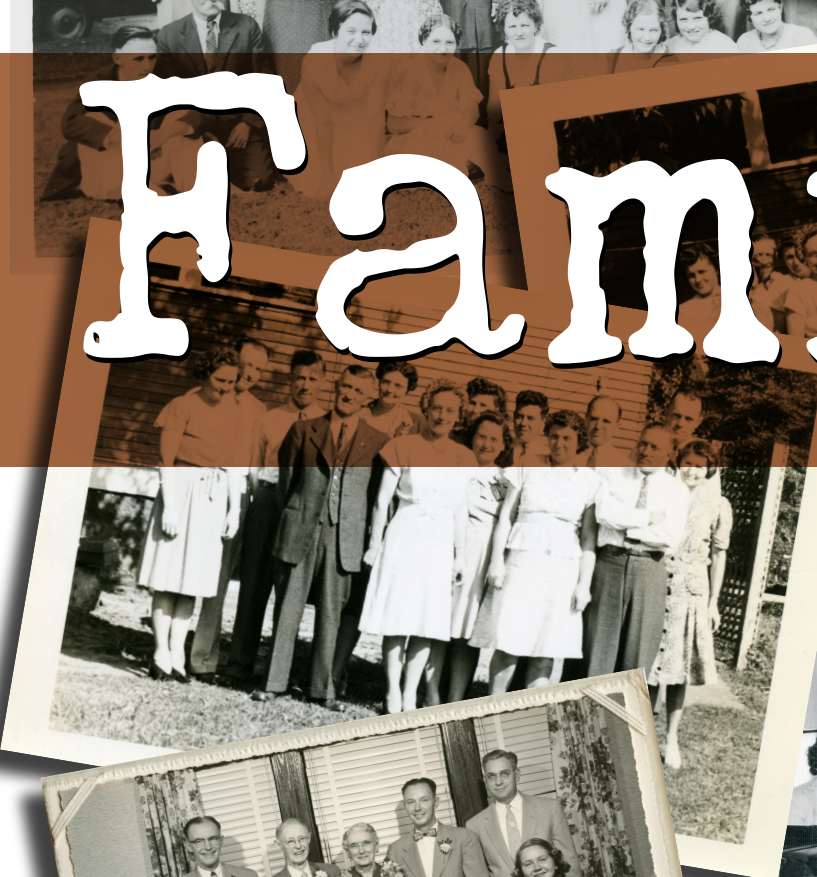


Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



Family



Stepping through the door to our church's sanctuary at a recent funeral, Linda and I were politely stopped and asked by the funeral home usher, "Are you family?"

Most of us have been asked that question, at either funerals or weddings, and we all understand the reason for the question: relatives are seated in one section, and friends or acquaintances in another. And there is nothing terribly offensive about the question; few of us would quarrel with the custom, for example, of blood kin sitting together around the deceased's immediate family as an act of identification, support, and mutual love.

Without giving it much thought at the time, I automatically answered the usher in the negative, and we found two seats in the non-family area of the room.

Later, however, the moment lingered in my mind, and I wondered how the usher would have responded if I had, quite truthfully, answered, "Yes, John is my brother. We are related by blood—Christ's blood."

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Creating a Family

GOD COULD HAVE CREATED THE CHURCH on the pattern of a commercial enterprise. He could have established it as an exclusive, members-only, secret society. He could have formed it, as many Christians today perceive it, as a social club. But He didn't. From the beginning the church was fashioned as—not *like*, but *as*—a family.

While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. Someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You." But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."

Matthew 12:46-50

In healthy families there is a bond not just of blood, but mutual love.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:34-35

It is beyond remarkable, it is astounding that the One who created the universe, the only true God, Lord and Master of all there is would not just come to earth and take upon himself human flesh, but that He would regard His followers as literal kin—"My brother and sister and mother"—and closer to Him than His immediate human-blood kin. And here, as in all things, Jesus was setting the example for those who would one day be His disciples.



Virtually everything in God's economy is based on family. Almighty God is referred to as "Father"—not High Potentate, not Chairman of the Board or CEO, but Father. For the salvation of mankind He sent not His lieutenant, His second in command; nor did He send His vice-president, but He sent His "Son." In its creative genius, the Godhead would design the community of followers as a family, consisting of "newborn babies," "children," "brothers" and "sisters," and venerable elders to be considered and treated respectfully as "fathers" and "mothers." And these are not just empty titles; His followers are "fellow heirs with Christ."

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

Romans 8:14-17

Consider if this were reversed, if *you* were the one who had suffered excruciating torture upon a Roman cross, and sacrificed your very life for every run-of-the mill human, for whom the only requirement was that he believe in who you are. Human nature being what it is, one can easily imagine then that, when the accounts are balanced, it would be *you*—the one who had made the ultimate sacrifice—who would be due whatever honor, rights, and privileges of the one for whom you gave your life. That is, you would be *his* heir, taking your place among the family members at the reading of the Will.

But in God's unique design it is just the opposite. He has done everything: He sent His



own Son to painfully die for the sins of fallen man; He subsequently sends His Holy Spirit to convict us of our sins and our need for Christ; *He causes us to believe!* Then, after God has done it all, instead of Him taking from us suitable compensation for all of the above, He adopts us, and offers us full membership and rights in *His* family.



This is the church. To further humanize it for our benefit and understanding, it is referred to in God's word as a "body"—Christ's body—because He is the "head" of the church.

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Romans 12:4-5

This body of Christ is both local and universal; it knows no political or geographical boundaries. It is the small, neighborhood Bible Study of four or five individuals, and it is the world-wide congregation of every believer, no matter his or her tongue, dialect, color or nationality.

And all are family.

A Better Root-stock

MOST OF US HAVE GROWN UP in some sort of family—a term which, today, has a far broader definition than it had as little as fifty years ago. Since in whatever form these families existed they were earth-bound, *human* families, they were by definition imperfect. Because most of our perceptions of family are based on our experiences with our own, it follows that these too will be imperfect.

If your parents divorced when you were at a young age, you may not understand what it is like for a man and a woman to remain faithful to each other for fifty, sixty, even seventy years. You may have no ready example of what it can *feel* like to be bonded to another person for life, to live as "one." If you were an only child, you may have no concept of the close, life-long bond that can develop between siblings. So when you read in God's word about "brotherly love," your mental picture of that sort of relationship might be anemic.

Happily, the ready illustration of the family from our immediate and extended relatives is not to be our standard. Our standard for the church family—for the Lord God's idea of a family—is not to be earth, but heaven.

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and

it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

1 John 3:1-2

Because Jesus is the head of the church, He is to be our standard for the type and quality of the relationships that exist within it. And the preeminent quality He demonstrates for His church is one of sacrifice: self-sacrifice for others. And this is what informs the biblical concept of brotherly love.

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

1 John 3:16

This fallen, earth-bound society operates under the rule, "What's in it for me?" But the family that is the church operates under the rule, "What's in it for *you*?" That is, "Even if it gains me nothing, even if it costs me something—or even everything—what can I do for you, my brother or sister?"



I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God,

the pillar and support of the truth.

1 Timothy 3:14-15

Living in a church family—or as Paul writes to Timothy, the warm and organic “household of God”—is a unique and holy habitation. There are few illustrations of it to be found among earth’s general populace—even among human family units.

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;

here with the blood of Christ shed at the cross. Then, setting it apart from every other kind of family, it is energized and sustained by the indwelling Spirit, weaving His connective threads not just between each believer and God the Father, but between all the members of the family. Like the intricate web of synaptic connections in our brain—billions strong, communicating, facilitating, supporting thought and memory—the Holy Spirit links every family member with every other family member. And we are not just connected to each other; the Spirit connects each and all of us to the mind of God.

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except

Brain cells communicate with one another by chemicals through synaptic connections. The human brain contains billions of neurons and each neuron has a large amount



of synaptic connections to other neurons... The human brain contains billions of nerve cells or neurons, the information processing system.

Andrea Campbell at bright hub education

and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 2:41-47

The body of Christ as a family is something special: like no other family on earth, it alone vibrates to the pitch of the Holy Spirit. It begins, just as earthly families, with blood—only

the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

1 Corinthians 2:10-13

No other family on earth has this kind of root stock. And because of this, no other family on earth is so blessed.

Love and Respect

THE POPULAR RADIO PERSONALITY Rush Limbaugh used to say, as one of his standard lines to vouch for his integrity, morality, and harmlessness, that he was, “a man with whom you could and would totally trust your wife, your daughter, your husband, your spouse and your kids in a Motel 6 overnight while you’re out of town on a business trip.”

Here, albeit in brash worldly terms, is described the poetic genius and beauty of the body of Christ.

Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity. Honor widows who are widows indeed;

1 Timothy 5:1-3

At that recent funeral I felt real pain over the loss of the deceased, not just because he was a friend, but because he was my brother in Christ; I felt real pain for his widow’s loss, not just because she was a friend, but because she is my sister in Christ.

In his letter, Paul’s counsel is offered specifically to Timothy, who was a young pastor and needed to hear the sage advice from someone older, someone with more experience. Even this word of counsel is a beautiful example of it being played out: Paul saw Timothy as his spiritual “son,” and the young man certainly saw the apostle as his spiritual “father.”

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Timothy 1:1-2

Even though Paul addresses this to his son as pastoral advice, this counsel regarding how to see and treat others in the church is not restricted to pastors, but applies to everyone in the body of Christ.



From time to time the Lord expects something from us that requires training and practice. And this is one of them, for, as with so many aspects of Christ-like living, it cuts against the grain of our fleshly nature.

It is not natural for me to consider the older women in the church as my mothers; I already *have* a mother and a mother-in-law. Why do I need more? It is not natural for me to consider the older men in the church as my fathers; I already have a father and a father-in-law—not to mention my heavenly Father. Why would I need more? And it is not natural for me to consider the younger men and women in the church as my brothers and sisters; my previous experience with siblings is not the best. Why should I look for more?

For these reasons and more I must train my mind and heart to recognize these relationships, and then I must continually practice using these terms until such recognition *does* become natural—or at least automatic. The best way to train my flesh away from its nature is to regularly employ these terms for others in the body of Christ. When I catch myself saying or thinking something harsh against someone who is older, I must establish the habit of asking myself, “Would I say that to my own father? Would I



think that of my own mother?"

When I get impatient or short-tempered with a younger man or teenager in the body, I must remind myself, "He is my *brother*, and the Lord has commanded me to love him."

[Jesus said,] "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:34-35

Requiring perhaps the most practice (at least for a man) is how I perceive the younger women in the church. When I catch myself admiring a woman's shapely form, or my eye being drawn toward a skirt that may be too short, I must quickly remind myself, "That young woman is my *sister*. Stop thinking of her that way!"

Practice works. By employing this or a similar technique, over time we will retrain our attitudinal reflexes—to the point that correction may no longer be necessary. Now from the outset we will consider every man a brother and every woman a sister, and we will honor every elder as a father or mother.



If we are of a mind to, we could whittle all this down to just one word: *respect*. In God's family we are to respect each other, treating those who are older with honor, those who are our age or younger with courtesy and purity, and all with deference.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Philippians 2:3-4

Nowhere else on earth is there a family like this. Being a follower of Christ means far, far more than just being saved from hell; being a follower of Christ means that one is *saved into an eternal family*.

And, just like Rush Limbaugh, we can be trusted with any of them "in a Motel 6 overnight while you're out of town on a business trip," because they are kin.

Because they are family. ◆



When we take God for our God, we take His people for our people.

Matthew Henry