

- Household of God -

*"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household."
(Ephesians 2:19)*



Berean Lamp Ministries
For the Body of Christ

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The Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)

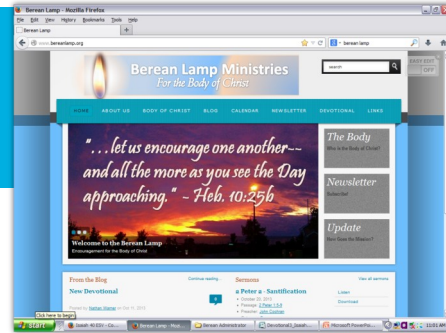


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The Berean Lamp Ministry seeks to:

1. Encourage and strengthen the Body of Christ by providing the means for each of its members to share their spiritual gifts with one another, rooted in the Word of God, thereby growing into deeper union with one another and with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).
2. Minister to non-believers; be a witness for Christ and a testimony to His Body in the world.

We would appreciate your help in contributing to the content and in spreading the work of this ministry. Thank you, and God bless.

- Pastor Scott Moller

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My Church

By Scott Moller

*“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build **My Church**, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”*

(Matthew 16:16-18 NIV)

The first principle we must understand in regards to the Household of God (The Church, The Body) is that it belongs to Jesus Christ. He established the Church, sustains the Church, directs the Church, and is the master of the Church. The purpose of the Church is to serve the will of Jesus Christ, not the other way around. Jesus is not our servant; we are His. The Church will always fail when it loses sight of its Head. Too many times the Church gets distracted serving the purposes of men and fails to look to its Master. Let us fix our eyes on the founder of the Church and look for His direction in all of our actions. Below are some verses that lay out Christ’s Headship over His Church, His Body:

*“And God placed all things under His feet and appointed **Him to be head over everything for the church.**”*

(Ephesians 1:22)

*“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the **mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ.**”*

(Ephesians 4:15)

*“For the husband is the head of the wife as **Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior.**”*

(Ephesians 5:23)

*“And **He [Christ]** is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy.”*

(Colossians 1:18)

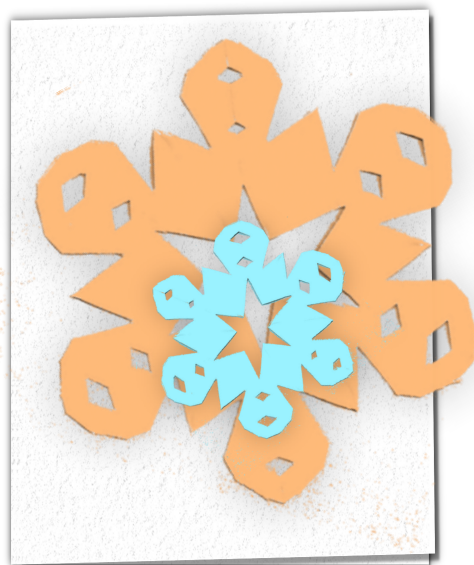
*“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the **Head** over every power and authority.”*

(Colossians 2:9-10)

“Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind.

*They have lost connection with the **Head [Christ]**, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.”*

(Colossians 2:18-19)



Relatives, Siblings, Rivalries

By Nathan Warner

What is the Church made up of? What are you and I? Are we members of a club, indentured servants, part of a sales team, loyal customers, savvy consumers, or a group of friends? Christians today vary all over the map in how they see themselves and others in the Church. Different expectations based on different views about what the Church is goes a long way to explain the many discords, conflicts, and disputes faced within the Church. For example, many think Church is a convenience store or a motivational marketplace – they are there to get something out of it, and like a concert audience, they expect to get their time and energy's worth or they'll walk out. Others are looking for a club of like-minded people – friends that they can hang out with and really resonate with, and if they don't feel fulfilled by the company, they leave.

But Scripture doesn't describe the Church as a store, club, party, or even a gathering of friends. The Word of God says we're a family. Jesus *"came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God"* (John 1:11-13 NASB), *"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!'"* (Romans 8:15) *"He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will"* (Ephesians 1:5), *"so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons"* (Galatians 4:5); *"so then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household"* (Ephesians 2:19).

Being part of a family is a bit more personal and permanent than wearing a tag that reads

"associate" or carrying a membership card in your wallet, wouldn't you say? Believers are the adopted children of God's Household. We are God's family. Brothers and sisters have a completely different relationship than employees or even friends. We are the adopted brothers and sisters of our Heavenly Father and are in His family. God uses the picture of siblings to convey our intrinsic, frictional relationship together under His parental authority. Siblings don't often get along, but we are supposed to love one another. Just think back – how often did you squabble with your siblings? How often did you hear your parents cry in exasperation, "Stop it you two! One more time and we're pulling the car over!" I know my parents were constantly yelling this at my brother and me from the front seat of our teal Geo Prism. Our response?

NATHAN – "He poked me again!"

ELLIS – "No, I didn't!"

NATHAN – "Yes, you did!"

ELLIS – "He poked me first!"

And on and on we went. So it often is in the Church – we war with one another over petty childish issues. It's a miracle of God's patience that He doesn't tire of our immature squabbling sometimes.

So what can we learn about God's spiritual analogy to the genetic family? I think our natural families provide us a picture. We can't choose our biological family. Some of us wish we could, but God chooses it for us. Some friends of mine once showed me how they used Photoshop to "cut out" or remove relatives from pictures because they had "fallen out with them." While we can say to our aunt, "You're dead to me!" we can't remove the fact that she is our blood relation. We may not always appreciate our family as much as we should, but they are still our family. You can't cut yourself out of your family – you can try to avoid them, move to the other end of the world, or disown them, but technically, they are still your family. You can't erase these relationships.

This is true of the Household of God be-

cause we also don't choose our Christian Brothers and Sisters. Some of us wish we could do the choosing, but God does the choosing by the power of His Holy Spirit. Does this mean we can never leave a church we are attending? Of course not. Under the leading of the Holy Spirit, we can move away from one group of relatives and join another group of relatives, but that doesn't stop us being Brothers and Sisters – and we should only do so under the express leadership of the Holy Spirit.

A Christian looking for a zesty spiritual product to pick them up or a pit crew to make them the Believer they always wanted to be will always be disappointed in the Church – an otherwise dysfunctional group of siblings justified solely by Christ's sacrifice, held together by God's Love, and made effective by God's Holy Spirit. Just think of the Apostles – they were quite dysfunctional at times (arguing with each other and all over the map), yet it was towards them that Jesus pointed and 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 12:49b-50). This fact also causes much consternation for those seeking a club of like-minded friends. Family can be embarrassing and hard to deal with, and this causes many churches to try to transform the Church into a club of compatible people by weeding out Believers that annoy. They do this by trying to homogenize the Body with codes, memberships, statutes, and mandatory doctrines – "cutting out" their more "embarrassing" or irritating relatives. Just as in our natural families, we may not always see eye to eye with our adopted siblings on everything (sometimes we may even harbor thunderstorms of injured pride, irritation, and anger in our hearts), but God has made us family through adoption, and we should avoid trying to make ourselves or our brothers into something other than what we are. We should accept that living as a family is a process, not simply a destination. Becoming part of God's Church doesn't fade out with "they lived happily ever after" – we will do this in Glory with Christ—but here on earth, there are still difficulties and frustrations "after the Honey-

"I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit". Isaiah 57:15

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By Ginny Larsen

moon,” so to speak.

Does this mean we should accept a life together of “dysfunctionality”? Of course not, but we do need to be patient with our family, for we are all “born” at different stages, and our spiritual birth and adoption come at different times in our lives. Some are saved late in life, some early. Some are young in years but mature in spirit. God’s path of sanctification can come in different ways to different people, and maturity comes at different times and different ages. No one is at the same exact place in their maturity, and we need to understand this as we encourage one another to earnestly seek the Lord. Think of a home-school family or a one-room schoolhouse: the young students are learning behind the older students, but they are getting a glimpse of what they will be learning through the older students ahead of them in their life, conduct, and knowledge. The older students are often tasked with aiding in the teaching of the younger ones. A 17-year-old sister shouldn’t try to push trigonometry onto her 7-year-old brother, when she should be helping him to read. We all need to be patient in teaching and building up our younger siblings when the Holy Spirit directs us. This is not to say we should avoid teaching God’s Truth. Of course not! But we should bear with one another, encouraging and challenging the less mature Believers to grow into greater maturity at the pace they can absorb.

Families take work. They take time and energy, and they take patience. But beneath it all, most importantly, families require foundational love. God’s love is what holds everything together through the working of His Holy Spirit in His children. Scripture is filled with calls for God’s adopted sons and daughters to love one another. A company, co-op, or a club requires similar purpose, interest, or knowledge to join, but they don’t require love for them to function. Love is the foundation of the family, and it is the foundation upon which every action must depend in the Household of God. When we share knowledge, correction, or judgment, it must be in love, for only then will it be edifying and build up the Body. If we do not, it will tear down and cause us to

stumble: “*The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him*” (1 John 2:10). We need to “*let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality*” (Romans 12:9-13).

Paul puts all things in perspective when he says love must be the foundation for all our activities in the Household of God: “*If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love*” (1 Corinthians 13). Even so Amen, Brothers and Sisters.

Where God Dwells

By Ginny Larsen

“And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:17 KJV). “This is none other but the house of God; wherefore he afterwards called it Bethel, which signifies the house of God; and so the church of God is often called, Psalm 23:6; which is of God's building, where he dwells, and his family is, of which he is the master and governor; which he beautifies and adorns, fills, repairs, and defends.” - John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible

There is one house of God, and there is one foundation that house is built upon. The house of God must be built upon the sure and solid foundation of Jesus Christ alone and His true Gospel. There are many who try to enter into the house of God and teach and build upon it, but if they are not building on the true foundation, all is a loss, and there is destruction.

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that

temple. (1 Corinthians 3:10-17)

What is the “house of God” or the “temple” but the place where God dwells? Under the old covenant, the Jewish Temple was the dwelling place of God. Now we, the Church, are God's temple or “dwelling place.” He dwells in His church with His “called out ones” – those called out of this world to be indwelt by His Spirit, to be made new, and to become His children. HE gives the power to be children of God to those who believe, not by the will of man but by that power of God (John 1:12-13, Romans 8:28-30). The foundation of that dwelling place is the righteousness of Christ alone. That dwelling place must be holy, clean, and pure. False concepts of Christ's salvation and His Gospel corrupt and pollute the Church. In the church of the Corinthians there had come in false apostles who were corrupting the house of God, trying to lay another foundation. Only that which is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ will stand in the end, for He is the foundation of every structure that shall stand firm in every test of fire. How very important it is, then, that we are careful not to add to or take away from the true understanding of that foundation, but that we understand the work of our Savior and what that salvation is. Without the understanding of that foundation, the house becomes polluted. There's no true “obedience” to Him if not based on the true Gospel, the foundation of our relationship with Him, and faith in His righteousness alone. Some Christians work to build upon that foundation of grace. Some work to build another foundation of grace plus works. Where does God dwell? He dwells only in the house He builds.

As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes

in Him will not be put to shame.” So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. (1 Peter 2:4-8)

The Jews totally missed Jesus because they stumbled over their own self-righteousness, that of “law-keeping,” and did not understand or accept the righteousness God provided - that is by grace through faith alone, in which by believing, His Law is put into their hearts. To them He became a stumbling stone. They “disobeyed” the Word...the Word of salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ. They were so sure and so ingrained in the Law that they failed to see its purpose and fulfillment. The same can happen to us when we become so ingrained in a way of seeing things. It is those who simply believe “into” Him who become His dwelling place. How difficult it is for us humans to receive this Word! Even those in the Church – those who have been born-again by faith – have difficulty completely receiving that it is not by any works of their own that they are made a dwelling place of God forever. They say they believe in His grace, yet they fear they must keep themselves by their works. They contradict themselves, but they don't see it. It is so hard for our pride to fully accept and trust in the full grace of God and the power of His salvation. They fear a message of grace will mean “lawlessness,” because they fail to understand the power of His salvation and what it is. But it is actually quite the opposite - it is failing to see this that leads to defeat in our Christian life.

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Galatians 3:1-3)

The house of God will only be perfected in the same way that it was begun. Anything we add to it will be wood, hay, and stubble.

“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:6-7).

There are those who feel they must warn those who are born again against “lawlessness,” claiming to believe our salvation is all of grace through faith, yet contradicting themselves by saying we must live under a fear of condemnation if we do not have works that are good enough to keep us. On one hand they speak of grace and on the other nullify it. They build straw man arguments against those who trust in Christ alone as the sole means of their salvation, so they build wrongly upon that foundation. There is no victory in our lives over sin other than that power which comes through faith in the true foundation of our salvation, which is forever. If not for faith in the security and hope of that salvation being in Him alone, we are weakened in our walk, and our faith becomes self-focused rather than a true leaning on that which is already accomplished in Christ. In Christ we are a new creature, with a new heart. We have a new nature that is His indwelling Spirit in us, which raises us up to newness of life. It is that power in us alone that continues in us and never leaves us, and Who conforms us to the image of Christ. When we understand that, we are set free from “lawlessness” and empowered to walk by that same rule of life, of faith in Him. The fear that if I trust in the security of my salvation in Christ, I will give in to lawlessness is a straw-man argument and shows a misunderstanding of His salvation, what it is, and the power of regeneration of the Holy Spirit. We are His house. He dwells in us. He keeps us. And true faith in that sets us free to live in true obedience...the obedience of faith.

A “straw man argument” according to Wikipedia: “A straw man is a common type of argument and is an informal fallacy based on the misrepresentation of an opponent's ar-

gument. To be successful, a straw man argument requires that the audience be ignorant or uninformed of the original argument.” The so-called typical “attacking a straw man” argument creates the illusion of having completely refuted or defeated an opponent's proposition by covertly replacing it with a different proposition (i.e. “stand up a straw man”) and then to refute or defeat that false argument (“knock down a straw man”) instead of the original proposition.

“Lawlessness” or “license to sin” as being the consequence of believing we are secure in Christ is the straw man set up to defeat. When there is a misrepresentation of what salvation is and what it entails, assuming that one who is born-again is no different in nature than one who is not born-again, other than “belief” in Jesus, then it's easy to argue that they must keep themselves and fear losing their salvation. It's as though one can be “in and out” of Jesus, based on strength of will or performance or “enough faith.” But when one fully understands what the salvation that Jesus worked in us when we were born of His Spirit, put “into Christ,” and given a new nature/heart/will, cleansed wholly and imputed with the righteousness of Christ, this is seen clearly to be a straw man argument. The right foundation is laid and built upon. We are “in Christ” forever, sharing His death and resurrection. We are transferred from death to life forever and have “eternal life.” Every understanding of the Gospel and of Scripture has to come from the true foundation. And that foundation is sure, strong, and stable, and will not fail. Every false teaching comes out of a misrepresentation of that foundation. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life”* (John 5:24). The Holy Spirit is given to us “forever” and never leaves us: *“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever”* (John 14:16). *“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.”* (1 John 3:9)

How are we to build upon the true foundation? The true foundation must be understood in order to build upon that alone. We build on it only by reinforcing the same as our foundation of every teaching and every work we do in Christ and for His service, by faith in Him alone and our assurance in His finished work. That foundation is ALWAYS central in our entire work and walk. In assurance of His work we are strong. In faith in His indwelling us, we walk and we work, not *so that* we are kept but because we are kept. Our life, our power, our hope, and our faith springs from His indwelling us. The house of God, then, is being continually built up and nurtured in that strength and in a true faith where He dwells. As John Gill said in the quote at the beginning of this article, “Which is of God's building, where he dwells, and his family is, of which **he** is the master and governor; which **he** beautifies and adorns, fills, repairs, and defends.”

In my own experience, when others had misunderstood and miss-taught that foundation to me in my early Christian life, my struggle with sin was a defeated struggle. When I no longer was under fear of condemnation but relied on and had security and assurance of the full power of His finished work, sin was overcome, love took over, and my life and growth in Him sprung from the right foundation and was nurtured, built up, and strengthened. Though they thought their warnings would produce holiness in me, they only produced lack of faith and understanding in the power of His salvation from which the only real power and love to walk in victory comes. That misunderstanding caused nothing but “wood, hay, and stubble” in my own Christian life, as it will in the house of God.

F.B. Meyer, *Through The Bible Day By Day*, on Ephesians 2:1-10: “Notice, also, the past tense which describes the finality of Christ's work, Ephesians 2:5-6. In the purpose of God we have been raised from the grave of sin and are seated with the risen Lord in the place of acceptance and victory. We were one with Christ when He lay in the grave and arose. In God's thought we

have already taken our seat with the glorified Christ upon the throne; only the pity is that we do not believe this or act as if we had done so [emphasis mine]. All this is the gift of God's unmerited love. By grace have we been brought into this position, and by grace are we maintained in it. We are of God's 'making;' such is the Greek word for *workmanship*, Ephesians 2:10. We have been created for good works; they have been planned for us and we have only to walk in them."

May the Lord open our eyes of understanding to have a revelation of the true power and completeness of His salvation for the Body of Christ to dwell in and through which He dwells in us, that same power that rose Christ from the dead, which raised us up also to be seated with Him in the Heavens. It is that power which works in us, conforms us to His image, and keeps us. We are not *created by* good works, but we are HIS workmanship, created in Christ Jesus...UNTO good works which He prepared for us (Ephesians 1:13-2:10). What wonderful joy in His salvation and power to walk in those works by true faith in Him we receive when we understand this! Then the house of God is truly blessed!

*"And He came
and PREACHED peace
to YOU
who were FAR away,
and PEACE to those
who were NEAR."
(Ephesians 2:17)*



By Lane Madsen



*"And this COMMANDMENT we have from HIM, that the ONE who LOVES God should love his BROTHER also."
(1 John 4:21)*

By Maria Madsen



In the Household of God

By Betty Harstad

How blessed are those who are accepted into the household of God. Paul spoke of the Gentile saints in the following verse: *“So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God”* (Ephesians 2:19 ASV). Scripture shows that salvation through the Son of God was carefully planned from the beginning, for the Jew first but also for the Gentiles. Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone of this marvelous plan of salvation for all who believe the Gospel: *“Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone”* (Ephesians 2:20).

We are to heed the sure word written by the apostles and prophets as we are buffeted in this world during various trials and testings. No matter how mature we think we have become, we will find it necessary to depend upon the written Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. *“In Him you also are being built up together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit”* (Ephesians 2:22 ESV). *“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 2:15). What glorious and sure promises these are for us as Believers in the household of God. God always fulfills what He promises in His Word: *“For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory”* (2 Corinthians 1:20).

What is sad is that so many churches and organizations have downplayed reading and meditating daily on the Word for individual and corporate study and for teaching. It seems to be replaced with systems that tend to promote the advancement of a movement and its leader, who uses only the few Scriptures that fit into his own views. But since we belong in the household of God, we are to devote ourselves to prayer and to the Word. *“And they devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching*

and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). We are to rely on the full and glorious work of the Holy Spirit to continually exalt the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to make His Person the grand central theme of our witness for ourselves and to others.

Remember what Jesus said to the disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection: *“O’ foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself”* (Luke 24:25-27). Think also of the disciples in Jerusalem: *“Then He said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem’”* (Luke 24:44-47).

Thanks to God for opening up our minds and our hearts so we may understand His Word and the Gospel. The plan and purpose of the Father concerning our salvation was fulfilled in Christ. Because of His great mercy and love He made the way so that by faith we could belong in the household of God and live with Him forever.

Bereans, Backgrounds, and the Body of Christ

By Jane Titrud

When serious Christians share a mutual love for God's Word, it can be a wonderful thing. It can open up all sorts of possibilities for positive fellowship in the LORD. However, different backgrounds and beliefs, different stages of spiritual growth, and different levels of skill in handling the Word of God can lead to division in the Body of Christ when questions arise over proper doctrine.

In traditional denominations, doctrine tends to be set by the church hierarchy. That is even though different denominations tend to disagree over various "issues." Teachers are told what to teach. The "faithful" are taught what to believe. The result is little conflict. This is an effective tool for promoting unity and uniformity within a large body of churches. However, people oftentimes fail to see the need to know the Bible for themselves under such circumstances. Church leaders can also end up usurping the role of Jesus Christ by acting as spiritual heads of the Body.

The goal of a Berean church, on the other hand, is to let Christ be the sole head of the body. This involves letting God's Word determine doctrine. In order to accomplish this, adherents try to uphold the example of the Bereans, as found in Acts 17:11. These were people whom the Bible describes as being "noble-minded" because they neither rejected nor blindly followed the Gospel Paul presented to them. Instead, their reaction to his preaching was to "*examine the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.*" If everyone in the Church were to follow their example, then perhaps all could be of the same mind with one another and with Christ as well. At least, that is the hope. God is not divided.

The trouble is that it is not at all uncommon for people to bring other ideas to the Bible. Indeed, the more a person's beliefs are subject to outside influences, the more the Bible tends to be interpreted accordingly. It is just part of

the way we are as human beings.

What this means in practice is that even in a Berean setting, teachings are not always presented or evaluated purely in light of God's Word. Instead, they are often rendered or received according to a person's prior beliefs and *interpretations* of Scripture that coordinate with those beliefs. This, in turn, can lead to division in the Body of Christ when people hold to different points of view.

Disagreement is never very pleasant in a church setting. Christians are supposed to love, respect, and submit to one another. Besides, the very same Scriptures are oftentimes used to support opposing viewpoints, so one can come away feeling that there is no solution to such dilemmas. Everything seems to come down to differences over various definitions of terms within opposing systems of thought. Hence, people oftentimes "agree to disagree." This is held to be the respectable thing to do. Otherwise, people just end up promoting endless strife and fleshly division — right?

The truth is that even if people are silent about their differences, the Body of Christ can still be divided. So, is there is no way to move beyond this point without being disrespectful? Is there no hope for achieving true unity in Christ? Or, is the ultimate truth that we can never really be sure of the truth, even when it comes to important issues that matter?

Certainly, the Bible teaches that "*we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away... For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known*" (1 Corinthians 13:9, 10, 12 NASB). In other words, we do not know everything yet, nor will we until we come into the presence of the LORD. Nevertheless, we must also bear in mind the sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible says: "*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). This would certainly cover the basic essentials of the faith. These include the per-

son and work of Jesus Christ and the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith. The Bible is sufficient to both teach sound doctrine and counter every heresy when it comes to these fundamentals. Indeed, the only way to define heresy is according to what God's Word says about such things.

But there are other important teachings in the Bible that Christians need to understand as well. Practical sanctification is a good case in point. False teaching in this area can lead to all sorts of personal difficulties. Failing to understand what God has provided by way of overcoming the power of sin, for example, can leave a Christian feeling defeated and condemned by the law, trapped in fleshly works without victory or perhaps even unsaved. Such Christians can then likewise become vulnerable to the wisdom of the world in their efforts to achieve victory. Either that or they can acquire a fleshly attitude of complacency toward sin. Hence, one can see the importance of understanding that the Scriptures do indeed provide adequate teaching on this subject. That is even though understanding in this area is commonly characterized by misinformation and dispute.

In cases such as this, definitions may indeed matter. Sometimes they need to be judged according to God's Word the same as the resulting doctrine. Extra-biblical definitions are often used as tools to draw people away from reliance upon God's truth. But as far as whether there is any real potential for understanding God's truth, His Word is clear. Paul told his younger charge, Timothy: *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15). There must therefore be some way of accurately handling God's Word. It may take some work by way of diligent study, but it is possible.

One may point out that there is such a thing as prideful arrogance. Indeed, there is. A verse that immediately comes to mind is 1 Corinthians 8:1-3: *"We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows*

anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him." Yet, Paul was coming against a particular application of knowledge here, apart from love, which was causing people to act against their own consciences. The context has to do with eating things sacrificed to idols: *"Now concerning things sacrificed to idols..."* (v. 1). Love was certainly more important than a prideful display of knowledge in this case. But he was *not* teaching that the need to exhibit love generally precludes the need to know and teach truth. On the contrary, Paul prays for the Philippians: *"That your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ"* (Philippians 1: 9, 10).

One may similarly note that we all have an anointing from God that allows us to understand the truth for ourselves (1 John 2: 27). We do not have to submit to any sort of "super-spiritual elite," for *"no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's interpretation"* (2 Peter 1:20). This is true. But if we take that attitude to the extreme, we can become a law unto ourselves. Anyone can be wrong. Hence, there is no place for complacency or presumption in regard to our own abilities. We *all* need to continually pray, study God's Word, and humbly seek His guidance when it comes to properly understanding and applying His truth. Otherwise, we can become a contributor to division ourselves.

There are rules pertaining to the proper interpretation of Scripture as well as rules of sound reasoning, and it is not prideful to insist upon following them. If we do not, we cannot be sure of knowing anything. Logic based upon speculative extensions of reason is to be avoided. Paul told Timothy to *"refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels"* (v. 23). Even so, Timothy was subsequently exhorted to *"preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but want-*

ing to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths." Paul would never have said such a thing if it was impossible to rightly understand the Scriptures. Timothy had to make sure that he was accurately applying such truth.

Proper doctrine is not what divides. *False* teaching is what does that. Hence, an important goal of ministry is to help the Body understand proper doctrine in order to attain to the full unity of the faith (see Ephesians 4:11-16).

We must not be ignorant of Satan's devices. He not only wants to bring division in the Body of Christ, but He also wants to keep people from knowing and teaching the truth. Our actions, therefore, must reflect the will of God instead of the enemy. This means that in addi-

tion to *"speaking the truth in love"* (Ephesians 4:15), we must also *"be subject to one another in the fear of Christ"* (Ephesians 5: 21). Such is the proper functioning of the Body of Christ. And to Him be the glory!

*"You are all CHILDREN
of the LIGHT
and CHILDREN
of the day.*

*We do not BELONG
to the night or to
the DARKNESS."
(1 Thessalonians 5:5)*

By Elliot Madsen



The Finality of Adoption

By Natalie Warner

During the Lord Jesus' earthly ministry, He used pictures and metaphors to illustrate spiritual concepts to those He taught so that they could both fully understand His words and so that they could succinctly and accurately pass on to others the same words. For instance, God created the structure of the "family" in the Garden of Eden and used that same concept to illustrate the relationship between Him and His Son and our relationship to Him and other born-again Believers.

Jesus testified to His Father in Heaven and told the Believers He taught that God was their Father, too. For instance, He admonished the people to *"love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 4:45 NASB), and He told them they were *"to be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect"* (Matthew 4:48). In earthly terms, the relationship each one of us had as children with our parents was the most closely-knit relationship we knew. We may have been close to a sibling, relative, or friend, but our biological tie to our parents was strongest and surest. To think of God as our heavenly Father is a wonderful picture of the depth of His love and desire to have a close relationship with us. It should also be a sobering discipline for us to remember He is our Father and that we are to obey, respect, and love Him as we ought to our earthly parents.

Along the same line, the Apostle Paul used the concept of "adoption" to illustrate a Believer's position once he/she is born-again. He encouraged Believers, saying, *"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!'"* (Romans 8:15) Speaking on being a son and heir of Christ, Paul also wrote,

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a

slave although he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'

Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. (Galatians 4:1-7)

Isn't it extraordinary that the King of the universe sent His Son down to earth to open the way for us sinners to be adopted into His family and made heirs of the King of Kings?

One of the reasons the concept of being "adopted into the family" and "belonging to the family (or household) of God" is so dear to me is that I think it speaks to the *assurance* of our place in it and the security of that familial tie. I believe John was earnest in his desire for the recipients of his letter to have *assurance* in their salvation: *"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may **know** that you have eternal life"* (1 John 5:13). When I think of the household of God, I think about how when we are in the family of God, as Jesus Christ taught, we cannot be "un-familied" or "disowned." Our adoption, our son/daughter-ship, our inheritance is secure and final. God doesn't have foster care, where the child may be removed after a time. What a blessing to know our adoption is final – that God will not void our adoption (after all, if we don't know whether or not He'll disown us, we pull into question the truthfulness of our Father)!

If we are truly born-again, we are His children! Have you ever tried to cut yourself off from the line of your parents? I would imagine it difficult. It's actually impossible! We cannot *not* have a parent. In this world, though a

parent might lose legal custody of a child, that child is *still* the biological child of his/her parent. No legal action can change that. Likewise, our adoption into God's family is sealed and can only be undone by God: *"In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory"* (Ephesians 1:13-14).

As I was writing this article, God brought me to the passage of John 8. Jesus was speaking to the Jews and told them, *"If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"* (John 8:31b-32). When they questioned him and asked how He could tell them they could become free when they hadn't been enslaved to anyone, Jesus said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; **the son does remain forever**. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free **indeed**"* (John 8:34b-35). Unbelievers are slaves to sin – they belong to the prince of darkness. Only the blood of Jesus can free us from that bondage, and, as the Lord of Lords said, if He frees you, you are free indeed. Thus, if we are truly freed from the bondage of slavery to sin (through repentance and trust in Jesus alone) and adopted by God, we remain in the house of God forever!

Continuing in John 8, the Jews told Jesus their father was Abraham, and Jesus showed them the difference between belonging to the father of darkness (satan) and belonging to the Father of light (God):

*If you were Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. You are doing the deeds of your father. [...] **If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even***

*come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. **You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father**. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.* (John 8:39b-47)

I believe Jesus taught that if we belong to God (i.e. in the house of God – saved by God – hidden in Christ), we desire to do the deeds of our Father. If we say we are His children but walk in the darkness, we have not been truly saved in our hearts, and we belong to the father of lies and do his deeds (this is a false conversion). This isn't to suggest Believers never sin, but we are free from the captivity of sin – the hold of sin. Thanks be to God that our being born-again is a full regeneration of the heart (*"Therefore if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a **new creature**; the **old things passed away**; behold, **new things have come**"* – 2 Corinthians 5:17). Adoption into the family of God for the born-again Believer is a promise from the Maker of All, the Author of Faith, the Establisher of our Ways, the Completer of the Work He has started in us.

Thanks be to God that He is a loving Father who forgives His children when we do sin and repent! I am so grateful that as true Believers our adoptive tie to our heavenly Father is not so fragile we could sin and break it. Thanks be to our Father, who has the power to fully cleanse us and who bends from the Heavenly Hosts to gather His children to Him and who gives to us freely the inheritance of eternal life. Amen.

March/April Newsletter Theme— PRAISE

Submission Deadline: March 29

Publish Date: April 7

Praise...

- What does it mean to praise God?
- Why does God desire our praise?
- Is it always easy for us to praise the Lord?
- What do your prayers mostly consist of?
- How is praise abused sometimes?

Verses on PRAISE (from the NASB version)

Matthew 21:15-16 — *“But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’ they became indignant. And said to Him, ‘Do You hear what these children are saying?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes; have you never read, “Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself”?’”*

Romans 14:11 — *“For it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God.’”*

Romans 15:11 — *“And again, ‘Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, And let all the peoples praise Him.’”*

Philippians 1:10-11 — *“So that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”*

Hebrews 13:15 — *“Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.”*

1 Peter 1:7 — *“So that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

Revelation 19:5 — *“And a voice came from the throne, saying, ‘Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.’”*