

Introduction

We are in the midst of a short series on the church. We saw that the Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, and it means those who are called out. The church is God's people, who have been called out of darkness into His light. They have been sanctified, which means to be made holy, and therefore, they are called saints. That is not a special designation or level reached by some. Everyone who believes in Jesus and has accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior is a saint. They have been made holy by the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross. He took our sins, and gave us His righteousness. Paul called the church in Corinth, saints, even though they were a carnal group of believers. They were saints, and Paul was exhorting them to live like saints.

(1 Co 1:2) "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours:"

We saw that we are called saints because of positional sanctification. The process of having our minds renewed and our lives transformed so that we live holy lives is called progressive sanctification. God's will for our lives is to be sanctified, and to live holy lives.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, which is a local church, but he also mentioned all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus, which is the universal church. A local church has its own elders, who watch over the flock, feed the flock, and will give account to God for the members of that local church. Those in the local church are exhorted to obey and submit to their leaders. We also saw that there are thirty-three "one another" commands, and the local church is where most of these "one another" commands are fleshed out.

We also saw that the church is made up of disciples, which means learners. After Stephen was martyred in Jerusalem, a great persecution of the saints occurred and the believers scattered. Some went to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. As they went, they shared the gospel with people, and the hand of the Lord was with them. If you want the hand of the Lord with you, start sharing the gospel with people. A large number of people in Antioch believed and turned to the Lord. The church in Jerusalem heard about it, and sent Barnabas to see what was going on. They did not just have a concern for their local church; they were concerned about the universal church, which consisted of believers in every place. They wanted to make sure that the new local church in Antioch was planted properly. After Barnabas witnessed the grace of God in Antioch, he went to Tarsus and brought back Paul. Then, for an entire year they met with this new local church in Antioch, and taught considerable numbers. It was in the church in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians. Notice that the "disciples" were first called Christians.

(Ac 11:26) "and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

The primary way that believers are referred to in Scripture is as a disciple. Being a disciple is not a choice that some people in the church decide to do; if you are a follower of Jesus, you are a disciple. The term, disciple, is used 272 times in Scripture; and is the way that believers were most commonly referred to. The second most-used term is brethren, which is used 190 times. Our focus today in this series on the church is on brethren.

First, we will define the term brethren. Second, we will look at the basis of being called brethren. Third, we will look at the behavior of brethren. Fourth, we will look at the benefits of being brethren.

Who are the brethren?

1. Definition of brethren
2. Basis of being called brethren
3. Behavior of brethren
4. Benefits of being brethren

1. Definition of brethren

My wife, Karen, and my son, Chad, who is our tenth child, went to Florida last week to celebrate our daughter, Joanna's, thirtieth birthday. In fact, eleven of her brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces all went there and surprised her for her birthday. She was surprised, and everyone had a great time together. Our family is a close family. Our children love one another and love to do things together. They love to gather for holidays and other occasions to fellowship, share meals together, play games, hike, camp, bowl, play pickleball, cornhole, and many other things. They grew up together and they love one another, and have a special bond with one another. What is it that they have in common? They all came from the same parents; they are brothers and sisters.

The Greek word for brethren is adelphos (Strong's G80), which means from the same womb. It is literally speaking of brothers in a family. Adelphos is used 346 times in the New Testament, but it is not always translated as brethren. It is translated as brother(s) 120 times. The word, brethren, is the plural of brother. Even though it refers to brothers, the principle is applied to sisters also; and we commonly call one another brothers and sisters in Christ. James Wylie was a good friend of mine, and served on our church board until he died earlier this year. James always called me, "Brother Bill," and he referred to Karen as "Sister Karen." He understood the concept of being brothers and sisters in Christ, or brethren.

Sometimes in the scriptures, the term, brethren, refers to the fellow Jews. Paul, Stephen, and Peter all referred to their fellow Jews as brethren. They had all descended from Abraham and Sarah, so they were brethren in that sense. Since we are talking about the church, the use of brethren was still used of believers, since they are brothers and sisters in the Lord. Therefore, we have to be careful when we read that we verify what brethren is referring to in each passage.

2. Basis of being called brethren

How did we become the brethren? We became brethren when we were adopted into the family of God. Paul wrote that we have received a spirit of adoption as son by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" Those that have received Christ and are walking in the Spirit are part of God's family. As a child of God, a son of God, I have the privilege of crying out, "Abba! Father!" Since there are many other children of God, I now have many other brothers and sisters in Christ. These are my brethren, and all of this happened when I was adopted into God's family.

(Ro 8:14-16) "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. {15} 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!" {16} The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,"

When do we get the Spirit of God? Paul makes it very clear in Ephesians 1:18, that after hearing the message of the gospel, and believing, we are sealed in Jesus with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance. An inheritance is given to the children. I have a will, and anything that my wife and I have will be given to our children; it is their inheritance. When we believe, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, and become children of God.

(Eph 1:13–14) “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, {14} 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.”

There are certain legal fees incurred with adoption. In our first church plant, we had a member named Randy. He and his wife were going to adopt another baby. Their first baby costs them \$25,000.00 in legal fees. Little Jake did not pay these legal fees; Randy has had to pay them.

There were legal fees when you and I were adopted. When Jesus was on the cross, He bowed His head and said the word “teleo,” which means, it is paid in full. Jesus paid for our adoption with His blood. We have been redeemed or purchased through the blood of Christ. It was very costly. Jesus did not want to go through it. He asked the Father to take the cup from Him, but not His will, but the Father’s will be done. It was painful to Him; it was a struggle for Him, yet He paid the price for us. In 1 Corinthians 6:20, Paul told the Corinthians that they had been bought with a price, and were therefore to glorify God in their bodies.

(1 Co 6:19-20) "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? {20} For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

In Acts 20, Paul was meeting with the Ephesian elders at Miletus. He admonished them to “be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” Jesus paid the price for us to become children of God, to be adopted into the church of God, the family of God.

(Ac 20:28) "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

In John 20, Jesus had risen from the dead, but He had not yet ascended to the Father. Mary went to the tomb and did not find the body of Jesus there. She thought that someone had taken His body, and she was weeping. There were two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet of where the body of Jesus had been lying. They asked her why she was weeping, and she told them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.” When she turned around, she saw a Man, and she thought it was the gardener, and she asked Him if He had taken away the body. Jesus said to her, “Mary!” At that, Mary recognized that it was Jesus. Then He said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.”

(Jn 20:17) “Jesus said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’”

Jesus called the disciples, “My brethren,” and He gave the basis for that, saying that we have the same Father and God. Even though Jesus is God, He came to earth as the Son of God, and as the Son of God, we are His brothers and sisters. However, when He returned to the Father, He returned to the glory He had before coming to earth.

(Heb 2:11) “For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,”

Matthew shared an account of when Jesus met the disciples, and after greeting them, they took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. They recognized Him as Immanuel, God in the flesh, fully God and fully man. Even though He is the incarnate God, He told them, “Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me.”

(Mt 28:9–10) “And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. {10} Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me.”

Before looking at the behavior of the brethren, I want to take a brief look at the time element in our adoption. There are two considerations in the time element of our adoption. We have been adopted, which is past tense; and there is also a future adoption date.

a. It is past tense.

In Romans 8:15, Paul says that we have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” Notice that this is past tense, but it has present implications. Since we have received a spirit of adoption, we can cry out to God as our Daddy or Father. Once we have received Christ and received the spirit of adoption, we are adopted children of God.

(Ro 8:15-16) "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!" {16} The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,"

b. It is a future event.

It is a future event which will take place. In Romans 8:19 Paul wrote that creation is anxiously longing for the revealing of the sons of God. Verse 23 says that we eagerly wait for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. Galatians 4:5 also says that we might receive the adoption as sons. This is referring to a future event, not something that has already taken place. While we enjoy some benefits of being adopted into God’s family right now, there are future benefits, like our inheritance or our future dwelling place in heaven that will come at a later time.

(Ro 8:19-23) "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. {20} For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope {21} that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. {22} For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. {23} And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body."

(Ga 4:5) "in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

3. Behavior of the brethren

Brothers and sisters in Christ have a love for one another. Jesus said that people would know that we are his disciples if we have love for one another. Paul wrote that love is the perfect bond of unity. Where brothers and sisters in Christ love one another, there will be unity and a strong bond.

(Jn 13:35) "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

(Col 3:14) "Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

When we look at the "one another" commands, we see this love fleshed out in practical ways. Look at just some of these commands.

- (Ro 12:10): We are to be devoted to one another in brotherly love.
- (Ro 12:10): We are to give preference to one another in honor.
- (Ro 12:15): We are to rejoice with one another.
- (Ro 12:15): We are to weep with one another.
- (1 Co 12:25): We are to care for one another.
- (1 Th 4:18): We are to comfort one another.
- (1 Th 5:11): We are to encourage and build up one another.
- (1 Jn 1:7): We are to fellowship with one another.
- (1 Pe 4:10): We are to serve one another.
- (Jas 5:16): We are to pray for one another.

When brothers and sisters are doing these things, they will be closely bonded together. There will be a special love that they have for another, and it will be obvious to the world. David said that when brothers dwell together in unity, it is good and pleasant. Furthermore, there is an anointing and a blessing on them.

(Ps 133:1–3) "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity! {2} It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, *Even* Aaron's beard, Coming down upon the edge of his robes. {3} It is like the dew of Hermon Coming down upon the mountains of Zion; For there the Lord commanded the blessing—life forever."

When my daughter, Kathleen, was diagnosed with leukemia, and was going through treatment and a bone marrow transplant, her brothers and sisters took turns staying in the hospital with her. They played games with her, and kept company with her. They cared for her. They comforted her. They fellowshiped with her. They served her. They walked through this trial with her; that is what brothers and sisters do for one another in a family. That is also what brothers and sisters in the family of God do.

I want to focus in on a couple of other things. In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul used the word brethren eighteen times. He calls them brethren, letting them know that they are family

to him. Even though he was an apostle, he did not assert his authority, but proved to be gentle among them, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. He had a fond affection for them, and imparted his life, not just the gospel. Notice that the Thessalonians had become dear to him. There was love in this church family.

(1 Th 2:5–8) “For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness— {6} nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. {7} But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children. {8} Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.”

When he repeatedly calls them brethren, he is now writing as a brother in Christ. In his letter, he requested that the brethren appreciate those who have charge over them (1 Th 5:12). He urged the brethren to admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, and to be patient with everyone (1 Th 5:14). He requested that the brethren pray for him and his team (1 Th 5:25). He exhorted them to greet all the brethren with a holy kiss (1 Th 5:26). This shows a warm affection for one another.

- (1 Th 5:12) “But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction,”
- (1 Th 5:14) “We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”
- (1 Th 5:25) “Brethren, pray for us.”
- (1 Th 5:26) “Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.”

I want to draw attention to another letter in the Bible that talks about the behavior of the brethren. In Paul’s first letter to Timothy, he tells him that the reason he wrote was to let him know how people are to conduct themselves in the church. What we will see is that we are to honor one another. Brothers and sisters are to honor one another. They learn this behavior in the home, and it is to be how the church family is to treat one another.

(1 Ti 3:14–15) “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; {15} 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.”

Paul wrote that the church is to treat older men as fathers. In the Ten Commandments, God commands us to honor our mothers and fathers, so we are to honor older men. In the same way, he instructs that we are to honor older women as mothers. Then, he said that we are to treat younger men as brothers and younger women as sisters. That means that we are to look out for them, protect them, and care for them.

(1 Ti 5:1–2) “Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but *rather* appeal to *him* as a father, to the younger men as brothers, {2} the older women as mothers, *and* the younger women as sisters, in all purity.”

(Ex 20:12) “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.”

I have seen brothers fight with one another, but when someone outside the family comes against one of them, watch out. They will aggressively defend one another.

He told Timothy that the church is to honor widows, who are widows indeed. He gave several qualifications for a widow to be supported by the church.

(1 Ti 5:3) “Honor widows who are widows indeed;”

Paul wrote that the church was to honor their pastors, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

(1 Ti 5:17) “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”

The common thread to all of this is honor. Brothers and sisters are to honor one another. That is the conduct that God wants in His household. We learn honor in the home, and our spiritual home is to embrace the same principle of honoring one another.

I want to mention just one additional passage about the behavior of the brethren. In Mark 3:33-35, Jesus’ mother and brothers came to Him, and the people around Him told Him that they were there. Looking around at those around Him, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.” The family of God does the will of God. We are not family members because we do things; we cannot earn our way to heaven. We become family members by placing our faith in Christ, not by works. But family members do the will of God and walk in the Spirit.

(Mk 3:33-35) “Answering them, He said, ‘Who are My mother and My brothers?’ {34} Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, ‘Behold My mother and My brothers! {35} For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.’”

4. Benefits of being brethren

In 1999, we were asked by Peggy Cochran, the women’s chaplain at Cobb County Adult Detention Center, to adopt a baby girl. The pregnant mother was out of prison, and was a new believer. Peggy had ministered to her while she was incarcerated. Since she was trying to get free from drugs and did not have a steady source of income, she thought it best for her baby to be adopted. Peggy recommended me, since I was also a prison chaplain, and had two foster children, as well as nine children of our own. Karen and I prayed about it and agreed to adopt her baby. We met the lady at the hospital, and took the baby home with us when she was two days old. As I had prayed, I sensed the Holy Spirit saying to me, “Don’t get attached to the baby; she does not belong to you.” So, I told Karen not to get attached because the baby does not belong to us, that the mother was going to get her back. Earlier, I had encouraged the mother to keep her daughter, but she had insisted we have the baby. She had not named the baby, so we named her Megan Grace. Magan (Strong’s H4042) means to be delivered in Hebrew. This baby was delivered by grace. In Georgia, the mother has ten days to change her mind about giving her child away for adoption. Three or four days later, we received a call from the mother and she had changed her mind; she now wanted to keep her baby, so we gave Megan back to her mother. The mother liked the name we gave her, so she kept the name we had given her. Because the adoption process ended during the ten-day period, she is not legally one of our children. She did not grow up in our family and receive the benefits of being in our family.

Karen and I were also asked if we would be foster parents for babies born to women who were incarcerated at the prison I worked at. Our first baby was Darius Brendon. Three weeks later we were asked to take a baby girl, so we took in Monica Lavergeray Sandtasia Scott. Sandtasia weighed almost five pounds when we took her in. Like most of these babies, she was a “crack baby,” and it took about seven months to get most of it out of her system. Our children took care of her. She was now part of our family, and her new brothers and sisters took really good care of her. They loved on her, took her on walks in the stroller. She was experiencing the love and care that a family offers.

While we were foster parents, the incarcerated mothers gave up the temporary custody of their babies until they were out of prison; then, we had to give them back to their mothers. The babies were never legally our children, or part of our family. We loved them and cared for them as if they were our own children, but they were never our children. There is a huge difference in being adopted and being a foster child. When God adopted us into His family, we were given all legal rights and privileges that come from being part of God’s family. God promised us an inheritance, as well as many other benefits of being His children. We can go to our Heavenly Father for any need that we might have, whether it be for wisdom, counsel, peace, protection, provision, or other things. As a child of God, we receive all kinds of benefits.

What are some of those benefits? The list of benefits is a year’s worth of messages, so we will only discuss a few of them. First, we have freedom from slavery. We were slaves to sin, but Jesus delivered us from the slavery of sin, and we became slaves of righteousness. Freedom from sin is a huge benefit. There are many people today in bondage to sin, and need the freedom that God promises.

(Ro 6:17–18) “But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, {18} and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

A second benefit is eternal life. Paul tells us in Romans 6 that the consequences of sin is death. Now that we have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, we derive our benefit, eternal life.

(Ro 6:20–22) “For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. {21} Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. {22} But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.”

Spiritual death is separation from God. On the other hand, eternal life is being joined to God forever. In John 17:3, Jesus defined eternal life. He said, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” When we believe in Jesus and receive Him into our life, we are adopted into the family of God, set free from the bondage of sin, and have eternal life.

(Jn 17:3) “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

There is a fourth benefit that we have, and this the privilege of calling God our Father. In Romans 8, Paul wrote that we have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, He began the model prayer with, “Our

Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name.” It is a privilege to be able to call upon our Father at any time of the day or night, for any need that we have or see that we are going to have, or just to spend time in His presence worshipping Him.

(Ro 8:15) “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!”

(Lk 11:2) “And He said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.’”

I remember one day walking from a green to the next tee, and I asked the Lord to fill me with His Spirit so I could have the fruit of peace. A breeze came upon me and the hairs on my arm stood up; God filled me with His Spirit.

Another day, in our prayer meeting before service, I asked the Lord to give us a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit. Once again, a gentle breeze blew upon all that were there praying, and we were filled with the Holy Spirit. There have been many times that I have called out to the Lord. As a child of God, we can call upon Him at any time and for any reason.

Peter encourages us to cast our anxieties or cares upon Jesus. Why? Because God cares about us. He wants to meet our needs. He wants to remove stress, anxiety, worry, and other things that might weigh us down. God loves us and cares for us, and as His children, we receive this huge benefit.

(1 Pe 5:7) “casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

In Psalm 103, David wrote, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits.” God pardons our iniquities, heals our diseases, redeems us from the pit, crowns us with lovingkindness and compassion, and many other things. The benefits run from Genesis through Revelation. Our message today is about brethren, so I want to spend a little time specifically talking about the benefits that brethren have.

(Ps 103:2) “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits;”

When we come into God’s family, we have a new spiritual family with many brothers and sisters in Christ. Each family member has a unique and special gift. Peter tells us to employ that gift in serving one another. When you need someone to mow your grass, give you a ride, make a meal for you, pray for you, comfort you, encourage you, counsel you, teach you, exhort you, or any other need, you have members of the body that can and will do that for you. There are thirty-three “one another” commands that the body is to carry out for one another. The world does not have a support network like that.

Recently, our neighbor across the street lost her mother. Her church family has been there to support her. People stayed with her to comfort her and to be with her in this time of grief and mourning. They brought meals and other things. They supported her the way a church family should do. She was not alone in her suffering; her brothers and sisters in Christ walked with her through everything.

This week as I was mentoring a pastor in Africa, he was feeling guilty about not always being available for his congregation. I shared with him Acts 6:1-4, where the apostles had the church

choose seven men to take care of the serving of food for the widows so that they could devote their time to prayer and the ministry of the word. I counseled him that he should not feel guilty about setting aside time to pray and study the word each week. He needs to study and prepare messages for the congregation every week; it is a priority. He needs to watch over the flock, and spend time in prayer. These are priorities. The pastor was very encouraged by what I shared with him. When you are in the body of Christ, you have brethren to counsel and encourage you.

I mentioned that eleven people in our family went to celebrate my daughter's 30th birthday in Florida. As brothers and sisters, we rejoice with one another; we celebrate with one another. It is not just in the tough times that we need one another; it is in the good times also. Did you know that Christmas is one of the loneliest times of the year for many people? It is not a lonely time for families because they celebrate holidays together.

Even though there are numerous benefits for the brethren, many are not experiencing these benefits. There are several reasons for that. One of the biggest reasons today is that many people are not connected to a local church. In Hebrews we are exhorted to consider how to encourage one another, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves as is the habit of some. We have many today forsaking the assembling of ourselves, and they miss out on the encouragement of others.

(He 10:24–25) “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, {25} not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

Another reason believers miss out on these benefits is that they are not part of a small group. In a 2015 Barna research report, he found “only 20 percent of Christian adults are involved in some sort of discipleship activity—and this includes a wide range of activities such as attending Sunday school or fellowship group, meeting with a spiritual mentor, studying the Bible with a group, or reading and discussing a Christian book with a group.”¹ In another survey, he found that “the proportion of Protestant adherents who are involved in small groups, 21%, has remained unchanged in the past several years.”² While different reports show differing levels of participation in small groups, it is safe to say that a substantial majority of Christians are not participating in small groups where discipleship, formation of deeper relationship, mutual care, and many other “one another” commands take place.

We must encourage believers to actively be involved with other brothers and sisters in Christ. The early church was committed to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, prayer, and breaking bread. In their fellowship and breaking bread, most of these one another commands would take place. We need to prioritize these four early church practices in our churches today.

(Ac 2:42) “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

Conclusion and Applications

We have been looking at the church. It is made up of saints, who are believers and have been sanctified by the blood of Christ. Second, we looked at disciples or learners; we are learning to

¹ https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

² https://www.barna.com/research/protestants-catholics-and-mormons-reflect-diverse-levels-of-religious-activity/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

become like Christ. Today, we looked at brethren. The church is those who have been called out of darkness into His light. The church is those who have been adopted into God's family. All those who have received Christ and the spirit of adoption, are children of God. The church is comprised of brothers and sisters in Christ, or brethren.

We also looked at the behavior of the brethren. Brothers and sisters love one another. They care for one another. They serve one another. They encourage one another. They also honor one another. Just as a natural family has a special bond and affection for one another, the family of God is an intimate and affectionate family. Their love for one another is a testimony for the world to know that they are disciples of Jesus.

Finally, we saw that there are many benefits from being part of the family of God. First and foremost, we have a relationship with God. We can call out to Him, "Abba! Father!" No matter what time of day or night, no matter what the need is, we have the privilege of going to the Father. We also have the privilege of knowing and worshipping the King of Kings, the Almighty God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. It is an awesome privilege to have a relationship with God.

In addition to being adopted as sons and daughters, we have forgiveness of sins. We have been justified. God has lavished His love on us. He has promised His provision and protection. We also have all the promises of God to stand on. He has given us everything that we need pertaining to life and godliness.

Our first application is about becoming part of God's family. Have you received Christ into your life? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and was raised from the dead? If so, and you would like to receive Christ and become part of the family of God, you simply need to confess Him as Lord. When you confess Him as Lord, you are yielding your life to Him, making Him your Master. You are committing yourself to following Him. If you want to receive Him, pray something like this.

"Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God and that You came and died for our sins and were raised from the dead. I ask You to come into my life and forgive me of my sins. I turn my life over to You today, and confess You as Lord. It is in Jesus' name I pray."

(Ro 10:9–10) "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; {10} for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

Our second application is to be connected to God's family. Join a local church. For us to enjoy the benefits of being brethren, we need to be relationally connected to other believers. We need to be part of a local church, because that is where most of the "one another" commands are carried out. Are you a member of a local church? Are you participating and committed to your local church? If not, I encourage you to make a commitment to be a properly functioning member in your church. If you are not a member of a church, I invite you to become part of the Connection Church of East Rome. We would welcome you into our church family.

Our third application is about the behavior of the brethren. Act like brothers and sisters. Are you acting like a brother or sister should act? Are you loving your brothers and sisters? Are you serving others? Are you encouraging others? Are you fellowshiping and caring for others? If not, ask the Lord to forgive you and to help you love the brethren as you should.

Closing Prayer

Father God! Abba! Father! We come to You today and give You all praise and honor. Thank You for predestining us to adoption as sons and daughters. Thank You for the love that You have given so that we could be called children of God. Jesus, thank You for paying the price for our redemption and our adoption. Thank You for laying down Your life for us so that we could have fellowship with You and the Father. Thank You for giving us the Spirit of adoption and for all the benefits and privileges that we have in being children of God. Lord, help us to treat one another with honor. Help us to love one another just as You love us. Help us to consider others more important than ourselves. Help us to care for others and to encourage others. Help us to be the loving family that You have called us to be. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- As a child, how was your relationship with your brothers and sisters? What were things that you did for one another that showed that you were committed to one another?
- If you grew up in a home with unhealthy relationships with your siblings, how has that impacted your life today?
- For you personally, what is the biggest benefit of being adopted into God's family?
- In your experience, has the church been more of an organization or a family? What are some things that we can do to make it more of a family?
- Why are the instructions in Dt 6:1-9 about fathers teaching their children God's commands so critical and relevant to the church today?
- What are some of the reasons that the majority of believers are not in small groups? What can churches do to improve the involvement of members in small groups?
- How did the structure and priorities of the early church (Ac 2:42-47) facilitate church family life?

Who are the brethren?

Introduction (1 Co 1:2, Ac 11:26)

1. Definition of Brethren

2. Basis of being called brethren (Ro 8:14-16, Eph 1:13-14, 1 Cor 6:19-20, Ac 20:28, Jn 20:17, Mt 28:9-10)

a. It is past tense. (Ro 8:15-16)

b. It is a future event. (Ro 8:19-23, Ga 4:5)

3. Behavior of the brethren (Jn 13:35, Col 3:14, Ro 12:10, 12:15, 1 Co 12:25, 1 Th 4:18, 5:11, 1 Jn 1:7, 1 Pe 4:10, Jas 5:16, Ps 133:1-4, 1 Th 2:5-8, 5:12, 5:14, 5:25-26, 1 Ti 5:1-2, Ex 20:12, 1 Ti 5:3, 5:17, Mk 3:33-35)

4. Our benefits of being brethren (Ro 6:17-18, 6:20-22, Jn 17:3, Ro 8:15, Lk 11:2, 1 Pe 5:7, Ps 103:2, He 10:24-25, Ac 2:42)

Conclusion and Applications

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.