

## Church as Family and House church

Can you define what a Christian is without mentioning the church? If you can, your definition just might not line up with the Bible's.

Think about it. If you're an orphan, you don't adopt parents; they adopt you. If your adoptive parents are named Smith, you now attend the Smith family dinners with the parents and all the children. You share a bedroom at night with the Smith siblings. When the teacher at school calls out attendance and says, "Smith?" you raise your hand like your older brother did before you and your younger sister will do after you. And you do this not because you decided to play the role of "Smith," but because someone went to the orphanage and said, "You will be a Smith." On that day, you became the child of someone and the sibling of others.

Only your name's not Smith. It's Christian, named after the one through whom you were adopted, Christ (Eph. 1:5). Now you're part of the whole family of God. "The one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family" (Heb. 2:11).

And this is no dysfunctional family, with family members estranged from one another. It's a fellowship. When God "called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9), he also called you into "fellowship" with the whole family (1 Cor. 5:2).

And this is no polite and formal fellowship. It's a body, bound together by our individual decisions but also bound together by far more than human decision—the person and work of Christ. You would be as foolish to say, "I'm not a part of the family," as you would be to cut off your own hand or nose. As Paul said to the Corinthians, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'" (1 Cor. 12:21).

In short, it's impossible to answer the question "What is a Christian?" without ending up in a conversation about the church; at least, in the Bible it is. Not only that, it's hard to stick with just one metaphor for the church because the New Testament uses so many of them: a family and a fellowship, a body and a bride, a people and a temple, a lady and her children. And never does the New Testament conceive of the Christian existing on a prolonged basis outside the fellowship of the church. The church is not really a place. It's a people—God's people in Christ.

*An excerpt from Mark Dever's book: [What is a Healthy Church?](#)*

### Terms Used to describe the Church as Family

We learn as much about the church by how it is NOT described as we do about the way it IS described. For example, though a spiritual battle rages in the heavenly places, and although Scripture tells each of us to "fight the good fight of faith" the New Testament never describes the church as an army.

Though the church deals with millions of people scattered around the world in a variety of countries and cultures, entrusted with huge amounts of resources, the New Testament never describes it as a business enterprise.

Though the church touches each individual believer and describes every one of them as vitally important to the task at hand, the New Testament never describes the church as a democracy.

Though the church is not dependent upon buildings and physical resources, it is never described as a hang loose spontaneous happening without structure or purpose.

### **Biblical Correction**

We are in the habit of saying that the church is LIKE a family. We would be more Biblically accurate to say "the church IS a family." The accumulation of the following verses indicate why that is so.

### **HOUSEHOLD**

Galatians 6:10

*So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.*

Ephesians 2:19

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,*

Timothy 3:15

*but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may 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.*

Hebrews 3:6

*but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end*

1 Peter 2:5

*you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

1 Peter 4:17

*For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

### **Brother/Sister**

Matthew 12:50

*"For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."*

Matthew 25:40

*"And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'*

Hebrews 2:11-12

*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, saying, "I will proclaim Thy name to My brethren, In the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise."*

Acts 9:17

*And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit."*

Acts 21:20

*And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law;*

Romans 16:23

*Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother.*

1 Corinthians 7:12

*But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away.*

2 Corinthians 2:13

*I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.*

1 Peter 1:22

*Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,*

1 John 3:14

*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.*

2 Corinthians 6:18

*"And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.*

## **What makes one a member of a family?**

### **Born of the father**

Hebrews 2:14

*Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil;*

1 Peter 1:3, 23

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.*

1 John 2:29

*If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.*

1 John 3:7-10

*Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.*

1 John 4:7

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*

1 John 5:1-5

*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith.*

## **Blood**

1 Corinthians 10:16

*Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?*

Ephesians 1:7

*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace,*

1 Peter 1:18-19

*knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.*

1 John 1:7

*but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

## **Marriage**

2 Corinthians 11:2

*2 For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.*

Revelation 19:7-8

7 "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." 8 And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints

Revelation 21:9

And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

2 Corinthians 11:2

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.

## **Adoption**

Romans 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!"

Galatians 4:4-7

But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And 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.

Ephesians 1:5

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, ... according to the kind intention of His will.

## **What is Significant About the Church Being a Family?**

The book of Acts gives us the history of how the gospel spread and the church progressed. Initially the followers of Jesus were called disciples. Discipleship is a Jewish concept meaning one who learns by following another person. Believers in Jesus follow Him in order to learn from Him.

It is interesting that the term, *disciple*, is used throughout the book of Acts until we come to chapter 20:1. That is the last time it is used in the New Testament. Why is that?

The church began in Jerusalem and was culturally Jewish. So, the Jewish term *disciple* was understood. However, persecution scatters the believers and Antioch becomes the center of mission activity. The church has now become culturally Gentile. They were not familiar with the concept of a disciple. However, they did understand *oikos*.

The New Testament word for house or household is *oikos*. In English, "household" means the nuclear family (husband, wife, children). *Oikos*, however, has a much broader concept and includes family, relatives, co-workers, friends and those with whom there was regular contact. It was in the *oikos* that as boys grew to become men, they followed the father and his co-

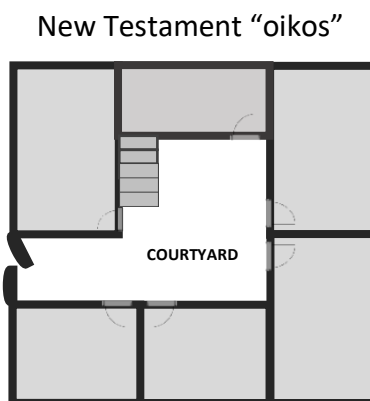
workers to learn a trade. Likewise, the girls followed the women of the oikos in order to learn the women's role in the family.

From Acts 20 through the rest of the New Testament, except for the occasions when attention shifts back to Jerusalem, the only mention of the temple is when Paul was pioneering into new locations and would go to the synagogue to discern if there was receptivity to the gospel.

All the activity centered around households and occasional public locations. This remained the pattern until about 300 AD.

It has been stated that:

- In New Testament times, Christianity was a community (family) of believers on mission.
- Then Christianity moved to Greece and became a philosophy.
- Then it moved to Rome and became an institution.
- Then it moved to Europe and became a culture.
- And then it moved to America and became a business.



Examples Abound Throughout the Scriptures:

- Luke 8:39 The demoniac was told to return to his household and described the great things done for him
- Luke 19:9 Zacchaeus was told salvation had come to his household
- John 4:53 The centurion's whole household was saved following the healing of his son
- Acts 10:2 This records that Cornelius was a righteous man who feared God with all his household. When Peter arrived to preach the gospel, we see that Cornelius had a broader understanding of *oikos* than simply his relatives.
- Acts 10:24 When Peter arrived, Cornelius had invited his relatives and close friends

- Acts 18:8 Luke describes how Crispus, leader of the synagogue at Corinth, believed in the Lord with all his household.
- 1 Corinthians 1:16 Paul baptized the household of Stephanas

In these and many other passages we can see how the natural webs of relationships, which comprised the oikos of the early Christians, became the primary means for the spread of the gospel. The early Christians knew when the message of faith was heard and demonstrated by friends and family who were known, barriers to the gospel were removed and receptivity to the message increased tremendously.

### The Principle Today

#### How People Come To Christ and Church

SPECIAL NEED	1 - 3%
WALK IN	2 - 4%
PASTOR OR CHURCH STAFF	0 - 3%
VISITATION/TELE-MARKETING	1/2 - 1%
SUNDAY SCHOOL/SMALL GROUP	4 - 6%
EVANGELISTIC CRUSADE	1/2- 1%
ALL OTHER CHURCH PROGRAMS	2 - 4%
FRIENDS AND/OR RELATIVES (Oikos)	75 - 90%

### Developing an *Oikos* strategy

#### The four worlds of a church member

- Biological World — related to me by blood or marriage
- Vocational World — work associates
- Geographical World — immediate community, neighbors
- Volitional world – the world of my choice, leisure activities, sports etc.

The average Christian has between eight and fifteen people in their oikos who presently are not Christians or active in any church, and Live within a reasonable driving distance of the church of that member.

### The Church Family is the Redemptive Family

What does that mean? When the biological or nuclear family is disrupted, the church family becomes the primary family.

1 timothy 5:3-16

*Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need.*

James 1:27

*Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

In our present American culture, we must be attentive to:

- the single parent
- street people
- refugees
- etc.

### **Example of Redemptive Family for Jesus**

Luke 1:21-22 - Jesus Is Baptized

Luke 2:1-13 – He is tempted in the wilderness for 40 days.

Luke 4:14-31 – He begins His public ministry

*<sup>16</sup>And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; (the location of His oikos) and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. <sup>17</sup>And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,*

*<sup>18</sup>“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, o set free those who are oppressed, <sup>19</sup>to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.”*

*<sup>20</sup>And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. <sup>21</sup>And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” <sup>22</sup>And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” <sup>23</sup>And He said to them, “No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’” <sup>24</sup>And He said, “Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. <sup>25</sup>But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; <sup>26</sup>and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. <sup>27</sup>And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.”*

*<sup>28</sup>And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; <sup>29</sup>and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. <sup>30</sup>But passing through their midst, He went His way.*

Question: When, where and how did His oikos come to His aid?

So what does Jesus do next?

*<sup>31</sup>And He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and He was teaching them on the Sabbath;*



Luke 4:31-37 tells us about His ministry in the synagogue.

<sup>38</sup> *Then He got up and left the synagogue and entered Simon's home. (Peter's oikos).*

The oikos was primarily seen as a place of provision and protection away from the public.

Jesus demonstrates that it is also a place of outreach and ministry to others.

*Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Him to help her. <sup>39</sup> And standing over her, He rebuked the fever, and it left her; and she immediately got up and waited on them.*

<sup>40</sup> *While the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and laying His hands on each one of them, He was healing them.*

Luke 5 – He calls them to follow Him and He will make them fishers of men.

Now we must transition to Mark's gospel - Mark 3:29-35

<sup>20</sup> *And He came home, (Peter's oikos) and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal.<sup>21</sup> When His own people (His family oikos in Nazareth) heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."<sup>22</sup> The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." . . .<sup>31</sup> Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him and called Him. (Remember, when Jesus could have used their concern in Nazareth, they were nowhere to be found.)*

<sup>32</sup> *A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You."<sup>33</sup> Answering them, He said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?"<sup>34</sup> Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers!<sup>35</sup> For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."*

### **Example of Redemptive Family from Jesus' Final Moments**

John 19:25-27

*But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.<sup>26</sup> When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "**Woman, behold, your son!**"<sup>27</sup> Then He said to the disciple, "**Behold, your mother!**" From that hour **the disciple took her into his own household.***