

OUR LIFE TOGETHER

An Intimate Family

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In our previous lesson we introduced a brief series on the subject of fellowship entitled "Our Life Together."
 - A. In our initial lesson, we asked if churches today are engaged in the kind of fellowship that was practiced by Christians in the first century.
 1. It was a fellowship characterized by a real sense of ONENESS; an INTIMACY in which there was not only a close, warm friendship between these disciples of Christ, but where they were also genuinely involved in each other's lives to the extent that when one member suffered, all the members suffered with them, and when one member rejoiced, everyone rejoiced with them.
 2. This sense of "oneness" and personal care and concern for the welfare of their brothers and sisters in Christ extended well beyond the local congregation.
 - a. This mutual care and concern was so important to them that when members of the Lord's church in one region of the world were suffering and in need of the basic necessities of life, Christians from other regions of the world would take up a

collection within each of their own congregations and send it directly to congregations in need.

II. However, in this lesson I want us to turn our attention to "An Intimate Family" we know simply as the Lord's church.

A. There are three things we want to better understand about our "Intimate Family," the church.

1. First, we want to notice how people in the religious world – including some of our own brethren – think of the church.
2. Second, we want to see what Jesus taught about the true NATURE of the church.
3. And finally, we also want to examine how the Lord's teaching should shape the KIND of fellowship He wants you and me to experience.

BODY:

I. When it comes to how people in the religious world think of the Lord's church today, there are a wide variety of contrasting views – even among those of us who are members of the Body of Christ.

A. For example, many people in the religious world think of the church as an institution, or as an organization.

1. In one sense of the word, the Lord's church **is** an institution, because the word institution is defined as, *"an organization founded and united for a specific purpose."*
2. And in once sense of the word, the Lord's church is **also** an organization, because the word *organization* is defined as being, *"made up of elements with varied functions that contribute to the whole and to collective functions; an organism."* And we are, *"a group of persons organized for a particular purpose."*
3. But when we think of the church as merely an institution or an organization, there is a tendency to lose sight of WHO organized and founded this group of persons, and the PURPOSE for which we exist.
 - a. We can't lose sight of the fact that the LORD is the founder and that our MAIN purpose as a group of people is to worship and honor the God of heaven and His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.
 - b. In addition to our purpose of worshipping and praising God and Christ, we ALSO have the purpose of spreading the gospel of Christ, AND of being a united body of believers who provide mutual support and encouragement to other believers.

4. The purpose of the Lord's church is NOT to function as a social service agency for the local community.
 - a. Rather, our purpose is to lead people to the Lord through the preaching and teaching of the gospel of Christ.
 - b. And, once people HAVE been led to Christ, our purpose is to also provide them with the encouragement needed to help them remain faithful to the Lord.
- B. While the church is DIVINELY instituted and organized by God, we often find ourselves using the word church incorrectly.
 1. We often use phrases like:
 - a. "I'm going to church."
 - b. "We need someone to help clean the church."
 - c. "That person has been missing church a lot lately."
 2. Part of the problem is because we have become church building oriented.
 - a. Like many people in the denominational world, we slip into the same trap of thinking of the church in terms of the building (or of a thing) rather than in terms of the people.
- II. Rather than fall into that trap, we need to think of the church in the way JESUS thought of it. How was that?

A. Jesus thought of the church as A FAMILY that would be out in the world doing the will of His Father in heaven.

1. **Matthew 12:46-50** – *While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. 47 Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." 48 But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" 49 And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."*

B. In fact, Jesus and His apostles frequently used the concept of family when speaking about the church.

1. Jesus spoke of God as His FATHER.
 - a. **Matthew 7:21** – *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."*
2. He also taught His disciples to address God as their FATHER.
 - a. **Matthew 6:9** – *"In this manner, therefore, pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.'"*
3. The apostles referred to the church in family terms.

- a. **1 Peter 2:17** – *Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*
- b. **1 Timothy 3:15** – *But if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house (NIV – “household”) of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*
- c. **2 Corinthians 6:17-18** – *Therefore “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.”*

- 4. And so, it should be clear to all of us that Jesus intended the church to be an intimate family, with a closeness and kinship NOT found in something that is simply an institution or an organization.
 - 5. In fact, every aspect of the life of God's people is to manifest the closeness of family intimacy.
- II. But the big question is how do we foster this closeness of family intimacy among ourselves as a congregation of believers? Although there are many ways we can accomplish this sense of family closeness, allow me suggest just three ways.

- A. First, we can foster this sense of family closeness and intimacy by understanding our RELATIONSHIP with each other.
1. We're brothers and sisters in Christ, and being brothers and sisters suggests a sense of equality.
 - a. Although it's not uncommon for brothers and sisters to occasionally strive for dominance over each other, the wise parent will step in immediately and remind them that they ARE brothers and sisters, and that NONE of them have the right to dominate the other.
 - b. That parent will also foster in their children a sense of dependency upon their brothers and sisters, and mutual care and concern because they are FAMILY.
 - c. Furthermore, a wise parent will foster a need of cooperation among their children – where each not only looks out for their OWN interest, but also for the interests of their brothers and sisters.
 2. In the **twentieth chapter of Matthew**, Jesus was approached by the mother of James and John asking that the Lord appoint one to sit at His right hand and the other at His left when He came into His kingdom.

- a. Sometimes when we read about an incident such as this, we miss the real hidden motive of the parties involved.
- b. The motive in this case was very simple – being in the position of the right and left hand of Jesus meant being second in command.
- c. The mother of James and John was essentially asking Jesus to appoint her sons in positions of authority OVER all the OTHER disciples of the Lord.
 - (1). And from Mark's account of this same incident we learn that James and John ALSO wanted these positions of authority over their brethren.
- d. Now you know why the OTHER apostles were INCENSED and OUTRAGED at the request of James and John.
- e. And so Jesus immediately called His disciples together and let everyone know that this kind of ranking and dominance would NOT be permitted in His spiritual kingdom.
 - (1). **Matthew 20:25-28** – *"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to*

be first among you, let him be your slave — 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

3. So, as far as our RELATIONSHIP with one another is concerned, we're brothers and sisters.
 - a. There is a sense of equality among us, dependency upon one another, and a mutual care and concern for one another.
 - b. We're FAMILY!
- B. Second, we can foster this sense of family closeness and intimacy by understanding our need to PROTECT each other.
 1. This concept of PROTECTION means that we will do everything of a PREVENTATIVE nature to KEEP our brothers and sisters from getting hurt or lost.
 2. But it ALSO suggests that we will do everything in our power to FIND our brother and sister who may be lost, and bring them back home.
 3. In the **eighteenth chapter of Matthew**, Jesus posed this question to His disciples.
 - a. **Matthew 18:12-14** – *"What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one*

that is straying? 13 And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

4. Now let me ask a similar question. Suppose YOUR brother or sister – a member of your OWN family – got lost. How DESPERATE would YOU be to find them and bring them back home? How DILIGENTLY and INTENSELY would YOU search for them until they were found and brought back home?
 - a. I realize some may be thinking, "There's a difference between a brother or sister who ACCIDENTLY wanders off and gets lost, from a brother or sister who DELIBERATELY leaves the family as a run-away."
 - b. You're right – there IS a difference. One was careless and got lost, while the other made a deliberate choice to desert the family.
5. So, let me ask the question a little differently. Suppose your OWN brother or sister – a member of your own FAMILY – ran away from home. How DESPERATE would YOU be to find them and bring

them back home? How DILIGENTLY and INTENSELY would YOU search for them until they were found and brought back home?

6. Every time you walk past a bulletin board with posters of missing children, you'll notice that SOME of those children are in their mid-to-late teens, and in MOST instances are run-aways.
 - a. But the fact that there IS a poster of them on the board speaks VOLUMES.
 - b. SOMEONE in their family DESPARATELY wants to find them and let them know that they're still LOVED, they're MISSED, and that it's *okay* to come BACK HOME.
 7. So, as far as our need to PROTECT one another is concerned, we'll do everything to KEEP our little brothers and sisters from getting hurt or lost, and if they DO get lost, we'll do everything in our power to FIND them and bring them back home – even the run-away.
- C. And finally, we can foster this sense of family closeness and intimacy by learning to truly FORGIVE each other.
1. NOTHING will destroy family closeness and intimacy any quicker than being UNWILLING to forgive our brother or sister for some offense.

- a. Harboring grudges, or constantly reminding them of the wrong they did is characteristic of an UNFORGIVING heart.
 - b. Not only that, but it destroys the already fragile self-esteem of that brother or sister – they will ALWAYS feel unworthy, unaccepted, and unwanted.
2. We need to realize the immense value of forgiveness in fostering a family relationship.
 3. Jesus not only taught that forgiveness should be automatic upon repentance, it should also be unlimited and come from a heart of genuine mercy and compassion.
 - a. **Matthew 18:21-35** – *Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master,*

have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 27 *Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.* 28 *But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!'* 29 *So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'* 30 *And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.* 31 *So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done.* 32 *Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.* 33 *Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?'* 34 *And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.* 35 *"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."*

4. There are two important truths taught here by Jesus.

- a. First, we should NEVER keep a tally of offenses – and second, we need to avoid the tendency to RANK sins.
 - b. We often see OUR sins as hundred denarii sins – some may be two hundred or even three hundred denarii sins, but NONE of us would even THINK of committing those ten thousand talent sins.
 - c. But what we forget is that we not only sin against our brethren (hundred denarii sins), but we have all sinned against God, and every sin against God is a ten thousand talent sin BECAUSE we sinned against God.
 - d. So, who do we think WE are to look down on someone and be unforgiving to someone who has sinned against US?
 - e. Sins committed against US don't even COMPARE to the sins we've committed against GOD, no matter HOW LITTLE we might see our sins.
5. While it's certainly true that even GOD doesn't forgive sins when there is no repentance, Peter tells us He *"is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."* **(2 Peter 3:9)**
6. God ALWAYS stands ready to forgive sins IMMEDIATELY and COMPLETELY, and so should we.

7. And allow me to make just a couple of additional comments about forgiveness.
 - a. Have you EVER read in the Bible where a forgiven person was put on some kind of PROBATION until they could PROVE themselves?
 - b. Neither have I. So why do we do that kind of thing? Who gave US the right to become someone's spiritual probation officer?
 - c. And one more thing. Sometimes I hear people say, "I'm certainly willing to forgive AS LONG AS their repentance is GENUINE."
 - d. Brethren, only GOD knows the heart of that repenting brother or sister – not us. OUR job is to unquestionably accept that repentance as genuine, AND to encourage and support that brother or sister to help them KEEP their repentance genuine.
8. So, as far as our need to FORGIVE one another is concerned, our forgiveness needs to be just like GOD'S forgiveness – immediate and complete.
 - a. Nothing will destroy a family any quicker than holding grudges and being unforgiving.

III. All these things point out one very important spiritual truth about the Lord's church – we need to see the church as a fellowship or close, intimate association of believers who consider ourselves as FAMILY.

A. For some, the church may be the only FAMILY we have.

1. Jesus taught His disciples that the COST of being His disciple is HIGH.

a. **Matthew 10:34-39** – *"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. 35 For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; 36 and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' 37 He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."*

b. For those of us who have never been forced to face this kind of situation, it's difficult, if not impossible, for us to fully understand how heart-wrenching this kind of decision is to make.

c. My heart aches for those who have been forced into making this decision and yet lack the strength and courage to do so.

- d. But at the same time, I say, GOD BLESS those who HAVE had the courage to stand up for the Lord against their family.
- B. For others, the church becomes a family for those who have given up everything, including the own family, to follow or even to serve Jesus Christ.
1. Like some of you, my family lives more than a thousand miles away – living in Oregon, California and Texas.
 - a. I envy those families who manage to grow up together and remain together in close proximity to one another.
 - b. But not all of us are fortunate enough to enjoy that kind of family closeness.
 - c. And so, in many respects, YOU become our family.
 2. In fact, Jesus saw the church in this same way. On one particular occasion, Peter reminded Jesus of all he and the other disciples had left to follow Him.
 - a. **Mark 10:29-31** – *So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, 30 who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time — houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions — and in*

the age to come, eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

3. So, take a look around you right now – what do you see? You see YOUR brothers and sisters in Christ, YOUR spiritual fathers and mothers, and YOUR spiritual children to nourish and help care for.
4. You see YOUR FAMILY!

CONCLUSION:

- I. Allow me to conclude by saying this about our FAMILY in this place.
 - A. Nothing fosters family closeness and intimacy more than spending time together.
 1. For some, it may mean being more faithful about attending the services ("FELLOWSHIP-TIME") of the church.
 2. For others, it may mean widening your circle of friends to include others.
 3. For all of us, it means being less self-centered, and being willing to become more involved with one another!
 - a. That means truly getting to know one another better.
 - b. It also means being willing to open our homes and our hearts to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

- c. And it means being willing to get involved in caring for one another, and helping our brothers and sisters carry their burdens.

B. In 1969, songwriters Bobby Scott and Bobby Russell collaborated in writing a song recorded a year later by recording artist Neil Diamond – it's still recognized as one of Neil Diamond's best songs.

1. The opening lyrics of the song goes like this:

*The road is long with many awaiting turns
That lead us to who knows where,
who knows where
But I'm strong,
strong enough to carry him
He ain't heavy, he's my brother.*

*So long we go
His welfare is my concern
No burden is he to bear, we'll get there.
For I know
he would not encumber me
He ain't heavy, he's my brother.*

2. That's GENUINE FAMILY LOVE!
- C. I realize this lesson affects everyone who hears it a little different.
1. For some of you here this morning, this lesson should encourage you to want to become a member of this family.
 2. For others, hopefully, this lesson should encourage you to want to come back to this family.

3. But for all of us, this lesson should encourage us to draw closer to one another.
- D. So let me ask this simple question. Do you truly see us as a family – as brothers and sisters?
1. If you truly want to become a member of this family, come to Christ in faith, willing to obey Him completely by being baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins – you will then be added by the Lord to the church (His FAMILY).
 2. And if you've reached a point in your life where you want to come back to this family, then come repenting of your sins, confessing them to God, and allow us to pray with you and for you.