

In 2009, Dr. James Dobson in his farewell speech for “Focus on the Family” said, “Humanly speaking, we can say that we have lost.” He meant that they had lost the battle to fight for the traditional and Bible based family in America. That must have been a tough thing to admit, but it was true. Could there be any more evidence of it than we can see today?

It is amazing to see how quickly things can unfold. I heard of one young gal who had been baptized and brought in by a daughter of the church. Her mom and dad didn’t attend, but they were supportive of her decision to come and worship. She was welcomed into the family of the church. It didn’t take long after her graduation that she wanted to move out. It couldn’t have been more than a month that had gone by when she was found to be doing drugs and even selling herself for them. When her pastor tried to reach out to her, she referred to her fellow prostitutes as her “sisters.” She referred to her “pimp” as her “mac-daddy.” She spoke glowingly of how he protected her and took care of her. She found a new “family” in this “daddy” and these “sisters” who were anything but good for her.

Come to find out, she had been sexually abused by her own father earlier in her life. So in response she left the “family” she knew to find this new “family” - which was really no family at all. It got me thinking about all of these family terms she was using; how she longed for a family that she could be tight with; relate with; come close to.

That’s a part of what having a church family CAN do for people. It can make you a part of a big family that has nothing to do with blood lines. And isn’t that a comforting thing to think about? Jesus was willing to eliminate blood lines when he talked of family. His mother and his brothers had come to talk with him; for a period of time they thought he had lost His mind. So Jesus look at the crowd of people who were following Him and believed in Him and He said, “**These are my mother and brothers.**” In the New Testament church they had to be family to those brought into the faith because many of those who turned to Christ were alienated by their own parents. This is how God likes it; for many people from different blood lines and ages to come together to be baptized into one Lord.

The church is missing that concept today. I think for instance of the “Cowboy Church.” Here are people who find familiarity in the fact they think of themselves as “cowboys.” Other churches provide a “children’s church” during church. They may have good intentions, but aren’t they separating the church by doing this according to age or interest? The whole idea is supposed to be that in Christ it doesn’t matter if we’re old or young; Packer fans or Lions fans; State or Michigan fans; not if God’s Word doesn’t say either of them is right or wrong. All of us; even starting from infancy; can be baptized into Christ and find the same mercy and the same forgiveness from the same Person. Under the cross we become family.

The devil’s design is to redefine family; to split up the family; to make it nonexistent - both physically and spiritually. Ultimately, people get hurt. Dr. Jennifer Roback Morse is a Catholic woman who openly discusses the results of divorce and the sexual revolution on the children. She wants them to see that there are terrible consequences that have come about because of the idea of “childless sex” and the breakup of the family; just as

there were for the one girl mentioned earlier. When you want to find family apart from God's design, there is no lasting and truly loving family.

When Jesus spoke to the Pharisees who were rejecting Him - He said to them, "**You belong to your father the devil.**" Wow, those are some harsh words. There is also an evil family; a family of the devil; that finds camaraderie in this world. They find joy and pleasure in the things God hates and condemns; things that run counter to the pattern. They condemn anything to do with Jesus and hate His family. There are only two families you can belong to according to God's Word. The family of the devil or the family of God. There is no neutral place. John wrote in 1 John 5 that, "**We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.**" So try as we might to be nice to all people and let our light shine, evil and good just can't get along. The lines are getting more and more clear as we continue to live in America. You can't blend in like you used to; nor are you supposed to. You have been adopted into God's family; and that means you will be at war with the world whether you want to be or not.

When people come to church and you have a theme on "family," it can often bring about guilt because many families are broken up. The devil wants to whisper in your ear and say, "You can't belong to this church because you don't have a family. You can't come here because you messed your family up." He can use that to keep people away from church because if they don't have a regular family they feel like they don't belong.

But that doesn't mean that we should be apologetic of the design for family that God created or not talk about it; or even act as if there were no design at all. In speaking of the physical family, even though Adam had no physical "father" or "mother" God said of him, "**Therefore he will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.**" God assumed a father and a mother; a leaving and a cleaving; until death do us part. This is how He created it to work. This is how babies are meant to come into this world. It is how they are meant to be nourished and protected and brought up in the faith; with a God fearing father and mother raising the child in the faith. It isn't easy. But it isn't impossible - not with God.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians of the spiritual family he said that "**his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name**" from the Father. So when we talk about belonging to the household of God we talk about being named by God and adopted into His family - brought from the family of Satan to the family of God. When does that happen but in our baptism - as God places His name on us? "**I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**" At that point the Holy Spirit moves into us; connects us with Christ; puts us to death with Him and raises us from the dead with Him; so that we are united with Him in deep and unsearchable way. This adoption has nothing to do with how we look or who we are; it has everything to do with God's promise in Christ. We become a part of God's family.

It takes faith to believe this; for we often times don't feel very Christian. We struggle against sin and temptation; and sometimes we lose. We have those who struggle with alcohol and pornography and anger issues. It feels hypocritical to claim that we are a part of God's family. But then we remember that Jesus came for sinners and died for sinners. The Gospel is for those who realize they are not worthy. We remember how Jesus reached out to the Samaritan woman at the well who had "five husbands" and we think of David who committed murder and adultery. God didn't give up on them. He called them to repent and forgave them. He still wanted them in His family. In the epistle Paul prayed that the Father would "**strengthen you with power**

through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” He wanted you as a failed sinner to see yourself; yes you; as identified with Christ; so that you would see yourself as God’s forgiven child; so that you would think like Christ, be like Christ.

Don’t forget the ideal of this spiritual family; even with your sin. This family is meant to be different. Jesus also said in the Gospel that **“whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”** Being a part of God’s family doesn’t give you a license to sin; but a license to fight against your sin; to do what the Father calls on you to do; to be who God says you are; even if it means having to lose relationships with your friends, your parents, or you own spouse for the sake of the kingdom.

Think again about the jailer at Philippi. When Paul and Silas were arrested they had been stripped and flogged. They commanded the jailer to guard them very carefully. So he put them in the inner cell. He had their hands and feet in stocks; a most uncomfortable position to be forced to sit in for a prolonged period of time. He didn’t have to do that; but he chose to give them an extra bit of punishment and confinement.

I can’t imagine what kind of pain the disciples were in after the beating they received and being placed in stocks. Yet what were the disciples doing? They were blessing in the midst of a curse. They were praying and singing hymns to God; and they had the whole audience in the prison. They weren’t full of bitterness and anger. In the midst of their pain, they were witnessing their faith and singing it.

Then God did something miraculous. He shook the earth and rattled loose the stocks and the chains and the doors. Paul and Silas had a free passage to freedom, and the jailer had a sure passage to death. He woke up suddenly. And when he had seen the doors were opened, he took out his sword to fall on it and kill himself, for he would have been held liable for their escape. At that moment he knew he was going to face his Maker and face hell for what he had done, for surely their escape had been the work of God.

That was when Paul cried out to him. **“Don’t harm yourself! We’re all here!”** That’s when God freed the jailer and adopted him into a different family; a family of freedom and forgiveness in Christ.

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.

Paul didn’t demand he give half of his money to the poor. Nor did he give him a five step system on how to receive the Spirit or speak in tongues. He simply told him to believe and be baptized.

When the jailer was given the forgiveness of Christ it completely changed him. He felt a camaraderie with his new brothers that he never had before. He took Paul and Silas home. He washed his wounds. He and his whole family were baptized that very day. He didn’t want to wait for one moment. He was anxious for it;

desperate for it. For him it was a matter of heaven and hell; he and his family needed to be baptized and adopted into God's family. It was of the utmost urgency. Baptism wasn't something that he put off for years and years. He didn't worry about the ramifications of what it would mean that he had become a Christian. It was as if Paul and Silas set the jailer free, even though the jailer was supposed to be in charge of the jail. He and his family were brought into a great family that day; the family of believers.

Think about the urgency of the jailer that day. Do you think about what a great privilege and joy it is to be baptized into Christ? Do you urgently rush your children and grandchildren to the font so that God can adopt him or her into His family? Do you look at fellowship here as of greater importance than your co-workers, friends at school, or family? Do you find more joy in communing with your child than you do seeing him or her make a great play on the sports field? Do you get as worked up over them being held out of playing in a game as you do over them missing a worship service?

I find it so sad that this is not the case in so many families - even within our fellowship. The devil wants to lead all of you astray to fickle families of sports or alcohol or drugs; just as he led that one gal astray I was speaking of earlier. He wants all of that to seem more like family to you than this right here. It shouldn't matter if there are people here your age or not. It shouldn't matter if you have much in common with people here; whether they all like the Lions or the Bears or whether they are Democrat or Republican or Independent, black or white; whether you're a jailer or a prisoner; slave or free. It is the fact that God is our creator; Jesus is our Redeemer; we are all forgiven by the same blood of many different sins; all baptized and adopted into the Christian family with the same Spirit into the same Lord.

When you go to a concert and listen to the music; you are willing to put up with a lot of different people in the crowd in order to hear the music. If someone is drunk and obnoxious, you don't usually leave the concert even. You just move to a different area. Why? Because you love the music and the performance. You are willing to put up with rain and heat in order to soak in the performance. Nobody is drunk here. Nobody is spouting off at one another. We are all here to listen and feed on Christ. We are all being given the promise of eternal life in Christ alone. We are all brought together from different families; some of them pretty messed up and broken up; to this one family; the family of Christ. We are called on to love one another as Christ loved us; with a sacrificial and honest love; one that speaks the truth; even when it hurts; in order to help.

There is a little saying on the back of the toilet of our members. It says, "Family. When you're here, you're family." I like that sign, it always makes me feel welcome. In the end, being a part of God's family is really quite simple too. It's about recognizing that none of us deserve to be here; yet Jesus died for the undeserving and He wants them too. It's about being baptized into the Triune God and believing in Jesus as your Savior. It's about fighting together against Satan's lies and misconceptions of family; and clinging to the truth. This faith eliminates party lines and skin colors and brings people together through repentance and faith. Isn't it wonderful to be part of a bigger family; with great heroes of the faith like Paul and Silas to give you courage; and great sinners in the faith like the jailer to give you hope; both coming from completely different backgrounds; yet united under the same joy and hope in the forgiveness and salvation of Jesus Christ; being a part of a greater family in Christ. Amen.