

## Family, Flock, Body, Bride

### *Selected Passages*

**H**ow would you like a job where you get paid for doing nothing? Well, at one time in New York City over 700 teachers received their full pay at approximately \$70,000 a year, for not teaching. Each of them had been accused, some falsely, of some type of misconduct, and they were all waiting for hearings to settle their cases. But even though they had been removed from the classrooms in the meantime, they still had to report each day to what are called “rubber rooms,” where they did anything they like—play cards, read, surf the Internet, talk on the phone, or even take naps. This went on for months and sometimes years, complete with vacations and holidays all the rest of the benefits teachers in New York City get. They cost taxpayers sixty five million dollars a year.

This past April, New York’s mayor Bloomberg and the city’s teachers’ union agreed to put an end to the rubber rooms, reassigning those individuals to some type of administrative work or other work outside the classroom. The story has brought a lot of embarrassment to the city, as you can well imagine. It seems that somewhere along the line, they forgot what the teachers were for. They forgot their purpose.

It may be that in the church, we, too, have forgotten something basic to our purpose for existing. Why are we here, anyway? What difference does it make that we are here? What would happen if Utica Baptist Church suddenly ceased to exist—would anyone outside the church even notice? To help us understand why God has placed the church in the world, we must first ask “What is the church?” Once we can put together a biblical answer to that question, then we must ask, “If that is what we are, then what are we supposed to be doing as a church?”

It’s not unusual for us to forget important things, things we should remember. Several years ago (1980), when the football team from Mississippi State defeated the team from the University of Alabama, everyone in our state was excited. I read in the newspaper the following year that one of the football coaches at Alabama wanted to remind all the students there of their defeat at the hands of Mississippi State the year before. He posted a copy of the *Clarion-Ledger* (newspaper from Jackson, Mississippi)—the one with the big headlines telling of State’s victory—

on the bulletin board leading into the campus cafeteria. He didn't want them to forget!

God has placed in the Scriptures a headline to remind the church of its purpose and reason for existing in the world. The Scriptures compare the church to many things, but today we need to remind ourselves of four basic truths found in the Scriptures which point out what we are as the church. If someone in New York had remembered why they had hired those teachers in the first place, they would never have paid them for doing nothing. If we will keep in our minds and hearts the purpose of the church, we will not forget these basic truths.

## **1 God's Word says we are a Family.**

Some of the most meaningful passages in the Scriptures compare the church to a family. The word "family" is rarely used in connection with the church, but there are other references made to the family. For instance, all through the Scriptures, reference is made to God as our Father. John wrote in the first chapter of his Gospel, *"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."*

Everyone at birth is born into a human family. Some of those families are large, and some are small. Some of those families are rich and some are poor. There are happy families and there are unhappy families. Some people are adopted into their families. But when a person is born again spiritually, he is born into the Family of God. **Now if we are children, who is our Father? God is!**

This spiritual phenomenon is described in Romans 8:15 this way: *"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the spirit of sonship. And by him we cry 'Abba, Father.'"* Galatians 3:26 tells us *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."* And Paul tells us that when we become serious about following the Lord, God gives us a promise: *"I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters."*

Now when God becomes our Father, we naturally become members of the Family! Ephesians 2:19 tells us that we *"are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household."*

Belonging to this Family means four things:

**First, it means that we follow and obey the Father,** just as a human child should obey its father. Jesus responded to the news that his mother and brothers were outside the building waiting to talk with Him, by saying, *“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother”* (Matthew 12:50).

**Second, belonging to this Family means that we share in the inheritance of the Father,** just as a human child shares in the inheritance of its Father. Romans 8:17 tells us that *“if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.”* All the riches in glory are ours in Christ!

**Third, belonging to this family means that we bear the Name of the Father,** just as a human child bears the name of his father. Paul wrote that he knelt before the Father, *“from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.”* When we are born into God’s Family, we become known as God’s child with God’s Name!

**Fourth, belonging to this Family also means that we acquire certain characteristics of the Father,** just as a human child acquires the characteristics of his father. One of the characteristics we acquire from God is that of holiness. Hebrews 2:11 reads that *“both the one who makes men holy and those who are holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.”* Think of that! Let that truth soak into your spirit like the sunshine warms the earth in Spring! In spite of who I am or what I do, in spite of all my sins and shortcomings, Jesus is still not ashamed to call me “brother”!

Bill Gaither grasped that truth, and it gave him cause to rejoice. He wrote in a little chorus, “I’m so glad I’m a part of the fam’ly of God; I’ve been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood! Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod, for I’m part of the fam’ly, the fam’ly of God.”

## **2 God’s Word says we are a Flock.**

More than once in the Psalms, the people of God are called *“the sheep of His pasture”* (Psalm 74.1; 79.13; 100.3). Jesus told His disciples once, *“fear not, little flock...”* (Luke 12.32). When Jesus sent them out on a

special mission, He said, *“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves...”* (Matthew 10.16). Jesus told about what would happen on the day of Judgment: *“All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats”* (Matthew 25.32).

It was prophesied in the Old Testament, and fulfilled in the New, that the Shepherd, meaning Jesus, would be smitten, and all the flock would be scattered. Isaiah uses the terminology in his writings: *“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young”* (40.11).

That we are part of God’s flock is a central truth in a psalm that most of us can quote from memory: *“The Lord is my shepherd: I shall lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters”* (Psalm 23.1-2).

**But every flock needs a shepherd, and if we are the flock, then who is our Shepherd? Jesus is!** Peter writes of the Great Day of the Lord, *“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away”* (1 Peter 5.4). And Jesus Himself said, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”* (John 10.11).

The people of God are God’s flock, God’s sheep. So it is no coincidence that lost people are referred to as being lost sheep. Once Jesus saw the multitudes of people, and He *“had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd”* (Matthew 9.36). Jesus told a parable once in which He said, *“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?”* Matthew 18.12).

You see, we are sheep. If you are lost, you are a lost sheep, and you are even now being sought after by the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. If you are saved, you are a sheep in God’s pasture, God’s flock. As the flock of God, we have the security and protection and provision that comes from being taken care of by a loving Good Shepherd.

### **3** God's Word says we are a living Body.

Paul told the church at Corinth, “*You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it*” (1 Corinthians 12.27). He also told them, “*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ*” (12.12). He says we are all members of the Body of Christ.

As the Body of Christ, we have life, and the life we have is His life! As the Body of Christ we have breath, and the breath we have is His breath, breathed into us the moment we first believed, and breathed into us by the Holy Spirit. The church is *not* dead, because the church's **Lord** is not dead! We are a living body, all of us together. Some of us are hands, and some of us are feet. Some are ears, and some are eyes, but we are all part of the body! In a healthy human body, when one part of the body is hurt, then the whole body suffers. And that is the way it should be in a healthy church: when one of us hurts, all of us suffer—all of us hurt with that member.

I am constantly amazed at how much difference there can be among churches—even Baptist churches! We differ in size, in the style of worship, in the music we appreciate and use to help us worship, in our budgets, in our outreach, in our preaching, in our emphasis of ministry, and in hundreds of other ways. **But we are all part of the same Body—the Body of Christ Himself.**

There is one thing about a human body which points out something essential to us today. If the head becomes severed from the body, the body dies. You see, every living body needs a head. **If we are the Body of Christ, then who is the Head? Jesus is!** Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church was that they might speak “*the truth in love,*” and that they would “*in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ*” (Ephesians 4.15). He told them that “*God placed all things under*” the feet of Jesus “*and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way*” (1.22-25). There are many other places in which we are reminded that Christ is the Head of the Body, the church (Ephesians 5.23; Colossians 1.18; 2.19).

The simplest mechanical action in a healthy human body requires the cooperation of billions of nerve cells, all receiving the signal from the brain. Whatever we do as

a church, it is to be done as the result of receiving the signal from the Head of the Body.

## **4** God's Word says we are a Bride.

John wrote in his Revelation, *"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband"* (Revelation 21.2). Many times in Scripture we are called *"the bride of Christ."* Revelation 19.7 reads, *"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready,"* and the reference is obviously to the church, the people of God.

No man can be a father without a child, and no woman can be a bride without a bridegroom. **If we, the Church, are the Bride, then who is the Bridegroom? Jesus is!** When Jesus told the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, He began this way: *"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."* He said later in this parable, *"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him'"* (Matthew 25.1, 6). Jesus was talking about Himself. He is the Bridegroom.

The disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus once and asked Him, *"How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"* Jesus answered, *"How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast"* (Matthew 9.14-15). Jesus was talking about Himself there, too. Jesus is the Bridegroom.

Paul had a lot of trouble with the Corinthian church! They were continually being deceived or arguing or becoming confused or straying, or something! When Paul neared the end of 2 Corinthians, he wrote, *"I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him"* (2 Corinthians 11.1). He was saying, "Keep yourself pure, unspotted, for your betrothed, Jesus Christ! Don't commit spiritual adultery by fooling around with the world! Remember that the great Marriage Feast is coming, and keep yourself pure for that day when you are one with the Bridegroom!"



Paying teachers to sit in a room and do nothing for months at a time is senseless. So is a church without an awareness of its purpose and reason for being. But before you and I can fully grasp what we are supposed to be doing, we must understand what we are, and what is our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are a church, but we make no sense without Jesus! We are a Family, but we make no sense without the Father. We are the Flock, but we are lost without the Shepherd. We are a living Body, but we are living only because Jesus is the Head. We are a Bride, but only because Jesus is the Bridegroom. And just as a family needs a father, a flock needs a shepherd, a body needs a head, and a bride needs a bridegroom, *so we, the church, need Jesus!*

We are incomplete without Him. We make no sense at all without Him. We cannot have forgiveness of sins without Him. We have no mediator between God and man without Christ. Nothing we do as a church makes any sense apart from Christ.

Even though I've tried to point us today to some truths about the church in order to remind us of our function and our heritage and our purpose as a church, this sermon is not really about the church. This sermon has been about Jesus! One day several years ago, I was at home studying. I had all the books piled up there on the kitchen table, when my daughter Jennifer, just a small child at the time, came up to me and asked me what I was doing. I told her that I was trying to decide what to preach about the following Sunday. In child-like faith and wisdom she gave me an answer immediately: "Daddy, just preach about Jesus!"

For her, Jesus was all there is to preach about. And I've tried to live up to that ever since. The longer we think about it, nothing in the church or the Scriptures—stewardship, prayer, comfort, strength, faithfulness, cross-bearing, eternal life, salvation—nothing makes any sense without Him!

But what about your personal life? Is your life like the teachers in the rubber room in New York City, getting paid to show up and do nothing? Your life will make no sense at all, you will have no lasting meaning in your life, without Jesus Christ in your life as Lord. Today, will you commit yourself to Him, and make Him Lord of your life?