



“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others,” Philippians 2:4.

The Christian Brotherhood

Lesson Aim: To stress the fact that as children of God by faith in Christ we are all brethren in His household.

L512. Date: April 1964. **Text:** Ephesians 2:14-19; Colossians 3:9-17.

Topic: Brotherhood; Ethics.

INTRODUCTION—There is a positive distinction between membership in the family of God and membership in a New Testament church. Each person who has been born again is a member of the family of God, for to be saved is to become a child of God, John 1:12. However, membership in a New Testament church is limited to those who are truly born again, have been baptized by the authority of a true church, and live in fellowship with a local congregation. In other words, the family of God is composed of all the redeemed, while each church is a local body of baptized and covenanted believers.

Today’s lesson deals with membership in the family of God. It should not be confused with membership in the church. The Lesson Aim is “to stress the fact that as children of God by faith in Christ we are all brethren in His household.” A new convert with simple faith and limited Bible knowledge and a learned theologian with profound insight are brothers in Christ and fellow-members of the household of God.

There are no rulers and servants among God's children. Jesus said believers were not to exercise authority over one another. **“Neither be ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren,”** Matthew 23:8.

In the Lesson Exposition below a study is made of things which all believers have in common; a common need, a common redemption, and a common career. “Common” is not used here in the sense of “ordinary,

undistinguished, low, or coarse,” but with the meaning “belonging to, shared by, and equal with all concerned,” Jude 3. So this lesson intends to stress the brotherhood between Christian believers everywhere: Oriental or Occidental, European or African, Latin American or Anglo American.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus,” Galatians 3:28.

EXPOSITION

I. A COMMON NEED, Ephesians 2:12-15.

Originally, all men needed a Saviour for they were “without Christ,” verse 12. Five expressions denote the hopeless and helpless state of Gentiles before they were led to Christ. They were separate from Christ in that they had not heard of and trusted Him and were not even one of the Messianic people--the Jews, Romans 9:5. They were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel in that Gentiles were not a part of the Hebrew nation. They were strangers from the covenants of the promise because the covenants were made to Abraham and His descendents. They were without hope because Gentile religion was pagan and refused to recognize the true God. They were without God in the world for when God sought to reveal Himself, depraved man perverted the revelation, Romans 1:18-32.

These truths magnify the plight of the Gentiles and the magnitude of God's grace that He would love and seek them. Like a wild olive branch, the Gentiles have been received before God and opportunity given for our salvation. This was a “mystery” which the Jews did not understand but was revealed to and taught by the Apostle Paul. **“How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; . . . that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel,”** Ephesians 3:3a, 6. This is another indication that God is no respecter of persons but receives any person who comes to Him through Jesus, Acts 10:34-35.

What was said of Gentiles is also true of the Jews. They needed Jesus as Saviour exactly as the Gentiles did. Their Law was not an end in itself, but a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ that they might be justified by faith, Galatians 3:24. Though the Jew had much advantage over the Gentile (Romans 3:1-2), both were sinners and without hope until Christ became their Saviour by personal faith, Romans 3:9.

2. Originally, all men were afar off from God, verse 13. Like the

Prodigal Son who went away into a foreign country to waste his substance in riotous living, so both Jew and Gentile had wandered afar from God. Paul insists that both need salvation. Both are concluded under sin. Romans 3:9; both have come short of the glory of God, 3:23; both stand guilty before God, 3:19. Neither Jew nor Gentile can cast accusing looks at the other. They have alike missed the mark. A man without God is not necessarily a wicked and debased man. He may be a very religious person. He may be most earnest in moral conduct. He may be highly respected. But if he is not a child of God by faith in Jesus, he is condemned in sin and headed for destruction. Every person is in this condition until Jesus becomes his Saviour by personal faith.

3. Naturally, all men are at enmity with God, verses 14-15. A part of the consequence of the Fall of Man was the depravity of his will. As a consequence of that, he is antagonistic toward God's holy will. Thus does Paul write, "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be," Romans 8:7.

This enmity expresses itself, however, in ill will between men. Jewish exclusiveness and Gentile pride erected a middle wall of partition between them. F. F. Bruce states, "No iron curtain, colour bar, class distinction or national frontier of today is more absolute than the cleavage between Jew and Gentile was in antiquity. The greatest triumph of the gospel in the apostolic age was that it overcame this long-standing estrangement and enabled Jew and Gentile to become truly one in Christ. Those who enter into peace with God must have peace with one another. And nothing but the gospel can remove the barriers which divide mankind into hostile groups in our own age." In the Jewish temple a wall was built upon which notices were affixed in Greek and Latin pronouncing death upon any Gentile who passed inside that boundary.

Peace between Jew and Gentile came the same way that peace between God and the sinner came—through the sacrifice of Jesus. With the passing of the ordinances (Jewish legal observances) and reconciliation to Christ, the Jew was willing to receive the Gentile as brother. Thus the two became one new man in Christ. This would never have been possible without Him. He who "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:20) between God and sinful man has also made peace among His people, whatever cleavages kept them apart previously.

Paul has discussed this matter at some length in Romans 1-3. Romans 1:18-32 shows the Gentile's need of salvation. Romans 2:1—3:9 shows the Jew's need of salvation. Romans 3:9-31 concludes the whole world—Jew and Gentile—guilty before God. This is the common need of mankind for

“There is none righteous, no, not one,” Romans 3:10. If salvation had been by works it would have given some basis for boasting. But as Christian brethren look upon one another they can know that no man deserved the good that has come to him through grace. Each Christian had the same need—a Saviour who could save them without demanding merit. They found such a Saviour in Jesus Christ. Their common need has been met in Him.

II. A COMMON REDEMPTION, Ephesians 2:16-19.

1. Redemption brings reconciliation to God, verse 16. Reconciliation is a gracious act of God whereby He changes us so that the state of enmity and estrangement to formerly existing becomes one of peace and fellowship. Men do not reconcile God to themselves in their sin. Instead God reconciles men to His righteousness by redeeming them from their sin. Such reconciliation comes through the death of the Lord Jesus (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:22) — through the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 2:16). It is because Christ died for the ungodly that we are reconciled by his death and justified by his blood.

Reconciliation through redemption comes by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, Ephesians 1:7. The Holy Spirit, by conviction and regeneration, makes effective to us the reconciliation wrought in Christ. To be reconciled to God means to have made peace with Him so as to enjoy freedom, fellowship and sanctification. Since harmonious relations exist between God and man, they will also exist between two men who are children of God. Common relationship with God produces peace between men, I John 4:7, 11, 20-21. So being redeemed, we are reconciled to God and made at one with Christian brethren.

2. Redemption brings peace with God, verse 17. Paul probably quotes Isaiah 57:19 (**“Peace to him that is far off and to him that is near”**). If it is the Gentiles who are “far off” and the Jews who are “near,” the grace of God is magnified in that peace was offered to both. How does this peace come? God has the answer, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ,” Romans 5:1. The Christ who has been “lifted up from the earth” truly draws all men unto Himself, John 12:32.

One reason redemption brings peace with God is because Christ's death removed the great barrier to peace—sin. Sin is the cause of all of man's trouble. He cannot expect to enjoy peace with God or with his fellow men until the sin problem has been solved. This problem is solved in Jesus Christ. But that is not all.

The entire system of Jewish ordinances was designated to deal with the sin problem. Gifts to erect a tabernacle, tithes and offerings to support a priesthood and the rituals of religion, sacrifices to propitiate sin, all these sought to deal with a remedy for sin. And it was exactly in these many ordinances that the “middle wall of partition” arose between Jew and Gentile. The Gentile was uncircumcised (a sign of dedication to God) and did not observe the ordinances of the Jewish ritual. The Jew looked upon him with contempt. The Jew was narrow and excluded the Gentile from this fellowship and the Gentile looked upon them with hatred. When a Jew and a Gentile each approached God in Christ, the middle wall was broken down and they became brethren! Jesus made peace between man and God as well as between man and man.

3. Redemption provides a perfect access to God, verse 18. Christians are invited to come with all holy boldness—a confidence sure of acceptance before God—to God's throne, for it is a throne of grace and there help for every need is to be received, Hebrews 4:16. Such an assurance of acceptance with God is not confined to Jew or to Gentile, **“for through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”** Being no “respector of persons” (Acts 10:34-35), God receives no man according to natural heritage.

In the Tabernacle and Temple of the Old Testament, the innermost room was called, “The Holy of Holies.” God's presence was considered to abide there. To keep the common and curious people therefrom, a great curtain was hung which closed the way. Hebrews 10:19.25 compares that curtain (veil) to the physical body of Jesus. Whereby the veil in the Temple excluded the people, the deeds of Jesus in His physical body opened the way to God! Through Jesus access to God is assured. **“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus . . . Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,”** Hebrews 10:13, 22a. Jesus guarantees access to and acceptance with God. Redemption makes real this privilege.

4. Redemption makes all the saved fellow citizens of the Kingdom, verse 19. Each person saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus is a “fellow-citizen with all the saints and a member of the household of God.” Where is his citizenship? He is a citizen of the kingdom of heaven! (See Philippians 3:20 where “conversation” is better translated “citizenship,” as in the margin.)

A kingdom is the territory and/or subjects over which a king reigns. It is used variously in the Bible when reference is made to the kingdom of God, including the whole world, or Israel, or in many instances the family of

God. In this latter sense the term is used here. When one is saved he becomes a fellow citizen with all the other citizens who are in God's household—His kingdom. (This writer considers the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God to be synonymous in the New Testament.) The Kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God as king through Jesus. All redeemed saints share in the privileges of citizenship therein.

5. Redemption means we become members of God's household, verse 19b. To be “of the household of God” means to “belong to” that blessed fellowship. Here again the marvel of grace is manifest. Instead of Gentiles being outsiders or second-rate citizens of the kingdom, they are now God's housemates—full members of His family. On the same basis as the natural children of Abraham, they have entered into God's family by “like precious faith,” II Peter 1:1.

The redeemed are all members of God's household because every redeemed person is a child of God, John 1:12. He is a child of God from the moment of his conversion and does not wait until eternity to receive this blessing, I John 3:2a. Moreover, God's Holy Spirit bears witness along with the believer's spirit that he really is one of God's own dear children, Romans 8:14-16. This is the privilege shared equally between all who truly know Jesus as a personal Saviour.

III. A COMMON CAREER, Colossians 3:9-17.

All the children of God have been saved from the same terror of sin by a commonly-shared redemption. By the act of faith, each one was set apart unto God—put into a state of sanctification. This fact of spiritual sanctification must become a reality in personal experience. It is to this holy disposition of life that Colossians 3:9-17 calls all the people of God.

1. The career of each Christian is marked by his separation from the old nature which controlled him before salvation verses 5-9. The duty of each believer is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in yielding his members as instruments of righteousness unto God, Romans 6:13, 19. Though sin may tantalize him, it does not have dominion over him, Romans 6:14. **“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death,”** Romans 8:2. Though Christ the principle of death has been rendered impotent in his body and must be so demonstrated in his life.

“Put to death” (mortify) any motivation or inclination of the body toward fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, verse 5. These things characterize the “children of disobedience,” not the children of God, and incur the wrath of God, verse 6.

God hates these sins because they degrade man and prevent the sanctification of His people. These sins rob the individual believer and God. Moreover, they are evidences of the past life to which the believer is now dead.

Not only sins of the flesh, but sins of the spirit must be put away also, verses 8-9. Like a filthy and tattered garment, these sins mar the beauty and obstruct the sanctification of God's children. Anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communications, and lying all receive God's anathema. One of these sins leads on to the others. God's children are called upon to put each of them to death that he not be defiled thereby.

2. The career of each Christian is to be marked by the qualities of a new man in Christ, verses 10-16. The grammar of these verses is of major significance in the Greek language. The believer is to "once for all put to death" the influences to sin. On the other hand, he is "ever being renewed" as a new man in Christ. This is something God is doing for and in him. He is daily "newing up" by going deeper and learning more of the different life of daily and experimental sanctification. **"Ye have put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,"** Ephesians 4:24. The new man in Christ will manifest his change in character primarily by his relationship with his fellow men. Therefore, Paul calls for him to exhibit the qualities of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness, love, peace, and knowledge of the word of Christ. These qualities are contrary to the carnal nature of man and when they are consistently exercised are an implication that he who lives them is a new creation in Christ Jesus.

This quality of life is to be "put on" because of relationship with God. All the elect of God are to manifest these characteristics, verse 12. No distinction is made here in one's culture, social background, or any such distinctions. The new man is to be put on by every member of God's family: **"Where there is neither Greek, nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all,"** Colossians 3:11. Because every believer bears the same relationship to Christ, God expects the same spiritual qualities in each.

3. The career of each Christian is to be determined by absolute dedication to God, verse 17. Clyde Lee Jackson says of this verse, "This is the sun at mid-day, while the other virtues were the intervening hours. Christianity is based on spiritual principles and not on ascetic rules, and everything is to be done for the glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31). Love always gives God the glory for it knows the depths of its redemption. God is recognized as its source, Christ as its means, and the soul as the lone object."

A redeemed person will accompany all his efforts with thanksgiving to God for redemption, sanctification, and opportunity for service.

The Homiletic Commentary gives this suggestive interpretation of this verse. (1) The universal obligation of Christian duty (“whatsoever ye do in word or deed”) is a recognition of, absolute dependence on, and supreme devotion to Christ in everything. (2) The guiding law of Christian duty (“Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus”) is centered in Christ in whom is the purest motive, the noblest pattern, the highest end, and the final authority of service. (3) The unvarying spirit of Christian duty is to be “thanks to God.” All in all, these verses suggest that God's will and glory is to be at the center of all the Christian is and does.

CONCLUSION—Today’s lesson aim was “to stress the fact that as children of God by faith in Christ we are all brethren in His household,” The exposition of the lesson text has pointed out that all true Christian believers shared a common need of redemption, were redeemed in exactly the same way, and are called upon to live the same kind of life. All Christians, regardless of their national, social, racial, or geographical background are brothers in Christ. Even those who have not followed the Lord in scriptural baptism and membership in one of His churches are still our brothers in Christ. Since this is true, with what loving and brotherly concern should we look upon all who share with us membership in God's family! What a holy bond should unite us. What sympathy, understanding and care should mark our relationships to one another. **"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus,"** Galatians 3:26. Of course, this does not mean that we are to condone heresy wherever we find it, whether among the church fellowship or outside.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the distinction between the family of God and a church of God?
2. Can we have Christian fellowship with those who are saved but not yet church members?
3. How does Galatians 3:26, 28 relate to this study?
4. What was man's condition before he was saved? (See Ephesians 2:12-15.)
5. Why were Jews and Gentiles at enmity with one another?
6. How were Jews and Gentiles reconciled to one another?
7. What benefits of redemption does Paul give in Ephesians 2:16-19?
8. How does Jesus provide us with access to God?
9. What is the believer to put out of his life? Why?
10. What is sanctification and how is it attained?

