

May 21, 2017 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND  
TITLE: TBC AND FAMILY, Ephesians 3:14-21; 5:1-2; etc. (*TBC Together #5*)

The longer I live the more I appreciate family and value time we spend together. Last week I was interviewed regarding what it is like to be a pastor. It may be hard for you to think of me apart from that role, yet I spent the first two dozen years of my life NOT as a pastor. I often describe myself as *a farm boy from Iowa*. I sensed God's call to ministry when I was 17, but God's formation of me was happening much earlier and continues to this day. My vocation or calling to be a pastor, although a unique role, is not the only calling. **Each of us is to respond to the calling, the vocation (or voice) of God, upon our lives:** educators, business people, medical personnel, manufacturers, farmers, etc. **That calling or vocation comes from God's call for each of us to discover our identity as His daughters and sons in Christ.**

**The way we discover our calling in what we DO must come from our calling of who we ARE, who God makes us in Christ.** Why do I say this? Because many of us follow a **false calling**. We don't begin from our identity, but from our job. When we identify ourselves from anything else: whether our family name, our possessions, our reputation, our education, our position, our job . . . it is a **false identity based on a temporary kingdom, which mimics yet distorts the true kingdom and King.**

Which brings me to family. Most often in the NT the word or root translated *family* is literally *house* as in *household*. Occasionally *family* is used to translate the word connected to our birth, our *genesis* or beginning. Three times a word is used that has more to do with our descent. Once in Luke of Joseph being of the house and lineage (or family) of David (2:4). Peter says that in Christ is the fulfillment of the promise to Abram that in his seed/offspring *all families of the earth* will be blessed (Acts 3:25; Genesis 12:3).

Paul makes this statement at the beginning of a prayer in the letter we know as Ephesians. *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named . . .* Ephesians 3:14-15

My family can't get away from me. Our children resemble their parents, have mannerisms that they've picked up from us, even think like we do. Kristy and I like our parents.

So my question. **What are others picking up from you regarding the family of God, the church and specifically TBC?** If, for example, you are in the habit of serving roast pastor for Sunday dinner, your children, if they are part of a church will often serve it, too. If you are in the habit of talking about others and openly criticizing this ministry or that leader, those around you will tend to do the same.

Chapter five in the book we are reading is titled: *I Will Lead My Family to Be Healthy Church Members*. Thom Rainer challenges all of us – married or single, with or without

children – to recognize that **we have a deep influence on how others relate to the church, especially those closest to us. Do they learn from us to value the church, to serve Christ and others with joy through the church, to love the church?**

Today we are going to return to the book of Ephesians to hear God through the apostle Paul. The first three chapters are a wonderful description of who we are, our identity. Paul writes about God's calling us to Himself, adopting us as His daughters and sons in Christ, sealing us with His Holy Spirit. We were the walking dead when we followed the prince of this world. In Christ we live in the grace of God's good work in and through us. Since we are no longer aliens and strangers to God, there are no longer to be walls between different ethnicities or genders or social groups. **We are a house built on the common foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the cornerstone.**

Paul goes on to describe himself as a prisoner for Christ Jesus, a minister of the good news that God has brought the Gentiles to be part of His promise to Israel. Then he concludes this chapter with a beautiful prayer of what this means. Read Ephesians 3:14-21. If we would lead our families to love the church, then . . .

- Let us live out of our identity as God's family in Christ.

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named . . . Ephesians 3:14-15*

I've shared that a couple years ago Kristy and I visited an area in northern Holland where both our fathers' ancestors lived before they emigrated to the U. S. in the 1800s. I had this sense that people are like me.

A week later we were in rural east Africa where ethnically and culturally the people are very different, yet so many of these people are my blood family through Christ.

When we respond with YES to who Jesus is, what He has done and what He will continue to do, we call it faith. We become known by the name of our Father. We are family. It is **the Spirit's power at work, causing us to grow in the love of Christ leading to our being filled with God's fullness.**

I am not known then by my role as a pastor, by my skin color, my language, the home in which I live, my education, my family name, my athletic or intellectual abilities. **I am known as part of God's family. WE are known as part of God's family.**

But here is the rub. I focus on me. If I don't like something, I find what I want or like, including a church that I like. When we realize we are part of a family, our perspective changes. Pastor Kalen and Sarah will tell you that the last six weeks have produced more change in them than the previous nearly four years of marriage. Parenting does that. Marriage causes one to think and behave differently. Adding children accelerates that with whiplash speed.

Whether or not we have a spouse or children, we are part of a family if we belong to Christ. **We belong to each other as we belong to Christ. Families make decisions differently from individuals. We look to our Father.**

Do you consider yourself to be a child of God? Do you think of yourself as being part of God's family? Of the TBC family? Question. Do you get to choose your family? **How are you living out of your identity as part of God's family in Christ?**

You won't find a place in the Bible that speaks of formal church membership and joining. What you will find though are repeated emphases on our being brothers and sisters through and in Christ. You will find that Luke writes of three thousand souls *being added* that day of Peter's Pentecost sermon, those who received the word and were baptized. Question. Added to what? The church (cf. Acts 2:41; 4:4).

When we identify with Christ through baptism, we identify with the His family, the church. If we could ask the first followers of Jesus if you could be a follower of Jesus but not identify with Him nor His family, they would be puzzled, because that is the whole point of following Him. **Membership is a step of obedience, of gratitude, of commitment, of living out of our identity as God's family in Christ.**

In our Discovering Church Membership Class we share these four reasons for the need for a formal membership. 1) a biblical reason: *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* (Ephesians 5:25); 2) a cultural reason: it goes against the culture of consumerism and selfishness, emphasizing commitment that builds character; 3) a practical reason, defining whom we can count on as family; 4) a personal reason, namely accountability that encourages spiritual growth.

If we would lead our families to love the church, then . . .

- Let us walk together in Christ's giving love, imitating God.

Three weeks ago we looked at the first part of chapter four, where Paul appeals to our calling to be one because we are one. Paul then describes how the gifts God gives builds a growing, maturing, Christ-focused body with love as the distinctive trait. Next he describes what that looks like practically in our behavior, our words, our relationships. Chapter four concludes with a reminder of the kindness and forgiveness of God in Christ for us, which we then give to others.

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.* 5:1-2 How many times does Paul use the word love? Three times. How does he define love? As a self-sacrificing giving of ourselves to God, just as Christ did.

I don't always like you, nor you me. Frankly, I don't always like myself. You may be thinking, *Well, you would have good reason for not liking yourself.* But what I think or feel isn't the point. **My identity is in Christ. Our identity is as family in Christ. That**

**means that Christ becomes our example.** We walk together in this life in Christ. We journey together as family. We give to each other. It's not about me. And as we love each other with the love we ourselves have received and which has both bought and brought us into this family, we are found to be mimicking our Father, Who first loved us.

**Our families will imitate us, whether they know it or not, whether we know it or not. Do they love the church? Do WE love the church, this church? It's not about like. It's about a self-sacrificing giving to God.**

As I was thinking about this message, I reflected on the families in which Kristy and I were raised. Both valued the church, the local church. One of the things I learned from my parents was to honor the pastor. One way we did that was inviting him and his family to our home. My mother learned that from the special relationship her parents developed with their Pastor. Kristy's parents modeled faithful, regular serving and tithing.

Another example. We put in long hours working, milking, feeding and cleaning on the farm. My parents didn't often go to the evening service, but it was rare for them not to be part of worship in the morning. They made sure that we kids got to Sunday School. I remember asking if I could go to a movie one Sunday evening. Mom's reply was, *If you have time to go to a movie, you have time to be in church.* It wasn't that I couldn't go to movies, but it had to do with priorities.

Neither of our families are perfect, but my point is that both Kristy and I were taught something by our parents that they may not even know they taught us, a love, a giving love for the church. **As we walk TOGETHER in Christ we imitate our Father.** If we would lead our families to love the church, then . . .

- Let us love, lead and serve our family as Christ.

How do we love our families? Tuesday through Thursday I was in Bismarck at a training to help identify, understand the contributing factors, grasp the magnitude of and respond appropriately to the commercial sexual exploitation of children. It was a heavy topic. We have a lot of misunderstandings which lead to a lot of missteps. One particular thing stood out: A healthy family is vital for healthy children.

Psychological and emotional abuse are often the not-so-hidden things we pass down to our children. Then there are the various forms of physical abuse or the abuse of things like alcohol and drugs. **We need each other in this thing called family and we need to recognize the gift of family to help us deal with our past and present..**

Paul's instructions about walking in love move to describing what love is not. We are to walk wisely, filled with the Spirit, not something else. We submit to each other in this family. Paul then lists specific relationships: husband and wife, parents and children, servants and masters. Those were the typical family relationships of Paul's day.

You know the instructions. Husbands are to do what? (Audience) Love our wives as Christ did the church, giving Himself to make her even more beautiful. Wives are to likewise submit by demonstrating respect for their husbands. Children are to obey parents in the Lord, demonstrating honor. Fathers are to recognize their responsibility not to expect too much and cause frustration leading to anger, but to train and instruct in the Lord.

Bondservants and masters are to likewise treat each other with respect. The servant is to serve as serving Christ. The master is to treat others as Christ and remember that He shows no favoritism.

In short **we are love, to lead and serve our family as Christ**. In other words **as Christ models and Christ instructs, but also as if they are Christ Himself**. Do we see Christ when we see our spouse, our parents, our children, our employees or employer?

Conclusion. **How are you leading and influencing others to be part of the church, to love the TBC family?** One of the things I wanted for our children was not feel forced to do or be something because their dad was the pastor. I wanted them to develop a love for God that isn't about a show, but is real. I've made mistakes, yet I thank God that each one loves and is growing in Christ. Each one is growing in their love for the church. The church, this church, is imperfect, as are each of us . . . but we are family. What is God's next step for you? (Pray)

NEXT STEPS: Review the outline and texts. Discuss with another the influence of your family and others in how you view the church. Share a positive example. How do passages like Exodus 13:8, 14-16 and Deuteronomy 6:4-9 relate to how we love God and His people? Share God's next step for you in your relationship to the TBC family. What is holding you back? Pray together, thanking Him for the TBC family. Read chapter six to prepare for worship next week.