

8.26.21 ~ Cultivate or Stagnate!

The Body of Christ is made up of all true believers and followers of Jesus, no matter what ethnicity, gender, socio-economic or educational level, we are all part of God's family (see **1Corinthians 12:12-18; 26-27; Galatians 3:28**).

Read **Ephesians 3:14-15**... Paul prays for believers, proclaiming that we have been given God's name [Christians], having been born-again by God's Spirit at the moment we trusted in Jesus Christ (see **John 1:12-13; Ephesians 1:13**).

The Bible doesn't teach a One World/One People theology; nor does it teach a Universal Fatherhood of God/Brotherhood of Man theology. God is the Creator of all, but He is only the Father of those who trust in Christ by faith; those belonging to God are called Christians in the Bible.

Neither does the Bible teach that it takes a Village to raise a Child; it takes a family.

And God's design for a family, is one man and one woman, committed to God and to each other, in order to raise children in the love and knowledge of God.

God wants every member of His family to realize that our most important distant relative isn't a mortal man, but God Himself. Have you ever researched your ancestral heritage? Your father's surname? Your mother's maiden name? It can be quite interesting, but what Paul says in **Ephesians 3:14-15**, is that Christians derive their name and their family heritage from God! **Christian** means "adherent [follower & believer] of Christ," and it is used three times in the New Testament: In **Acts 26:28**, it speaks of becoming a Christian. In **Acts 11:26**, it speaks of living as a Christian. In **1Peter 4:16**, it speaks of suffering as a Christian.

Read **Ephesians 3:16-21**... Paul prays for us to take hold of, understand, and apply to our lives all that we have been given by our merciful and gracious heavenly Father. God not only provides a special name for those who are born into His eternal family, He also expresses His love for us and graciously equips us with everything we need to enjoy this life and trust Him for the next (cf. **2Peter 1:2-4**).

Paul reminds us of "all" that we have been given in Christ, and this is a great mystery. God purposed to have an eternal relationship with us, NOT because of our good looks, intrinsic nature, intelligence, special abilities, or human ancestral heritage. He has done this, just because He loves us.

Paul prays for us to be strengthened in our hearts, for it is only God who can reach into and heal the inner soul of a person, to bring eternal spiritual life to us through the presence of God's Holy Spirit.

Paul encourages us to have confidence in God "who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine," and this is "according to His power that is at work within us," through God's Holy Spirit.

Paul makes it clear that everything to be done "in God's church" [God's Family], is to be done for God's glory, "throughout all generations, forever and ever!"

As God's children we are to imitate Him (**Ephesians 5:1-2**), "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

How can we imitate God the Father whom no man has seen? By following the example of Christ (**1John 2:4-6**), "The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." Jesus said (**John 14:6-7**), "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."

Jesus Christ is God's sovereign plan, purpose and provision for salvation and eternal life in God's Family.

We are to (**1Peter 2:12**), "Keep [our] behavior excellent among [unbelievers], so that... ..they may because of [our] good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation."

We are to live in a manner that is excellent before unbelievers so they can see our good deeds, and many unbelievers will come to Christ because of our behavior, our good works, our witness to them, they will glorify God because they have believed in His Son and come to Him for forgiveness.

We must allow Christ to show in and through our lives (**1Peter 3:14-16**), "But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame."

Sanctify means to be set apart by the love of God for the purpose of loving others on His behalf through Christ.

Jesus is the living God, He is the Word of God (see **John 1:1**). Jesus is God and yet He died for us in the body of Jesus, so that we can live for Him. We need

to encourage one another toward love and good deeds. We need to come and fellowship with our believers in Christ. The world needs to see the good deeds God has prepared for us to complete (see **Ephesians 2:8-10**).

We are born-again (created) for good (anything that pleases God) works. We are born from above (**John 1:13**), "born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

We must read and study God's Word, then apply it to our life (see **1Peter 3:15**), only then can we be obedient witnesses for Christ. We must set Christ as Lord in our heart, remaining sober minded (clear headed) and ready to be used by God; so that when someone asks us why we do what we do, why we are the way we are, we can tell them we are trying to do what pleases God.

We just remain ready to share the gospel with gentleness to unbelievers (horizontal), out of reverence for God (vertical).

We were all unbelievers at one time, but God in His merciful love for us reached down and saved us in Christ (see **Ephesians 2:1-7**).

This world is angry, confused, chaotic, and corrupt. The world needs peace, the world needs Christ. We are to be peace makers, we have God's peace in us through Christ, and we must share it with those in need.

Hebrews 10:19-25 commands us to come together with other Christians in order to stimulate one another toward love and good deeds. We are not to abandon the practice of meeting together, getting to know each other and encouraging each other in the things of God.

If we don't consistently come together, in person, around the Word of God, for the purpose of encouraging one another toward love and good deeds, the Body of Christ will suffer spiritual apathy, becoming weak, leading to atrophy, a lack of appropriation of God's Word, and therefore, a diminished witness for Christ.

This should not be! When family members don't pray, study, serve and play and together, they lose their intimacy and their sense of connectedness; their relationships stagnate [becoming apathetic], if this is left unchanged those relationships may grow cold, causing everyone to look out only for their own personal interests, instead of what is good for the whole family of God.

When concern for personal freedoms and comforts rise above our witness as Christians, and coming together for the purpose of praising, honoring, and worshipping the Lord, then we need to seek God's forgiveness.

We must be diligent and determined in building up one another: in our homes, in our Church, in our Community, as we spur one another on toward love and good deeds; living more willfully and proactively as believers and followers of Christ, applying the whole counsel God's Word to our lives where others will see.

The world needs Jesus, and if you are a Christian, God's Spirit (the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Christ) is in you; and you are to live for Him.

Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

Read **Romans 10:8-15...** Your birth into God's family occurs when "you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, at that moment, you are saved; for with your heart you believe, resulting in righteousness, and with your mouth you confess, resulting in salvation, "for "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

As Christians, we will experience pleasure and pain, victory and defeat, sorrow and joy, but God has promised and provided all we need to know Him, serve Him, and enjoy life on this earth, while trusting Him for our eternity in heaven.

As Christians, we are new creations, brothers and sisters in Christ, children of Almighty God, the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth and all that is in them.

As Christians we are called to serve God together, in His Church, His Body [of which Christ is the head and every Christian is a member of that body].

God's Word is clear that as Christians (**Ephesians 4:4-6**), we are members of one Body, and there is only one Lord, one Faith, one Spirit, one Baptism, one God and Father over all those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior & Lord.

It is my sincere prayer today, that God's Spirit will encourage and exhort and convict each one of us, to become and to remain more deliberate about cultivating our relationship with God, God's Word, and God's people; so that we might influence this godless world for Christ.

May God be praised now and forever, Amen!

Pastor Mike
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