

We are the Family of God

DAVE BAST

I wonder if you have ever sung this in church: I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God...joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod. Well, the poetry there has always seemed like a bit of a stretch to me, but the idea of being heirs along with Jesus in God's family...I like that. It comes straight from scripture, as we will see today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, we have come to the third and middle program of five on images of the Church in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament. So, we looked at the Church as the body of Christ, the Church as the bride of Christ, and today we come to the Church as the family of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as we get into this image specifically about the Church as God's family, one of the things that we have been doing in this series a little bit is reflecting on how these images in the New Testament for the Church do have Old Testament ties to ancient Israel. The Church is the new Israel, so it is not too surprising that the old Israel would have some ties; but as well as the theology of the whole Bible; and in that vein, Dave, it is interesting to note that the Bible teaches that there is a sense in which the entire human race is, or was originally intended to be, one giant family.

DAVE BAST

We are all children of God. That maybe seems a bit much for some Christians to say. It kind of implies a sort of universalism, but it is a very biblical thing to say. It is a profound truth, because we all come from the same parents according to the Bible; and in fact, the Apostle Paul makes this point in a famous address that he gave to the Greek philosophers and intellectuals in the city of Athens. It is a story told in Acts 17, and as part of his speech to the leaders in the Areopagus, Paul said this:

²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth, and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth, and he marked out their appointed times in history, and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷God did this so that they would seek him, and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸For in him we live and move and have our being, as some of your own poets have said, we are his offspring.

Which is a remarkable passage, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is; and curiously enough, Paul kind of makes his big, climactic point here, not by quoting from the Old Testament or the Hebrew scriptures, but from a secular Greek writer, who said we are his offspring. So, this is one of the places where Paul says: Well, non-believers get it right sometimes, and here is an instance

where this particular person, who probably didn't believe in the God of Israel nonetheless got it right. We are offspring of God—we are children of God, which therefore means God is, you know, our divine parent; and therefore, we are supposed to be one family; and indeed, we are. One of the great tragedies of history...and we have been seeing it play out all over the world in the 21st Century, unhappily enough, is that we blind ourselves to our common humanity. We don't look for that image of God deep inside every person we meet; rather, we seize on differences: Speech, accents, socioeconomic differences, skin color, the fact that some of these [are] immigrants instead of a native-born person, the cut of their jib...whatever it might be, we seize on something and use it as an excuse to treat somebody as less than fully human. It is one of the things that always happens in war. We immediately start using images of our enemy as rats or vermin or lice, and so forth. We dehumanize people...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then we think we have permission to mistreat them. We forget, those are sisters, those are brothers; we are supposed to be one family made in the image of God.

DAVE BAST

There is a thing that in theology we call common grace. It is God's grace that is common to all. All the truth that there is to know about God isn't just contained in the Bible. There is truth elsewhere as well, and as we like to say sometimes, all truth is God's truth, so we embrace that wherever it comes from; but Paul affirms here, quoting from a pagan Greek writer that we are indeed God's offspring; and that is, as you said Scott, an especially important point for us to remember today, where there seems to be a rising tide of animosity and hostility; and we do tend to say even those who disagree with us, not just who don't look like us...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But maybe they have a different political opinion or a different this or that, and we kind of tend to treat them as outside the family, but they are not.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, it is not too surprising then that in the work of Jesus and in the New Testament and through the Church, like all of our brokenness, the Church is supposed to unmake that—the Church is supposed to begin to alleviate that and fix that; and indeed, Jesus is going to make clear that believers...people who have faith in Jesus...we are supposed to be remaking us as the family of God by becoming a new family.

So, in Matthew 12:

⁴⁶While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside waiting to speak with him. ⁴⁷Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside waiting to speak to you." ⁴⁸He replied to them, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹And pointing to his disciples, Jesus said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

DAVE BAST

Listen to this. It gets even stronger. Jesus, in Luke 14, is talking about the cost of discipleship, and he (Luke) says that ²⁵large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them, he said, ²⁶"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple. ²⁷And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

So, what Jesus is clearly saying...and he is exaggerating...it is hyperbole. He doesn't really want us to hate our parents. I mean, remember this is the man who, while he was dying on the cross, made sure his mother was taken care of.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and he is certainly not undoing one of the Ten Commandments, which is to honor your father and mother...

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is not the point.

DAVE BAST

Right; that is not the point. The point that Jesus is making is there is this other family...family in the narrower sense...the family of those who are his disciples...who are committed to him...who are devoted to him...who have left all to follow him, and that takes precedence—that relationship—over even the closest ties of blood and kinship. That is what it means to be part of the family of God. It is to be a follower of Jesus; and therefore, his brothers and sisters, as we go on in the path of discipleship; and that costs us something; and yet, at the same time, the good news is it is open to everybody. You are never going to be...Scott, I hate to break this news to you...but you are never going to be a British lord or duke or...you have to be born into that...that is the aristocracy; the American aristocracy we measure by wealth. You have to earn your way into it...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But anyone can be part of Jesus' family. All it takes is to follow him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, that is some wonderful truth, and there is some pretty deep theological insights behind all of that; and so, there is a lot more to explore in this image of the family, and we will do that in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we said that in God's original design for this creation, we are all supposed to be God's offspring, as Paul said in Acts 17. We are all supposed to be the children of God; and we are, therefore, supposed to recognize one another as sister and brother. No matter how outwardly different we may look from each other, we are all supposed to be siblings in God's family. Sin has broken down that. It has erected all kinds of walls of hostility, walls of division that keep us apart; things that we seize on that we think give us license and permission to mistreat each other, even to kill each other, because we block out our family bond with our fellow human beings. Not surprisingly, that is one of the things the Church—the people called by Jesus—is supposed to undo.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are supposed to return to being a family in the Church.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and not only has sin broken down the relationships between peoples and nations and races, it has actually broken down our relationship with God himself; and we end up being estranged. I mean, the symbol of that is, I guess, maybe Adam and Eve leaving the garden; and God will pursue them and he will find them again, but I remember hearing the great preacher/writer/theologian John Stott say once that the great tragedy of the world is that so many people who were made by God and made like God in his image, and made for God to know God, are nevertheless living apart from God. So, a lot of people in the world have forgotten that they are God's children. They have forgotten God, and what is needed, says the New Testament, is reconciliation...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

This great work where God brings people back to himself and back to each other and back into the family. Scott Hoezee;

Yes; and in the world of the New Testament, in the world of the early Church, and in the world into which the Apostle Paul in particular wrote his letters, there were very few divisions as stark as those between Jews and Greeks or Jews and Gentiles. The people of God had all along been identified as the people of Israel, who could trace their ancestry clear back to Abraham, and they are the people of God—the Jews; and the Greeks and the Gentiles are all dirty, and they are on the outside. Paul, of course, was called by Jesus to be the great Apostle to the Gentiles, and it was a major part of Paul's work to help his Jewish brothers and sisters to accept the fact that Jesus was saving Gentiles, too; and then when he did, they didn't have to do anything else to become your full brother and sister in the Church and in the family of God; and indeed, we can read a little bit from Ephesians 2, which is a passage that is going to pop up often in this series. We looked at it for the bride of Christ image, and so forth; but here Paul is talking to the Ephesians, who were not Jewish by birth. They were the Gentiles; and so, Paul says: ¹¹Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth, and who are called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision, ¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenant of the promise, without hope and without God in the world; ¹³but now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away, have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

DAVE BAST

¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one, and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace; ¹⁶and in one body, to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him, we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So there you have it.

DAVE BAST

That is a passage and a half, right there. That is a great, powerful...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It all centers on that word you said just a few moments ago, Dave: *Reconciliation*. To bring together people who have been estranged, who have been far apart. They are reconciled to God, but by being reconciled to God through the commonality of the blood of Jesus, they are also, therefore, to be reconciled to one another.

DAVE BAST

Really, to understand this passage, you have to be able to visualize a little bit the temple in Jerusalem as it stood in Jesus' day. It was a great, ornate, beautiful central building, but it was surrounded by rings, sort of, of different courtyards. The one closest to the temple was just for the priests, and then the one just outside of that was just for the men of Israel, and then the one outside of that was for the women of Israel; and then, way far away was the so-called court of the Gentiles; and there was literally a wall built, separating that from the temple that pronounced you could be liable to death if you cross this barrier as a Gentile; and that is the image Paul has in mind when he says: Jesus broke down that dividing wall of hostility...a literal wall separating Jews and Gentiles...when he died on the cross, because he did away with those ceremonial laws and rules that had kept Jews and Gentiles apart.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Jesus himself previewed that even before the cross when he cleansed the temple. Remember, they were holding this kind of flea market in the gentile court, so that the non-Jews no longer had even *that* place in the temple, where they could come to pray. So, Jesus, you know, drove out those moneychangers and quoted scripture: My house shall be called a house of prayer for *all* nations. So, Jesus is already previewing, even before the cross, this is not going to be a for-Jews-only deal. My salvation is going to be the fulfillment of what God first said to Abram in Genesis 12: Through you all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed. Israel was all along just a start. In Jesus, that start finds its end; and the end is bringing everybody together.

DAVE BAST

There is all kinds of spatial imagery here, isn't there, in this passage? This idea of being far away, and yet being brought near; and being made one; and in fact, Paul says...he kind of goes one better. He doesn't just say you are all one family now. He says you are one new humanity. Almost like this is a new start for the human race, and that is what the Church is meant to be. It is God's new thing. It is God's display of what his power can do in bringing people back to himself, and bringing people back together; and this all happened at the cross. So, the Apostle says: It is the blood of Christ that has done this. Think about that the next time you are tempted to get mad at somebody in your church who disagrees with you, or you know, squabble or quarrel over something. The cross was undertaken. Jesus died...Jesus shed his blood to make us one in the Church.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Fractures in families are always among some of the saddest fractures we experience. It is one thing to not get along with your boss or with your coworkers; it is one thing to have a friendship that goes bad; but boy, when brothers and sisters cannot talk to each other anymore...when Mom and Dad can never hope to get the whole family back together again, that hurts us, just on the regular level of life. Well, how much more doesn't it hurt God, whose Son shed his blood to make this one family, and when we cannot get together as brothers and sisters in the Church...when we cannot get along...how does that wound Jesus; far more than even our own mothers and fathers are wounded when they see their children squabbling. So, this image has that implication.

DAVE BAST

Well, there is one verse here at the end of the passage that we read that I think is especially interesting. It is Ephesians 2:18: For through Christ, we both have access (we both, meaning Jews and Gentiles) have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Notice the trinity there: Christ, the Father, and the Spirit; but it is the role of the Spirit in this whole work of making us God's family that we want to explore, and we will do that in the time that we have left.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this program, the third in a five-part series on images in the Bible for the Church; and this program has been about the image of the

Church as family.

DAVE BAST

So, we are the family of God. That is based on Christ's reconciling work, as Paul describes it in Ephesians 2; but there is also a role for the Spirit in this, and that leads us to another great chapter of the New Testament, Romans Chapter 8, and the idea of adoption. So, here is another metaphor for salvation...the New Testament has several. It talks about redemption, it talks about reconciliation, as we have been mentioning, it talks about atonement, justification; but here the idea is adoption, because in the Roman world, a slave in a household could actually legally, and at times was legally adopted as a son and heir for a childless person, and that is the idea behind these wonderful verses in Romans 8.

SCOTT HOEZEE

¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba, Father," ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God—joint heirs with Christ, if in fact we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. It is one thing to say, oh, you know, you are an heir of your father, and so, you know, the three million dollars that he has in the bank will come to you upon your father's death. That is your inheritance. But when you are told that you are an heir of God...a joint heir with the Son of God, Jesus Christ...our inheritance is just a little bit more than three million bucks!

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; and this wonderful phrase where the Spirit teaches our spirit or testifies with our spirit. It is something that happens inside us that enables us to call God Abba, which you could translate father, but actually is the Hebrew form for daddy. It is this intimate term that a child instinctively uses, knowing...it is like daddy or mama. What could be closer than that? You know, Romans 8 is the great chapter of assurance—of Christian assurance. How do you know God loves you? How do you know God is for you? How do you know God won't judge you? Well, Romans 8 begins with the words *no condemnation*...there is, therefore, now no condemnation. When God looks at you, he sees his beloved child because of Jesus; and when the Spirit prompts you to look back at him and say: You're my Father, who loves me. That is all God at work in us. That is not just our ideas that this might be true...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes.

DAVE BAST

We are not condemned. He does not judge us any longer. There is no condemnation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The world does. The world is forever trying to beat us down; the world is forever saying: You're ugly. You're a loser. You're no good. You're a ne'er-do-well. The world is always trying to beat us down. Satan is always trying to beat us down, Paul will also say in Romans 8; but Paul says: No, no, no; you have been adopted. You are in the family now; you understand? You are in the family of God now. You are a co-heir with Jesus Christ now; and because that is true, nothing can now separate you from your Father and from your big brother Jesus. You are in the family now...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Don't let anybody try to tell you that you are a loser or you're not worthy. You are.

DAVE BAST

You know, one of the things I think that sometimes affects people about the Christian faith is the thought that, yeah, okay, maybe it's true, but, boy, you have to give up so much; you know, you have to lose all the fun out of life and you have to follow all these rules and all that; and I think Paul is trying to tell us here: You know, that is not how it is. Lose? You lose by becoming a Christian? You become Christ's joint heirs. Everything that God has to give him, he is going to share with us. You think you're going to lose? It is like God has already given you a brand new car and he is going to withhold the floor mats now? He has already given us Christ. So, we come to this climactic statement toward the end of Romans 8, where Paul runs through all these options and possibilities:

^{31b}If God is for us (he asks) who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own son, but gave him up for us all, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? (There it is again—no condemnation) It is Christ Jesus who died; yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ?

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, Dave, some of what you were saying in this very passage reminds me of the very end of the parable of the prodigal son, which we have looked at before on *Groundwork*, and we have all heard sermons on. The older brother gets his nose bent out of shape because his younger brother, who wasted his inheritance, comes home and gets welcomed back; and you know, he says to his father: You killed the fatted calf for this guy, you know...you never even gave me a goat for me and my friends to have a party; and his father looks at him and says: Oh, my son. Don't you know? Everything I have is yours. It has been true all along. And I think we are like that older brother. We forget sometimes, everything God has is already ours because we are his kids. We have been adopted into the family. What an incredible truth. How dare we ever forget it for even a moment.

DAVE BAST

What a great image; although Paul does add one little proviso at the end of this wonderful statement: Joint heirs with Christ, he says, provided we suffer with him...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

We will also share his glory. So, as the old saying goes: First the cross and then the crown.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But be sure, the crown is coming. We are the family of God; thanks be to him.

Well, thank you, too, for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork* today. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee. We hope you will join us again next time as we study the image of the Church as the household of God.

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