**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 11-19-2023
The Family of God**

I feel led to begin this morning’s message by singing one of those old famous church hymns about Christian community. If you happen to be familiar with it, please feel free to sing along.

Sing the Cheers song:

Making your way in the world today takes everything you’ve got. Taking a break from all your worries, sure would help a lot. Wouldn’t you like to get away? Sometimes you wanta go, where everybody knows your name. And they’re always glad you came. You wanta be where you can see, the troubles are all the same. You want to go, where everybody knows your name.”

Don’t you just love that great church hymn?

Oh, hold on here. That’s not actually written to be a church song. My apologies.

But on second thought, maybe it is really meant to be. I truly believe that deep and authentic fellowship is what we were created for. We are called to be part of a true spiritual family. A family where everyone not only knows your name, but truly loves you and gets to know you as a person. Friends, that is part of what God intends for His church.

But community and living as spiritual family does not happen automatically. All too often the church seems to function as more of a collection of individuals, especially in places like America, where we highly value individual identity over group identity.

But being a family and living as a spiritual family is God’s plan for us. This does take some time and effort in allowing ourselves to be vulnerable with one another. But the end result is a very beautiful thing. In fact, Christian leaders such as John Wesley, teach that Christians cannot grow to their potential without being intentional in practicing community with one another.

Today, as we conclude our journey through Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi, we see Paul addressing this reality of community and what it means to be the family of God.

**Please turn with me to Phil. 4:21-23:**

**21 Greet all God’s people in Christ Jesus.** **The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings.** **22 All God’s people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.**

**23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.**

This is Paul’s closing words. His parting words. And closing words are always important in messages, aren’t they? Think about phone calls that you are on or letters and emails that you have written. The closing words would be the last things that are read or heard. These would be the things ringing in the ears of the reader.

And what is Paul’s focus as he finishes this epistle? It is all about family. While he does not use the word family, the concepts of family and friendship and love and community are all implied.

First, Paul says, “**21 Greet all God’s people in Christ Jesus.”**

Here Paul is passing on his greeting to every one of God’s people in this church in Philippi. The greeting is not meant just for the church as a whole, but to each and every person within the community. No one is left out. Each one of God’s people is an important member in the family of God. Each person is valuable to the life of the entire church.

And what is it that unites all God’s people? It is their common faith in Christ Jesus and their Lord and Savior.

Paul then writes, “**The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings.**

This would refer to Paul’s close circle of co-workers. While he does not mention them by name, I think of Epaphroditus and Timothy and others that would have been visiting Paul during his house arrest in Rome.

Each of these co-workers is sending their personal greeting as well.

Then Paul states, **22 All God’s people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.”**

Friends, this is a remarkable statement. Paul is not only alluding to the fact that there were numerous believers in Jesus Christ whom Paul has gotten to know in Rome, but that this included believers from Caesar’s own household! Wow!

Think about how far the gospel of Jesus Christ had penetrated in so short a time. Within a generation, the good news of Jesus had spread from Jerusalem all the way to Rome and even to members of Caesar’s own household! Jesus was building His church.

And what a profound thought for Paul to leave lingering in the minds and hearts of the Christians in Philippi. There were now believers in the very household of the emperor.

You may recall from earlier in this letter that it appeared that there was a very real threat of persecution breaking out against the church in Philippi. And the threat was likely due to emperor worship. There was an exception that for those under the rule of Rome to acknowledge Caesar as Lord. They were asked to offer a pinch of incense as an offering to Caesar. They were to bend their knee in homage to Caesar and confess with their mouth that Caesar is Lord.

And of course, Christians would not do this with a clear conscience, even as they sought to live as law-abiding loyal Roman citizens.

But now, at the virtual end of the letter, Paul informs them that even members of Caesar’s household now confess that Jesus is Lord and not Caesar. **These words were meant to give strength and encouragement to the church in Philippi. And not only this, Paul was also teaching them that the family of God is far bigger than any congregation**.

And Paul concludes this great letter in essentially the same way that he began it, which was with a powerful blessing centered on the grace of the Lord towards the Philippians. Paul writes, **23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.**

This takes you back to verse 2 of chapter 1, where Paul writes, **“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

We are reminded from these words of Paul that from start to finish, the Christian life is a work of God’s grace through Jesus Christ. It is grace that saves people from their sins and grace that grows Christians together at the family of God.

I find this to be greatly comforting. It means that it is God’s idea and He is already at work in bringing it to pass.

So as we process these concluding words to the church in Philippi, what is that main thing for us to take with us today? And I believe it is this. We are to be intentional in living as the family God, no matter what. No matter the threats or the challenges we are facing, we are to live as a spiritual family.

We do this by valuing and treasuring our connection to one another as well as to the larger church as a spiritual family. We are truly brothers and sisters. Sometimes I refer to you as a brother or sister in my communication with you. This is not meant to be just church lingo or Christianese. This is because I truly believe that we are a spiritual family through Jesus Christ.

We are all united through Jesus Christ and we must seek to be intentional in practicing community and fellowship with Christians near and far.

Now what can we do to live out being a healthy family together? Here are a few things.

#1 **Try to learn everyone’s name**. – This is a basic beginning step. If it worked for Cheers it will work for the church. The church should be a community where everybody knows your name. Far more than Cheers or any bar, we are to get to know one another and to be a safe and welcoming community for everyone.

#2 **Seek to spend time with one another outside of Sunday Worship**.

Getting to know one another’s name goes beyond just learning their first and last name. This speaks of learning some of their story and sharing some of your story with them. This involves laughing together and playing together. This speaks to eating together and sharing life with one another. This takes intentionality and it takes time. But it is more than worth it in building the strong community that we are called to be.

Families are intentional in getting better. We have Thanksgiving and Christmas coming up and many families do their best to get together to celebrate the holidays with loved ones. This is because time together matters.

And this is just as true with our church family. We have great fellowship opportunities here, such as our turkey dinner after worship a couple of weeks ago and various other things throughout the year. They are great and important. But God calls us to go beyond these events as well. What is God calling you to in getting to know others better?

#3 **Pray for and support one another**. This would include both our local church as well as the universal church. We are all united as a family not only with one another, but also with believers in Christ Jesus all over the world. We are to be intentional in praying for one another, but not just your sisters and brothers within Chestnut Grove, but also in every country and nation. Perhaps you can ask the Lord on how He may direct you to pray or to take other action in support of the larger universal church.

You may have heard it said that the family that prays together stays together. I believe that as we collectively become more intentional in prayer for one another and for the larger church, we will undoubtedly grow stronger as a family in the Lord.

In closing, as we now wrap up this profound letter to the church in Philippi, I would like to mention that for the Christians in Philippi this letter was pretty much their Bible. Many of the Christians were not Jewish and probably did not have access to the Old Testament. The New Testament was still in the process of being written. This letter would essentially be their Bible. And they would be urged to re-read it many times in order for these words to sink deeply into their soul.

I would like to challenge you to read Philippians in a similar way. And not only Philippians, but every book within scriptures. We are to treasure it. It is more valuable than gold or silver or rubies. These words are life-giving and life-changing.

Let us pray...

Resources: [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

Paul’s Letter to the Philippians by Gordon D. Fee