



April 09, 2021

Brethren?

Warm hellos friends, brethren, co-workers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God, from here on the Gulf Coast. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you all doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

As I've been continuing studying, analyzing, and pondering the events up until the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ our Savior, I've also continued to meditate and reflect upon the members of the early church.

We've been reviewing the names or descriptors of the members of the early church. We've looked at the use of the terms "disciple" and "of the Way".

There is another term used, that we still regularly use today, and that is "brethren". In fact I use it every week in my first sentence of my weekly letter. At times it's used to refer to the members of the church. (Acts 6:3; Acts 9:30; Acts 11:29; 1 Peter 1:22).

At other times the term is used to refer to members of the Jewish community or to fellow Jews (Acts 13:26; Acts 13:38; Acts 28:17). The Greek word translated "brethren" and "brother" is *adelphos*. At times *adelphos* even refers to biological brothers (Matthew 4:18; 10:2; 12:46).

The Online Bible Greek Lexicon comments on *adelphos*: 1) a brother, whether born of the same two parents or only of the same father or mother 2) having the same national ancestor, belonging to the same people, or countryman 3) any fellow or man 4) a fellow believer, united to another by the bond of affection. What we can ascertain from number 4, is that the use of "brethren" implies a family relationship that is both affectionate and caring.

As seems has always been, many members of the body of Christ are suffering from health problems, some being quite serious. I receive weekly numerous prayer requests for "brethren" from various parts of the body, or fellowships. The apostle Paul encourages us in 1 Corinthians 12:26 "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" instructing us to pull together as a caring family (or brethren) and pray for and encourage one another in faith, hope, and love.

Jesus emphasized the component of love in the relationships of the disciples. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love

one another." (John 13:34) "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12) John refers to the love that the Father and His Son exhibited to humanity. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:16-17)

This is such a positive message and powerful example. God wants you and me to be a caring and loving family where all the brothers and sisters get along and have respect for one another. He wants us to emphasize encouraging and building up each other, not engaging in condemnation and fault-finding. But then we know that right?

The apostle Paul referred to brotherly love. (Romans 12:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 13:1) Jesus also stressed the common bond of His disciples having obedience and respect for His heavenly Father. "And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:49-50)

We can influence one another positively by living and practicing God's commandments and instructions. I love Amos 3:3. When we are on "the same page" of the same book, there is a positive unifying spirit and attitude. That same page does not necessarily mean we all think exactly alike. Many teachings of God are difficult to understand, and perspectives vary. God considers us His sons by using the generic term for a child. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (Romans 8:14). Part of being "brethren" is that we are led by the same Spirit, and worship the same God, yet recognize differences without building walls and fences within the family.

This is a good time of year to reflect on our baptism, when we repented and expressed faith in Christ's sacrifice, and then God sent His Spirit to us and added us to His spiritual family. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26).

We are looking forward to the upcoming Feast of Pentecost, and as we draw closer to that reminder of a very famous event, let us all truly look within to see if indeed we are "brethren" as Christ desired...

Arms up friends! Our prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Please do pray for us as well.

-Scott Hoefker

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