



February 24, 2023

"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 doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

As I've been continuing to study and analyze the events up until the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ our Savior, I've also continued to meditate and reflect about those members of the early church. Let's look at more descriptions of the disciples this time as I promised last Friday night.

Last week we reviewed briefly the names or descriptors of the members of the early church. We looked at the use of the terms "disciple" and "of the Way".

Another common term that is still used today is "brethren".

At times it is 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* 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. The use of "brethren" implies a family, and close, caring, and loving relationship.

As I write this letter I can't help but think about how many members of the body of Christ are currently suffering from health problems, some quite serious. As 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". We're to pull together as a caring, loving family, and pray for and encourage one another in faith, hope, and love. In this type of prayerful relationship of Godly love, there is no room for competition or comparison.

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 exhibit 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 a powerful example! God wants His people to be like a caring and loving family where all the brothers and sisters get along and have respect for their parents and each other. He wants us to emphasize encouraging and building up each other and not engaging in condemnation and fault-finding.

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 owning and practicing God's commandments and instructions. When we are on "the same page" of the same Book, there is a positive unifying spirit and attitude. God considers us His sons to use 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).

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 gave His Spirit to be within us and added us to His spiritual family. "*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*" (Galatians 3:26).

Some thoughts to meditate on and consider as we near the end of another week, and look forward to God's Sabbath.

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Hoefker', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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