

Sermon Title: How To Treat Spiritual Family

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Philemon 1-7 (Bible Postcards #2, Philemon #1 of 2)

Date: 9-25-22

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We are continuing our newly-begun series in Bible Postcards—the books of the Bible that are just one page long. There is only one in the Old Testament, and we dealt with that last week: the little Book of Obadiah. Now we move to the New Testament. These are one-page books; I did not promise only one visit to each one. Philemon is going to take us two weeks.

It's all about spiritual family. I will explain that to you, but, speaking of family—as we work with each other in the Body of Christ, we need to deal with each other as if we are family. And I had a charming little thing that came from a family experience this week.

I got an e-mail Wednesday night from someone who attends our Wednesday morning women's Bible study. Here's what she wrote: "The kids and I were listening to the end of the sermon on the way to ladies' Bible study this morning." They listen to a sermon of mine and follow a listening guide, and have discussions—come and join them, if you like. So she's listening with her kids in the car. "It was the part where you mentioned that alcohol isn't a sin—only drunkenness. This is the conversation that my daughter—three years old—and I had:

DAUGHTER: 'Mom, do you know that alcohol isn't a city?'

ME: 'No, I didn't know that. (I'm pausing for a moment to wonder what in the world she was talking about.) Oh! Do you mean that alcohol isn't a *sin*?'

DAUGHTER (Now stopping to really ponder my question): 'I'm not really sure, because I have no idea what alcohol is.' "

And we need to train one another in the family as we grow up.

So let's talk about Philemon. When the Apostle Paul, from his jail cell in Rome, finished the Book of Colossians and sent it off—I envision him putting it in a satchel and sending it off with Epaphras—along with that scroll of Colossians came another letter: this one that we know as the Bible Book of Philemon. They were written at the same time. They were delivered to the same destination.

Colossians is a *crucial* book for the whole church; it was designed to help them deal with a specific doctrinal attack they were enduring, to correct false teaching; and it has *great* exhortations to believers. It has a lot of parallel passages to Ephesians that we just studied, such as Colossians 3:17—"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

Philemon is quite different, but just as "inspired" (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). Colossians is doctrinal; Philemon is all personal—and it is going to occupy our attention for today and next Lord's Day. And then we will move on to the other New Testament postcards: Second John and Third John—two personal letters from the Apostle John—and then the Book of Jude.

So today: Philemon. If you want to start turning to it, I'll give you a couple minutes before I specifically refer to it; and if you can't find it, I'll bet you can find Hebrews—go one book backward from there, and you will find Philemon.

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This book is a *shining* example of many of the relationships within the Body of Christ, as they played out in the early church. I'm going to give you the background of this book; and when I do, you will see: It is both easy to interpret *and* chock full of *direct* applications that we will not struggle to make the connections to, ourselves.

This man named Philemon was one of the pillars of the church at "Colossae" (Col. 1:2). That's a city in Asia Minor, in what we now know as Turkey. In the first century, in the times of the New Testament, I was known as "Asia" (1 Pet. 1:1)—but not referring to the continent of Asia; it was a province within the Roman Empire.

It was a neighboring city to "Laodicea" and "Hierapolis" (Col. 4:13). You know, up in Washington they speak of the "Tri-Cities"—that's kind of what this was: Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae.

It was part of the same region of churches to which the Book of Revelation is addressed: "Ephesus...Smyrna...Pergamum...Thyatira...Sardis...Philadelphia...Laodicea" (Rev. 1:11). You can visit those seven cities in that sequence, in an almost circular manner; and when you get to Laodicea, you going to also be near Hierapolis and Colossae.

As I said, this little letter is very closely associated with the Book of Colossians; it was written at the same time by the same Apostle, sent by the same delivery system through Epaphras in the year 61 A.D.

Along with Ephesians and Philippians, Philemon and Colossians are referred to as the "Prison Epistles" because they are the four books that were written by Paul from Rome during the first time that he was imprisoned there (Phil. 1:13).

This man Philemon—I called him a "pillar" in the church; you know, the church has people that you can call "pillars" (Gal. 2:9): they support everything in the church; and then there are the "caterpillars," who just crawl in and crawl out. Those are the two kinds of people that we pastors can joke about when you're not in the room. Did I say that out loud?

Philemon had this reputation for loving the Lord, and he loved the brethren—and he had demonstrated it over and over. He was Paul's spiritual son—his "son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2, NKJV); Paul was the one who had introduced Philemon to the Lord, and his changed life had become evident to everyone that knew him, and he had this strong reputation among the believers.

There is a legend—it might be true, but it's impossible to verify—that later on, Philemon became the Bishop of Ephesus. That's a concept—the idea of a Bishop: the word means "overseer"; it's one of the words the New Testament uses as a synonym for elders and pastors. But the idea of a bishop over a *region* developed fairly early on after the New Testament. As I say, it's not a position mandated by the Scriptures; but in a lot of denominations, there will be someone like a district superintendent, or there will be a regional governing board. In each region among the pastors, our Russian friends elect one of their pastors to be the "regional pastor"—who arranges the group activities, the

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missions work, the church planting, and things like that. And some people think that Philemon became that for the region of Ephesus—which would have been very, very influential; and he could have been a spokesman and an overseer for them. We don't know that, but we *do* know that Philemon had a great reputation.

Philemon also had a slave named Onesimus. Now, don't *gasp* and think "slave" and think all of the worst of everything that you have ever heard about slavery. As part of the culture there, a very *significant* portion of people were enslaved; we would call them "debt slaves" or something like that: people who needed to work to pay off a debt or something like that. A slave was generally, in most situations, considered a member of the household; and Onesimus was considered part of the household of Philemon.

But Onesimus ran away. He eventually journeyed all the way to Rome. Now, I didn't take out a map and look, but Rome to Colossae—I mean, he didn't just walk there one day; he had to go across most of the Mediterranean Sea, or around the whole northern curve of the Mediterranean Sea, to get there. He went a long way.

And we don't know how it happened, but he came in contact with the Apostle Paul. One thing that *might* have happened: Maybe Onesimus, the runaway slave, committed some crime. We know that Paul was kind of a minimum-security prisoner (Ac. 28:16, 30-31); maybe Onesimus met Paul when they were both prisoners. We don't know that. We know that as of the writing of this letter, Onesimus was *not* in jail, and Paul was. It doesn't matter *how* they met, humanly speaking; they met in the providence of God (Prov. 20:24). And now Paul became the spiritual father not only of Philemon but also of Onesimus (Philem. 10; cf. 1 Cor. 4:15)—he introduced him to the same Lord.

And as we are going to see in this book, Paul became very fond of Onesimus. He even makes a play on Onesimus's name. The word "onesimus" means "useful"; and so, the one whose name means "useful" had become "useless" to his owner, and *particularly* "useful" and precious to Paul (vs. 11).

But as much as he liked Onesimus, and as much as Onesimus ministered to Paul, Paul deemed that it would be improper to just maintain the status quo and keep him in Rome for his own convenience. He decided: "I need to send him back to his master."

And so he sent him with this very carefully and politely-worded letter to request that Philemon now accept Onesimus not merely as a "slave," but now as a "brother" in Christ (vs. 16). And when we finish the book, you'll see how he wanted to resolve this conundrum.

So this letter is a great lesson in tact and honesty—you might call it "Christian Diplomacy." It illustrates the delightful balance between sound doctrine and the love of the brethren.

Paul wrote this for at least three reasons. Number 1—obviously, he was going to do what was right to secure forgiveness for Onesimus and to bring about reconciliation between Philemon—who had been wronged by Onesimus—and Onesimus himself.

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Secondly, he wrote to strike at the heart of slavery, in the sense of requesting that this slave owner obey "the law of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2) by showing love to all, *including* his slaves. Remember, the Book of Ephesians had those instructions about, "Here's how to be a Christian slave," "Here's how to be a Christian slave owner"? And Colossians has many of those same instructions there. And so, he is calling Philemon to act at the *highest* possible level of Christian maturity here.

And thirdly, he was also writing because he had plans. He had plans to get out of jail—and eventually, he did. And he wanted to come to Colossae—and I assume he probably did; the New Testament doesn't say that he did or didn't, but he wanted to have a place to stay when he got there, and he knew that Philemon's house would be a good place to be (vs. 22).

So here's a simple outline of an entire book of the Bible:

Verses 1 through 7—How To Treat Spiritual Family. That's our venue for this morning. Next time, Verses 8 through 25—How To Help Spiritual Family.

Let's start with: How To Treat Spiritual Family. If you want to start memorizing books of the Bible—I've said this many times: You can start memorizing 13 books of the Bible all at once, if you can remember "Paul"; his name is the first word in 13 books of the Bible. You do not have to read to the end of a letter in the First Century to figure out who wrote it; they put the name at the front.

Verse 1—"Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker."

He calls himself "a prisoner of Christ." Remember, we saw that same thing in Ephesians: "I belong to Christ. I'm a prisoner. It doesn't matter who arrested me; it doesn't matter where they put me. I belong to Christ, so I am 'a prisoner of Christ'—in the sovereignty of God, that is where I am." (cf. 2 Tim. 2:8-9)

And I said this is a lesson in tact—how *tactful* to put that right at the beginning of the letter; so when Philemon gets down to the end of the letter, it's as if Paul can be saying, "Well, you know, in comparison with the sacrifice that *I'm* making, the favor that I am asking *you* is pretty simple." So, there's humanity involved in this.

And we know that Timothy was with him. He says: "and Timothy our brother." Timothy was with Paul during a part of the Third Missionary Journey. They had known each other for a long time, and Timothy became one of Paul's right-hand guys (Acts 16:1-3; Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Thess. 3:2).

Timothy became one of Paul's understudies. Paul left Timothy in "Ephesus" (1 Tim. 1:3)—which was a *big* place of influence—to deal with some false teachers there. And the relationship and the ministry partnership between Paul and Timothy continued all the way to the end of Paul's life (2 Tim. 4:6, 9, 21).

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So, "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker." Verse 2—"and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house."

"Church in your *house*"—what does that mean? Well, the "church" met at his "house" (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15). It might have been the meeting place of the entire church of Colossae, though I doubt that. But where the believers gathered, there were not a lot of church buildings. It would be what we would call a "network of house churches." They were always under the elders—the mature ones—in the region, wherever it was. But there was some manifestation of the church that met in his "house."

And you have these two other people mentioned: "Apphia our sister" and "Archippus our fellow soldier" (cf. Col. 4:17).

You might be surprised how elegant the theories have become about who "Apphia" and "Archippus" were. If we needed to know details about "Apphia" and "Archippus," it would be in the Bible. We don't know for sure, but people have made up all kinds of fanciful things.

I think—just look at the book, consider the history, consider what is said here—the most obvious explanation is the best: "Apphia" was probably Philemon's wife, or she might have been one of those who was recognized among the church—like "Phoebe," who is the woman mentioned in Romans Chapter 16 (vs. 1), and the word "deacon" is used for her; it's where some people get the idea of "deaconesses." She was obviously somebody the people knew, and certainly that Philemon knew. I think she was probably his wife.

"Archippus" was probably his son. Why do I say that? Well, we know that slaves were regarded as family members—part of the family. So this is a family issue that he is dealing with; and it would make sense that the whole family be addressed and brought into the circle of considering this, even though ultimately, whatever decisions were going to be made would be up to Philemon.

So, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul was guided to include them in the ones addressed in this letter about the problem of a fugitive slave. Now, we get the privilege to eavesdrop on this inspired communication between Paul and this precious Christian family.

By the way: If you or somebody you know is expecting a new baby, this little book is just chock full of possibilities of names you might consider. We have not one single "Apphia" at Heritage Bible Church. We have not one single "Archippus" or "Philemon" or "Epaphras" or "Aristarchus" or "Demas"—"Demas" apostatized (2 Tim. 4:10); you might not want to hang *that* name on your precious little one.

But it's a family communication. And what does he say to them? Verse 3—"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." That is the most familiar New Testament greeting (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:2)—just like at the end of Colossians, where Paul said: "Grace be with you" (4:18).

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What more could you possibly want for your brothers and sisters—your spiritual family—than that they walk in the "grace" of God, and they enjoy His "peace"? So those aren't just words you blow past. That's *how to pray* for your spiritual family!

Now, look what he prays for them: Philemon 4 through 7—"I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints; and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother."

Well, that's all seven verses that I said we are going to study today! So let's circle back and look over these opening seven verses to find clues that match our title for today: "How To Treat Spiritual Family." Paul is a great example to follow in how to think about other Christians, how to talk about another Christian behind his or her back.

In Verse 1, he called them "beloved"; that's the first clue. Recognize that *all* Christians are the objects and recipients, personally, of Christ's love—*just as you are* (cf. Gal. 2:20; Rev. 3:9). It is hard to look down on someone, it's hard to treat someone shabbily, when you realize your best Friend—our God and Father—your best Friend considers that person "beloved" (Rom. 1:7; Eph. 5:1; Col. 3:12; 1 Thess. 1:4). We're *family*! "Blood is thicker than water"—the "fellowship of the Spirit" is thicker than that (Phil. 2:1; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).

In this context, it obviously goes beyond *only* the love of God for Philemon, and recognizes that he had sown love for others in his ministry—so he had come to be "beloved" by Paul and by his coworkers.

And he calls Philemon—and these other guys also, but especially Philemon and Archippus: "fellow worker." Here's Paul, an Apostle—arguably the most influential of the Apostles (Ac. 9:15; 1 Cor. 15:10); he has all of this apostolic authority, *he is writing the Word of God*—and he calls Philemon his "fellow worker." He didn't see himself *above* anybody else (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:9; Eph. 3:8); he saw us all as *spiritual family*.

Now, here is the point: The ministry of Christ is meant to be shared by *every* member of the Church of Jesus Christ—by *every* believer in Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:12-13). Applying this to us: This is *our* church; it will go *just as far* in serving God, pleasing God, glorifying God, as we are collectively willing to accept responsibility to serve God faithfully.

If a person has *no* desire to serve others in the local church, and to serve God by sharing the Gospel and ministering to the saints—*that person does not know how to practice Christianity!* (cf. Acts 9:26a)

Now, understand: You become a Christian—you get saved, you are adopted into the family of God—*individually*; no one can do it for you. And you cannot become a Christian by hanging out in a church. The old adage: "Being in a church doesn't make you a Christian, any more than being in a garage makes you a car." But if you are a car, you belong in a garage or on the road. And if you are a Christian, you belong in the church!

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You belong *to* the church, you are *part* of the church, you are one of the *bricks* in the church (Eph. 2:22), you are a "member" of the "body" (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13), you are part of the group; and you cannot practice the *group* activity known as Christianity, as a solo individual! (cf. Prov. 18:1)

Now, I look at you and I'm thinking, "Why are you getting all excited saying that? *These guys are here!*" Okay. But there are people who need to hear that. There are people who need to understand that.

The commitment of Heritage Bible Church from our first day is that we will *all serve together*, just like Ephesians 4:16 says, that we studied a few months ago: "according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body."

How many parts need to be working?—"each individual" one! There *are* no exceptions! *Everyone* plays a role! (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10) *Everyone* prays! *Everyone* encourages! *Everyone* sings! *Everyone* attends! *Everyone* says, "What needs to be done that I can do?" Now, there are some things that you may not be great at doing. I have noticed that most of you do not seem very interested in being preachers. If I told you that you have to take my place next Sunday, a lot of you would make Jonah look spiritual, how fast *you* would be off for Fiji or something like that. Okay! I have your back! I'll *fill in for you* in that area. But there are *a lot of things* that *I* cannot do any better than *you* can preach! So, please, *fill in for me* in those areas.

We just announced a new schedule. And by the way, disclaimer here: I decided to do this series, we decided to make this new schedule apply—I did *not* put those together and say, "I want to make sure the first half of Philemon comes on the day that I announce the new schedule." But I'm sure glad that Philemon came on the first Sunday that I announce the new schedule.

*We're family*, and we have things to *do*—a *lot* of things to do—and a lot of you are *doing* a lot of things! Great! Some of you are new; some of you *haven't yet* grown your roots; some of you *haven't yet* found out how your Velcro matches up with somebody else's, and you can stick together and serve together side-by-side. But, friends, *we need each other!* We *belong* to each other! We are *incomplete* without each other! (cf. 1 Cor. 12:18)

And if somebody doesn't understand that and thinks they don't *need* a local church, and they don't *need* to give their allegiance to others—*that's not Christianity!* You can say you are a Christian, but if you are not *tenaciously* tied to a local church—if that *isn't* the most important, highest priority in your life—I have to say: My friend—my brother, my sister, if you *are* my brother or sister—*let's talk about this!*

This is *Christ* our Lord, "building" His "church" (Matt. 16:18). So in Verse 1, he refers to a "brother." In Verse 2, he refers to a "sister." That's who we are. That is how we regard each other as Christians, because we have been adopted by the same heavenly Father—so we are, by "adoption," brothers and sisters (Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5; cf. Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19). We *have* a family allegiance! (cf. Gal. 6:10)

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When I go to Russia and I hear them talk to each other, *any time* they say anything to the church, it always starts out—and I'm going to *totally* butcher this, okay; be nice to me, Yvonne: "братья и сестры" ("brattia yi sestry"). The first thing they *ever* say: "Brothers and Sister"—"Brothers and Sisters, Brothers and Sisters..." That is just part of the mentality—that is *who we are*.

And he says: "Family, I pray for you. I want you to have 'grace' and 'peace' (vs. 3)." You "stand" in His "grace"(Rom. 5:2). He offers His "peace...which surpasses all comprehension" (Phil. 4:7). When you are going through something, He can give you "peace" (Ps. 29:11; cf. Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 3:16; Heb. 13:20). He says to bring all your "cares" to "Him" because "He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7; NKJV). That's who we are (Jn. 14:21, 23; 16:27).

So, what is it that you ask God for, when you think of other Christians? Well, "grace" and "peace" (vs. 3). And did you notice Verse 4? "I *thank* my God always, making mention of you in my prayers." Thanking God for your spiritual family is a natural part of being a Christian! Actually, I should probably say: It is a *supernatural* part of being a Christian.

We live in a selfish world that tells us, in countless ways: Make sure you look out for yourself, make sure you take care of yourself—you are the most important one (2 Tim. 3:2a; cf. Ps. 12:4). And that is exactly the *opposite* of the understanding of who we are in Christ (Phil. 2:3; cf. 1 Cor. 13:5b).

I dare you to spend two or three minutes a day this week, specifically thanking God for Christian brothers and sisters by name. That's not that hard to do. Remember the challenge I picked up from somebody else, and I gave it to you a few weeks ago: How about pray your way through the church directory. The way our directory comes out on paper, if you do one page a day, that's three households. Thank the Lord for these people!

And if you look at that picture, and you look at that thing in the directory, and you say, "Lord, I have no idea who this person is! Well, how about we *do* something about that? *Thank You* that there is someone in *my church* that I *haven't met yet!* Help me *find them!* Maybe they need *help* in whatever it is that they are doing. Maybe I could help them. *Maybe* this is the one that might be able to *help me!* Why did I volunteer for that thing? *I need help!*"

Pray for each other (Jas. 5:16). Thank the Lord for each other. Why? Verse 5—"because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints." Take another clue about how to regard your spiritual family: *Major* on the positive things that you see! Hey, they know the same Lord *I* do.

Now listen: Let's get real here. I *fully* understand that God keeps saving people without asking *me* if I like them. There are irritating people in the Body of Christ! I *know!* I'm *one of them!* If I haven't irritated you yet, stick around; give me a little time—I'll get around to you! One guy said after the first service, "Okay, I'm here—irritate me! Let's get it out of the way."

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Look, I know that people, in general—and Christian people as well—will *let you down*, and they will do things to annoy you. They might even *sin* against you. But the way to regard other people in the Body of Christ is to regard them in exactly the way that you want them to regard you. Look at how they love God. Look for the fruitful things that they do. And go ahead and tell people about the good things that you see them doing. Dare to be encouraging, and just watch what God might do with that.

And Verse 6—"and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake."

That is the completion of the prayer. It's another example for how to regard a Christian brother or sister: Pray that they will continue to take the next step of obedience; that in our fellowship, our shared partnership in the faith, we take the next step forward.

"The fellowship of your faith" is the partnership that we have in encouraging each another (1 Thess. 5:11) and deepening our faith and serving alongside each other.

I also announced a workday coming up, and I described it as "the fellowship of labor," or, "the fellowship of work." Yeah, we'll have some food together; we'll open God's Word together for a few minutes; but then, we're going to roll up our sleeves and work together. And that makes *friends*. Sometimes relationships that last a lifetime get started that way.

Are you in? Are you willing to extend yourself to help make the family as healthy as it can be? Do you really ask God to help your brother or sister to live up to every good thing he or she knows is ours in Christ?

And Verse 7, where we left off; that's just the same song in another key: "For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother."

Paul chose to focus his thoughts on every good thing that he had ever shared with Philemon, and to rejoice for every good thing that he had seen or heard that Philemon had done for other believers.

So do you see why God let this little letter get into His Word? By eavesdropping on Paul's interaction with a dear friend, a "child in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2), we learn a lot from his example.

We are going to take a little more time next week, Lord willing, to savor the rest of this; and we will see what Paul does about their mutual friend, Onesimus—and it's brilliant, it's wonderful, and it's more about being a spiritual family.

But remember: Try to drink in what we have observed from the beginning of Paul's letter to Philemon. Remember: *You are a sinner!* You're "saved" by "grace" (Eph. 2:8)—so is everyone else around you this morning, who have put their faith in Christ.

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Our world is a fallen realm; and in this era dominated by "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4, LSB), "the prince of the power of the air," that "spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2; cf. 1 Jn. 5:19)—*we are the odd ones!* (Matt. 7:14) We don't *belong* to "the world" (Jn. 15:19). We don't *fit* in the world (cf. Lk. 6:22; 1 Pet. 4:1-4). But we *belong* with each other—why, we belong *to* each other, we are "members one of another" (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25).

And as we pass through this fallen world, remember: Even as adopted children of God—what Romans Chapter 8 says—we still "groan," we are still waiting for the finality of our "redemption" (vs. 23; cf. 2 Cor. 5:2). But in the meantime, we have our *family!* (cf. Mk. 10:29-30) We can link arms and groan together (1 Pet. 5:9), we can pick up the ones that have stumbled (Gal. 6:1), we can lean on the ones that are strong (1 Thess. 5:14).

And just like in your own family, you deal with one another's faults, idiosyncrasies, sins—even the *hurts* that you cause to one another. The spiritual family which is the Body of Christ is called to be together, and John 13:34-35—they will "know" you are Christians by the "love" that you "have for one another." Nobody is going to know that unless they can see it; nobody is going to see it unless we *do* it; and we can't do it unless we are "one-anothering"—which means: *being with* one another.

And so, yes, without the *slightest apology*, I say: Your family needs to make Sunday morning at church—those three hours, that 1.7% of your week—*the very highest priority*, because *it is our identity in the world!* We *belong to each other!*

And then, when you see each other at *any* of the other things that we do that are supportive of that and spinoffs from that, or that feed into our Sunday mornings together—or you see *each other at the grocery store*—it's, "Wow, Brother! Sister! I'm glad to see you!"

We're family. We are "fellow workers." We "stand" in "grace" and in the "peace" that *only* God can "give" (Jn. 14:27; cf. Is. 26:3). We "pray" for each other. And we need to contribute to the "fellowship of our faith." See what you can do to impart and encourage and comfort your family.

And let's pray for each other, shall we?

*Father, I just want to thank You for my spiritual family here. Oh, how I love Heritage Bible Church! I have never seen a manifestation of Your Body more caring, more loving. And yet, Father, not everyone can see it, not everyone feels it. We still so much, every day, need to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ." Thank You for everyone here. And I pray that, as You continue to build the Church—which is the Body of Christ—that this local manifestation of it would give You glory. Please, have Your way with us according to Your plan. Give us wisdom and boldness to serve and love as You would have it to be. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*