



BETHEL
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Understanding the Church, Part 4

Angels Watching

One of the consequences of the gospel ministry is this:

Ephesians 3:10, “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.”

The last phrase, “the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” is the angelic host in heaven! Paul is teaching here that the angelic host is watching us, the church, and learning about God!

The angels are as Adam and Eve were in the garden before the fall. They clearly understand the “otherness” of God, that He is completely different from them:

- He is eternal.
- He is unchangeable.
- He is awesome.
- He is infinite.
- He is glorious.
- He is majestic.
- HE IS HOLY.

It is His “kind attributes” that they cannot personally know-, His:

- Grace.
- Mercy.
- Love.
- Compassion.
- Tenderheartedness.
- Care.
- KINDNESS.

These are attributes that one cannot personally know unless you were sinful and God forgave you. Well, the angels have no sin and therefore cannot personally experience these things when it comes to God. Accordingly, for them to learn about God’s “Kind attributes” they have to watch how God deals with the church.

Now from redemptive history alone, we can conclude a couple of things that the Angelic Host would have known about the Kingdom of God by the time of Christ. They would have understood that the church is a distinct people to whom God bound Himself for His glory and their good. This would have been clear from watching God’s workings as far back as Abraham. They also would have understood that God did NOT have two programs for two different peoples. But rather that there was and is one people of God transcending all the ages- variously identified as

- My people.
- Israel.
- Church.
- Temple.
- Vine.
- Bride.

They also would have seen the place of the church in God’s plan of redemption. That indeed it isn’t a small part of what God is doing in this world. But that indeed His people are at the center and climax of world history. While the wedding of Christ and His bride has yet to take place¹ Nevertheless the planning and preparation is going on right now and they know it.

Finally, they also would have a good understanding of the kind of community God intended the church to be unlike every other nation in the world which lives off the weak, helpless, and infirmed, God’s people were and are to be a community, a village, a family such that the weak and helpless are the ones most protected and cared for.

See just as God’s heartbeat is for the care of the alien, orphan, and widow,² so it only follows that the covenant community created by God, which He calls His bride, also would place a high priority on caring for its own.

Deuteronomy 24:19-21, “When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine

¹ Compare Revelation 20:6-9

² Compare Psalm 146:8-9

olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.”

Truly providing and caring for the less fortunate members of the body was never to be an after-thought, but that which was to weigh heavily upon the child of God at all times.

James 2:14-16 (NASB), “What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? [To illustrate a thriving faith, James gives the following example...] If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? [The conclusion?] Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.”

You can say all day long that your faith-walk is great, but if you neglect the body of Christ, the diagnosis is that you have an unhealthy faith.

1 John 4:20, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”

From this we concluded last time one can:

- Have the greatest quiet times.
- Master the English Bible.
- Know your theology like no one else.
- Enjoy the deepest and most heart moving worship.

But if you neglect caring for the body of Christ, the conclusion is that:

- Your walk is shallow.
- Your zeal is misplaced.
- Your soul is not healthy.

Indeed, THE mark of Spiritual vitality when it comes to the child of God, and so a church, is NOT their felt personal piety, BUT their regard for the people of God!

All of this the Angelic host would have known by the time Christ walked the earth. Yet what they could not have known was the impact this teaching would have on the body of Christ living in the fulness of time³ AFTER the coming of the Messiah in the time of completion when the church no longer was “under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father” (Galatians 4:2).

In other words:

- What bearing did the coming of Christ have on the church?
- What ought the church of God to look like now that her Savior has come?
- What are the practical implications which arise from the OT teaching on the church of God?
- How should we then live?

³ Compare Galatians 4:4

The Family Defined

We are going to wrap up this study considering the place that the church, the body of Christ, ought to have in our lives. As we approach this topic, don't be surprised if you find that you fall way short of the Biblical calling. That's inevitable; we're sinners. Accordingly, don't let the following points condemn you. Rather let it encourage you and inspire you as to where you and I want to be in the coming weeks, months, and years.

Knowledge of the covenant community ought to define our understanding of our family.

From what we've seen already with regard to the covenant community and its impact on the family, you can imagine how serious it was for Christ to hear that His family was outside waiting to speak to Him.

Matthew 12:46-47, "While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee."

Quite naturally we would have expected Christ at this moment to "drop everything" and attend to His family. And yet with what would have amounted to a shocking statement, Christ redefined the family to include those in the body of Christ.

Matthew 12:49-50, "And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Don't misunderstand, Christ here was not dishonoring His blood relatives nor was He denouncing them. Rather, He was extending the Jewish understanding of the family to include any and all who serve the Lord. Did you get that? Christ here has gone on record to say that what we consider to be our immediate family must now include the body of Christ!

That is why last week I referenced the seemingly unbreakable bond that exists in blood families in the United States. Yes there are exceptions, but for the most part it is in the family that we witness unconditional love and acceptance. Have anyone else treat you the way your parents or a sibling have, and you'd be done with them. But the grown man or woman shrugs it off and goes right back on caring for and loving the family member, often times to the chagrin of the spouse.

That same kind of unconditional love, acceptance, and commitment **MUST** become part of our understanding as it relates to the body of Christ if we are to function as a true church.

Lone Survivor

Recently I read a gripping book by Marc Luttrell about a failed Navy Seal operation in Afghanistan in which Marc's entire outfit was wiped out, and he alone was left. In the book, Luttrell describes the kind of training he underwent in order to become a Navy Seal.

Throughout all of his training, the ONE value which was prized above all else was the placing of your team above yourself. Much of the indoctrination (Indoc) and BUD/S training is designed to get the soldier to stop

- Thinking about himself.
- Feeling sorry for himself.
- And to place his focus on helping his comrade in arms.

When the group of would-be-Seals began to function as a unit/family, that is when they were most rewarded. In *The Warrior Elite* a book describing the training of Luttrell's Seal Class, Dick Couch wrote this:

“Friday morning features another four-mile timed run, and several slower 228ers are worried about making the thirty-minute cutoff. The class gathers around their slow runners and they make the run as a class. Casey Lewis and Marc Luttrell are on the bubble because they have yet to make the timed run in Third Phase [which means they soon would be cut from the program], but they make this one. Luttrell is still having trouble with stress fractures in his legs. Ensign Jason Birch ties a line between himself and Luttrell, half pulling him on the run. Bill Gallagher and Eric Oehlerich run on either side of Lewis. The whole class runs the four miles under twenty-nine minutes, its best effort to date.”⁴

It is from this culture that the most effective combat unit in the world is forged- the culture of a family, of unity, of cohesiveness in which no individual is left out or overlooked.

Now brothers and sisters, if indeed we are in a war as a church, we are the church militant. It stands to reason that the more we band together as a family, the greater will be our effectiveness as a church.

Oh family of God, may we forever understand that, more than anything else, today we are the family of God.

Self-Sacrifice

In the covenant community self-sacrifice for the good of others is normal.

Romans 9:1-3, “I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”

Who here hasn't read this and struggled with a lack of identification?

Paul in essence says here that he was willing to go to hell in the place of any and all of his fellow Jews. Brothers and sisters, such commitment and care is beyond us. In the church, we can hardly get people to sacrifice one day out of seven in order to care for the body of Christ. And Paul is talking about sacrificing his soul. Such love and willingness to sacrifice for your immediate family is not out of the possibility.

Let me ask you this: Would you be willing to be damned if that meant the salvation of your children? How about your mom and dad?

You know what I conclude about Paul here is that this verse tells us more about how Paul viewed his Jewish brethren than Paul's commitment to the Lord (which I'm certainly not questioning). Truly, the idea of perishing for a loved one, near and dear to our heart is not unthinkable. And that Paul was willing to so suffer indicates that he took seriously the claim that the body of Christ is a family.

⁴ Marcus Luttrell, *The Lone Survivor*, Little, Brown and Company; 1 edition (June 12, 2007), ISBN-10: 0316067598, page 235

Do you? Are you here today because Bethel Presbyterian Church was the product you at one time were looking for? Or are you here this day as one who has adopted Bethel as your family and we you?

Truly there are two kinds of people sitting today in many a church pew: There is the sheep, and so one who approaches the church as it really is, the family of God; and there is the shopper, the one who approaches the church as a consumer looking for the best buy. And it is not very hard to spot the difference.

A sheep

- Is more committed to the welfare of their brethren than they are to being right.
- Rejoices at the success of another and does not feel envy.
- Is not content to live with strife; they must be at peace with their siblings.
- Is willing to deny their freedoms in Christ to see their brothers and sisters grow in their love and devotion to the Lord.
- Suffers humiliation, inconvenience, fatigue, financial drain, and the like in order that others might know and love the Lord.

In contrast, the shopper:

- Evaluates family get-togethers in terms of “What’s in it for them.”
- Stays only as long as they get what they want.
- Places their wants and needs above the rest.
- Complains loudly when they don’t get their way and tries to get others to rally around their cause.
- Doesn’t care about unity or peace; it’s their needs that are most important.

Such a contrast to THE standard when it comes to the body of Christ.

1 John 3:16-18, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”

Since we are a family, self sacrifice is not the exception, it is the rule.

Neglected or Forsaken

That leads us to a third characteristic of the family of God, the covenant community should not be neglected or forsaken.

1 Timothy 5:8, “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

The context of this verse is Paul’s discussion about widows in the body of Christ. Paul is teaching that those who have a parent or family member that is widowed and does not care for that one and take care of their needs, they are as if they have denied the faith and have placed themselves in the category of the sinner who does not know Christ!

Because what Paul teaches here is true and because Christ has extended our understanding of the family to

include the body of Christ, THEN are we not guilty of denying the faith if we neglect any who are in need in our body?

Indeed! Because we are a family, we are morally obligated to care for one another! To fall short here, as we saw last time, is to testify to an unhealthy soul no matter how moved you may be in your worship.

You say, “But I don’t see any needs!”

If you don’t see any needs at BPC, you are not close enough to this body. Each and every one of us is hurting in some way. We all are struggling. In fact, that is what is behind our passion as a congregation for our fellowship gatherings after service. Today we’ll have four or five homes hosting a meal so that the entire body might be able to gather for fellowship if they so desired. Our conviction is that if we are going to be a brother or sister to each other, we need an environment where we can get to know each other. Thus, each meal is hosted to allow you to gather at a house and invest in one another.

If you don’t know of any needs in this body, come not as a ministry but a minister; invest in someone, and you’ll soon be in a position to bear another’s burden. And so indeed, because of what we have become in Christ, we must not forsake our forever family of God!

Encouraging the body

What does this positively look like?

The covenant community places a high value on encouraging the body unto its growth in grace. Let us look at Hebrews 10 once again.

Hebrews 10:24-25, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting⁵ one another.” Paul is talking about the three “THEREFORES” which flow from the glorious news of the gospel.

1. Hebrews 10:22: We must draw near to God.
2. Hebrews 10:23: We must hold fast our confession.
3. Hebrews 10:24: We must strive to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

Now it is the last “therefore” that I want you to consider. On account of the gospel, we are morally obligated to care for one another. For, don’t miss it, to do anything else is to forsake the body of Christ!

Yet forsaking the body here is not just simply NOT showing up on Sunday. Rather, it implies showing up and yet failing to “stimulate” another person on the “love and good deeds.” The word *exhort* is typically used in the context of being provoked, incited, irritated, or prodded in a bad way.⁶ Yet here in Hebrews 10 it carries a positive connotation and so implies a fellowship in which people are challenging one another to love and serve the Lord in the various and sundry contexts of life. Because we are a family, that is the ministry expected amongst the body of Christ.

And because this is the case, we must therefore be careful when it comes to our relationships with one another. Misery loves company. Thus, if in my ministry to another person I incite them in any way to do or think evil thoughts toward their spouse, children, church, etc. I will be guilty of “stimulating” them on

⁵ παρακαλεω parakaleo

⁶ Compare Acts 15:39; 17:16; 1 Corinthians 13:5

to hatred and ill-deeds.

And if that is the case, you will be guilty of something God hates:

Proverbs 6:16-19, “These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”

Contrast this to what we are commanded to do:

Galatians 6:2, “Bear⁷ ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

The word for “bear” is used in Scripture of the carrying of a rock⁸ or of a cross.⁹ Thus to “bear the burden” of another speaks NOT of tolerating another person’s weakness, BUT helping them carry the burdens of life.

I love this, for this is what being in a church family is all about. It is about being weak and having a stronger brother or sister tie a rope to your waste and run along with you. It is lacking trust and having members of the body run alongside of you to ensure that you do not quite. It’s about doing what we can to help carry the burdens of another. That is what it means to be in the family of God!

Once again, consider this verse:

James 1:27, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit¹⁰ the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

The word *visit* means much more than to drop by for a chat. It carries the idea of caring for others, exercising oversight on their behalf, and of helping them in whatever way is needed.¹¹ In fact, *visit* is used frequently in the New Testament of God’s visiting His people in order to help, strengthen, and encourage them.¹²

So what ought we to be like as a covenant community? What should characterize the church of God?

We ought to be radically committed to one another such that we long to prod each other to love and good deeds. If you have been saved, this is how God intends you to live and so function in the body of Christ.

You say, “But I’m weak and have very little offer!” Then go down doing all you can to love and support the body.”

During the battle referenced in *Lone Survivor*, Marc Luttrell spoke of Danny Dietz a young man who grew

⁷ βασταζω bastazo

⁸ Compare John 10:31

⁹ Compare John 19:17

¹⁰ επισκεπτομαι episkeptomai

¹¹ It is from the same root as *episkopos*, which means *overseer* and is sometimes translated *bishop* (see the NASB and KJV texts of Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 2:25).

¹² See also Luke 1:68, 78; 7:16; Acts 15:14; Hebrews 2:6

up in Littleton, Colorado. Danny had been shot five times. His thumb had been blown off. He had been shot in the throat, chest, belly, legs such that he couldn't walk, much less move to safety.

And so one of the Seal members grabbed him by his shirt and attempted to drag him to safety. And as Danny was being helped he held his gun the best he could and fired at the enemy as he was being drug to safety.

That's what family members do, regardless of their personal strength, they fight to protect, encourage, or help their brothers and sisters!

Faith Practiced

So how do you embody this? How do we come to the point in our lives where we place the family of God before our own welfare?

Consider with me Hebrews 10:24-25 one more time. The calling of this text to stimulate another to love and good deeds rests upon two prior truths.

Hebrews 10:19-22, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

How do we begin to embody the teaching of God's word this morning?

1. We must become convinced that there is indeed, "No condemnation" in Christ that is the teaching of verse 19-20.
2. We must understand that Christ Himself right now is praying for us and so aiding us in our calling. verse 21.

With this knowledge and so with this freedom, we are enable to take our focus off our ourselves, and place them on Christ's Kingdom. May God give us the grace to be found laboring when He comes!

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon and these notes can be found at [The Culture of the Church](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 10, 2007. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church