

The Family of God Growing Together

By Ginny Larsen

In the family there are different relationships where we form bonds, learn to love, learn to bear with another, learn to forgive, and learn many things about our relationship with God as His children. God shows us His love for us in many ways. He is the author of relationships and family. He gave us family for a purpose.

God gave us the husband and wife—a relationship said to be symbolic of Christ and the church (Ephesians 24-32). By this relationship, we have children and experience the tremendous bond of love between a parent and child, which is how God refers to us, as His children (John 3:1). As children we learned the love of our mothers and fathers, and we see the perfect love of our Heavenly Father. We also have sisters and brothers in a family and in God's family we have sisters and brothers—not through blood, but through His Spirit given to us, causing a new birth into His family. It is not the earthly family that teaches us so much of His love, because not all earthly family relationships are good. Some are corrupted so much by sin that they become bitter relationships. No, it is God's love that teaches us what a true family is and what love is, and His examples of the type of relationship He created through the family shows us the immense love He has for us in those different types. As we live in our families in step with the Spirit, we demonstrate His love to our family and others.

Following, is an older article I wrote on relationships in the body of Christ. We are learning to be a “family” in Christ together, and though flawed, we will be continually learning this throughout our sojourn here below. These are things we need to learn as believers in our earthly families as well as in our family in Christ. *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another”* (1 John 4:11). *“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother”* (1 John 4:20-21).

RELATIONSHIPS IN CHRIST

It would be helpful today to read the entire chapter of Colossians 3 for the background of what I would like to share today.

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:1-4).

“And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Colossians 3:10).

We are to put on the “new man”—the new image of Christ in us, which Christ has made us and which is “hidden in Him” (v. 3) to be revealed when we are with Him. Put that on now and put off all those things that cause aggravation in relationships—those fleshly things that bother us or clash in our personalities with one another, knowing that in our life in Heaven, those things will disappear as that image of Christ and love is pure and perfect between us all together in

Christ and from us to Him. Just as His love is perfect, our love for one another will be perfect without any fleshly differences. Personality clashes and flesh rubbing against flesh will then be gone. So as they happen now, be “*forbearing*” (v. 13), and put on what you see in Christ (v. 12) knowing that it is your portion. “*And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*” (Ephesians 4:24).

As we increase in the knowledge of God and the image of His Son within us, all the more we are able to “put on” that image in our daily walk. We learn to walk in what Christ has already made for us – that image which is hidden now in Him. We have been made a “new creation in Christ Jesus.” “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Though we are a “new creature” (and only that “in Christ”), we are yet learning to know Him and put that image on outwardly that He has put in us inwardly. We are yet growing in that. But as we are continually renewed in the knowledge of that image, we are more and more being outwardly conformed to it. We don’t learn to put on that image by looking *inward* and seeing if we find it there. No, it is “hidden in Christ,” and we must *look heavenward* for it. We must *fix our eyes on things above*, His redemption, His life, His finished work, and His attributes, learning of Him. The more we see Christ, the more His image is being formed in us. The more we live in that, the more our affections are on Him and what He is preparing for us. If our affections are on things here below and what they can do for us in our temporal lives, we live according to that, and guard those things. “*Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure*” (1 John 3:2-3).

This can only be by faith in what Christ alone has done. His finished work must be believed in and apprehended for oneself by faith, as we learn more of what He has done for us, in us, and saved us for, the more we are by faith enabled by the grace He alone gives, to walk in that new creation He has made us. Again, it is by faith. It is **His** work. We submit to and walk in that work. Unless we understand **His** work, and our position given “in Christ,” we will not be able to “put on Christ.” The “putting on” is under condition of what was first stated in v. 1: “being risen with Christ” (Colossians 3:1). We must see ourselves as now risen with Him positionally, because God, Who is outside of time, sees all things as finished in Christ, for He, “*even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*” (Ephesians 2:5-6).

He sees us there in the Heavenlies with Christ already. The rest of His instructions in this chapter are all based on this. And even as we put off our own fleshly things, and put on Christ in His loving others, we also need to see them as that new creation in Christ, also loved by Him. Therefore, we must be forbearing with them, even as Christ is with us in these bodies of death! We need to be merciful and gracious with our differences and irritations. Our brothers and sisters may not sin against us, but they may just rub us the wrong way in personality or likes or dislikes or scruples, etc. Should we avoid others in the body of Christ because of these things and cling to those who are more like us? No. We need to “put off” our own preferences and love as we are loved by God. We need to put on Christ in His love, not thinking of ourselves or our preferences for one over another, but of His love for each one. When we see each other in His love, we see each other very differently. Putting on His love, is putting on the “*bond of perfectness*” (Colossians 3:14b).

This is something I've been becoming more and more convicted of in my own life. Most of our friendships are formed because of mutual interests or needs. We tend to spend more time with the person who validates us in some way and agrees with us. We tend to avoid people who stretch us or make us feel uncomfortable in any way. What if God sees something you don't see? What if he sees Himself in you both and is wanting to use each of you in a relationship to help each other see the flesh for what it is, that we might put it off and embrace His image in each other. Sometimes it takes some work to do that. I have to ask myself, am I seeking relationships for myself, or am I allowing God to bring whatever relationships in my life He chooses for His purposes and not mine. Sometimes we "bear with" one another, as the Lord does us, and continue walking in that love, putting off ourselves, putting on Christ. Sometimes we are hurt by friends who don't reciprocate our feelings. We can't make people like us. We can't make people agree with us. But we can love them regardless.

Think of it – in Heaven there will be no favoritism among ourselves, no jealousy, and no slighting one another in favor of someone else's friendship, but there will be the bond of perfectness in our love for one another just as we are loved by Him. All of the sinful flesh will be done away with – all those things that we tend to do without realizing it because of our own flesh and it's comfort preferences, likes, and dislikes. We hurt one another without meaning to or realizing it because we prefer one over another in the body of Christ. We form "clicks." We leave someone out because we may not feel we have as much in common with that one or maybe they have a personality that is harder for us to warm up to. We can't help that in the flesh we are drawn to some more than others. All those things are done away with in Christ as we put on the "bond of perfectness" in His love. Those in this place look past all, and they love for Christ's purposes, not our own. They bear with little personality irritations and love the brethren as we are all in Christ. We are all His, and He has stamped His image in each of us. The freer we are of the love of self, the freer we are to love the unlovely, not looking to get something out of it. "*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful*" (Colossians 3:15).

If the "peace of God" is in our hearts, it comes from knowing He is in our hearts and has justified us and has put us "in Christ," removing all doubt of our eternal life in Him, then we are also able to be ruled by that peace with each other in the body of Christ, as a "family," not quarrelling with one another but understanding ourselves as all of His body, united under His headship. His peace acts as our "umpire" in all our relationships here. As true Believers we are not individuals with our own interests, but one body filled with His Spirit, growing together under Him, being builded together as a dwelling place for Him. Can He have any other dwelling place than perfect love?

"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:1-8).

There are so many things within ourselves that can separate us. There are so many differences of personalities, likes, dislikes, opinions, ways of doing every day things, etc. We

can let them cause hurt in the body of Christ and in some cases even divisions. We hold onto grudges and hurts. We side with one over another on issues that do not relate to eternity. It happens in families, it happens in friendships, it happens in churches. We are quick to speak up our opinion to put down someone else's instead of taking an interest in them and listening. We are quick to have the last word to make sure we are validated, disregarding the other. Do we always have to make sure we are heard? Have we really listened with interest in what the other is saying?

But we must "let this mind be in us that was in Christ." If He, the Son of God, could humble Himself taking on the form of flesh, taking the form of a servant, can we humble ourselves enough to serve one another? Can we allow God to use relationships He brings in our lives to serve Him rather than serving ourselves? We have the mistaken idea sometimes that God will only bring people into our lives that will be a strength and encouragement to us, so we don't allow others in. Sometimes we are called to be a strength and encouragement to others, and sometimes we're just called to love and bear with someone who is not so lovable, simply because they are His. He loves them and we are to love them no less. He sees their need for friendship, how hard it is in the natural for them to have that, and He is their friend. He wants to work in each of your lives in ways neither of you see.

I can't help but think of how drained the Lord must have gotten from the people around him, being God in the flesh, and knowing all He knew, yet putting up with sinful men with all their temperaments and self-serving attitudes. Some people drain you. If you ever have a hard time putting up with someone, just think of how much the Lord has put up with you! Should you do less toward your brother? "*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony*" (Colossians 3:12-14).

Above all – love—which is the bond of perfectness. This is what we are being perfected in, and ultimately will be perfect in love.

Abba, Father, enable us now and each day, more and more, as we gaze on things above to put on Christ in all His love. Amen.