

The Father's Good Pleasure

— *The church as the family of God* —

The revelation of the church as a family

The highest and the deepest matter in this entire universe is the church as the family of God. The reason for this is that the church as the family of God touches the good pleasure of the Father's desire and will (Eph. 1:4-5). Every father has a good pleasure. A father's good pleasure is his children and grandchildren. I have a good pleasure with my children, and now my grandchildren. They are all my good pleasure. Our new little granddaughter is our good pleasure. There's nothing that can so quickly change an atmosphere as just letting her come into the room. Just let her be there and our hearts are touched. Nothing satisfies, nothing warms and melts us, like the presence of our children. It's our good pleasure.

Although the church is revealed as the Body of Christ, the New Man, and the Bride of Christ, nothing touches the Father's heart like the church as His family. This is truly the good pleasure of His

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will.

The very nature of God's revelation of Himself is as Father. Indeed, the most prominent and significant revelation of God in the Bible is God as our Father. In this universe, our God is a Father, and He has a Father's heart and a Father's plan. He's a Father that desires a family. This desire touches the deepest chord in God. It is to speak about Him in terms of the good pleasure of His Father heart. That good pleasure and desire is to have a family.

In Ephesians 1:3, Paul breaks out with, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This brief utterance testifies to the highest and deepest pleasure in God — He's the Father of His Son. This Father-Son language dominates the pages of the New Testament. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Father's Son, His beloved Son. He's the Only Begotten Son and He's the Firstborn Son. As the Firstborn Son, He's the very Image for all of us to be conformed to. Indeed, He's declared to be the Firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29). That is, there are to be many in the Father's family just like the Firstborn Son. This touches the Father's heart.

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To know the church is to know the church as the family of God. It's the Father and the family. This is not a mere organization or something we join. Neither is it something made up by man's doing. The church as God's family is something begotten. This is something that has the Father's life and the Father's nature. We're the result of the divine life getting into us, to produce what? Not just disciples, not just believers, not just Christians, but children — children of God — sons of God, because God is our Father, with His Only-Begotten living in us. The inner fabric and structure of all the New Testament revelation about the church is permeated basically with the revelation of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been born again into the family of God, not "qualified for membership," but born. Born of the Spirit, born as children of God — that's the way we became a Christian. We became a Christian by being born of God. This birth is a family matter. We were born into a family. So, we are the Father's family in the deepest sense of that word. We're indwelt by "the God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:6). We're His family. Thus, the church is a

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family. It is this revelation of the church which touches the Father's good pleasure and reveals the highest and deepest meaning of the universe.

The Father's good pleasure in eternity past

The church as a family reveals the Father's good pleasure in eternity past. Ephesians 1:3-4 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ, according as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blemish before Him [in His presence], in love." Then verse 5 says, "Having predestinated us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." It's not the harshness and sternness of His will, but the good pleasure of His will — that which is closest to His heart. This will expresses His Father heart for sonship, which simply means He desires a family.

Considering the church as the family of God brings us back into the whole scenery of eternity past and reveals why God wanted a universe. Why

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did He create the heavens and the earth? Why is there a universe? Why are there billions of light years? Why is there plant life? Why is there animal life? Why are there human beings? Why are we here on this earth? What is the meaning of it all? Who can solve the mystery of the universe? The one unique answer to all these questions is simply that the Father wanted a family. He wanted a family of children like His Only-Begotten Son. He wanted many sons that could share in and enjoy the flow of love existing between Him and His Firstborn Son.

The universe is the stage. Why? Because the Father, in His desire and good pleasure, wanted a family. He wanted the family life with many sons. And that is synonymous with the church life. When we touch the genuine church life today, it's not merely a good feeling we experience, or merely a happy mood. We're so deeply satisfied and joyful, because we have echoed the deepest heart strings in the universe. God is our Father, and we're living in the purpose for which He has created us. Nothing is deeper and higher and more satisfying in this whole universe and in human life than to know that I'm a member of the family and

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I'm enjoying the Father in the family, with His blessed Only Begotten, Firstborn Son. When brothers and sisters touch the reality of the church life, the utterance that most often flows out in their testimonies is not, "I found the church" or "I'm in the Body" or "I'm in the new man." What comes out, without any coaxing or teaching, is "I'm home! I've found my family!" This means that the church, properly speaking, is the reality of the family of God.

When we're together as the church and people are being added to the church, when the family is growing and love is flowing between the members, this answers the meaning of the entire universe — the good pleasure of the Father's will. He has predestinated us unto sonship through Jesus Christ, directly to Himself, in order that every one of us as children would have a direct relationship with Him, having Him in our hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Gal. 4:6). This is the deep significance of the church as the family of God.

In the church He leads the praise. Hebrews 2:12 is quoting Jesus Himself: "In the midst of the church, I will sing hymns of praise unto You." "I'm going to sing praises in the midst of the

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church, Father. And that means I'm going to take up the church into Myself. I'm going to gather up the church as My very Body, and I'm going to sing praise to You, Father, in the midst of the church." So, when we're singing and worshipping, it's really Jesus in all of us, singing in our singing and crying Abba in our Abbas. He's worshipping in our worshipping. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." So, it's the Lord Himself with us. Nothing touches His heart so much as this reality of the church. The church life as the Father's family spans from eternity past to eternity future and aligns us with God's plan for the universe.

For years we may have thought that our starting point as Christians was redemption. However, redemption is not the starting point in God's thought. Rather, redemption is the recovery of man — to reconcile man to God, bringing him back to what he was originally made for. Thus, the Father's heart, with the good pleasure of His will to have a corporate family, also becomes our starting point.

We must see redemption in its true context. Redemption was part of the eternal covenant

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between the Father and the Son (Eph. 1:3-7; Heb. 13:20-21). In the event that anything happened to God's chosen and predestinated ones, the Son had covenanted with the Father to lay His life down and to shed His blood that not one of the elect would be lost, but that all would be raised up on the last day (John 6:39-40). Thus, redemption was accomplished in order that the Father could continue working out the good pleasure of His will for sonship.

This leads us into the matter of the kingdom of God, which must also be understood in the context of the Father's good pleasure being fulfilled. The kingdom is identified in Colossians 1:13 as "the kingdom of the Son of His love." That's the kind of kingdom it is — not just a kingdom of ruling and reigning and the putting down of all the enemies. The kingdom focused in the Son of His love is the kingdom of the Father's good pleasure with His chosen and redeemed family. At the end of the Son's thousand-year reign, He will turn over the kingdom to the Father for the Father's good pleasure in eternity future (1 Cor. 15:24-28). Then the universe will be fully recovered to its original purpose — the purpose from which it

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sprung and for which it was designed and created. And that purpose was the good pleasure of the Father's will in eternity past.

In eternity future, the Father's good pleasure with His family will be expressed in the holy city, the New Jerusalem, that is, all the redeemed and chosen ones as the habitation of God: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3). So we can see that the Father's good pleasure, which He purposed in eternity past, is consummated in eternity future with His dwelling place and home with man.

The goal of the Son's finished work

Now that we've seen that the Father's good pleasure in eternity past was to have the church as His family, we also need to see that the goal of the Son's finished work was to produce the Father's family. We all are familiar with the Lord's utterance from the cross in John 19:30, which says, "When Jesus then had taken the vinegar, He said, It is finished. And He bowed His head and gave up

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the spirit.” What was finished? First of all, the word “finished” implies He had been working. He had been working to carry out the Father’s will and heart’s desire, with all of what that meant. He declared, “It is finished.” That meant He had completed His work and reached the goal in His earthly ministry. His purpose of going to the cross to bear our sins, to accomplish redemption, and to create in Himself one new man was completed according to Ephesians 2:13-16. The goal in the Lord’s crucifixion was reached. The mission of the Son in accomplishing the Father’s will was completed.

Now we need to take a closer look at the scene around the cross and consider the deep significance of the Lord’s utterance, “It is finished.” Just stand there for a moment, around the cross. There He is, suspended there on the cross, speaking His last words — “It is finished.” Just prior to this we read John 19:25, which says, “Now there were standing by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary of Magdala. Then Jesus, seeing His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, said to His mother, Woman, behold,

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your son. Then He said to the disciple, Behold, your mother. And from that hour the disciple took her into His own home.” Then verse 28 says, “After this, [please note —“after this”] Jesus, knowing that all things had now been accomplished...” The Greek word for “accomplished” here is the same word that in verse 30 is translated “finished.” Although most Bible versions translate it “accomplished,” it’s the identical Greek verb for “finished.” Every single word the Lord spoke on the cross revealed volumes of the divine heart, if only we knew what was in the divine heart.

When the Lord turned to the apostle John, the disciple whom He loved who was standing by, He told him to behold his mother. Then John took her from that hour into his home. It was at this point that Jesus knew everything was accomplished or finished. When He spoke of Mary becoming the spiritual mother of John, He was revealing the Father’s good pleasure of securing a family through His death on the cross. In other words, the Lord could finally say, “It is finished,” in the context of establishing relationships in the spiritual family between the disciples.

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This reveals that the ultimate goal of the Lord's death on the cross was to produce the family of God. Through the Lord's death on the cross, we're forgiven, we're redeemed, we're reconciled, and we're bought with a price. Why? The answer to this is not in the realm of merely meeting our need, but of satisfying the Father's good pleasure.

The Son's perception of the real family

The Son's perception of the real family is found in Matthew 12:46-50: "While He was still speaking to the people, behold, His mother and His brothers stood outside, asking to speak to Him. And someone said to Him, Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak to You. But He replied to the man who told Him, 'Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?' And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He 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.' " Luke 8:21 adds, "My mother and My brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

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Thus, before the Lord spoke the words from the cross related to the family, He had already established the reality of the spiritual family. The real family are the children of God — brothers and sisters in the Lord, spiritual fathers and spiritual mothers, babes in the Lord, young men and children, begotten of the Father, who constitute the church. Of course, this often includes our family according to the flesh, as it did the Lord's own mother.

The last words of the Lord on the cross reveal the goal of His whole mission. He realized His work had been accomplished. It was all finished. He had reached the goal. Then, He speaks to John to take Mary as his mother — “Behold, your mother!” Mary was now to be John's spiritual mother. The beginning of the family of God was emerging — John and Mary and all the brothers and sisters. Here, in this little scene around the cross, we touch the Father's heart from eternity past to eternity future. The goal was reached in His Son's death on the cross — producing the real family.

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The cross producing the family

Ephesians chapter two confirms this same truth, revealing to us that on the cross the Lord Jesus broke down all the barriers and destroyed all the ordinances. This He did in order that He might create in Himself one new man. He reconciled us to God through His death. Now, all of us that were in the natural realm, in our old relationships, can have direct access to the Father in one spirit, through Him. So we are no longer strangers and sojourners, but fellowcitizens and members of the family or household of God. This is Ephesians 2:19, and it follows Ephesians 2:14-18, which tells us about what He did on the cross. He broke down the barriers and made one Body, and this issues in us being in the reality of the family together, touching the spirit, coming to the Father, so that we are no longer strangers and sojourners.

Unfortunately, the English word “sojourner,” doesn’t mean that much to us. But the Greek meaning makes it very clear — “away from home.” “Sojourner” simply means “away from home.” Now in the church as the family of God, we’re no longer sojourners. We’re no longer away

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from home. We've found home. We've found the family. We've found the household of God in spirit, because when we touch the realm of the spirit, it transmits to us what He did on the cross. What He did there was not only to forgive us, but also to make us a member of His family.

When the Lord said, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places" (John 14:2), He meant that we are all dwelling places in the Father's house. You're a dwelling place and I'm a dwelling place. Through His death and resurrection,

He made us dwelling places in the Father's house. The "place" the Lord was going to prepare for us was not just something physical, as a place or an abode outside of us. Rather, through His death and resurrection, He made us to be the places or abodes in the Father's house. The church as the family of God is the Father's house with all the many abodes or dwellings which we are. So we could see, the goal of the Son's work on the cross was to produce the church as the family of God.

The objective of the Spirit's indwelling

The good pleasure of the Father's will is to

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have the church as His family. The goal of the Son's finished work was to produce the church as the Father's family. Then, we need to see that the objective of the Spirit's indwelling is to make real to us the family life in the Father's house.

In John chapter fourteen the Lord revealed that the purpose of His crucifixion and resurrection was to make us the many abodes in the Father's house. He also revealed in that chapter that the objective of the Spirit's indwelling was not to leave us as orphans. In John 14:16-18, He said, "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." These verses reveal that the coming of the Spirit is the same as the coming of the Lord Jesus to us. And the objective of the Spirit's coming is not to leave us orphans. This means you will not be without a family. Even the Spirit's objective and goal is related to the family of God — "I will not leave you orphans."

The church is the family of God. We're born

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into it with the divine nature and life indwelling us. We're in the church as a most privileged and dignified person, because out of this whole universe we're existing as members of the family of God. What a privilege! Hallelujah! What dignity, that I belong to this family! Otherwise, we're orphan Christians, trying to make it on our own, trying to be victorious. We must see that our victorious supply of the Spirit is properly in the context of the brothers and the sisters with the family church life, where we are not left as orphans.

Psalm 68 is a glorious Psalm about the Lord's victory over the enemy. It's all about God's economy, from beginning to end. Beginning with verses 4-6, it says, "Sing to God, sing praises to His name. Extol Him who rides on the clouds. By His name YAH, and rejoice before Him. A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families. He brings out those who are bound into prosperity, but the rebellious dwell in a dry land."

Many of us here in the church life have a deep appreciation for a sister who was among us a few years ago. She had been with us for several years.

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She served with us. She cared for us. She served faithfully in the Lord's work with us day and night. She loved the Lord and was a real fragrance of Christ. Then the Lord took her. Her testimony was very touching concerning the church as the family of God. When she first came into the church life, God gave her a word, and it was the word in Psalm 68:6, that God sets the solitary in families. She had a personal revelation of being set into the church as God's family. Those of us who knew her can testify that the church life was truly her real family. This kind of experience touches the heart strings of God because the church as His family is His good pleasure.

Consider the divine economy of the Godhead — of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Father's good pleasure in eternity past was the family. The Son's goal in His work on the cross consummated with establishing the spiritual family among His disciples. And then the Holy Spirit, coming as the Lord Himself, said, "I will not leave you orphans." So, we're not orphans, and we're not solitary. We are in the family. Praise the Lord!

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The way to have the family life

Finally, the way to have the reality of the family life in the church is revealed in Romans 8:28-29: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers.”

Here we could see, there's only one way to experience the family life, and that is to be the brothers and sisters in the family who are allowing all things in our lives to work together for good. And the way that happens is by loving Him — just loving Him. Through all of our environmental circumstances, we just say, “Lord, I love You.” Even a dear sister among us who lost her son prayed this way in the church meeting with deep love and thanksgiving to God — “You do all things well. Thank You, Lord Jesus! Thank You, Lord Jesus!” What does such a prayer do in a person's life? It conforms us to the image of Christ. That means God's life so saturates our vessels that we are increasingly changed into His

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likeness.

We must see that under God's sovereignty, our problems and dispositions, including our weaknesses, are not a mistake or accident. The hairs on our head are all numbered, and even a sparrow is not forgotten before God (Luke 12:6-7). There's not one single thing that has happened in our environment that is apart from God's sovereign arrangement for our good. But what do we do with it? How do we respond to God in our environments? There's only one way to be a person in the reality of the family church life — keep loving God. Tell Him you love Him. Say to Him, "I still love You, Lord, despite how I feel at the moment."

When you and I take hold of our circumstances and turn them into opportunities to love God, we're not only being individually conformed to the image of His Son, but we're also corporately expressing the family life of the many brothers — many brothers who are praising and worshipping Him for His Fatherly wisdom over us. Hallelujah! He's the Father of our spirits, lovingly caring for us, even when He disciplines and scourges us as sons (Heb. 12:5-11). So, don't

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despise any suffering that you pass through in your life. Let it work together for good. This is the way to have the church life as the Father's good pleasure, with His expression in His family.

In the process of being conformed to the image of the Father's Firstborn Son, all of us are becoming sweeter and more amiable and agreeable children of God. What a blessedness when the church life becomes a full reproduction of Christ in the lives of the many brothers. Oh, what a glorious church this is — the church as the family of God! Amen.

— *Bill Freeman*