

Gavin Orton. 2nd November 2008 Galatians 6:10

It's all in the blood

Family background:

Come from small family – contact only really with immediate relatives – mother, father, brothers, sisters and grand parents. All live in/around Melton... ..family the other side of Leicester – too far away!

Christiana's family background – very different! Greek and Nigerian families... ..know no limit and really breaks the definition of the extended family. Christiana has aunts and uncles coming out of her ears. Their family is spread all over the world.

Their understanding of 'family' is not the same way as the typical British family is.

Through our marriage we are now one family – very different but we are now one family.

Similar situation for the church – we are a variety of people with different backgrounds experiences and cultures yet we have been brought together as one family – not through marriage, but through the blood of Christ.

Today we are looking more closely at our relationship to those around us, in particular other Christians.

The Bible has a lot to say about the church and the people of God. But we're going to be using the following verse:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers
Gal 6:10

I think as we read this, the first thing that would jump out to most people and make them think is:

...let us do good to all people...

First off, that's a pretty tall order to meet when we look at it on its own. I could stand here for the next 30min giving all kinds of ideas, suggestions, tips and what not into how we can go out and do this... and not even cover 1% of how we could do good to all people ...but I'm not (well there might be a bit of that)

What I'd like us to focus on is the bit that comes at the end:

...family of believers

I think that if we have a deeper understanding of what this means, a firmer grasp on what this means to us – all of us – to be a family of believers then, hopefully, the first bit about doing good to all people will become natural and we will be doing it without even thinking about it!

If you're here this morning and you are not a Christian – you're probably thinking:

Hmmm, this chap is going to be talking about how Christians relate to one another and is something that doesn't relate to me.

Well, my question to you would be:

Do you have a family? Do you have a mother? A father? brothers or sisters? I am 100% certain your answer would be "Yes". I'll even as far to bet this 50p that I'm right! If you have any relationship with anyone... well, then this morning's talk is also for you.

Even more than that, I'll be talking about how relationships between Christian can affect you.

One of the most fundamental aspects of the human race is we are social beings who relate to one another constantly! The thing is relationships matter.

Relationships Matter

In a survey of British homes, when asked openly "What things are important in people's lives?"

The majority of people answered "family and relatives". This is not that surprising.

And yet many of us, whether your Christian or not, can often act as though relationships are something that need to be squeezed into our schedule. We can talk about finding time for our children or husband or wife. Or we make time for people in our hectic busy lives. It gives the impression that maintaining of relationships is just another task.

But that is not how God sees relationships – to him relationships are crucial and are what life is all about.

4 of the 10 commandments talk about our relationship with God. The other 6 deal with our relationship to others – all ten are about relationships!

TEN COMMANDMENTS

You might say, well that was the OT and part of the Law. Well, when Jesus was asked which is the greatest commandment, he said:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’
Matt 22: 37-39

Relationships matter.

Rick Warren puts it this way:

When people are on their death bed, in their final moments, he has never heard anyone say “Bring me my diplomas, I want to look at them one more time. Show me my awards, my medals, that gold watch I was given”. When life on earth is ending, people don’t surround themselves with objects. What they want around them are people – people they have loved and had relationships with.

It’s important that we realise the value of relationships now – today!

The great thing is, that every relationship we have is different.

We are not Borg!

Here comes a bit of the geek in me!

I used watch Star trek when I was younger and one of the big stories that kept coming up in the show was that of the Borg.

The Borg are an amalgam of cybernetically enhanced humanoid drones of multiple species, organized as an inter-connected collective with a hive mind, inhabiting a vast region of space with many planets and ships.

Los Borg son humanoides de diversas razas que combinan lo sintético con lo orgánico, dándoles mejores capacidades mentales y físicas. Las mentes de todos los Borg están conectadas por los implantes corticales a una colmena, una mente colectiva, orquestadas por la reina Borg, quien no permite la individualidad y los sentimientos personales de sus súbditos o drones; lo que piensa un Borg lo comparte con todos los Borg de la colmena

In simple terms: they took control of everything and made it their own. There was no individual – they shared one mind. Diversity was not permitted. When they came into contact with different aliens, they ‘assimilated’ them – basically turned them into more Borg.

Whether you are a Christian or Muslim, British or Kurdish, man or woman, white or black, tall or short, young or old, rich or poor, strong or weak one thing is that we are not, and that is Borg! No one human being is the same as another.

God created diversity! God loves diversity! God brought diversity together in creation!

Just take a look around the world in which we live in – the richness of diversity is everywhere. No more so than in us.

When I look at my family, each and everyone is different – ok, we may look similar, but there is so much in us that is different – our personalities and characteristics, our opinions and beliefs, the way we dress, the food we like, the deodorant we buy, the style of our hair, our dreams our aspirations... ..I could go on. But one fact remains – we are family. Nothing I can do or say will change that fact.

Some of you who have known me for a while, know that I recently changed my surname. When I was younger my mum remarried and changed my surname from 'Orton' to 'Stanley'. Now, I have since changed it back to 'Orton' but whilst I was known as Gavin Stanley – my dad, was still my dad. The changing of my name did not alter that one bit.

In fact, here's my Birth Certificate to show that – recorded as Gavin Carl Orton.

But even if the best fraudster in the world changed this document to say Gavin Carl Stanley – the truth is the very fabric of my body, the DNA in my body is unique to my family and despite all of our differences or name changes – we are still family.

God created that diversity in my family... ..and he made that relationship permanent.

It's the same in God's family of believers. Take a look around us here today – I know it's not a particularly British thing to do, but just look around at each other.

We're all different – and that is the same across the globe. Christians are worshipping God all over the world today – in different languages, buildings, musical styles – and yet in all of these differences, one thing remains that connects us all:

There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and in all
Eph 4:4-5

We share the same hope. We have the same Lord, faith and baptism. We have the same Father who reigns above the entire universe, a Father whose hand has created everything that we see and are – right down to our DNA.

But as humans we tried to change that – since Adam and Eve took the first bite from the apple, man has tried to turn its back on God and deny His sovereignty. That sin broke our relationship with God. We were separated from God and because He is Holy and perfect and good and true, we could not know Him.

But God desired a relationship with us. God loves relationships.

Throughout the OT, God tried to make away for His people to be in relationship with Him. But as we know, that didn't work. Man made the Law of God a burden for all to carry and so they turned other ways and sought satisfaction through other means – this again caused separation between God and His people.

But God still desired a relationship with us. God still loves relationships.

And so, He did everything He could to ensure that that relationship was established for all time:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

Even though we turned our backs on God, even though didn't want to listen, even though we became selfish and didn't care about Him or what he said – God loved the world so much, he sent his one and only Son to the world to not only show us the way, but to pay the greatest cost – his blood for our sin. His blood for our wrongs. His blood for our selfishness.

The moment I became a Christian will be one of the most memorable moments of my life.

Praying in my study bedroom – and unsure as to whether to make the commitment or not.

I asked God: "If you exist, why now?"

His response "I have always been there."

This truth overwhelmed me, as He said those words to me I was overcome with a great sense of His love for me as my Father, in the fact that throughout my entire life I had turned away from him, time after time after time, and yet through all of that, He stayed with me, He protected me, He cared for me, He blessed me, He loved me.

And it's the same for you.

God loves you so much He said "Yes, I will send my one and only Son so that I can be your Father and you will be my child"

The Blood of Christ

It is through the blood of Christ that God is our Father.

It is the blood of Christ that we have been brought together.

Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ... you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household
Eph 2:13-19

As soon as I made that commitment to God – I became a fellow citizen of God's people – I was welcomed into His household. The thing that hit me following the commitment – was that I wasn't alone. I all of a sudden became aware of other Christians around me – at university, in the CU. I became aware that night; I had become part of a whole new and exciting family with God as our father!

Christians I met for the first time – where as normally they would have just been someone I had just met, as soon as I mentioned that I had recently become a Christian, became brothers and sisters.

I can remember talking through my experiences of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit with new Christian friends and they were grinning back at me with huge smiles – filled with love and knowledge of precisely what I was saying – they experience the same!

Christ united us together. We had a relationship with the same God.

In the early church this bringing together of all people was also a revolutionary change.

Before Jesus came to unite all of God's people, it was the Jews who were exclusively considered God's people. The Jews believed that their special relationship with God was inherited – through the family bloodline – and their family line could be traced back through the years to demonstrate how they were descendants of Abraham.

This lineage was something that could not be changed or altered. It was given through birth. But when Jesus came, he changed all of that!

Jesus came to bring the fullness of the good news to all people – not just the Jewish.

His blood was the bloodline that created the relationship to God the father.

Jesus opened the door to everyone.

From that point on, anyone could become a member of God's family – regardless of the family heritage, regardless of their background, regardless of their situation, political views and social upbringing.

What mattered was that they believed in Jesus Christ, placed their faith in him, loved him and obeyed him.

If they did this, then Jesus' heritage became theirs, Jesus' history became theirs, Jesus' sinless spotless life became theirs, the relationship Jesus had with God the Father became theirs:

"If you love me, you will obey what I command... ..Because I live, you will also live. On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.
John 14:15-21

The effect that this had was that people from diverse backgrounds were brought together under one roof. Masters and slaves, Jews and gentiles, men and women all became Sons of God through their faith in Jesus Christ.

The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

Unlike the Borg, and very much like every family, differences can be good, bad and even ugly. These differences can become issues. Family life is not always good; sometimes it can be bad and sometimes even ugly.

This is the same in the family of God - when we forget that we are united through Christ.

Earlier on in the letter to the Galatians, Paul talks of the difference within the family of believers but that even:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither a Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.
Gal 3: 26-29

We must remember that we are not perfect. We are human and sin can cause us to become proud and arrogant, selfish and impatient, bitter and unkind towards one another through differences, disputes or disagreements. We must remember that we are united in Christ. These disputes can affect the whole family. The church is often referred to as the body of Christ.

God has combined the members of the body... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it, if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it
1 Cor 12:24-26

Paul was aware of conflicts within the early Church. Many of Paul's letters offer advice and guide the young churches in how to act in situations of conflict. The fact was that people who normally would not be seen in the same room with one another were all of a sudden sharing communion.

How were these Christians supposed to respond to differences when, for generations, there had been separation and disagreement?

Paul knew the church in Ephesus when he wrote to Timothy, was bringing in a wide number of new Christians from a variety of backgrounds. Ephesus was the most important city in western Asia Minor (Turkey) and with its port, it became a commercial centre attracting people from all over the known world – it was a bustling city of different backgrounds, religions and cultures.

How then, was such a diverse range of people meant to relate to one another?

One thing in common with them, as with anyone, was that they would have all had a family – fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters back home. The new believers and growing Church were to relate to each other as they relate to their families – especially in times of conflict and disagreement.

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.
1 Tim 5: 1-2

Further more, he said that they should:

Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
Eph 4:2-3

This is how we should be with one another today – nothing has changed. We should see older men as our fathers and younger men as brothers, older women as our mothers and young women as our sisters. To all of these, we should be humble, gentle, patient – bearing with one another in times of difficulty with love.

The purpose of this is to maintain unity, which helps to create a healthy body, a healthy family of God.

When this is happening – the effects can be astounding and amazing – not only within the family but more outside of it...

We're contagious

The opening of the God's family to all people who accepted, loved and followed Jesus Christ in the first century caused issues not only within the Church but also in the broader social, political and economic aspects – the truth that all people could become equal and a member of the family of God through Jesus Christ changed the world.

In the first century, the known world was ruled by Roman Empire, which was ruled by a string of emperors called the Caesar. Now Caesars believed that they were sent by gods to renew creation and as such they expected all of creation to worship them. One of Caesar Augustus' favourite slogans were:

"There is no other name under heaven by which men can be saved than that of Caesar."

Or

"Caesar is Lord"

It's also interesting to know that cities that acknowledged Caesar as lord was called an *ekklesia*.

If you were a citizen of the Roman Empire – you were pretty important, as you were a member to the most powerful kingdom ever. The whole Roman society was ranked and ordered. Roman citizens were higher up than non-Roman citizens; men were higher than women, slave owners and those who were free were more important than slaves. Everybody had a place in the hierarchy.

Now all this was to change...

Here was a small movement group that followed Jesus that exploded in a small ethnic minority group in a corner of the empire. This group was claiming that their leader had announced the arrival of the kingdom of God, had been crucified and had risen again from the dead and appeared to his followers.

Further more, one of the favourite slogans of the group were:

"There is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved than that of Jesus"

and

"Jesus is Lord"

Can you imagine what the Romans were thinking? – If Jesus is Lord... ...who is Caesar?

Further more, the early church were calling their gatherings “Ekklesias”, which is the word that we now translate in English as Church.

This combined with the fact that they were saying that, through Jesus Christ, all were equal began to through the entire Roman empire into question – and rightly so.

The family of believers began to grow and even more so when their actions began to reflect on of the key messages of Christ.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another...”

The early Christians began to care for one another; love one another – the way in which people where treated did not depend upon their history, their background or the status. They were welcomed as brothers and sisters through their faith in Jesus Christ.

They began to act as though they were a family!

And this was witnessed by unbelievers – who were shocked and in amazement. But this was the purpose of the new command of Jesus – so that people could witness the kingdom of God here on earth in its true working:

“...By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
John 13:34-35

Jesus was saying that, greater than any theological argument, our greatest way of demonstrating the kingdom of God was through our love for each other.

They were reclaiming and restablising the truth of God’s vision for this world and they were living out what this meant in their daily lives:

They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... ...All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all people.
Acts 2:42-47

All the believers were one in heart and mind... ...they shared everything they had...
...much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them.
Acts 4:32-34

The family of believers were caring and loving one another and reflecting what the Kingdom of God would be like to the world!

And this continued and grew and spread across the Roman Empire.

So much so that one Roman Emperor Julian in the 4th Century wrote to one of the high priest in Galatia complaining that:

“The Galileans support not only their poor but ours as well; everyone can see that our people lack aid from us”

This letter was sent to the same area where Paul had written to 300 years earlier saying:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers
Gal 6:10

The Galatians obviously took this on board and passed the heart of the doing good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers, onto the next generation and on and on.

And now it's here with us today!

Can you imagine Martin receiving a letter from Gordon Brown complaining that in this current credit crunch and recession the crown church is making the government look bad because we're providing for those who are not being provided for by the state – paying for people's mortgages that have gone into arrears, buying a tank full of petrol so that they can go to work, buying the weekly groceries...

Those who believe in Jesus Christ, those who have faith in Him, those who love Him and obey Him belong to His church – belong to his family of believers. We are part of that family!

As we look around the area we live in, our city, our country, it is obvious that we, the family of God, are like the early Christians, a minority. We are different the secular culture we live in

At work I am the only Christian, in my family back home, I am the only Christian, to some of my friends, I am the only Christian they know – but I am not alone – I have all of you. Together we are a family.

The purpose of the first century family of believers was to worship God and love one another. This reflects and demonstrates to the entire world what the true kingdom of God is like.

That purpose hasn't changed.

The purpose of the Church today is just as it was then – to reflect and demonstrate the unchanging goodness of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus came to earth to show the way – he established the Church and then commissioned us to carry this on.

The church doesn't exist for itself – it exists to serve the world. God blesses the people of the world through the church.

The church is about sharing the blessings of God – about sharing with one another and sharing with those around us - Christians and non-Christians, rich and poor, British and Kurdish, men and women, old and young.

I'm saying all of this, and you know what, I'm thinking:

Man this is a tall order!

To selflessly serve those around us – really takes everything a person has. But then Jesus never said that he offered the easy way – he offered the narrow way but it is the right way!

On our own, yes it is a tall order. And I know for certain that if it was all up to me... ..well, then we're lost. But thankfully it's not just about me. It's about us.

Jesus knew that it would not be easy, and that's why he created the church - a family of believers. This life is meant to be shared together.

Like in any family, it's not all plain sailing. There are hard times, some really hard times. But we have a family around us who we can turn to and say – “this is hard – I need help”

We can share our burdens and worries, just as if we went to our family and know that they would be there with us so that we are not alone. The family of believers, the church, is the same.

I just want you to look around again at each other.

Think of all the experiences we've been through, all the stories we've shared, all of the joys and the worries, all of the defeats and all of the success. The meals we've shared, the parties we've gone to. The coffee's we've drunk together. The late nights talking and the early mornings praying. Think of the people who are not here with us today – those who have moved away but are still part of the family.

For example last week – eating together – a group of us adults was sat in a circle. Esther came and sat with us – of her own accord and chatted to everyone as though they were her older brothers and sisters. We told jokes, talked about the food, we saved each other's seats when we went to get more food.

I think we can learn a lot from the children in our family here. If you look at how the children relate to their peers and those older than them as fathers, mothers,

brothers and sisters. Look at how they take care and are soft and gentle with the children who are younger than them – that is the sign of a family of believers that is reflecting the true likeness of the Kingdom of God.

I am always amazed and inspired by the children in the crown. In how they simply, unknowingly reflect the character of God – I think we can learn a lot from them.

We've shared those times together.

We're here today together.

We'll be together tomorrow and in eternity.

Christ has brought us together from all areas of the world, all kinds of backgrounds, all forms of experiences. We are a united family of believers.

In our differences we are united under one name, one faith, one hope and one Lord.

We are united in the blood of Christ.

We're brothers and sisters in Christ!

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Gal 6:10