

## Brethren

In addition to the terms disciples, believers, and saints, Christians are also called brethren. The term brethren refers to the family relationship between God our Father, Christ our brother, and fellow members of the body of Christ. Members of the church are adopted children of God by the adoption process He has described in His Word. Along with His only begotten Son, He has adopted us as His children and made us heirs together with Christ of an eternal residence in His Glory. With God as our Father, the risen savior as our brother, and the Holy Spirit as our guide, we are one, extensive family (Romans 8:14-17).

The several elements within Israel were called brethren, brother, and sister. There were the children of a couple that are brother and sister, either singular or plural, as in 2 Samuel 13:20. In today's shortened speech pattern, we call them siblings. But referred to together, they are called brethren. Members of a family group, including uncles, aunts, cousins, and even servants, all working together, are brethren. Each member of a tribe referred to members of their respective tribe as brethren. Also, a collection or group gathered from one or more of the tribes within Israel as in 2 Chronicles 28:8. All Israel, all tribes collectively, were and are referred to as brethren as in Deuteronomy 18:18 KJV & NKJV, translated countrymen in NASV.

Paul's writings refer to the descendants of Jacob, Israel, and members of the church as his brethren. For Israel, he calls them *"my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh"* (Romans 9:3-5). For the church, he pleads for the unity and peace and harmony in Christ. *"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"* (1 Corinthians 1:10). Without unity in doctrine with Christ, there cannot be a family relationship. *"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God"* (Hebrews 3:12).

In lessons from the Old Testament, we learn of the terrible consequences of forgetting the family relationship. (Amos 1:9) tells of the punishment to come upon Tyre because they forgot the contract of a brother with Edom. (Zechariah 11:14) describes the breaking of the bond of brotherhood between Judah and Israel so that the Assyrians could destroy the Northern Kingdom. Almost all new Testament writers remind us of our responsibilities as brethren, members of God's family, to work together, guided by the gospel of Christ, caring for each other and helping each other remain faithful.

The teachings of Jesus often use nature to illustrate the close family relationship between Christ and His sanctified saints. The illustration of the vine and branches recorded in John 15:1-8 is an example. Jesus said, *"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."* Jesus also said, *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit."* The close association of Christ to the members of His church is shown by the branches being attached to and drawing strength from the vine. An unproductive branch can be taken away, disinherited as a family member. Romans chapter 11 speaks of the adopted children of God, added to the vine, as being *"grafted in among them and became partaker with them."* Paul writes of the planned adoption into God's family. *"He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will"* (Ephesians 1:5).

Peter refers to the brethren in the church as *"A spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 2:5). And Paul stresses the need to keep the sanctified family of God pure and undefiled as he writes to the church in Corinth. *"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord. 'and do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' Says the Lord Almighty"* (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).