

Not Ashamed to Call Us Family

Hebrews 2:10-18 (NIV)

¹⁰ In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹ Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. ¹² He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." ¹³ And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." ¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Christmas is a great time for family. Maybe you still have visitors with you that came out for Christmas. Maybe you have already said your goodbyes, drove them to the airport, and watched them head back home. You loved seeing them. You are so glad they came out to be with you. But there is something to be said about it being time to go. After a while, the stress of hosting starts to get to you. You want things to return back to normal but at the same time you don't really want your family to leave. And then there are times when you really do just want a particular family member to leave.

There always is that one person, that one relative, who stresses you out like none other. Every time they open their mouth, you have a faint look of horror because you don't know what they are going to say. As soon as the words come out, you clench your jaw so as to not say something careless or spiteful or hurtful or anger-filled. Will they say something insensitive? Will they insult you and your hospitality? Will they comment on your weight? On the cleanliness of your house? Will they tell you how to parent, how to fix all your problems? Will they make comments to dig under your skin, to purposefully push your buttons because they know that they can? Are they the person who can't wait to have a soapbox for their worldview to be displayed, to make political statements that are asking for a fight? Are they waiting for that opportune moment to put down your Christian beliefs?

Maybe there is something even darker with this familial relation, sins that they have committed that you never want to utter to anyone. Maybe this person has a history with alcoholism, drugs, crime. Maybe they are abusive. It's a person that you want to stay away from. A person like this not only tries your patience and stretches your hospitality to the max, you are quite frankly ashamed to call them family. They have messed up so bad. They treat you so poorly that you wish you weren't related to this person. But you are.

On Christmas Day, we celebrated the fact that the little Christ Child came into the world and gave us light. He gave us the right, the power, "to become children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (John 1:12-13) The Christ Child's coming into the world changed us. He adopted us into his family, chased away the darkness of my sins. This happened when he caused us to believe in his name as our Savior, either when we heard it for the first time or when we had all our sins washed away in baptism, making us holy.

As a member of God's family, have we ever become that family member that everyone is ashamed of? For the Hebrews, the original recipients of this letter, they called themselves Christians, yet they were not model Christians. They called themselves Christians while at the same time they worshiped angels. Some maintained that Moses was a bigger and better prophet than Jesus. Some thought that the old way of doing things, of having a high priest who offered sacrifices day after day, was the way to continue, the true way to worship God, not this simple trusting in Jesus as the end all and be all of their faith. The Hebrews elevated so many other things over God. Christ was not the center of their lives. By doing these things, they brought shame to the name "Christian."

Although we may not hold up angels, Moses, or high priests as the end all and be all of what we believe, do we ever bring shame to God? We call ourselves Christians, but is Jesus Christ our focal point every day of our lives throughout the year or is Jesus to us more of a Sunday thing or a Christmas thing? Do we say things like, "Don't take the Christ out of Christmas," but then make the focal point of Christmas about something other than Christ such as the gifts that we bought, the family get together we have annually, or taking time off from the normal routine of life?

We call ourselves Christian, but are we model Christians? Is Christ the first place we turn at all times? Through every sickness or hospital visit, every distress or hardship, every difficult situation or problem ahead, through every tear we shed and every moment when we feel depressed, is Christ the first place we turn and continue to turn to while our lives are in crisis or do we turn elsewhere? Whenever we are delivered from our problems, whenever we get to celebrate happy moments in life, when we realize that we have been blessed, when things are going well, is Christ the first place we turn to in order to give him thanks, for the reason why things are good for us, or do we just continue on living? When life is just so-so, it's kind of even keel, do we still thank God saying that this is the day that the Lord has made or do we simply carry on?

When Christ is not the center of my life, the reason for doing what I do, the reason to give thanks, the person I turn to in every situation, are we really all in on Christ in the way that God wants us to be, the way that we say we are as Christians? Do we faithfully, nobly, perfectly represent Christ or really only when I can find the time to do so? Do I trust in him in every situation, or do I lean on myself or others more than him? Am I a model example of a Christian, or do I bring shame to Christ?

Even those who do a multitude of good works still find that being a perfect Christian is out of reach. I am not good enough. I don't live up to the standards that God set forward for his followers. I am not perfect. God should be ashamed of me. He should want nothing to do with me, like I want to have nothing to do with that particular family member. He should cut me out of all the family photos. He should cast me away to eternal death.

But God does not cast me away. Instead, he draws me closer. "Surely it is not angels [Jesus] helps, but Abraham's descendants." (verse 16) Even though we fail at being the perfect model of a Christian, even though we do not keep Christ as the focal point and center of our lives, he did not push us away as if he was too ashamed to even look at us. In order to bring us to his glory, "he too shared in [our] humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." (verses 14-15) Jesus shared our humanity to take our place. He took on flesh and blood so that he could suffer like us, so that he could die like us, all to make us a part of his family and to take away my shame.

"For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." Jesus is not like the Old Testament high priests. He did not have to keep making sacrifices day after day for his sins and then for the sins of the people. No, he was sinless. He instead, as our high priest, sacrificed himself to atone for my sins, to reconcile me with God, to remove my shame.

Now it is true. "Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters." (verse 11) Jesus calls us family, and he is not ashamed to do so. No matter what we have ever said, no matter how well we have lived up to his name, no matter how imperfect we are, no matter how many of his commandments we failed to follow, no matter how much of a fool we may have made of ourselves, Jesus is not ashamed to call us family because he atoned for our sins. He took on flesh and blood specifically so that he could suffer for us, cry the tears that we cry, feel the depression that we feel, go through the sicknesses like we do, and experience joy as we do. He did not do this just so that he could relate to us, but so that when he gave his life, having never sinned, he removed our shame and made us a part of his family.

Since Jesus has made us family with him and removed our shame, he is not ashamed to help us. Instead he offers all the help he can for us to make Christ the center of our lives, to live for him in every moment, to be that model Christian that he calls us to be.

"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (verse 18)

Jesus helps me as his brother, as his sister, as his family, in good times or bad times or even mediocre times. He is everything to me because he chose to come to this earth to make me a part of his family. No matter what my life looks like on any given day, I can thank him for removing my shame. I can help other brothers and sisters in Christ to see that their shame has been taken away just like mine.

Although God should be ashamed of us, like that one family member, and keep us as far away from his family as possible, he chose to make us a part of his family. Christ came and shared in our humanity, our flesh and blood. He made us holy by his suffering and death, removing our shame for all the times when I did not live up to his name. He atoned for my sins. This is why Christ is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters, to call us family. Amen.