Brother and Sister

"In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will."
(Ephesians 1:4–5, ESV)

When I was a child growing up in a Pentecostal church, I rarely heard adults in the congregation addressed as Mr. or Mrs. They were Brother Smith and Sister Pierce. Children addressed them that way. Adults addressed one another that way.

I doubt that anyone stopped each Sunday morning to consider the theology behind those words. We simply understood that we were family.

Years later, after completing basic training and technical training in the Air Force, I received my first permanent assignment at Charleston Air Force Base in South Carolina. The military had ordered me to report on Christmas Eve, which seemed particularly unreasonable to a young airman away from home.

A few days later, I was walking along King Street in downtown Charleston. I found a telephone booth, opened the telephone book, and looked for a church belonging to the denomination in which I had grown up. I found one and noticed that the pastor was H. C. Smith.

I knew that name.

A pastor named H. C. Smith had once served a church in Hamilton, Ohio. I put a coin in the telephone and called the number.

When he answered, I asked whether he was the H. C. Smith who had pastored in Hamilton. He said that he was. I told him my name.

His response was immediate.

"Are you John Wheeler's boy?"

I told him I was.

Then I explained that I had just been assigned to Charleston Air Force Base. He asked where I was calling from. I told him.

"Don't move. I'll be right there."

He came and got me.

From that moment, I was welcomed into his home and treated like a son.

Why?

We were family.

Something similar happened after basic training when I arrived at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas. I contacted a church and discovered relationships with people connected to my years at Lee University. Once again, homes opened. Once again, I was received not merely as a visitor but as family.

That is what adoption does.

God does not merely forgive sinners and send them on their way. Through Jesus Christ, He adopts them. They become His children. And if God is our Father, those whom He has adopted are our brothers and sisters.

Paul calls Christians *"members of the household of God."* (Ephesians 2:19, ESV)

The church is certainly an assembly. It is a congregation. It has officers, responsibilities, ordinances, and discipline. But underneath all of those things is something wonderfully personal.

It is a family.

Perhaps we no longer commonly address one another as Brother and Sister. Customs change, and Scripture does not command those particular forms of address. But it would be unfortunate if, in abandoning the vocabulary, we also lost consciousness of the reality it expressed.

The person sitting across the aisle on Sunday morning is not merely another attendee.

The elderly widow is your sister.

The young father struggling to raise his children is your brother.

The lonely serviceman hundreds of miles from home is your brother.

The new believer who hardly knows anyone yet has entered your family.

There was something wonderfully reassuring about being a young man far from home, making a telephone call, giving my name, and hearing someone say, in effect, "You belong to us. I'll come and get you."

That is what families do.

And through Christ, that is what we are.

Brother and Sister.

Just a thought.

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