

The Imperative of Relationships

Writing to the saints at Philippi, Paul provides a great insight into personal relationships within the early church, calling them his brothers, his beloved, longed for, joy and crown (Phil. 4:1), not terms used in a professional relationship. As their apostle he establishes a foundation of personal warmth, Godly delight, affectionate ambition, and ultimate commitment. Nowhere to be found are the formality and externalism which sometimes characterise the modern church. Let's try to rediscover the true nature of the church and the beauty of its fellowship.

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I. Relationships within the church

A. Not a club I belong to, a business I am engaged in, or a lecture theatre I attend

B. Church is an intimate family

C. Leaders establish the tone

II. Paul's outstanding example

A. My brothers

1. Modeled by Jesus

2. Paul, though having an apostolic authority, related as a brother

B. My beloved

1. Not a formal relationship

2. Unashamed to be explicit – 2 Corinthians 11:11

3. Expressed not only in words but in action - 2 Corinthians 12:15

C. My longed for

1. Not simply 'long to see'
2. Longed for with the affection of Christ – Philippians 1:8
3. Laboring for their maturity – Galatians 4:19
4. Includes desire for present fellowship - 1 Thessalonians 3:6

D. My joy

1. Did not communicate heavy burden
2. Always giving thanks – Philippians 1:4
3. Even gave thanks for the Corinthians – 1 Corinthians 1:4
4. Much yet to be accomplished but still communicates joy

E. My crown (or victory wreath)

1. Not a brief passing relationship
2. A relationship with eternity in view
3. Relevant to rewards received from Christ