

AN Approved Church is a Friendly Church

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What does it mean to be approved by God? 2 Timothy 2:15 speaks of Christians demonstrating that they are approved by God because of their study of Scripture. In order to be assured of the blessing of being a Christian, one must demonstrate that they are approved by God; i.e. that they have God's stamp of approval. Revelation 2-3 teaches us that churches also must have God's approval, or they may have their candle removed. This is akin to losing their charter, their franchise, or their name. There are many requirements for a church to be approved of God; one of those requirements is that it demonstrate the love of a family to its members.

The Book of Ephesians has much to say about the purposes of God. It speaks to God's purpose (Eph. 3:11), the church's purpose (Eph. 4:11-15), and our purpose as Christians (Eph. 5-6). One of the most critical passages in that text is in chapter 2, when Paul declares the identity of the church as the family of God.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord. Ephesians 2:19-21

What makes a family? In the world we would say that it is their common blood (i.e. parents). But sometimes family adopt others into their family; they may not have that common blood, but they respect and honor the same parents. We must add to that they submit to the same authority (parents). But even then there is more to a family. They have a unique affection towards one another. All of these things are what make a local church a family (Colossians 3:12, Ephesians 4:32). In these places it is emphasized that we must be kind and tenderhearted to one another. Perhaps we might sum this up by saying that an approved church is a FRIENDLY church.

What is the importance of being a friendly church? Scripture makes the case that this is an important part of fulfilling the family aspect of a church. A church need to exercise characteristics of friendliness in order to avoid impeding the message (Matt. 7:5). A church's friendliness stirs desire by others to know more about the walk of Faith (1 Pet. 3:15). Finally, a church that is friendly is fulfilling the will of God (Heb 13:1-3). In order to be approved of God, a church must work to be friendly. A church is friendly because its individual members are friendly; this is what we must work at in order to show ourselves approved.

Being a friendly church begins in the assembly. First, friendliness is shown to those who visit; visitors don't go without engagement. They don't walk in and out without a greeting or conversation. They sense our desire that we want them to be here. But it should be even greater to our own brethren. An approved friendly church has members who engage with each other as much as possible. We don't just visit with our friends; all of our brethren are our family. Being a friendly church is more demonstrable outside the assembly. Member work to create friendships with brethren (Philippians 2:1-4). Members work to practice the work of hospitality (Romans 12:10-13).

It is tempting to avoid working on our friendliness. Some may say that this is simply not part of their personality. They may simply point out that they are not always feeling friendly, or that being friendly is just not who they are. But to be a Christian is to have abandoned who we were to become the person God wants us to be. *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The local church is a family; we are God's family. Our family affection can always grow and improve. We understand that friendly churches have friendly members; our goal should be to be friendly members.