

NO BORDERS NO LIMITS



PART ONE: Discovering God's Resource for Task Completion by Discovering God's No Limits Family

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A FAMILY WITHOUT BORDERS

Prior to our recent journey to the US and our meetings with leaders there, I had been camping out in Mark 3. It contains the record of a very strange sequence of events early on in the ministry of Jesus in Galilee involving an unnamed crowd of people, an aggressive deputation from religious headquarters in Jerusalem and members of his earthly family. The interaction between the three groups forms the backdrop for Jesus to identify the formation of a radical key resource for the work of the kingdom that would ignite heavenly fire on the earth and continue throughout eternity.

A Crowded House

Jesus was in a house full of people crowding to hear him. They were as eager as Jesus was responsive and the ministry went on and on with no so that even stopping for food was impossible. While this would strike most of us as generally desirable it seems that it was not viewed like that from two very different quarters. On the one hand we are told that Jesus' family heard what was happening and came around to "take charge of him"¹ because they thought he had "lost his marbles." On the other hand we are informed of the representatives of the religious right from Jerusalem. They showed up and began to accuse him of being demon possessed. Not a good day at the office by common standards. In the presence of a house full of willing listeners, Jesus responds to the accusations by pointing out the logical flaw to their reasoning along with a solemn warning about resisting the Holy Spirit. At that point the proceeding is interrupted by a message to Jesus from his family calling him to come outside to them. We must assume that they wanted to carry out their previously stated intentions to constrain him.

This sequence of events presented Jesus with a profound cultural dilemma. Family obligation was second only to the worship of God. The anticipated response would have been to leave aside the ministry for a moment and go out to the family. He could have quietly sent a message back to say that he would be out to see them as soon as possible. Jesus chose neither. Instead he made the issue the next agenda item of the teaching session. His words have shock value that crosses the years and the cultures:

"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those who were seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."²

Wow! Why would Jesus have spoken in a way? Why do something that would seem to bring shame on his family and stir up seeming needless controversy? And why transfer such culture specific and highly honorific title to a group of people who just happened to be in the house that day.

If we assume that Jesus was as much the incarnation of the Father on this day as any other and that he wasn't just taking a break from being perfect, this record makes us witness to some very radical

¹ Mark 3:21

² Mark 3:33-35

ideas about a very different kind of “family.” This is the day that Jesus identified a new self selecting supernatural family created by a marriage of the grace of God and people who sought his will above all else.

He announced to all who were present that, in point of fact, the people sitting around him were members of this new “family.” It wasn’t identified by an official badge. They were not graduates from a training course. They were people who heard and saw the will of God in Jesus and wanted to follow after that will by following him. Pretty basic really. To apply the full context to our understanding of this “family” of people it is important that their commitment to follow Jesus and keep on listening to him had already been tested by the religious police from Jerusalem who had declared the official view about Jesus: he was demon possessed. The people who were sitting around Jesus at the time had heard that conversation and decided to stay. That’s a reasonably big issue when you think about it. Today it would be a bit like being in a meeting listening to someone speak about political issues and have the authorities come and declare that the person was a terrorist. Are you going to stay in the room? They remained committed in spite of these challenges.³ And this decision suddenly qualified them as members of a new kind of “family.”

A Family that is Discovered, not Chosen

It is important to see this in a wider context. The people Jesus was referring to here were not the twelve apostles. We would have been a little more relaxed if Jesus had been talking about them as family because at least he did choose the twelve disciples. When we talk about a relationship in terms of “mother” or “brothers” we are talking about a very special bond. There are people we come across during our lives with whom we develop a mutuality that is like a family bond. But those relationships are built through a series of free and mutual decisions. The people in the circle around Jesus that day were had not made those kinds of decisions. They had chosen to be where Jesus was, watching, listening and receiving. They were probably not the first century Galilean version of a “balmy army,” a bunch of rabid groupies who show up at every event. They were not like besotted rock star fans or sports fanatics. They were there because they wanted to be where Jesus was. As a result Jesus called them his family.

The context notes they were still sitting there despite the relentless and acerbic criticisms of the Jewish nation’s peak religious body. Jesus made a decision to expose something very precious that was going on right there in the midst. He was discovering, in them, members of his family. The people who pushed inside the house and remained in Jesus’ presence despite harsh and damning criticism from people who had the power to beat them, jail them and even kill them were making the same discovery. They were discovering a bond with this radical rabbi from Nazareth and he was willing to publicly identify them and identify with them. He was even prepared to identify with them in a way that he could not identify with his own family at the time. They were discovering each other.

³ Compare this to an occasion where Jesus was talking about his body being bread to eat and his blood being wine to drink [John 6]. On that occasion most of the people decided that Jesus was saying things that didn’t make any sense and therefore could not represent the will of God. As a result they left. On that occasion his own twelve disciples decided that whether or not they understood what he was saying he was still speaking words that brought life.

It needs to be pointed out that if these people were the ones who happened to be there that day. On another day the same criteria would have identified a different group of people. His presence and his message created a line between people. That distinction was a decision in the one to place the will of God as the top priority in their lives.

A Family That Makes the Will of God Tangible

If Jesus identified the people in his supernatural family as those who “do the will of God” we have to address the question as to how we might know what the will of God is. The issue has been greatly clouded over time. Two thousand years and forty thousand Christian denominations later we may have trouble knowing who genuinely represents a commitment to the will of God and who doesn’t. Forty thousand denominations mean that we have forty thousand groups who think that their distinctives represent a higher expression of the will of God than their counterparts. If we just set the philosophical issues aside and bring it to a person level, I think it remains immensely possible to identify the will of God in our time in a way that will not involve a detailed survey of forty thousand constitutions and their confessional statements.

My own point in all of this is to emphasize the fact that God always wants these kinds of family members to discover each other. The identifying of this family will always provide its own generation with an incarnation of the will of God. All that means is that at a particular time and in a particular place the will of God is to become visible and audible through the lives of those who are living out the revelation of what God wants to do.⁴ Only through these people will God’s will be known and only through what these people DO and do TOGETHER will the genuine will of God be identified against the expressions that claim to be the will of God but aren’t. It is one of the ways I am able to identify “church.” The “doing-the-will-of-God-above-all-else” people will also be identified by the wider community and therefore provide the same hope that Jesus did in his day. The religious institution of Jesus’ day provided an imposing and intimidating statement about what the will of God looked like and sounded like. It gave its constituents a set of binding and enforced obligations. Jesus burst onto the same stage as the genuine expression of the will of God. He was unrecognized by the incumbent system, misunderstood by even those who followed him and considered mentally unstable by his own human family.⁵

I don’t think I would buy too many arguments if I said that the people’s desire to do the will of God qualifies them to be “church.” Church is another term used to describe people who know what the will of God is and want to do that rather than their own will. Even though that “will” exists in the purity of God’s revelation through his Son (the Word) and is testified to in the Word of Scripture, we are all too familiar with the experience of the “will of God” being too often reduced to “what I am comfortable with” or “what I prefer” or “what I am used to.” We find the commitment of people to do the will of God being shaped by theological systems, structural distinctives, spiritual stylistics or

⁴ Jesus did exactly this and only this during his life and ministry on the earth. We know from many references in the gospel of God that Jesus ONLY did what he saw his Father doing. The Father told him what to say and how to say it. It follows that every incident we have recorded in the gospel was an example of the will of God being made known in Jesus and then fulfilled through him. The same is to be true for the people who follow Jesus in every generation. The idea that this happens through a family of people simply expresses the profound New Testament identity and function of the ‘body of Christ.’

⁵ Cp. John 1:11,12

even particular ethnicity. When our commitment to the will of God is qualified by these and similar premises it will always produce an aberration. And before you respond by saying that none of us will ever apprehend the fullness of the will of God, let me suggest that the issue here is not whether or not we have GAINED the understanding of God's ultimate will, but whether we are committed to it in a way that makes us free to set aside what we have previously seen from what we are seeing of the more of God's will.⁶ A group of people in a house in Capernaum chose to sit around this same Jesus and declared themselves one with him. He responded by calling them "family."

The Family that Represents the Promise of More in the Presence of Less

Christian history is a wonderful tutor in this regard. If more people sought out more of its wisdom they would be less likely to go on repeating the mistakes everyone made before them. George Bernard Shaw was right on that score.⁷ Throughout Christian history there have always been situations where a group of people represented "less" of the will of God. It may have happened through decay and neglect or simply because we start with a little and then stop growing. Wycliffe and Hus had more than the institutional church of their day. So did Luther, Zinzendorf, Wesley, Carey, Seymour and many others. The same thing is true where you live. There are people in your circle of Christian relationships who have more than you in some area of discipleship and you are a person who is hungry enough for the more of God's will that you see in your brother or sister and then have to make a decision whether you are going to become more than a spectator. Paul speaks about this very fact when he observes that we should celebrate the differences between us and allow them to become signs of the more we all need to embrace.⁸ The people who seek more and who see the ultimate fulfillment of God's purposes define the family like the family Jesus spoke about in Mark 3. We will always need to discover them, embrace them, receive from them and walk with them and work with them. We will similarly find that they will be seeking the same from us. This is the "family" that will give us the best chance at getting from less to more. Paul describes the heart of this family in Philippians 3

⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his

⁶ It is worth noting that this was the issue for the apostle John. When he wrote the first letter (I John) nearer to the end of the first century there were plenty of teachings about who Jesus was and not all of them measured up. John profoundly cut to the same chase as we need to do by saying that genuine Christian discipleship could only be measured by how much the disciple loved people in the same way as Jesus loved people. Same then and same now.

⁷ "We learn from history that we learn nothing from history." George Bernard Shaw

⁸ **1 Corinthians 11:18, 19** Paul uses two different words to describe two different kinds of distinctions between believers. The first is a Greek word from which we get our word, "schism" and the second is another Greek word from which we get our word, "heresy." He says that there should not be schisms, but that there should be heresies. We would probably think both of them should be avoided. The NIV translates the two words as "divisions" and "differences." That is probably as good a distinction as any. Divisions in the context of Corinthians were created by personality cults [cp. Ch. 1-4] and the idea that spiritual gifts created a caste system in the church. Having denounced those he goes on to say that there needs to be "differences" [heresies in the Greek]. These differences are caused by the fact that someone will have embraced Biblical revelation and therefore experienced change in ways that other people had not. These differences needed to be accorded the value they represented in the body of Christ. They were examples of something sacred; a work that God had done in someone's life. In their experience the WORD of God had become incarnate. As such those of us who do not share their experience can recognize what has happened, even weigh it up against the Scripture and then be encouraged to embrace it for ourselves.

resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

¹⁷ Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.⁹

The Family Representing Divergence without Division:

The family of people who choose the will of God as their first commitment don't compromise the goal and don't sacrifice the relationships.

People make choices in this world. People who believe in God make choices also and those choices will determine what they belong to. What they belong to will determine what they give priority to. All of this will also determine who they are likely to work with. If I was a Reformed Baptist I would probably classify people first of all on whether they were "Baptist" or not. But then I would be asking whether they were "General Baptists" or "Particular Baptists" and that would depend on whether or not they subscribed to the thirty two statements contained in the 1689 Reformed Baptist Confession of Faith. I would judge and approve your Christianity on those criteria. If I met a Reformed Baptist person today, I think I could value them and love them. I could respect the sincerity of their commitment to Christ and probably a whole lot more. I would not find myself belonging to them and it would be very difficult, if not impossible to forge a bond on the basis of more of Jesus and more of the kingdom. Though we both would have much in common, their priorities would be so different from mine and their way of viewing and judging the world would be so different. Their "business profile" would be radically different. They would give priority to preserving and protecting things that I would have no urgency to protect. Their way of belonging would be on the basis of their willingness to own and protect revelation featured at the Baptist Conference in London in 1687 and I would want to accept people on the basis of their commitment to see the kingdom of God come through people who wanted to become like Jesus. It would not be a question of fellowship. We could have fellowship but we would not often experience a primary kind of belonging. The same would be true for someone whose primary commitment was to protect the sovereignty of their local congregation and would measure their priorities accordingly. While I value people who congregate together in order to serve Jesus Christ, its structure and detail is nothing more than a tool, not a badge. It is to be used, not protected or defended. Our belonging and our partnership would be limited in so far as it was defined by values like that. I would not entertain the idea that we should be DIVIDED, but there will inevitably be divergence.

The Family Without Borders?

There will always be belonging in a general sense and there will be strategic belonging. If I was good enough to be selected in the first grade squad for the Raiders Rugby League team for the 2010 season it wouldn't stop me from belonging to all sorts of other groups, but come December 2009

⁹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic Ed.) (Php 3:7-17). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

and certainly January 2010 I would be at training, observing strict eating, sleeping and socializing habits. All of that would be designed to do one thing and one thing only- win the 2010 Premiership. I would have a different bond with the people who were committed to that goal. I would still be friends with people who were not, but the strategic bonding would be shaped by a commitment.¹⁰

What if there is a family of people whose transcendent desire is to see the kingdom of God come everywhere through the agency of people who love and serve Jesus above all else? What if their commitment to Jesus and the kingdom was not constrained by the past, what is familiar, what is culturally acceptable, what is known? What if there were people who would allow the mission intent to shape those relationships and to shape their lifestyle? What if they could see through the religious c**p that is so commonly offered as the life giving good news of Christ? Are there people who are willing to be committed to anyone, as long as it will advance the kingdom? Are there people who are willing to lay down and set aside everything that hinders the ministry of Jesus to the community?

The phrase, "family without borders," highlights the fact that when most people group together, the closer the relationships get the more exclusive they become. It is a natural human process albeit a decidedly ungodly one. When Jesus said, "Here are my mother and my brothers..."¹¹ he wasn't describing the members of a club or soldiers in a uniform. He was identifying a group of people who could well have gone unnoticed by the crowd. They could have come and sat in the room with Jesus and then go from the room and nobody would have known that they were "Jesus' family." If the same thing happened the next day Jesus would have identified different people who would have been similarly unspecified and yet he would have called them his "family." He didn't ask them to join his email distribution list, nor to become financial partners in a worldwide enterprise. He didn't offer them premier club membership. They didn't get a discount to the next meeting or priority seating. He just acknowledged what their decision to follow after the will of God had made them become. In my opinion this family is the least exclusive and the most inclusive organization in the whole world. It exists by a heart connection that can instantly become a strategic connection simply because that heart is committed to doing the will of God above all else.

I have the makings of a rank idealist inside of me and it sometimes endangers my usefulness to the cause of Christ. By idealist I mean a person who wants to see things shaped by some ideal form – something like the shadow on the wall of Plato's cave.¹² I realize that this form of idealism is much more the product of Greek philosophy than it is Biblical revelation. The more I discover the Jesus of the gospels I can see that it is much more about redemptive purpose than ideal form. In the end I don't really care if we never have the "ideal" church, as long as we become more effective in our calling to minister redemptive love to every human being. A lot of people think that God will only visit when the "form" is perfect. I, myself have quoted Exodus 40 and the fact that when everything was done just as God told them to do it, the presence of God filled the tabernacle. Jesus and Christian history shout the error of this Greek idea if it were to be applied to kingdom ministry and the church. God is shaping the church to make it more like Jesus, but the expression of Jesus will probably be like love. It will take different forms in different situations without being any less an

¹⁰ The divergence referred to earlier would simply say that there are a lot of good hearted people who have a commitment to Jesus but who would never self select into this group of people. They might at some later time, but our issue must be to find the "family" people who DO self select because the message about Jesus and the kingdom IS in them

¹¹ Mark 3:34

¹² As described in Plato's work, "The Republic."

expression of genuine love. No ideal structure, no franchised worship style and nothing much that the Harvard Business Review would recognize. Just more of Jesus and therefore more of the kingdom.

The reason I speak this way is because I am becoming convinced that the fulfilment of the purposes of God have been largely usurped by all kinds of groups and organizations that started out with revelation and zealous intentions. It seems that all too soon the flow of Holy Spirit power is railroaded by human organization built for power and control. These elements create more problems than they solve. This is especially true in the western nations of the world. We just HAVE TO organize and FRANCHISE everything. The organizations and franchises soon become the badge we wear and define who is out and who is in; who is preferred and who is tolerated. So easily, such organizations become their own measure of orthodoxy. It is all sincere and it is only rarely devoid of things that are good. Like the religious systems of Jesus own day they generally end up opposing what God wants to do next. Sincerity is not enough when it comes to Christian ministry. I could be sincere in my attempt to do brain surgery on you, but if you were going to entrust yourself just to my deep sincerity you would also need to get your estate in order and know that you were not long for this world. I am convinced that everything needs structure, but the structures we generally opt for are the very things that spell the ultimate doom of what we are hoping for. The Pharisees hoped for the coming of the kingdom but that hope was locked into the system they had developed for organizing God. So my idea of “family” must avoid as many of the religious and cultural temptations as possible if it is going to go beyond the places we have already been.

A Passionate Disregard for Borders

One of my recent working hypotheses has been the assumption that if something is genuinely kingdom of God in nature, it works the same way no matter what sphere or level of operation. My idea of discovering “the family without borders” could begin with one or other of the community spheres where you and I have missional responsibility. Take my street. Is it possible that there are people in my street who want the kingdom of God to come? Or, if they heard the message about the kingdom of God is it possible that they would want it to come? Is it also possible that this desire could have little or no necessary reference to what “church” they belonged to? What if we just talked about working together in such a way that the kingdom of God would come to the people in our street? If that goal was accomplished, or even before it was accomplished we could start working on the streets around us. We could discover “family” by that method. This family would be the primary resource for getting the job done.

How would this work in a regular kind of church? You simply have to ask the question whether there are people in your church who want the kingdom of God to come everywhere through people who follow Jesus and who look, sound and act like him. It wouldn't necessarily smash too much of what was going on in that church. Churches are about herding people into programs, so if you show up on Sunday and let the programs keep rolling out, most people in the church will be happy. But your interest would be in discovering the people who wanted the kingdom of God to come more than programs. As you discover them you can find ways of supporting one another in doing whatever will enable the kingdom of God to come in the community spheres where you live and work. As you do that you discover people in those spheres whose hearts are like those who gathered in the room with Jesus - people who are prepared to put up with religious leaders who want to determine the

kind of Jesus they will accept but who are not prepared to forego the passion to follow Jesus into the fulfilment of God's will. Soon there will be a very holy mess that will be shaped by its missionary goals, not by its commitment to protect the 1689 Reformed Baptist Confession (or its contemporary counterpart). These "family" members will never form some kind of secret society. They wouldn't need a badge and they wouldn't need to worry too much about "membership." They would have to keep on pursuing two kinds of connections: they would need to keep connecting with the people they were seeking to love in Jesus' name and they would need to keep finding the equipping and supportive relationships that would enable them to keep doing the work of the ministry.

In my street, how many "family" people would it take to create a critical mass capable of seeking the kingdom come in this sphere? Any more than two would be a bonus. In a city or region, how many "family" people would it take to provide an operations base for what would be going on in community spheres? The answer would be a relatively small number but with a very high level non-negotiable commitment. The further answer would be that they would need to go find some willing itinerant leaders willing to walk with them and provide mentor/equipping over time. The only thing that would need to be guarded and protected is the only thing the Bible says should be guarded and protected: the goal or intention would need to be kept simple and pure.

Family members are, according to Jesus, people who want to see the will of God being done more than gaining popularity and approval. Forget about how all kinds of groups who by their compromises have sullied the will of God to the point where it looks like the pagan culture of their own society. Forget about the church institutions that have commandeered the agenda in order to preserve their own religious system. Just understand that the will of God comes at the same price as it has always come. It involves the same basic criteria as it has always involved. It is about being like Jesus in the presence of the people in our community who need to be offered a chance to be rescued: Jesus, the kingdom of God and the kind of church that proclaims and represents them are the things that matter. We need to discover the people who want to belong to that.

WITHOUT BORDERS

I need to make a final plea for the "without borders" issue. At the risk of repetition I need to say that I am a little wary of the way we sometimes speak about Christian community. What we are generally talking about is Christian tribe by a different set of descriptors. Tribe is what happens when natural human traits govern the way people belong. It is the creation of an "in" group who enjoy a gratifying sense of belonging to each other that becomes exclusive even when they don't mean it to be. When they go somewhere their identity is marked by the way they gather to each other rather than to non-tribe people. Their conversation is based upon a whole library of common experiences assumed by the IN group but is not shared by people OUT of the group. Their communal activities may well serve very worthy ends and those may benefit people who are not part of the community. The problem is that the way the activities are carried out merely increases the IN factor and inadvertently protects the borders rather than making them more open. Security and identity are found in terms of membership of the group and participation in its regular and irregular activities. It is very easy for this kind of group to become defensive of what they possess and become critical of and aloof from the "others." As I have said before, this is all very natural. But that's the problem. It is a case where something that started as a spiritual supernatural work has

developed as the result of natural forces. Limits start getting invisibly imposed and the multiplying variegated destiny of the kingdom becomes impossible.

The reason why I feel this so strongly is because it so MIS-represents the character of God and the nature of the Trinity. There is never going to be a set of relationships that are as connected or that belong together as the three Persons of the Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Spirit. You could never get a group that had more in common, more shared experience, more perfect strategic partnership yet who lived to include everyone who wasn't part of that group. The community of the Godhead live in houses that everyone lives in and walk the roads that everyone walks. This is the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth. He exploded the demonized idea of a hidden and aloof God only accessible to vetted members of an exclusive club. With the Godhead there just is no "Members Only" sign.¹³ Even more to the point, the inclusiveness of the Godhead was not just a matter of keeping the doors open for anyone to walk in. The strength of their relationship was totally given going out after people and bringing the open door to where they were and giving them a taste of what it was like on the inside. Such is the aggressive inclusiveness of the model Christian community.

What right does the relationship between two or more believers have to create let alone justify exclusivity? The sad truth is that we don't know we are doing it and the reason we don't is a measure of how little we know God and how much we reflect our godless culture. Few would be guilty of knowingly stopping people from belonging. Our supernatural concern should stir us to deliberately generate inclusivity. This new kind of family must have this inclusiveness inside their hearts so that it finds new forms of expression with every day that goes by. All you have to do is to ask the question as to what you have done today to express this inclusiveness. I fear many of us spend much more time being unknowingly exclusive. It always carries a permeating presence that is definitely not the presence of God. On the other hand, that amazing inclusiveness allows the kingdom to explode and unmistakably proclaims the kingdom and the presence of the King. In other words, Jesus shows up.

So my idea of discovering "family" in the spheres where we operate is that this family should represent the kingdom presence of God and should be always looking for the next person who would be included. It should make the mistake of offering inclusion to people who may make a mess and may eventually self exclude. The very willingness to take the risk would define what is going on as genuinely kingdom.

Our Apostolic Family

¹³ Some may want to cite the occasion where God told the people not to touch the mountain where he was meeting with Moses and others might like to talk about the Tabernacle where only one human person was allowed to enter only once a year. The only reason it cannot be claimed that the holy presence of God is off limits to people is precisely because both of those images are "shadows" of a reality that is only known in Jesus Christ. The separation demanded by God was for protection, not for segregation. The heart of the tabernacle was the holy heart of Jesus. As the God tabernacled in their midst through the tent, Jesus was incarnate in the womb of a woman, a village and a nation.

The apostolic message is one way of identifying the will of God in a given time and place. If we genuinely carry an apostolic message,¹⁴ the sharing of that message should resonate in the hearts of people who want to do the will of God and will be ignored or opposed by the people who redefine the will of God according to some doctrinal, cultural or other issue that they have given their primary loyalty to. It could be as genuine as a previous apostolic message being given the status of having final defining authority. The Pharisees opposed the message of Jesus on this basis. The Judaizers opposed the message of Paul on this basis. The Pope opposed the message of Luther on this basis. It did not expose them as unbelievers but as conditional believers. Their faith was modified against their particular presuppositions. Our concern should not be to coerce or berate nor should our response be to separate and eternally define ourselves by what we are opposed to. That has been done more than forty thousand times and has never produced anything of very much value to the core task. It is divergence that is happening, not division. If I think about our current congregation at Grace Canberra, I wonder how many people it would take to create an unstoppable critical mass. If I think about our street or my community group I realize that the issue is not going to be how many people but what is inside their hearts and what we are going after together. If I concentrate on teaming with those people to see how we could represent Jesus and do the work of the kingdom of God it will be sufficient to upset the status quo and make a decent kingdom mess.

We must start and finish with the fullness of Jesus and the advancement of the kingdom as our only non-negotiables. The fulfilment of that purpose without compromise must see every religious or cultural substitute as “manure,”¹⁵ We may then discover a momentum that will not get easily diluted or bushwhacked. If we only measure increase in terms of genuine gospel Christ likeness and kingdom advance, then we will have a better chance of disregarding all the spiritual sounding religious activities that distract, neutralize or oppose the fulfilment of God’s great heart of love.

In these days we need to find those who belong to this family and then find out how we can serve them and serve with them. It will always be wheat among weeds, but the task of a wheat stalk was never to define itself by exposing every weed stalk. The task of wheat is to produce and multiply wheat. Besides, in terms of the Biblical analogy, weeds can get converted – so let’s give ourselves to being wheat and producing wheat. Let us find the wheat stalks around us and decide to fill a few silos with the fruit of our relationship. And let this family be as aggressively inclusive so that there will never be any borders. That way we will never own it, fully define it or defend it. If we can do that we will have accomplished something that has been rare, but that God intends to become common. In the house that day, Jesus announced a new family - one with no borders and no limits.

¹⁴ My definition of an “apostolic message” is a message that will get the church from where it is to where God wants it to be. It is best understood by looking at Jesus speaking to the seven churches (Rev. 2, 3). It was different in every case, but had the same purpose in every case. The same is true when you read Second Corinthians and see the leadership ministry of a genuine apostle compared with the leadership of false apostles.

¹⁵ To use the image from Philippians 3: “What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ⁹.....¹² **Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.**