



Lesson 87

Brother and Sister?

- **“Brother” and “Sister” in History**
 - Who coined the terms?
 - Paul used “brother” and “sister”
 - Ellen G. White used “brother” and “sister”
- **Should We Use “Brother” and “Sister”?**
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In this lesson we are going to look at another aspect of equality that has been opened up recently. We'll see how we were unwittingly discriminating in the past and why we should change.

“Brother” and “Sister” in History

Who coined the terms?

The words “brother” and “sister” can have more than one meaning. The first meaning- the one that everyone knows- is referring to someone you're related to. The second meaning is quite different. “Brother” and “sister” can be referring to someone who believes the same thing as you- someone in the same church. The first instance where we see that second definition being used is in Christ's history. “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” Matthew 12:50. In Matthew, Christ specifically explains what he means by “brother” and “sister”. He says that it's someone who does the will of His Father, which we can say is someone who's in the church. That is where we see the second definition of “brother” and “sister” begin to be used.

Paul used “brother” and “sister”

The terms “brother” and “sister” were used by God's church after Christ introduced them. The apostles used those terms to refer to people in the Christian church. In Acts 21:20, the elders of the Christian church in Jerusalem called Paul “brother”. Another example is Romans 16:1. Paul is talking about the lady that delivered the letter to the church in Rome; he says, “Phebe our sister”. Paul calls her a “sister”- referring to her being a member of the Christian church. Talking to the Ephesians Paul said, “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19). Here Paul compared the church to a household- or a family. Since that time the terms “brother” and “sister” have been used by God's people to address people that were a part of the church.

Ellen G. White used “brother” and “sister”

In Ellen G. White's time, the terms “brother” and “sister” were still used. We looked at how Christ began the use of the terms “brother” and “sister” when referring to anyone in the church. Then we saw how in Paul's time, the terms were still used. In Ellen G. White's time, the Millerites and early Adventists still called each other “brother” and “sister”. RH September 6, 1899 paragraph 6 says, “...Says Christ, Obedience to my Father in heaven is filial obedience. This is the bond of union between me and all who shall become members of the heavenly family. All who accept the word of truth will enter the hallowed circle that binds to me every believer as brother or sister or mother.” So we see that Ellen G. White speaks of how the terms “brother” and “sister” are given to the people who accept the truth. And Ellen G. White used these terms; when you look at the letters she wrote to people in the church, she always put the words “brother” or “sister” before their names- take for example her August 15, 1869 letter where she begins with “Dear Brother Loughborough”, or

her August 1, 1891 letter where she begins with “Dear Sister Mary Steward”. As we can see, in the Millerite history, the words “brother” and “sister” had become second-nature for the church.

Should We Use “Brother” and “Sister”?

Equality in our time

The Movement understands more about equality than any other group of people in history. We know this from the chiasmic structure of history- beginning in Eden. Sexism was introduced in Eden when Eve was put into subjection to Adam. Sabbath breaking was introduced next when Cain’s descendants refused to keep the Sabbath. Then racism was introduced last when Ham was cursed. We said that the line was a chiasm, which is basically a mirror, so on the second half of the line, the first issue would not be sexism like it was in the first half of the line, it would be racism. Racism was the issue in the history of the Millerites. The next issue would be Sabbath breaking, which was the entire issue in the 1888 history. But also in that time people were still aware of the issue of racism. Last would be sexism, which is the issue of today. Sexism is gender inequality, which includes not only women, but the LGBTQ+ community as well. Just like the 1888 history, however, we are still aware of racism, which is why we have the greatest understanding of equality.

Gender and gender neutral

The LGBTQ+ community is an important subject in this Movement and one that is being addressed more now. There are many different categories that people can fall in, some of which overlap. Some people do not identify as men or women. Their identity can be put under the heading of “transgender” but some don’t like that title. Another more specific heading is non-binary; it describes people whose gender identity is not in the binary: male or female. Some people do not have a gender at all (they are called agender). Others have more than one gender and they switch between them, they can be male, female, and/or neither (or something else) at different times. Some people do not choose a gender so their identity moves around. People can also have a gender that is a combination of male and female. As you can see gender identity is not nearly as simple as male or female.

We don’t discriminate

The history we are in is the history of equality. According to the line of progression, in Eden there was gender equality, so in the new Eden, which we are headed to, there will be gender equality. Therefore, we need to practice equality so our characters will be fit to go there. When we say gender equality, we usually think of men and women having equal rights, but gender equality also includes LGBTQ+ equality because gender is also involved with them. So when we are practicing gender equality we also must practice LGBTQ+ equality, we can’t leave them out because the two are connected. One way we are leaving out LGBTQ+ people is when we use the terms “brother” and “sister”. When we refer to people in the church, there is no neutral term, everyone is a “brother”, or a “sister”. And this poses a big problem for some of the LGBTQ+ community. There will most certainly be LGBTQ+ Levites, and there are some already in the Movement. If we are practicing equality and giving everyone, including LGBTQ+ people, equal rights, then the people who don’t identify as male or female must have the same rights as those who do. No one has a problem with identifying as male or female, therefore we shouldn’t have a problem with identifying as gender neutral, if everyone has equal

rights. We might agree to that, but then how would we refer to the non-binary people in the church? It would be unorderly to refer to this person as “brother”, this person as “sister”, and then this person by their name, that won’t work- so we have to throw out the terms “brother” and “sister”. This Movement has agreed that the terms discriminate against some LGBTQ+ people (the people who are non-binary), and we don’t discriminate. To be clear, we aren’t throwing the terms out because they are unorderly, that is just one point, the important reason is that it discriminates against non-binary people, who don’t identify as a “brother” or “sister”, by leaving them out of the church family. We aren’t saying you can’t refer to someone that is your actual brother or sister as “brother” or “sister” (unless they are identify as gender neutral, but that’s a different discussion) but when talking to church members, we no longer use those terms, we simply refer to people by their names.

Gender isn’t the most important thing

In this Movement, we used to address people as “sister” such-and-such or “brother” such-and-such. What we were doing was putting people’s gender before their name. While before, it was the right thing to do, it isn’t anymore. For one, when members of the LGBTQ+ community join this Movement, we won’t be able to address everyone like that. But the other reason we aren’t doing that anymore is because of what doing it infers. It’s like that saying, “put your best foot forward”. That means to start off with the very best, or the most important. So by saying people’s gender before their name, it’s like we’re saying the best thing about that person is their gender- the most important thing about them, before even their name, is their gender. And we all know that’s not true. So, that is a big reason why we have stopped saying “sister” and “brother” when addressing someone- because there are many, many more important things about someone than their gender.

We are still a family

The use of the terms “brother” and “sister” have changed but the concept is still the same. This Movement is still a family because we believe the Midnight Cry message and Jesus used the symbol of a family to represent the people who believed the gospel. But, as we learned, the message of equality tells us that we need to be inclusive of all people and that gender is not that important. Those are the reasons we no longer put “brother” or “sister” before people’s names. Some people in the Movement have wanted to stop using those terms because the world doesn’t use them, but we aren’t stopping because of that, we’re stopping because that is what the message says. In the past using the terms “brother” and “sister” were the right thing to do, but as we learn more and more truth (specifically about equality) the things that were right to do can change. That is what happened with “brother” and “sister”; in this dispensation- the dispensation of the 144,000 (especially since the Midnight Cry message arrived)- those terms are no longer acceptable.

In summary:

“Brother” and “sister” were first used in Christ’s time. The terms continued to be used in Paul’s time and Ellen White’s time.

But with this Movement’s greater understanding of equality, we can no longer use the terms “brother” and “sister” in reference to our church family.

There are people in the LGBTQ+ community who are non-binary, which means they are neither a “brother” or “sister”.

Another reason we don’t use “brother” and “sister” anymore is because a person’s gender is not the most important thing about them.

Just because we don’t use “brother” and “sister” anymore doesn’t mean we aren’t a family anymore; we still are.

If you have any questions or comments on any of the material contact us (YPG) at:
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