

## Members of the Family

***“He has chosen us out in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be set apart and blameless before Him in love, having established us beforehand unto sonship through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good purpose of His will, unto the praise of the glory of His grace with which He has surrounded us in the Beloved One”*** (Ephesians 1:4-6).

In the midst of the constant pursuit of Christian excellence—doctrines and creeds; religious exercises and rituals—we tend to forget that we are members of a family and not of a religious sect. From the moment of salvation, one is often put on a course of the achievement of certain goals as outlined by the particular group that one is associated with. (They all seem to have different priorities and practices). Thus Christianity becomes a highly structured and highly organized membership in a religious club. And thus Christ often becomes more the leader of a religious movement than the Father of a family. Much of this is based upon the religious and legal emphasis of the presentation of our salvation. Much of the responsibility for this position is due to the constant use of technical terminologies to describe our position. Some of these terms are quite Biblical while others are humanly devised labels.

One such term which has obscured the realities of our familial relationship, is the word “adoption.” It is the standard translation of the Greek word υιοθεσια (*Huiothesia*). This word means simply to place as a son and does not necessarily involve a legal factor. (The word “son” here is generic and means either son or daughter). The word does not intrinsically carry with it the way in which the sonship takes place. Of course in salvation, we become the children of God by birth—birth of the Spirit. Jesus made that quite clear to Nicodemus when He said you cannot be part of the Kingdom of God without being born again. Nicodemus was puzzled by this and Jesus confirmed what He meant by saying it requires an actual second birth—one of the Spirit. So we have become members of God’s family not by a simple legal decree, but by an actual birth which makes us also partakers of His Divine nature. Adoption can never imbue the adoptee with any of the characteristics of the family.

It is commonly, but erroneously assumed that the legal aspects of adoption are a guarantee to us of our place with God. This is far from the truth. Adoption is no less irrevocable than marriage. To tell a child that it would have been better to have been adopted than to have been a natural-born son or daughter, would certainly be a diminishing of the relationship. As far as the legality is concerned, an adoption can be easily revoked, while a naturally born child can never be disowned. Parents talk about disowning children, but legally if a natural child is not mentioned in a will, even to the point of giving a dollar, the will can be broken. A parent might alienate a child, but can never call back the birth.

The glorious thing about our salvation is that we have become members of God’s family by a birth process which has made us partakers of the Divine nature and members of His family forever.

*But what about the passage in John 15 that says that branches that don’t bear fruit are cut off?*

You have to understand that Jesus was talking here about Israel as a nation, who was regarded in the prophets as the grape vines that never produced and were cut down. He was not talking about individual believers. That verse has been misused considerably and has become a cudgel with which the believers are often beaten. To keep Christians on the track by warning them of losing their salvation, puts the whole matter of our relationship to Christ on a human basis and destroys the very foundation of our rebirth. If remaining in the family is a matter of human behavior, then we are all in constant jeopardy. And if this were the case, it should have been made clear by Jesus as well as the New Testament that salvation is a matter of joining the “club” and not a matter of a spiritual rebirth.

Of course, the use of the term “adoption” opens a can of worms. It allows the whole idea of a revocable salvation and a connection with God that is merely legal. Such a concept has robbed the believers of the peace “that passes understanding” and puts it on the human level of performance, with one’s position constantly in jeopardy.

Christians are not, of course, above offenses. In fact, as humans, we are constantly subject to human failure. The question is not whether or not Christians sin, but how God uses the failures of Christians. John, in his first Epistle, urges the believers not to sin, but he says that if they do sin, they have a defender in Christ (2:2). So sin is always offensive to God, but He deals with it in a different way in His family than with those who are not members of the family. A good analogy would be an incident where a young lady “borrows” her mother’s jewelry without permission, and is then reprimanded for her action. If a stranger would come into the house and “borrow” the same jewelry, the chances are the police would be called. It is quite obvious that the members of God’s family do fail often, but in their failure they are treated as members of the family, who may need to be reprimanded and sometimes feel the brunt of their misdeeds, but God does not disown them or throw them out of the family.

It is obvious that the use of the concepts of the family is an accommodation to our human condition. Actually the relationship goes far beyond that, because it imbues us with the very Spirit of God for eternity. It is also true that there are different facets of the family relationship that are illustrated in our relationship to Christ. He is not only the Father, but He is also the Brother as in Hebrews 2—“*For which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren.*” And, of course, the family relationship is only one facet of His interaction with humans.

He is also identified as the Shepherd; the Vine and Vinedresser; the Lord and Master; the Sacrifice and the Priest and the Captain of our salvation. These are only a few of the relationships in which Christ has identified with humans on the earth. These human analogies are necessary because of our present condition. We are not able to grasp the realities of the spirit realm, but one day we will be able to do so in our glorified state.

*“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly [obscurely]; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known”* (I Corinthians 13:11,12). These verses have nothing to do with earthly maturity, but rather with the fact that

as long as we are on the earth we will always be children in our understanding. It is only when we have come to our glorification that we will have left “the childish things” of our misunderstandings. It is probably true that the moment we are glorified, the scales will drop from our eyes and we will “know as we are known.” But for now we must be content with symbols and types and allegories and analogies and leave the full revelation to the Spirit of God. This is one reason why there are divisions in the body of believers. Many do not understand the limits of our present capacities. If we would all acknowledge these limitations we could no doubt join together in the unity of our inadequacies, and get along together as brothers and sisters in the Lord’s family.

The realization of this familial relationship should soften the harshness with which Christ is often viewed as the Task Master and Judge. Like Jacob of old, the Lord found us in the wilderness and has gently carried us to safety and sheltered us in the storms of this world. *“He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him and there was no strange God with him”* (Deuteronomy 32:10-12).

And David said, *“I waited patiently for the Lord and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God”* (Psalm 40:1-3).

The Bible is filled with such passages as these, which show the gracious and tender side of our Heavenly Father. The focus has often been so much on exhortation and judgment, that the believer is robbed of the peace and grace that attends the sense of our position as children in the family and under the tender care of our Heavenly Father. The Lord redeemed us for our sakes, in order that He might make us members of His family—not slaves and charges. He is putting together a family—not an orphanage.

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