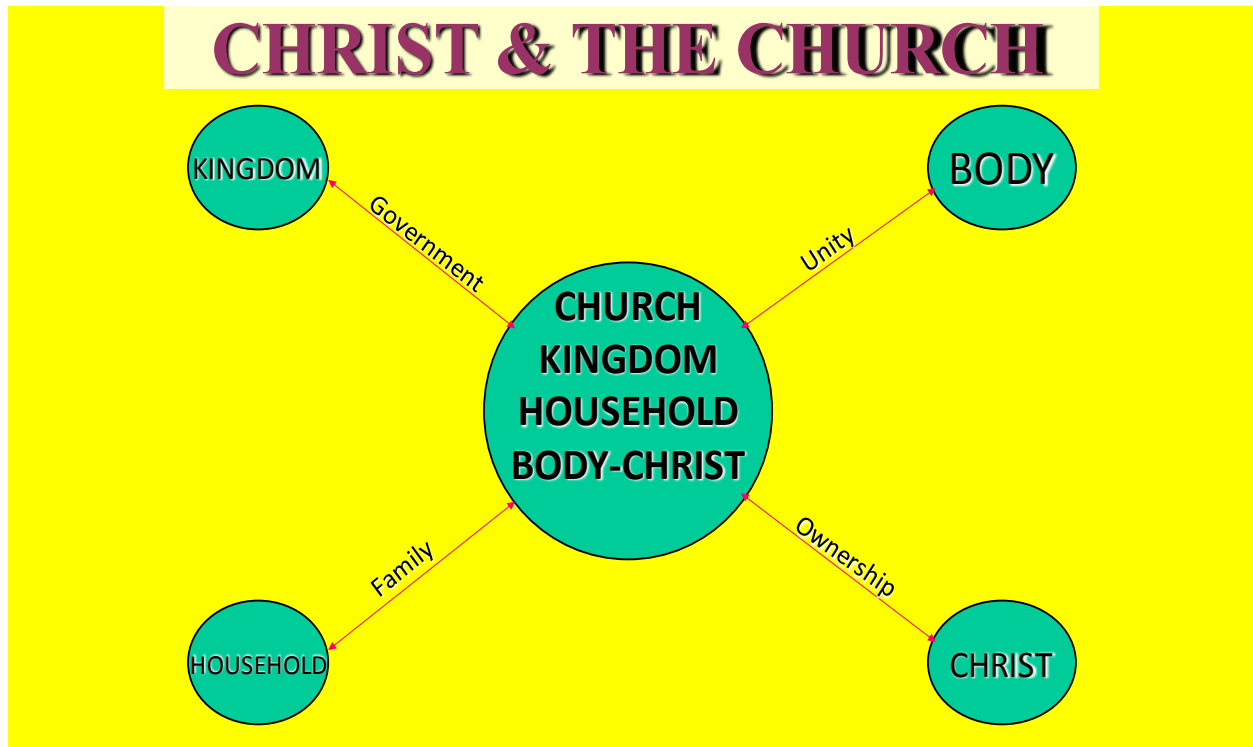
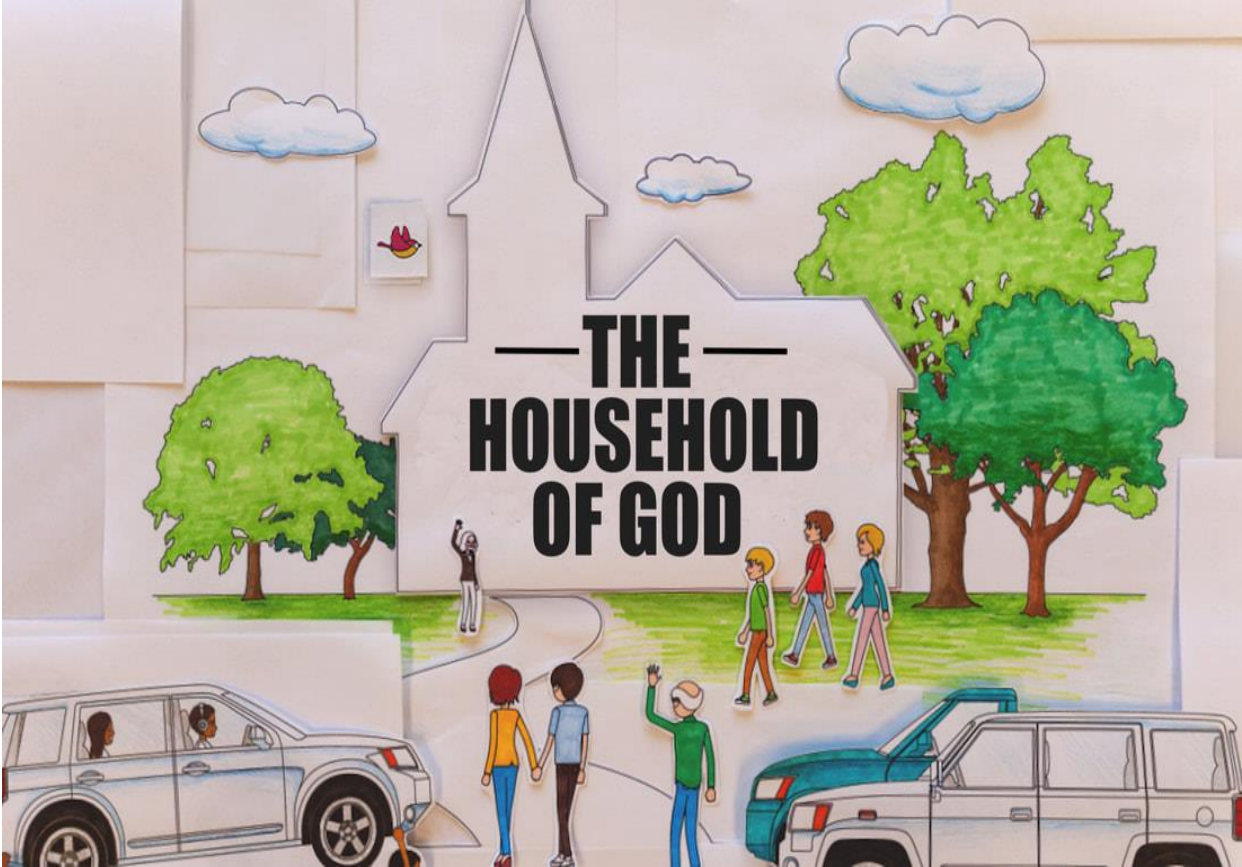
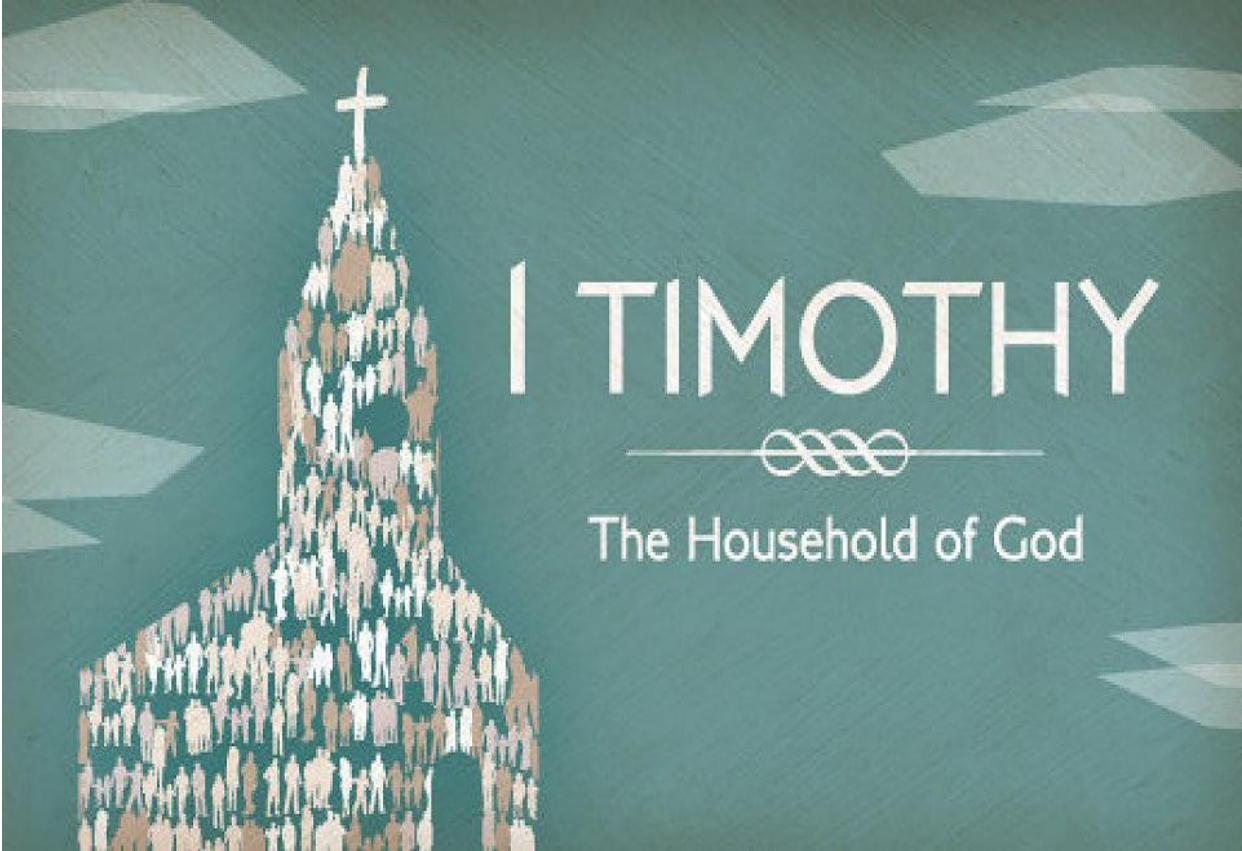


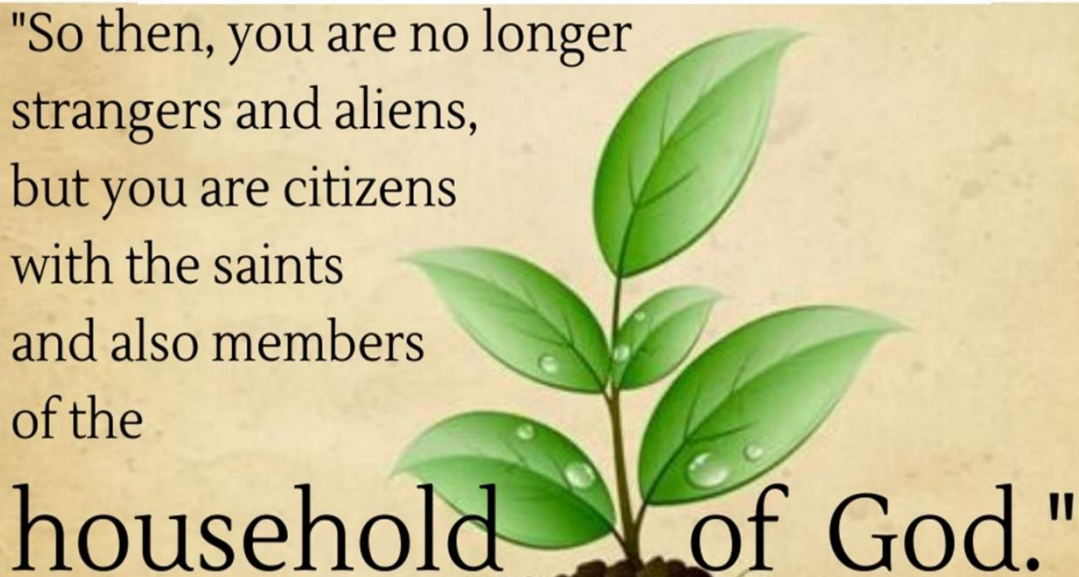
THREE-CORNER HOODS OF CORINTH: FATHERHOOD-BROTHERHOOD-NEIGHBORHOOD

By David Lee Burris





"So then, you are no longer
strangers and aliens,
but you are citizens
with the saints
and also members
of the
household of God."



Ephesians 2:19

THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

II. The Nucleus of the Family

- A. God is the Father (Eph. 4:6; 1 Cor. 8:6; Mt. 23:9)**
- B. Jesus is Son over the house of God (Heb. 3:6) & Christians are His brethren (Heb. 2:11).**
- C. Those who do God's will are Jesus brethren (Mt. 12:46-50).**
- D. Christians are children of God (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 3:26-27)**

Benson Commentary

[Ephesians 2:19-22](#). *Now, therefore* — Being thus reconciled; *ye* — Believing Gentiles; *are no more strangers and foreigners* — If it be necessary to make any distinction as to the signification of these two words, in the former, (ζενοι,) the apostle may refer to persons of a different country; and in the latter, (παροικοι,) to those of a different family. The following clause evidently leads to this sense. *But fellow-citizens with the saints* — The Church of God is here spoken of under the emblem of a city, as it is also [Isaiah 26:1-2](#); [Isaiah 60:1](#), &c.; [Isaiah 62:12](#); [Php 3:20](#), (where the original expression signifies, *our citizenship in heaven*,) as also [Hebrews 12:22](#); [Revelation 21:10-27](#), and in many other places of the Old and New Testaments. Of this city, the believers at Ephesus are here represented as genuine citizens, entitled to all the glorious immunities and privileges of it; ***and of the household of God*** — **Members of his family, his servants, yea, his sons and daughters.** As if he had said, God not only stands related to you as a king to his people, or the chief magistrate of a city to the citizens; but as a father to his children, who are under his peculiar protection and care, have the nearest access to him, and most intimate communion with him. “Perhaps,” says Doddridge, “this latter clause, οικειοι του Θεου, ***domestics of God***, may have some relation to that peculiar ***nearness to God*** in which the Jewish priests were, and refer to that great intimacy of unrestrained converse with God, to which we, as Christians, are admitted; in which respect our privileges seem to resemble, not only those of the people praying in the common court of Israel, but those of the priests, worshipping in the house itself. Nay, it is elsewhere added, by a figure, which seems beautifully to rise even on this, that we have ***confidence to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.***”

And are built — Here the apostle alludes to a building, particularly to the temple at Jerusalem, to which he compares God’s visible church and he represents the believers at Ephesus as constituent parts of this building; ***upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets*** — fundamental doctrines declared by them, on which the faith and hope of all true believers are built.

Christian Relationship: Not Title Or Brand Change But New Family Identification

"Whenever we read Bible stories we can't help but notice an important event that happens over and over again. People who have had a significant experience with God that transformed their life, more times than not they ended up with a name change. When Abram was called to leave his family & become the father of a great nation, his name was changed from Abram to Abraham. When Jacob wrestled with the angel & is blessed at the end of the battle, that blessing is signified in the change of his name from Jacob to Israel. When Simon confesses Christ on the mountain in Caesarea Philippi, his name is changed from Simon to Peter...

That is why it is significant that one of the first things that happens when Daniel and his friends are taken into exile in Babylon is that their names change. Each one of their original names has a significant connection to God. Daniel means "God judges." But when Daniel and his friends are renamed, all the references to God are lost.

It should be interesting for us as believers to pay attention to how the world would name you. To those who would see you as the end product of evolution, you are simply the next step in the process -- a conglomeration of proteins and water and carbon. To Madison Avenue we are consumers, targets to be separated from our money. To politicians we are voter groups who have significant key issues or points of interest, or agendas.

That is why it is so significant for us to remember who we are in Jesus Christ. We are indeed, rejected by the world but chosen and precious by Jesus (1st Peter 2:4). We must understand who we are - because - what we do comes directly out of who we believe ourselves to be. If you believe your life is not worth anything, then you will make choices that reflect that lack of value. If you believe that you are created in the image of God and are called according to His purposes, then your behavior will reflect that basic belief.

Many of us complain about **living in a world where we're called numbers.** [Or a workplace nickname of physical or behavioral caricature.] It's more than just a rude way to be addressed by corporations. It is a basic loss of our humanity. The Gospel is good news because it restores our broken relationship to God, and in doing so restores our humanity. Today as you pray, confirm within you the name that He has given you, and that you will live in the freedom of knowing who you are. Then you simply won't respond to a world that calls you by a wrong name." - *Michael Duduit*

Redefining Descent from Abraham

The process of reassessing kinship with Abraham begins with John the Baptist and Jesus, as they question the meaningfulness of physical descent from Abraham on its own. In light of the coming judgment of God, there can be no resting on the merits of that honorable ancestor, or automatic reception of the promises given to Abraham (Mt 3:9; Lk 3:8). Instead, it is necessary to bear good fruit oneself, in effect to show one's kinship with Abraham by living righteously as he did. Genealogy is no insurance against the Day of Judgment: "I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 8:11–12; see Lk 13:28). Jesus strikes at the heart of Jewish doctrines of election as he claims that Gentiles will enter the kingdom of heaven while the blood relations of Abraham find themselves excluded.

Paul develops this even further, prompted in no small part by the disturbances that erupted in the Galatian churches. After Paul had evangelized that region and set up a number of house churches, other teachers came to those Christians, who were mostly Gentiles, telling them that they had to accept circumcision (and perhaps the dietary and calendrical laws of Torah as well) in order truly to belong to the people of God. Paul had given them a good beginning, but they needed to seal their place in the family of Abraham by accepting the mark of circumcision as Abraham had done. In this way, Jews and Gentiles could enjoy **table fellowship** in the new community without leading the Jewish Christians into breaches of Torah. That Paul attributes the Judaizers' main motive to be avoidance of persecution may not be entirely untrue; if they could make it plain that Christianity both kept Jews Torah-observant and made Gentiles into Torah-observant proselytes, their non-Christian Jewish neighbors would no longer have cause for censuring or opposing the movement.

Paul's response to the persuasive arguments of the Judaizers centers on what makes one a descendant of Abraham. In Galatians 3:16, he notes that the promise of God is "to Abraham and his seed" (κτν). In a twist of linguistic legerdemain, Paul points out that "seed" is in fact a singular, not a plural, word (it would normally be read as a collective noun, much like our word "offspring").

Paul argues that Jesus was *the* seed, and that all who belong to this seed, to Christ, belong to the family and inheritance of Abraham: “In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.... And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:26, 29). According to Paul, **birth into this family happened at baptism**, in which the baptized “clothed [themselves] with Christ” (Gal 3:27). As they dress themselves with the Son, they become sons and daughters themselves. **Embeddedness in Christ** is the way to be embedded both in the family of God and the family of Abraham—anything else is meaningless; anything less leaves a person outside the inheritance.

In Galatians 4:21–31 Paul effects an exegetical coup by crossing the natural lineage of Jews (traced through Isaac) with the lineage of those nations that would end up being counted among the Gentiles (the descendants of Ishmael). In this argument, “flesh” serves as a metaphor broad enough to link Abraham’s natural power to beget a child (Ishmael) and the Judaizers’ emphasis on circumcision as the physical sign of belonging to Abraham’s family and the people of God (a mark in the flesh). Because they rely on a mark of the flesh and on physical descent for their place in Abraham’s family, Paul is able to identify the non-Christian Jews as children born according to the flesh and the Christians, whether Jewish or Gentile, as children born according to the promise. **Because they are born by trusting God’s promise (in Jesus), the Christians emerge as the true descendants of Isaac, while the Judaizers and the non-Christian Jews are disinherited as children of Hagar!** The relative honor of these two lines—one born of a slave into slavery, a most dishonorable condition, and the other born free—would not be missed by Paul’s readers. The Christians would be confirmed not only in their legitimacy as children of Abraham and therefore children of God but also in their higher place of honor in Abraham’s family. Paul prepares thus a potent remedy to the doubts raised in the Christians’ minds about belonging to the family of God, removing any advantage to be gained by accepting the Judaizers’ proposal.

Paul’s definition of kinship with Abraham and belonging to the line of promise eventually wins in this debate. Looking back on this argument, Luke presents the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 as a decisive turning point in the construction of the “family of God” and “family of Abraham.” In Acts 15:23, a clear note is sounded as the Jewish brothers send greetings to the believers of Gentile origin with the report of the Jerusalem Council about circumcision.

This is an incredibly significant step in the Christian movement since it has at least been decided that **a believer does not have to join the “house of Israel” through circumcision and proselytization in order to join the “household of God”**—these two houses being one and the same for the non-Christian Jew.

Paul has far greater sympathy for his “kin according to the flesh” than one gleans from Galatians alone. In Romans 9–11, he struggles at length over the place of non-Christian Jews and Christians in the “household of God.” He is keenly aware of the tension between the promises made to Abraham’s posterity and the response of Israel (defined as Israel “according to the flesh” to distinguish it from the church, called “Israel of God” in Gal 6:16) to the work of Jesus and the proclamation of the gospel, the good news of how God is fulfilling those promises given to Abraham so long ago. In Romans 9:3–5 he states the problem: the Jews, his “kindred according to the flesh” (note again how Paul qualifies their kinship as at the level of the flesh), had the advantage by birth of possessing the adoption as sons and daughters, the patriarchs who had received the promises, as well as “the glory [or honor], the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises,” and even the Messiah, who was born into their extended family. Why then did they not embrace the inheritance when it appeared? This question is even more pressing because it is ultimately God’s faithfulness to the promises that is at issue—whether or not “the word of God had failed” (Rom 9:6).

In a first argument, Paul makes the case that genealogical descent does not equal kinship (a stunning claim, to be sure): “Not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham’s children are his true descendants; but ‘It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.’ This means that **it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants**” (Romans 9:6–8). He uses the historical precedents of Isaac and Ishmael, and then Jacob and Esau, to demonstrate the claim he makes, a claim that turns out to be supported by Scripture itself. When God declares that only the children of Isaac will be counted as Abraham’s descendants with regard to the promise, God himself initiates the relativization of natural kinship that Paul continues in his interpretation: it is the children of promise (those born of trusting) rather than the children of flesh (those born of natural descent) that are ultimately “Israel.”¹

¹ deSilva, D. A. (2012). [*Honor, patronage, kinship & purity: unlocking new testament culture*](#) (pp. 202–206). Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Stranger? Or Family and Friend?

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

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“So, then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

The foregoing are words that Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, a congregation with which he worked for three years (Acts 20:31).

Some nineteen centuries before the birth of Jesus, Jehovah selected Abraham to be the founder of a new nation, the nation of Israel. The relationship was formalized even more with the giving of the law of Moses, which stood as a middle wall of partition, separating the Jews from other nations (Ephesians 2:14).

The purpose of this special relationship between God and Israel was redemptive, i.e., through these people the Messiah would come, and the Jews would play a role in preparing the world for this wonderful event. Jesus emphasized this truth to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well near Sychar when he declared: “[F]or salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22).

In view of this unfolding plan, there are many Old Testament references to, and provisions for, “strangers” (Exodus 22:21-24; Deuteronomy 16:11ff). While it is clear that the Lord cared for these “strangers,” they were alien to a formal relationship with God.

That day changed, however, as a result of the mission of Christ and the provisions of his new covenant for “all nations” (Matthew 28:19), a reality that had been foretold by the prophets of Israel (cf. Isaiah 2:2-4).

Hence, Paul could declare to the saints in Ephesus (mostly Gentiles by background; cf. Acts 19:8-10) that as a result of the conciliatory work of Christ (Ephesians 2:11ff), they were no more strangers and aliens, but “fellow-citizens” in the “**household of God.**” Note the phrase that depicts family!

What a thrilling concept it is to transition from being a stranger to becoming a citizen, indeed, a family member and a “friend.” Our Lord once said: “You are my friends if you do the things which I command you” (John 15:14).

It is a most unfortunate thing that many, who have the impression that they are friends of Christ, within his family even, actually are not. This is not because the Lord does not want them as such, but due to the fact that they either do not know, or ignore, the conditions for this relationship.

Some, such as the Universalists, contend there are no conditions. Others, like Calvinists, believe God chose them unconditionally before the foundation of the world, in conflict with Hebrews 5:8-9, which affirms that Christ is the Author of salvation to those who obey him. Not a few entertain the unfounded notion that their “morality” (and that is what they judge such to be) will get them by.

The expression “washing of water” in Ephesians 5:26 is a clear allusion to the obedience of immersion in water, which culminates the “new-birth” process (John 3:3-5). Scholars virtually are of one voice in acknowledging that the “water” of this text refers to baptism (see the Greek lexicons of Thayer 1958, 634; Danker et al. 2000, 1024). No one prior to the time of Calvin even questioned that the water of the new birth was baptism (Wall n.d., 95-96).

If you are a Christian, rejoice in your sweet relationship with Christ. You are not a stranger, but a family member and a friend.

Adoption into the Family of God

That God “destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:5) is a frequent topic in the New Testament, since it stands at the heart of what makes Christians kin one to another—adoption into a single family under a shared Father. Both Paul and John find in the promise made by God to David with regard to his successor (2 Sam 7:14) a promise that now applies in the plural (see Hos 1:10 as a possible bridge) to the new community of faith: “I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor 6:18); “Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children” (Rev 21:7).

Our place in God’s household is the result of the beneficence of the Son, Jesus, whose death redeemed us “so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4–5, my translation), an adoption effected, as we have seen, through trusting in Christ (Jn 1:12) and symbolically enacted in baptism (Gal 3:26–29). The Christians thus become heirs of what God has promised, and the Holy Spirit within them bears witness to their place in God’s family (Gal 4:6–7; see also 3:1–5). Gentile Christians are no longer “aliens” (*paroikoi*) to God, but members of the family (*oikeioi*): “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God” (Eph 2:19). Paul uses references to God as the Father of believers at the start of many of his letters, showing the prominence and almost “givenness” of this new household and its *paterfamilias* within Christian culture, and thus its availability as a foundational principle from which to derive ethical exhortations, explanations of the believers’ condition in the world and encouragements from their hope for the future (see Gal 1:3, 4; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:1; 2:16).

New Testament authors frequently find it useful to draw sharp contrasts between the believers’ natural birth and heritage and their adoptive birth and heritage. Birth into God’s family signals the potential for a radical break with everything connected with one’s natural birth and becomes a powerful image with which to drive ethical exhortation and to reinforce group integrity and solidarity. John is especially strong in this regard. The new birth is not added to an individual’s former birth and heritage but replaces it. Christians are “born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God” (Jn 1:13).

A person's birth "of the flesh" is of incomparably less value than being born "of the Spirit" (Jn 3:3–8). Being born of the spirit means being born "from above" (ironically, the beloved expression "born again" represents more Nicodemus' misunderstanding than Jesus' meaning), birth of a higher order than that which belongs to the physical realm. First Peter makes the difference in value clearer: "You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. For 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' That word is the good news that was announced to you" (1 Pet 1:23–25). **Natural birth is what ultimately gives a person the inheritance of death; mortality is the only result of human seed. Birth into God's family, however, means that a believer has been born into eternal life beyond death. The Christians are thus no longer subject to going the "way of all flesh," to perishing as swiftly and meaninglessly as the grass of the field.**

Along with the dissolution of one's first birth comes redemption from the heritage of that birth. As we have seen, the ultimate heritage therefrom is death, but the author of 1 Peter recognizes that the convert has also inherited much else from his or her earthly parents: "You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors" (1 Pet 1:18). These "futile ways" refer to the primary socialization of the believers before their conversion into the values, the worldview and the religion of the dominant culture. This former way of life is most negatively portrayed as an inheritance of dishonorable vice: "You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry" (1 Pet 4:3). The believers, who are experiencing society's pressure to return to that way of life inherited from their ancestors (see 1 Pet 2:12, 15; 4:4, 12–16), are urged to keep themselves distanced from that way of life—to consider it now alien and foreign to them: "I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11). **The reason for persevering in their new, secondary socialization into the values, worldview and ethos of the Christian community is the surpassing value of the new inheritance that attachment promises to bring: "By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1 Pet 1:3–4; see also Eph 1:11, 14; Col 1:12).**

Language of birth into God's family can thus become a strong incentive to ethical behavior, to solidarity among the Christians & to separation from those activities that, though they would reduce the tension between church and society, nevertheless would blur the distinctive witness of the Christian way of life.

An important issue is the "status inconsistency" experienced by Christians. On the one hand, they enjoy the great honor of being children of no less distinguished a Parent than the God of the universe. On the other hand, that status is hardly manifested in the world as they variously experience insult, reproach, physical abuse, financial hardship and ruin, even imprisonment and, occasionally, lynching. This is dealt with in a number of ways.

First, the experience of Jesus provides an important lens for integrating these two opposing points. The early Christians know what honor Jesus had as God's Son, but also what slander, abuse and degradation he suffered at the hands of people. They also know that God vindicated Jesus' honor by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand. Based on this precedent, the Christian may begin to make sense of the dishonor that falls to him or her in the world on account of attachment to the household of Jesus (see Mt 10:25; Jn 15:18–20), sharing in his rejection by the "wicked and perverse race," knowing that God will manifest their honor to the world even as God manifests Jesus' honor at the second coming (see chapter two). Hebrews 2:5–18 is again relevant here: the bond of unity between Jesus and the "many sons and daughters" assures them that the honor he enjoys now, namely, the exaltation over creation celebrated in Psalm 8, will be theirs at the completion of their pilgrimage as well (Heb 2:10).

This conviction of faith leads directly to promises about the day when **the inconsistency will be resolved finally in the Christians' favor, a second resource for making the tension more endurable in the interim.** The opening benediction of 1 Peter (1 Pet 1:3–9), for example, addressed to the Christians throughout Asia Minor suffering reproach and rejection from their non-Christian neighbors, strategically begins by talking about this very hope, the imperishable inheritance reserved in heaven (1 Pet 1:4), the "deliverance that is about to be revealed." The believers' perseverance in their love for Christ in the midst of their trials will mean "glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Pet 1:7). They are the recipients of all the wondrous gifts of God that the prophets foresaw (1 Pet 1:10–12), and so are encouraged to lift their eyes away from the present situation to the "gift that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13), the final manifestation of their "glory and honor" in the eyes of their detractors.

Romans 8:14–23 is a particularly rich discussion of the believers' place in God's family, the tension they experience as God's children in this age, and the inevitable resolution of that tension:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Paul begins by pointing to the Spirit as the proof of their share in Christ's inheritance. That Spirit, and the assurance it brings them, should enable great boldness in the face of whatever opposition or suffering the world brings to bear on the believer—it is the Spirit of a freeborn child of God, who should exhibit courage and confidence rather than cowering slavishly. Enduring the hostility of unbelievers means solidarity with the one who is now seated at God's right hand and thus means, in the end, honor. They are assured that the cost they pay now is but pennies on the dollar compared to the inheritance they will enjoy at the consummation. Moreover, the Christians are not alone in their groaning for the manifestation of their full honor and their glorified existence in the resurrection; all creation feels the tension as well, groaning to God to bring resolution. The hearers are encouraged to persist in solidarity with the name of Christ, remain associated closely with him even though it means some degree of deprivation or even suffering now, because that association is their claim on the inheritance. The Spirit that bears witness to them about their **adoption is merely the first-fruits** of their promised crop.

Finally, the believers do experience their favored status as sons and daughters in the assembly and in enjoyment of God's gifts. This includes first and foremost the gift of the Holy Spirit as the internal witness to the Christians' place in God's family (Rom 8:14–17; Gal 4:6–7), the pledge of our full adoption, and as the seed planted in us that enables us to live as Jesus lived, to love as God loves—in short,

to resemble our new family. It also means assurance of God's provision for his daughters and sons (Mt 17:24–27, for example, is a story that leads to this expectation), and of God's assistance in answer to the requests of his household (Mt 7:7–11). While the non-Christians may thus challenge the believers' honor, God himself, in the fellowship of the family of faith, continuously affirms the believers' honor as his own children. As we will see below, the "many sons and daughters" also play an important role in affirming one another's worth as God's children, countering the power of society's resistance with mutual support, encouragement and affirmation.

The author of 1 Peter, writes: "Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy' " (1 Pet 1:14–16). Here the injunction to be like their new Father (using Lev 19:2 as a resource) strengthens the exhortation against melting back into the dominant culture and the kinds of behaviors they would approve. In Ephesians Paul uses the topic to cultivate an ethos of mutual forgiveness and love within the Christian community. Since God forgave, they are to forgive; since Christ loved, they are to love. In this way, they are to "be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Eph 4:31–5:2; see also 1 Jn 3:1–3).

Paul brings another dimension to this in Romans 8:29: Christians are being "conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn of many brothers and sisters." Thus, the Christians seek in all things to imitate not only the Father but also their senior brother. Answering the question "What would Jesus do?" (and then doing it) is not just a clever gimmick—it is the distinguishing mark of Jesus' kindred.²

² deSilva, D. A. (2012). [*Honor, patronage, kinship & purity: unlocking new testament culture*](#) (pp. 206–212). Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press.

The Blessings & Responsibilities of God's Family

Open your Bibles to Romans 8 which we will touch on in a few moments. I want to talk about the blessings and responsibilities of being a part of the family of God.

Blessings of a Physical Family

- The love and care of parents
- The daily necessities of life
- Protection from dangers and problems
- The blessing of a good name

Great blessings come from having a physical family.

Responsibilities to a Physical Family

When you are in a family there are responsibilities that are part of being in that family.

- Obedience - [Ephesians 6:1](#), [Colossians 3:20](#), [Luke 2:51](#)

- Provision - [1 Timothy 5:8](#)
- Respect - 1 Timothy 5:4 (Adult children are to provide for their own).
- Training and Admonition - [Ephesians 6:4](#)

A Christian is a Part of God's Family

- [Romans 8:14-17](#)

As many as are led by the Spirit, they are the children of God.

- [Romans 8:1,6](#)

Those who walk after the Spirit are those who are obedient to God. Those that are in the flesh and walk according to the flesh are under condemnation. But, those who walk with God, there is no condemnation and they are adopted into the family of God. We are part of God's family. And, an adopted child is an heir in every way.

- [1 Timothy 3:15](#)
- [Galatians 3:26-27](#)

We are the children of God by faith, having chosen to walk in the faith and being obedient to His will.

Being a child of God and a joint-heir with Christ brings great blessings. But, being a child of God also carries with it certain responsibilities as well. This lesson will consider both the blessings and responsibilities of being a child of God.

The Blessings of God's Family

There are certainly many blessings of being a member of God's family.

- **We Have God as Our Father**

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He had them address the prayer to "Our Father..." [Matthew 6:9](#). When you think about the child of God calling God his Father, we can say, "Abba Father." That is, a personal address.

- Christians are children of God - [1 John 3:1-2](#)
- Separate from the world - [2 Corinthians 6:14-18](#), [James 4:4](#)
- Led by the Spirit - [Romans 8:14](#)

- **We Wear the Greatest Name**

- It is the name of Christ - [Philippians 2:9-10](#)
- His disciples are to wear the name of Christ. - [Acts 11:26](#)
- Wearing the name of Christ:
 - Speaks of their salvation - [Acts 4:12](#)
 - Tells that they belong to Him - [1 Corinthians 6:20](#)
- One must be baptized "in His name" in order to rightfully wear His name. - [1 Corinthians 1:10-14](#)
-

- **We Enjoy the Protection of God**

- The child of God does not have to fear others. - Peter 3:13-14
- Even if a child of God has to suffer, he is blessed.
- [Matthew 5:10-12](#)
- Jesus gives assurance of the Father's watchful protection.
- [Matthew 10:27-31](#)

- **We Receive the Proper Spiritual Provisions**
 - Water unto eternal life - [John 4:10-14](#)
 - The bread of life - [John 6:51](#); [Acts 20:32](#)
- **We Enjoy the Promises of God**
 - Those of the faith have been given great and precious promises. - [2 Peter 1:1-4](#)
 - These promises are sure. - [2 Peter 3:9](#)
 - Remission of past sins - [Acts 2:38](#)
 - Access through prayer - [1 John 2:1-2](#)
 - Eternal life - [Titus 1:1-2](#)

We have these great promises. We also have the great blessings of being a family of God with all of the other Christians around the world. Wherever you go in the world there is that great blessing of being part of the family of God.

To enjoy the great blessings of being in the family of God, one has to be adopted into the family. How is one adopted? We've looked at some of those things, those that are led by the Spirit of God they've received the spirit of adoption. We're led by the Spirit of God when we obey the Word of God. When we follow the teachings. Jesus said, *if you love me, keep my commandments*. We keep the commandments of God and that is how we show our love.

We can enjoy the great blessings, especially the blessing of eternal life as a child of God. But, we have to do as God commands in order to be His child.

Believe that He is, that Jesus is the Son of God, confess that Holy name, repent of our sins, confess the name of Jesus, be baptized to wash our sins away. Then, you are added to the body, the church of Christ, the family, the house of God. – *Oak Grove Church of Christ*

KINSHIP & THE “HOUSEHOLD OF GOD” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Creating a New Family

Christians were heirs to the Jewish conception of the people of God as “brothers and sisters,” which was for Israel merely an exaggeration of natural genealogical proximity (they were, ideally at least, all actually related as descendants of Jacob). This conception of people of God as kin takes a particularly Christ-centered focus. It is now attachment to this Jesus that determines whether or not a person is in the family, rather than the person’s bloodline or natural lineage. Discussions in the New Testament of the formation of this family focus on determining “the true descendants of Abraham” as well as adoption into God’s own family. The purpose of such discussion is manifold: it gives the early church a sense of shared identity and binds the members together in the solidarity of the kinship bond; it provides them with a legitimate connection to the promises of God recounted in the Jewish Scriptures; it speaks of the profound honor and privilege that has come to them by virtue of attachment to the Christian community, and the coming manifestation of that honor, such that perseverance with the group remains an attractive option.

Jesus’ sonship. The critical link in the construction of this family is Jesus, who enjoys a double lineage (see Rom 1:3–4). First, he is a legitimate descendant of Abraham, but he is also the Son of God, the “heir of all things” (Heb 1:2). Both aspects of this lineage are highly significant for the presentation of the Christian family as the true “descendants of Abraham” as well as “children of God,” the many siblings of the “firstborn of many sisters and brothers” (Rom 8:29, my translation). The “Son of God” title appears to be more frequently affirmed across the New Testament, perhaps because of the power of this concept to create the relationship between Christians and God as children and Father through faith in the Son par excellence.

As Son, Jesus becomes the most effective and important mediator between humanity and God. On the basis of his filial closeness to the Father, Jesus becomes a better mediator than the many priests who inherit that status through their Levitical lineage. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews can now therefore reject physical descent as a basis for priesthood in the case of Jesus (Hebrews 7:3, 5–6, 13–16).

This most central defining feature of priestly status is overturned on the basis of Jesus' divine appointment. Just as Jesus is named "Son" by God (Heb 1:5 and 5:5, both quoting Ps 2:7), so he is named "priest forever" by God (Heb 5:5–6).

Jesus as Son is thus the bridge between those who are made the many children and the Father, the one who knits together this family and brings the believers to their inheritance as children of God. Hebrews 2:5–3:6 develops this link at some length, starting with an interpretation of Psalm 8:4–6. Jesus is the only human being in whom the glorious vision of that psalm has been fulfilled, but he has made it possible for all to arrive at glory. The Son is the pioneer who leads the "many sons and daughters" to their destiny (Heb 2:10). His incarnation—his sharing in flesh and blood—becomes a witness to his kinship with us, his willingness to call us his sisters and brothers, as well as the cause of his sympathetic mediation on our behalf. This trustworthy Son has made all the believers part of his household (Heb 3:6), and as we remain attached to Jesus, we retain our grasp on our promised inheritance in glory.

Descent and lineage. It is noteworthy, however, that even in Hebrews 2:5–3:6 it is not sufficient to describe the Christians as the "many sons and daughters" of God (Heb 2:10, my translation). They are also specifically identified as "the children of Abraham" (Heb 2:16, my translation). Abraham's story is the beginning of the story of redemption. God promised blessing to Abraham: the gift of a homeland, an innumerable progeny and, through him, blessing to "all the families of the earth" (Gen 12:3). He was the channel through whom God's promise would flow and to whom the fulfillment would come. His family thus had a unique and matchless heritage: his descendants were the people of God's promise and possessors of a great inheritance. This was a heritage that the early Christians would claim as their own. In the birth pangs experienced by the movement as it separated from the parent body, the claim to be the true descendants of Abraham gave the church the assurance that it was the God-approved continuation of the faith of the patriarchs, the strength to withstand the censure of non-Christian Jews, and the ability to persevere in trust that it would receive the promised blessings of God. The particular way in which kinship with Abraham was redefined within the Christian movement allowed Gentiles and Jews to enter the family on an equal basis, eliminating the ethnic particularities attached to conversion. In effect, it turned the God of Israel into the God of all the nations (Rom 3:28–30).³

³ deSilva, D. A. (2012). [*Honor, patronage, kinship & purity: unlocking new testament culture*](#) (pp. 198–202). Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press.

1st Century Interpretation @ God's Household

“Natural” Households and Early Christianity

Early Christianity was basically a “household” movement first in that it sought after the conversion of heads of households, whose dependents would follow them into the new faith. The unnamed official in John 4:53 believes “along with his whole household.” Cornelius, who had previously committed to semi-attachment to Judaism along with his household as “God fearers” (Acts 10:2) also converts to Christianity with his whole household (Acts 10:24, 44–48). The same pattern of conversion along with the head of a household is evidenced in the stories of Lydia (Acts 16:14–15), the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:31–34) and Crispus in Corinth (Acts 18:8). Entire households are greeted as part of the church in several Pauline letters: “the family of Aristobulus” in Romans 16:10, the “family of Narcissus” in Romans 16:11, the “household of Stephanas,” baptized together by Paul (1 Cor 1:16; see 16:15), and the “household of Onesiphorus” in 2 Timothy 4:19. In Titus 1:10–11, false teachers are “upsetting whole families” with their doctrine, another testimony to this prominent (though by no means consistent) tendency.

Second, it was a household movement insofar as it depended on the hospitality of its member householders not only for the regular assemblies of the church (see Acts 5:42; 12:12; 20:20; the house of Aquila and Prisca in Rom 16:3–5 and 1 Cor 16:19; the house of Gaius, host to the whole church in Corinth, Rom 16:23; the house of Nympha, Col 4:15; the house of Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus, Philem 1–2) but also for the travels and visits of its itinerant leaders and teachers (see Mt 10:11–13; Acts 16:15, 40; 21:8, 16; 28:14; 2 Tim 1:16; Philem 22), as well as lay Christians serving as messengers and couriers in the work of the church (2 Cor 8:23; see 3 Jn 5–8). Hospitality withdrawn or refused was a powerful means of limiting or even quashing the influence of “deviants” within the Christian movement (2 Jn 10). The household base also made possible the charitable relief of the sisters and brothers in need or in prison, “the economic self-sufficiency of the movement,” and the provision of a “sense of belonging” to the “rootless, the aliens, the deprived and the dispossessed.”

Because the household became the center of the new religion, the structures of the household affected the structures of the new religion. This is seen most prominently in the Pastoral Epistles, in which householders emerge as the only likely candidates for bishop and deacon. According to Titus 1:6 (see also 1 Tim 3:5), only heads of Christian households, with obedient Christian children, are allowed to serve as bishops. These local leaders are to have been married only once (just as true widows are those who have had only one husband according to 1 Tim 5:9–14, 16) and able to manage their own natural households (especially their children) well as proof of their ability to manage the household of God (1 Tim 3:2–5, 12).

Managing the Christian (natural) household. The survival of a group propagated through households and supported in households depends ultimately on the survival of households: “The household as a religious and social unit offered the Christians the best possible security for their existence as a group. Any weakening here would thus be a potentially devastating blow to their own cohesion.” The extensive overlap between the expectations of each member of a household (and the qualities to be embodied, for example, by women and children) in the dominant culture and in the emerging Christian culture reveals the importance of the continuation of households as the early Christians had known them for the survival of the movement. New motivations for old behaviors (e.g., now anchoring them in the example of Christ or the will of God) stand alongside startling modifications of old behaviors necessitated by the example of Christ. These give the Christian (natural) household a distinctive identity and internal dynamic while at the same time maintaining a positive stance toward the maintenance of family units, with the result that the movement would not be branded as a subversion of the social order by the dominant culture (particularly by its officials).⁴

⁴ deSilva, D. A. (2012). [*Honor, patronage, kinship & purity: unlocking new testament culture*](#) (pp. 226–229). Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Household Codes

Three New Testament texts contain blocks of instructions, called “household codes” (the German word, *Haustafeln*, became a technical term encountered even in many English studies on the New Testament), directed at the different members of the household, following the pairs laid out as early as Aristotle to such a degree as to suggest that these were standard topics in ethical instruction. Thus, in Ephesians 5:22–6:9 and Colossians 3:18–4:1 we find instructions to wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters (the same male being potentially husband, father and master in a household); a truncated version of this form is found in 1 Peter 2:18–3:7, with instructions to slaves, wives and husbands.

These passages are but a small part of the larger enterprise of the great household code being formed throughout the New Testament, teaching “how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God” (1 Tim 3:15). The more universal rules explored above as aspects of the ethos of honorable kin apply all the more within the Christian natural household. This is something that Paul brings out forcefully in Ephesians 5:21, the preface to the entire household code: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” **Mutual love, unity, cooperation for one another’s good, putting the interests of the other ahead of one’s own—all these form the relational context in which these household codes are to be enacted and the interpretive lens through which they are to be understood and applied.**

First Corinthians 14:34 also speaks of the subordination of woman, presumably to the husband, (as does 1 Tim 2:6–15 explicitly) as the proper ethos for Christian women, just as it had been the ethos for these wives in their pre-Christian enculturation, whether Jewish or Greco-Roman. This theme also comes out forcefully in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 as the rationale for head coverings: “Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ” (1 Cor 11:3). However one chooses to translate *kephalē* (“head”) here, the firstness indicated by this term is difficult to avoid. **Submissiveness as a wifely virtue also receives affirmation in Ephesians 5:22–24 and 1 Peter 3:1–6, where the example of the church’s relationship to Christ is invoked as a model and rationale for marital relationships.**

We begin to see how the church is modifying and qualifying these traditional values in Paul's preface to his own household code in Ephesians 5:21: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." In this way, the household hierarchy is not eliminated, any less than the celestial hierarchy of the supreme servant is diminished, but as the instructions to husbands make clear, it is to be lived out in such a way as manifests the essential and paradoxical nature of authority as servanthood (personified in Christ).

The distinctive Christian modifications are most apparent in discussions of the husband's role and the ethos he is to embody in Ephesians 5:25–33 and 1 Peter 3:7. That husbands are to care for their wives "as for their own flesh" will probably be familiar from Greco-Roman ethics, since the same thing had been said even of slaves four centuries before, and since the female's honor was embedded in the honor either of her father or husband. The model for loving now available to the Christian, however, is the self-sacrificial love of Jesus, who gave himself for the church. This certainly raises the level of nourishing and tender caring for the wife to a new height. To this, the author of 1 Peter adds the following advice, which has been consistently mistranslated in English versions: "Likewise the husbands are to live together with their wives considerately as with the weaker vessel, giving honor also as to fellow heirs of the gift of life in order that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pet 3:7, my translation). Again, the first rationale will be familiar from Greco-Roman ethicists, who also would frown upon inconsiderate domination of the wife. The great dignity conferred on the woman by God, however, as a fellow heir of the same gift of life for which the husband hopes necessitates holding her in honor—indeed, in equal honor as he might hold himself. This is the principle that is to guide him in his relationship with her.

Children, in keeping not only with the Greco-Roman ethic but also the Mosaic Decalogue, are still to obey their parents (Eph 6:1–3, which explicitly refers to Deut 5:16). Fathers are urged to train their children gently, specifically "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). The father's role in education is not new (see Deut 6:4–8; 4 Macc 18:6–19; fathers were also involved in Greek and Roman education), but the curriculum is specifically a Christian one. The father is charged with the momentous responsibility of making disciples here not of all nations but of his own children. Again, the specific injunction not to "provoke your children to anger" (and, in Col 3:21, not to bear oneself in such a way that the children lose heart) guards against a pre-Christian or non-Christian equation of the *paterfamilias* with monarchical ruler of a household. He is here cast as a patient pedagogue, a servant of the household educating the children.

Finally, these household codes turn their attention to the attitudes that slaves and masters are to have toward one another. Slaves are predictably enjoined to “obey [their] earthly masters in everything,” not only when their work is being scrutinized but at all times (Col 3:22; Eph 6:5). So far, this is standard. The rationale offered by Paul, however, is wholly new. They are not to work in this manner out of a desire to please their earthly masters but are offering service in their appointed tasks to their heavenly Lord (Eph 6:6–7; Col 3:22–24). They are called to be exemplary slaves out of faithfulness to Jesus, the one who will bestow on the slave his or her inheritance, which we recall to be the inheritance not of slaves but of children of God. Ephesians makes this all the more clear: “Whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free” (Eph 6:8). Before the judgment seat of Christ, when “each will receive his or her reward for deeds done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor 5:10, my translation), such earthly status markers as “slave” and “free” have no meaning—a brilliant insight declared in Galatians 3:28, but awaiting the passing of centuries and millennia to be worked out in practice.

The author of 1 Peter also offers instructions for slaves, going so far as to enjoin them to show deference even to bad and unjust masters (whom, one would hope, would have been found only outside the Christian community), never committing a crime such as would merit punishment, but enduring undeserved punishment, if it comes, assured of God’s favor and approval of their upright character (1 Pet 2:18–20). The Christian slaves are to imitate Christ, who also endured undeserved suffering, did not sin, offered no insult or abuse in return, entrusting himself instead to God (1 Pet 2:21–24). What is most striking about this author’s instructions, however, is that the exhortations to slaves become the prism through which he develops his instructions to the whole body. After giving instructions to slaves (1 Pet 2:18–25), wives (1 Pet 3:1–6) and husbands (1 Pet 3:7), the author turns to the whole Christian community. Now he enjoins all to endure any suffering incurred on account of their attachment to Jesus, knowing that they have God’s approval (1 Pet 3:14, 17; 4:14, 16), to avoid criminal entanglements and sin (1 Pet 3:10–12, 17; 4:15), to refuse to retaliate (1 Pet 3:9), to entrust themselves to God (1 Pet 4:19), all with an awareness of Christ’s own example (1 Pet 3:18; 4:1). It is the slaves and not the masters who become the model for the behavior of all Christians.

Masters of slaves receive specific instructions in the household codes of Ephesians and Colossians. The instructions are brief, making the distinctively Christian rationales and modifications stand out all the more:

Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven. (Col 4:1)

Masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality. (Eph 6:9)

The way a master or mistress treats his or her slaves must be governed at all times by an awareness of their mutual Master in heaven, who will judge both master and slave without partiality (see Job 31:13–15, a clear piece of evidence that Christianity builds on Jewish ethics at this point). The Ephesians text is even more striking, first in openly challenging the meaningfulness of human-made distinctions between **slaves and masters—a distinction that does not exist in the eye of God, with whom “there is no partiality.”** The equality of persons before the heavenly Master is presented as a check to the inherent *hybris* of the masters, who must not lord it over the slave with threats and force. The master must remember that he or she too is but a human being like the slave and that **the human-made labels of “slave” and “free” merely reflect a temporary and passing order rather than the absolute value of two classes of people.** Second, the instruction to masters opens very strangely, calling on the masters to “do the same” toward their slaves as Paul has enjoined on the slaves to do for their masters, namely to **“render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord...knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free” (Eph 6:7–8).** This is a most stunning return to the topic of mutual subjection that opened Paul’s “household code” at Ephesians 5:21, showing that it is unavoidably the guiding principle for the Christian master as well as the slave (just as it was for husband and wife).

The fledgling church was being nurtured and grown through households, and [to focus attack on the institution of slavery directly would be] to overthrow the constitution of the household by attacking its fundamental order would have resulted in the crash of its own support network. That considerations of the group’s reputation were on the minds of the early Christian leaders is made evident from the Pastoral Epistles. Slaves are to honor their masters “so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed [i.e., slandered]” (1 Tim 6:1).

Similarly, the pastor gives instructions to older women that they are to teach the younger women in the church “to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands”—in short, all the things Plutarch or Xenophon would have wished for from a wife—“so that the word of God may not be discredited” (Tit 2:3–5; see chapter two).

We should also note carefully amidst the many concessions the early church leaders made, however, the tremendous qualifications they placed on the slave-master relationship, just as they had on the wife-husband relationship. In addition to the clear statements that before God (and in Christ) there is no distinction between slave and free, and to Paul’s bold prefacing of instructions to slaves and masters with that **all-encompassing admonition to “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ,”** the canon includes the very important letter to Philemon, a Christian slave owner. The slave Onesimus had left Philemon’s house and sought out Paul, whom he knew to have a lot of influence with his master. While with Paul, he came to the faith. Now Paul sends Onesimus back (with the letter) with the hope that Philemon will release his slave to join Paul and be of help to him in prison. In the letter he includes these words: “Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord” (Philemon 15–16). For Christian master and Christian slave, Paul leaves no doubt that **the relationship of “brother” was the fundamental one, and “slave-master” the secondary, indeed incidental one. A master could no longer treat his slave in way that would be unsuitable for one sibling to treat another.**

These texts say less than liberationists would wish, but they also say far more than the supporters of hierarchies (like patriarchy) would wish—if we truly read them rather than use them as legitimation for power structures.

The way in which the New Testament speaks to the institution of slavery, making so much room for a pattern of relationship that, ultimately and rightly, the church rejected as contrary to God's purposes for humanity in creation and redemption, should caution us strongly against taking it as God's whole word on the subject. We otherwise would stand in danger of mistaking concession for command, expedience for excellence. The larger principles of mutual submission, of seeking to serve rather than to rule, of seeing others in the Spirit rather than according to the flesh are, like leaven in bread, slowly helping us to rise above the best level we could attain on our own (namely, the ethics of the pre-Christian, Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures). God cannot accomplish his whole purpose at once, for his church and the society around it cannot so quickly leave behind the "futile ways inherited from [their] ancestors" and attain the "freedom of the glory of the children of God" (1 Pet 1:18; Rom 8:21). The church has come to recognize and been bold enough to affirm that "there is no longer Jew or Greek," and eventually that "there is no longer slave or free," but that all these distinctions based on the flesh and on this temporary ordering of the world are not ultimate.⁵

⁵ deSilva, D. A. (2012). [*Honor, patronage, kinship & purity: unlocking new testament culture*](#) (pp. 229–237). Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press.

The Ethos of the “Household of Faith”

The Christians are explicitly instructed to treat one another as family: “Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father, to younger men as brothers, to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters—with absolute purity” (1 Tim 5:1–2). Fostering an ethos of kinship within the Christian group was a widespread technique of the group, grounded in the conviction that believers have become kin by the blood of Christ, being adopted into the one household of God as the many sons and daughters.

Of all the possible family relationships from which to choose, however, it is the sibling relationship that emerges as prominent. *Philadelphia* (“the love of brothers and sisters”) becomes the central topic for shaping relationships with one another in the church. Believers are often specifically exhorted to embody this particular species of love toward one another (Rom 12:9–10; 1 Thess 4:9–10; Heb 13:1; 1 Pet 1:22; 3:8; 2 Pet 1:7), and their fellowship is called a “brotherhood” by one author (*adelphotēs*, 1 Pet 2:17; 5:9). Use of the terms *brother*, *sister* and *brethren* for the community of disciples from the very beginning (see Mt 18:15; 28:10; Lk 22:32; Jn 20:17–18; 21:23; Acts 1:15; 9:30; 10:23; 15:1, 3, 22, 32–33, 36, 40; 21:17; 28:15; by far the most common way of referring to fellow Christians) facilitates the adoption of a sibling ethic for the Christian church. **The New Testament authors consistently come back to this kinship ethic to evaluate what behaviors are compatible and what behaviors are incompatible with living together as the household of God.**

Mutual love. First, Christians are repeatedly urged to love one another (Jn 13:34; 15:17), specifically after the example of Jesus, who valued the well-being of his sisters and brothers above his own life (Jn 15:12–13). Just as it would be disgraceful for a person to love his or her natural kin only as long as that love cost nothing, so people joined by the blood of Jesus are to “go the distance” in loving each other. **Putting one another ahead of our comfort level, our attachment to our money, even our personal safety**—this was the kind of love that, for John at least, sums up all of Jesus’ teaching. This is to be the church’s essential mark, so that the world will recognize their connection with Jesus by the love they show one another (Jn 13:35).

Love of the brothers and sisters is an essential characteristic of those who are “in the light”; without such love, one is “still in the darkness” (1 Jn 2:9–11). Loving the family of God is the indication of being “born of God” (1 Jn 4:7) and also of loving God. As for Plutarch, so for John, **love for siblings is the best proof of love for one’s parents**. Those without such love for the fellow believers show themselves to be “children of the devil” (1 Jn 3:10), as were the schismatics who broke off relations with those whom John consoles in his letter.

Love must be practically demonstrated. John provides a simple way in which “laying down one’s life for the sisters and brothers” can be enacted: “We ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (1 Jn 3:16–18). So also for Paul, love and its practical manifestation in mutual service go hand in hand: “You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another” (Gal 5:13). Christian freedom is a very different thing from modern, Western notions of freedom. The Christian’s freedom is always directed by love for the other, not concern for our own rights and desires. It seeks opportunities to serve in the name of Jesus, not to indulge oneself in the name of rights.

Paul in two places forcefully urges believers to put the spiritual well-being of the sister or brother ahead of the exercise of the believers’ freedom in Christ. Abstaining from hurting the sister or brother takes the highest priority: “When you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall” (1 Cor 8:11–13) To injure a brother or sister is to cease “walking in love” (Romans 14:15, 21). Such concern for what is in the interest of one’s sisters and brothers becomes the primary guide to conduct (both abstention and positive pursuit): “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (Phil 2:40). Paul’s standard of love means abstaining from one’s rights if the full exercise of one’s freedom will offend and tear down a sister or brother. Most ecclesiastical debates I have witnessed tend to pursue an alternative strategy, namely, forcing one’s perceived freedom on the rest of the family of faith, trying to maneuver one’s way into making them “live with it” and “accept it.” Our commitment to enjoying and enforcing our rights inevitably results in shattering the body of Christ into ever more splinters. It is an American way but not a Christian way.

The following three topics develop a richer New Testament picture of what it means to have “fellowship” (*koinōnia*) in the body. Where fellowship means less than this, the church is missing out on the full enjoyment of its inheritance in this life.

Sharing of resources. The conviction that siblings are to make use in common of their inherited goods undergirds the exhortation to benefit and share with one another within the community (Heb 13:16; cf. 6:9–10; 10:24–25). Lucian bears witness that this attitude is thoroughly established among Christians by the second century in one of his satires: “Their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another.... Therefore, they despise all things [i.e., material goods] indiscriminately and consider them common property” (*Peregr.* 13). As siblings in Christ, the believers are to pool their resources in every way so that each member of the family **knows the love of this family at his or her point of need** and so that all arrive safely at the heavenly goal.

The picture of the earliest community of disciples painted by Luke is one in which the ideal of friendship is fully lived out: “No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common” (Acts 4:32). As the need to care for the poor in their midst made itself felt, the Christians of means would sell their houses and lands, and bring the proceeds to the apostles for distribution (Acts 4:34–35). What we witness in the early church is an attitude that each believer has toward fellow believers—“love for the brothers and sisters”—and lives out without reservation. The realization of kinship through the sharing of possessions continues in the famous collection project for the poor in the Judean churches (Acts 11:29), which is also a prominent topic of Paul’s letters as he actually carries out that project. Such an attitude toward possessions was not a historical curiosity of the first decade of the church but continued to be a prominent aspect of its living out of the new relationships God had forged, as well as a proof of the genuineness of Christian faith (Rom 12:13; Gal 6:9–10; Jas 2:15–17; 1 Jn 3:16–18). Believers are called on throughout the New Testament to fulfill the ideal for the people of God promised by God in Deuteronomy: “There will...be no one in need among you” (Deut 15:4); **“there was not a needy person among them” (Acts 4:34).**

The relationship of hosts and guests was long considered a sacred bond, the preservation of which is a facet of being a just person (Pseudo-Cicero *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 3.3.4). Within the Christian culture, hospitality was also an important expression of the love of believers one for another, a living out of the ethos of kinship within the Christian community:

In addition to the poor, the outcasts, the dispossessed, the imprisoned and the widows and orphans who had to be cared for, there were, according to Hatch, “the strangers who passed in a constant stream through the cities of all the great routes of commerce in both East and West. Every one of those strangers who bore the Christian name had therein a claim to hospitality. For Christianity was, and grew because it was, a great fraternity. The name ‘brother’...vividly expressed a real fact...a Christian found, wherever he went, in the community of his fellow-Christians a welcome and hospitality.”

The importance of hospitality toward visiting brothers and sisters carrying on the work of the church is apparent throughout the New Testament. Itinerant teachers, missionaries and leaders of the movement were especially dependent on the hospitality of their fellow believers along the way. Third John, for example, praises Gaius for his hospitality toward visiting Christians (3 Jn 5–8) but censures Diotrephes for his refusal to extend hospitality and his attempts to prevent others from exercising this ministry (3 Jn 9–10). Paul, similarly, depends on the hospitality of converts for his travels (see 1 Cor 16:5–6; Philem 22). Hospitality is also an aspect of sharing one’s resources with the local Christian community, since the houses of the better-endowed believers became the meeting places for the local Christian community, which sustained the “constant intercourse and meeting...essential to preserve the Church’s cohesion and distinctive witness,” as well as providing the place where the distinctive Christian worship could be practiced (see Rom 16:3–5, 23; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Philem 2; 1 Pet 4:9). Both for the ongoing nurture of the local community and for the sake of ongoing connectedness with the larger Christian culture—the local family of God—hospitality was a core value of the early church.

Unity, harmony, concord. The author of 1 Peter writes: “Finally, all of you, be of one mind, sympathetic, filled with brotherly and sisterly love (*philadelphoi*), compassionate, humble” (1 Pet 3:8, my translation). The first two words (*homophrones, sympatheis*) are, as we saw above, very common in discussions of the third word, “fraternal love.” Being “of one mind” or “of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32), is the source of the Christian movement’s strength in the face of strong opposition—a witness, as it were, to the ultimate victory of Jesus over the world: “You are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation” (Phil 1:27–28).

In 1 Corinthians 1:10–11, having opened the letter with friendly words of greeting and praise, Paul turns to an area of deep concern to him: “Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.” The repetition in each sentence of the address “brothers and sisters” is strategic, as Paul holds before them the disgraceful inconsistency between their identity in Christ (their close kinship) and their behavior (divisions, quarrels). The words *schismata* and *erides* conjure up images of factions, of ugly rivalry, of breaches of the unity and harmony that is the ideal state of an honorable family. The Corinthians are confronted at the outset with the ugliness and inappropriateness of their behavior toward one another. They should be defusing rivalries and partisanship rather than fostering it.

A fine study in the application of the ethos of unity and harmony to life in the church is Paul’s letter to the Philippian Christians. Two prominent women in the church, Syntyche and Euodia, whom Paul calls his co-laborers in the gospel, are at odds with one another (Phil 4:2–3), and this rivalry threatens to undermine the unity and strength of the congregation at a time when pressures from without are also high (Phil 1:29–30). The nature of their quarrel is forever lost to us, but knowing the specifics would probably only move us to take sides, as it was doing within the Philippian church. Paul addresses this situation by censuring all rivalry, all selfish ambition and everything else that contributes to disunity as out of place in the church. It is a violation of the “mind of Christ” that believers are to have toward one another:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. (Phil 2:1–4)

Paul discerns that the self intrudes mightily wherever division and strife emerge, and this promotion of the self is exactly what Christ refused to consider as he ran the course of obedience unto greatest honor. So also, we as sisters and brothers in the church are enjoined to keep our focus on the work of God, on the larger vision of God in which we can cooperate and which we will only serve effectively as we put the needs and worth of one another ahead of our own, even as Jesus did.

One specific breach of unity brought out by Paul, and quite relevant for the American scene, was the tendency of the Corinthian Christians to continue to raise lawsuits against one another: “Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another, but a believer goes to court against a believer—and before unbelievers at that? In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—and believers at that” (1 Cor 6:5–8). Lawsuits were just one more facet of their pre-conversion life that the Corinthian believers thought nothing of continuing. Paul argues, however, that the new relationship between the parties makes court cases inappropriate. It is better to suffer injury or loss than to seek to hurt or avenge yourself on your kin. An important aspect of this for Paul is the public that will view the suit—“and that before unbelievers.” In Paul’s eyes, such lawsuits are a stain on the honor of the family of God as well as an excellent cause for unbelievers to question the virtue and value of this group that calls itself family.

As Paul has structured Philippians 2:1–4, the experience of God is primary: since you have received encouragement from Christ, since you have shared in the one Spirit of God, live in full accord with one another, being of one mind. We are prone to be disputatious and to place victory in theological debates higher than the bond of unity. This is not Paul’s way except in issues that truly cut to the core of being Christian (and most issues, let us be honest, do not). Rather than seek to “have it our way” in terms of every dispute, we again find an opportunity for laying down our lives, or at least our egos, for our sisters and brothers as we put love, peace and unity with one another ahead of being right all the time. Paul makes it clear that no one has *all* the facts (1 Cor 13:12–13 is strong and necessary medicine for our conceited race), and therefore disagreements are not ultimate. To be “like-minded” is not to agree on everything; it is to put foremost in our minds what is central and common to the believing community in every place, what makes for building up the church of God in the bond of love.

Cooperation and mutual honoring, not competition for precedence. Given what we have learned about the cultural context of honor, it is not surprising to find that early Christians approached life in the church and discipleship as another arena for the competition for honor and winning precedence and distinction.

What New Testament authors keep emphasizing—and this with astonishing frequency and unanimity—is the inappropriateness of viewing one another in this fashion as competitors, which is essentially to view one another as outsiders to one’s own honor and family. Instead, Christians are to view one another as partners, cooperating for and contributing to one another’s honor and success.

Mark 10:35–45 provides a helpful study in this regard. James and John come to Jesus seeking advancement together: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (Mk 10:37). They are acting as natural kin ought to do, cooperating with each other in the quest for honor. It is probably of no importance to them which is granted the seat at the right hand over the left. Nevertheless, their request is not in keeping with the ethos Jesus seeks to create among all his disciples. The two natural brothers have made a distinction between themselves and the other ten and see themselves in competition with the other disciples. The response of the ten here, who are “angry with James and John” (Mk 10:41), as well as their previous argument with one another concerning “who was the greatest” (Mk 9:33–34), shows that all twelve were still thinking in terms of competition for precedence within the group. Jesus declares that such an attitude must yield to the kinship values of cooperation and seeking how to be most of service to the brothers and sisters, rather than seeking how to achieve the greatest precedence and distinction among them. That is what will make for honor within the Father’s household—acting honorably as family rather than competitively.

Jesus’ criticism of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:5–9 addresses this rather directly. These figures are censured for seeking precedence over their brothers and sisters (i.e., other Jews), seeking to distinguish themselves above their fellow Jews so as to become a class of religious “leaders” (*Rabbim*). Jesus’ followers are not to do this: “You are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father” (Mt 23:8–9, my translation). They are to maintain the bond of unity as siblings under one Father—namely, God—and not create hierarchies that divide.

Paul also seeks avidly to replace competition for honor with cooperation and mutual honoring within the church, countering a primary aspect of their socialization into the dominant cultural values of seeking precedence over those who are not blood relations. Thus, in Romans 12:10 he advises: **“Try to outdo one another in showing respect.”**

Throughout the hortatory section of Galatians (Gal 5:13–6:10), Paul weaves in terms of sibling relationship (“brothers,” Gal 5:13; “household of faith,” Gal 6:10, my translation) to create an ethos of cooperation, love and solidarity within the church. The works of the flesh are heavily weighted with descriptions of behaviors specifically inappropriate for kin: “enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy” (Gal 5:20–21). Similarly, Paul proscribes boasting, challenging and envying (Gal 5:26) for members of the household of faith, who should instead serve one another and protect (rather than challenge) one another’s honor. Since Christians are not in competition but in a joint venture together, they are free to “practice the art of making mutual concessions, of learning to take defeat, and of taking pleasure in indulging brothers rather than in winning victories over them,” as Plutarch puts it (“On Fraternal Affection” 17 [*Mor.* 488A], LCL).

Paul skillfully uses the metaphor of the body, the living organism composed of many parts, in 1 Corinthians 12 to reinforce the ethos of family within the church—and this in a historical context in which competition and claims of precedence in honor were a besetting problem in so many areas of the church’s life: “But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (1 Cor 12:24–26). **Paul articulates a principle, derived from the metaphor of the physical body, that holds true for the social body of the household as well.** As J. D. M. Derrett rightly observes, “The advance of one member of an agnatic family would advantage all his kindred,” as the reverse would be to the detriment of the whole family. This means that the honor or loss experienced by one member of the household is the honor or loss felt by the whole kinship group. Aristotle’s description of siblings as being “identical with each other” since they share a common identity with their parents and are therefore “in a sense the same thing, though in separate individuals,” (*Nic. Eth.* 8.12 [1161b31-33]) confirms Derrett’s observations about the way close kin respond to one another’s successes and losses. This sense of sharing completely in one another’s fortunes, then, is precisely the solidarity that Christians are to embody. It is also a sure path to fulfill the command to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

The author of Hebrews uses this same rationale in his appeal to the hearers to “remember the imprisoned, as being imprisoned together with them, the mistreated as being yourselves in their skin” (Heb 13:3, my translation). They are, as kin, “the same thing, through separate individuals,” so they should feel and respond to one another’s needs in that spirit—**the free believer must regard the sufferings of another as his or her own sufferings and alleviate them as wholeheartedly and bravely as a person would relieve his or her own distress.** In this manner, the Christians not only reassure those who are experiencing the most pressure from outside the group but also reassure one another that this new family will never desert them in their time of need. Rather, they will be for one another the visible and active manifestation of the promise of God never to forsake or leave the believer (Heb 13:5).

The specific focus on reorienting the believers’ attitudes toward one another away from competition for honor and toward celebrating and building up one another’s honor and self-respect serves the goal of promoting unifying behavior and averting divisive competition. It is thus effectively a subset of the values of unity and concord among kin.

Reconciliation in the family. Also, in keeping with the ideal of unity and concord is the emphasis in the New Testament about brotherhood, on seeking reconciliation where an injury has occurred. Forgiving the penitent is not optional but necessary since both parties have been adopted into God’s family and made siblings by God’s prior forgiveness of much weightier offenses (Mt 18:21–35; see Lk 17:3). Rather than complain or murmur against a fellow Christian (see Jas 4:11; 5:9), which advertises rather than hides the shame of one’s kin and contributes to an atmosphere of division, the believer is to seek reconciliation one-on-one with a sibling in Christ. The procedure outlined in Matthew 18:15–17 shows a great deal of sensitivity to keeping the disagreement as private as possible, so that reconciliation can be effected without at the same time damaging the honor of a sister or brother.

It is noteworthy that both the Matthean and Lucan sayings on this matter lay responsibility on the offended sister or brother to tell the offender that an injury has been done, rather than merely to wait for the other person to make the overture, during which time grudges can grow, unkind thoughts and words multiply, and breaches widen. Within Matthew, both the one who has been hurt and the one who has caused hurt are separately exhorted to drop everything and seek reconciliation. The two should run toward each other and remove the threat to unity as quickly as possible.

Within the family, siblings may need to be reconciled not only to each other but also to the values of the group and to their parent. Believers are to stand before the Father in prayer on behalf of the sibling who sins, with the result that the sin will in most cases be forgiven, covered over by God (1 Jn 5:16). They are to rebuke the wrongdoer and restore him or her to the spirit-led way “in a spirit of gentleness” (Gal 6:1–2), grieving with the wrongdoer rather than using it as an occasion to put him or her down. The Christian family, like any natural family, can apply pressure to keep its wayward members in line with the family values. The relevant point here, however, is that even in the midst of applying such corrective procedures, the community is to remember that the offender is a brother or sister *first*, and not an enemy and outsider: “Do not regard them as enemies, but warn them as sisters and brothers” (2 Thess 3:15).

The parable of the two sons (Lk 15:1–32) and the restoration of Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1–10) model for the Christian community how they should treat wayward members of the household of faith and how they should extend that gentle spirit of restoration to those outside the community of faith. Jesus sees Zacchaeus as “a son of Abraham” (Lk 19:9) whose restoration ought to be sought after diligently, whereas his neighbors see only “one who is a sinner” (Lk 19:7) and exclude him on that account. But the sinner, Jesus shows us, is first a sibling in God or at least a potential sibling in God, and it is on that basis that we must reach out to him or her in welcoming love. The parable of the two sons is directed primarily at the scribes and Pharisees, whose criticism of Jesus’ willingness to meet sinners where they are opens the chapter (Lk 15:1–2). That parable places the sinner and the Pharisee in the relationship of brothers, reorienting the latter toward the former and showing how ugly a spirit of exclusivity and condemnation is in the eyes of a father who longs for the return of all his children. If we look upon outreach to the “undesirables” of our community as did Luke’s Pharisees, Jesus’ criticism of the scribes and Pharisees will be his criticism of us as well.⁶

⁶ deSilva, D. A. (2012). [*Honor, patronage, kinship & purity: unlocking new testament culture*](#) (pp. 212–225). Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press.

FATHERHOOD: PARENTAL LOVE

**THE HOLY SPIRIT
SEALS THE UNION.**

**THE FATHER IS ONE
WITH THE SON.**

YAHWEH THE FATHER

**YAHWEH THE SON:
THE LION OF JUDAH**

YAHWEH'S PEOPLE

**THE SON UNITES
THE FATHER WITH
HIS PEOPLE.**

**THE SON IS ONE
WITH HIS PEOPLE.**

SnyderTalk

**TIME 4
GOD**

**FOR YOU DID NOT
RECEIVE A SPIRIT THAT
MAKES YOU A SLAVE AGAIN
TO FEAR, BUT YOU RECEIVED THE
SPIRIT OF SONSHIP.
AND BY HIM WE CRY,
“ABBA, FATHER.”**

ROMANS 8:15

In Scripture there are many different names used to describe God. While all the names of God are important in many ways, the name "Abba Father" is one of the most significant names of God in understanding how He relates to people. The word *Abba* is an Aramaic word that means "Father." It was a common term that expressed affection and confidence and trust. *Abba* signifies the close, intimate relationship of a father and his child, as well as the childlike trust that a young child puts in his "daddy."

Abba is always followed by the word *Father* in Scripture, and the phrase is found in three passages. In [Mark 14:36](#), Jesus addresses His Father as "Abba, Father" in His prayer in Gethsemane. In [Romans 8:15](#), "Abba, Father" is mentioned in relation to the Spirit's work of adoption that makes us God's children and heirs with Christ. In [Galatians 4:6](#), again in the context of adoption, the Spirit in our hearts cries out, "Abba, Father." Together, the terms *Abba* and *Father* doubly emphasize the fatherhood of God. In two different languages, we are assured of God's care for His children.

Many claim that [all people are "children of God,"](#) but the Bible reveals quite a different truth. We are all His creations and under His authority and lordship, and all will be judged by Him, but the right to be a child of God and call Him "Abba Father" is something that only born-again Christians have ([John 1:12-13](#)). When we are born again ([John 3:1-8](#)), we are adopted into the family of God, redeemed from the curse of sin, and made heirs of God ([Romans 8:17](#); [Galatians 4:7](#)). Part of that new relationship is that God now deals with us differently, as family.

It is life-changing to understand what it means to be able to call the one true God our "Father" and what it means to be joint-heirs with Christ. Because of our relationship with our Abba, Father, He no longer deals with us as enemies; instead, we can approach Him with "boldness" ([Hebrews 10:19](#)) and in "full assurance of faith" ([Hebrews 10:22](#)). The Holy Spirit "testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" ([Romans 8:16-17](#)).

Becoming a child of God is the highest and most humbling of honors. Because of it we have a new relationship with God and a new standing before Him. Instead of running from God and trying to hide our sin like Adam and Eve did, we run to Him, calling, "Abba, Father!" and finding forgiveness in Christ. Being an adopted child of God is the source of our hope, the security of our future, and the motivation to "live a life worthy of the calling you have received" ([Ephesians 4:1](#)). Being children of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords calls us to a higher standard, a different way of life, and, in the future, "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade" ([1 Peter 1:4](#)).

When Jesus [taught His disciples to pray](#), He began with the words *Our Father*. There is much truth in those two words alone. The holy and righteous God, who created and sustains all things, who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present, not only allows us but *encourages* us to call Him "Father." What a privilege is ours. What amazing grace that God would love us so, that Jesus would sacrifice Himself for us, and that the Holy Spirit would indwell us and prompt our intimate cry of "Abba, Father!" – *Got Questions?*

God as a Father

By **Wayne Jackson**

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The term “father” is a most meaningful term — or should be; and the most precious association of the term is with God. There are four senses in the scriptures in which the word “father” is connected with God.

The Human Family

Jehovah is the “Father” of **mankind** in the sense that he is the Creator and Sustainer of our very existence. Humanity was fashioned in the “image” and “likeness” of God (Genesis 1:26-27) — a phrase that hints of parenthood (cf. 5:3).

We are not accidents of a naturalistic, evolutionary process. We are products of creation. Moreover, in him we live, move, and have our being — evidence of the fact that we are his “offspring” (Acts 17:28-29; cf. Luke 3:38). Every ray of sunshine, breath of air, bite of food and drop of water are the results of the Creator’s providential benevolence (Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:17).

Nation of Israel

In a very unique way, God was the “Father” of the **nation of Israel**, a special people with a redemptive role — that of being the conduit through which the Messiah would be sent into the world (Exodus 19:5).

Isaiah spoke of the “lovingkindnesses of Jehovah” and his “great goodness toward the house of Israel.” God said, “they are my people, children that will not deal falsely....” He was Israel’s “Father,” though the people “grieved his Holy Spirit,” and he was compelled to punish them (Isaiah 63:7-19; cf. 64:8). Hosea referred to the nation of Israel as Jehovah’s “child” who was delivered from Egypt (11:1).

One must understand, however, that Israel generally became increasingly resistant to its “Father.” The rebellion of the nation reached its pinnacle when the Jews murdered their own Messiah.

Jehovah’s final disfranchisement (cf. Numbers 14:12) came ultimately with the destruction of the Hebrew system by God’s armies (Matthew 22:7) in A.D. 70. For a detailed study of this matter, see the article **God and the Nation of Israel**.

Jesus Christ

In a very special, singularly unusual way, God was the “Father” of **Jesus Christ** (see John 3:16; “only begotten,” literally “one of a kind”). David prophesied of this relationship when he represents the Father saying, “You are my Son, this day have I begotten you” (Psalm 2:7; cf. Hebrews 1:5). This Father/Son relationship commenced with the incarnation of Christ and continues eternally (Acts 9:20; Hebrews 1:8; 3:6).

At both the baptismal scene, and in the incident of the transfiguration, the Father audibly acknowledged Jesus as his Son (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). After spending some three years with the Lord, being with him on a daily basis, listening to his powerful words, observing his phenomenal miracles, the disciples were forced to concede, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16; cf. John 20:30-31).

Even the soldiers who were involved in the Savior’s crucifixion, when they saw the effects of the earthquake (e.g., rocks torn apart, tombs opened, etc.), “feared exceedingly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God”” (Matthew 27:54).

The Saved

In a most wonderful way, God is the “Father” of **the redeemed**, i.e., those who have submitted to the “new birth” process (John 3:3-5; cf. 1:12-13).

In a spiritual begetting and birth process, we become “children of God.” By the implantation of the “seed” (the word of God – Luke 8:11), one is “begotten” (cf. 1 Peter 1:23); subsequently he is “born of water” (Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 5:26). See our article on the **New Birth**.

The begetting takes place when a person is exposed to the gospel message & faith is germinated in his heart. The birth’s accomplished at the point when he is immersed in water, entering a relationship with Christ (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27).

Because of this son/daughter relationship (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:18), God bestows the Holy Spirit, authorizing us to cry to him, “Father, Father” (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). We may, therefore, approach him in prayer, as “our Father” (cf. Matthew 6:9; Colossians 3:17).

By way of contrast, those who do not sustain the Father/child relationship with God, can have no confidence that he hears and responds to their prayers in any way commensurate with his relationship to those who have been “born anew.”

Conclusion

The “fatherhood” of God is a magnificent concept. Since the term “father” can be employed in different senses, the context in which the expression is found must be carefully examined.

BROTHERHOOD: SIBLING LOVE

The early Christian leaders found the recognition that God had created a new family in Christ to provide a powerful resource for the transformation of the individual believer and the formation of vital and nurturing communities of believers. The concept of having been born into a new household and a new heritage, and having been set apart from a fleshly, worldly heritage and destiny provides a powerful image for engaging in a close examination of our desires, our prejudices, our assumptions about what makes a person worthwhile, and the goals we have set for ourselves in life. It invites us to explore what the imperishable seed of the Word says about the heritage into which we have been born, and the way of life and relationship we are called to live out, and thus also to discover what “futile ways inherited from [our] ancestors” persist in our own lives and pollute our relationships and our ambitions.

The teaching of the New Testament about what it means for Christians to relate to one another as family could have a remarkable effect on the depth and fruitfulness of what we call “community.” For this to happen, however, we need to answer for ourselves a basic question about whom we will regard as our family. Will we persist in thinking of blood relations as our real family and the church of God as “nice people” with whom we are happy to associate casually but who are, nevertheless, outsiders to the real family when push comes to shove? **The church has an enormous opportunity, as it is instructed by its Scriptures, to realize the depth of mutual commitment, help, encouragement and healing that would come from choosing to live as a real family, related by blood—the blood of the Lamb.** This begins as we speak to one another as family and make our fellow Christians feel that they can talk about any aspect of their lives freely with us as family. It continues as we respond to one another’s needs as we would to a natural sister, brother, child or parent, making no distinction between the level of care we owe to a Christian sibling and the level owed natural kin. We have a tremendous opportunity before us to **honor Christ by saying his blood is more important than our own in determining who shall be our family.**

Our churches will be better equipped to serve as vessels of God’s love and favor as we adopt and help one another in the church keep before their eyes the “ethos of kin” that Jesus, Paul and the other New Testament voices instruct Christians to take up toward one another. Many Christians are less than kin and less than kind to one another.

Violations of the spirit of unity and of the command to put the interests of the other ahead of a person's own interests need to be addressed gently but forthrightly in the context of the vision the New Testament gives us of what the church could be for the believers and for the world in need of Christ. **Such a vision can be a powerful motivator to individuals, who long at a deeper level to give themselves to a greater cause than themselves, and can turn the manifestations of rivalry and partisanship in the church into opportunities to commit to be sisters and brothers in fact and not just in religious platitudes.**

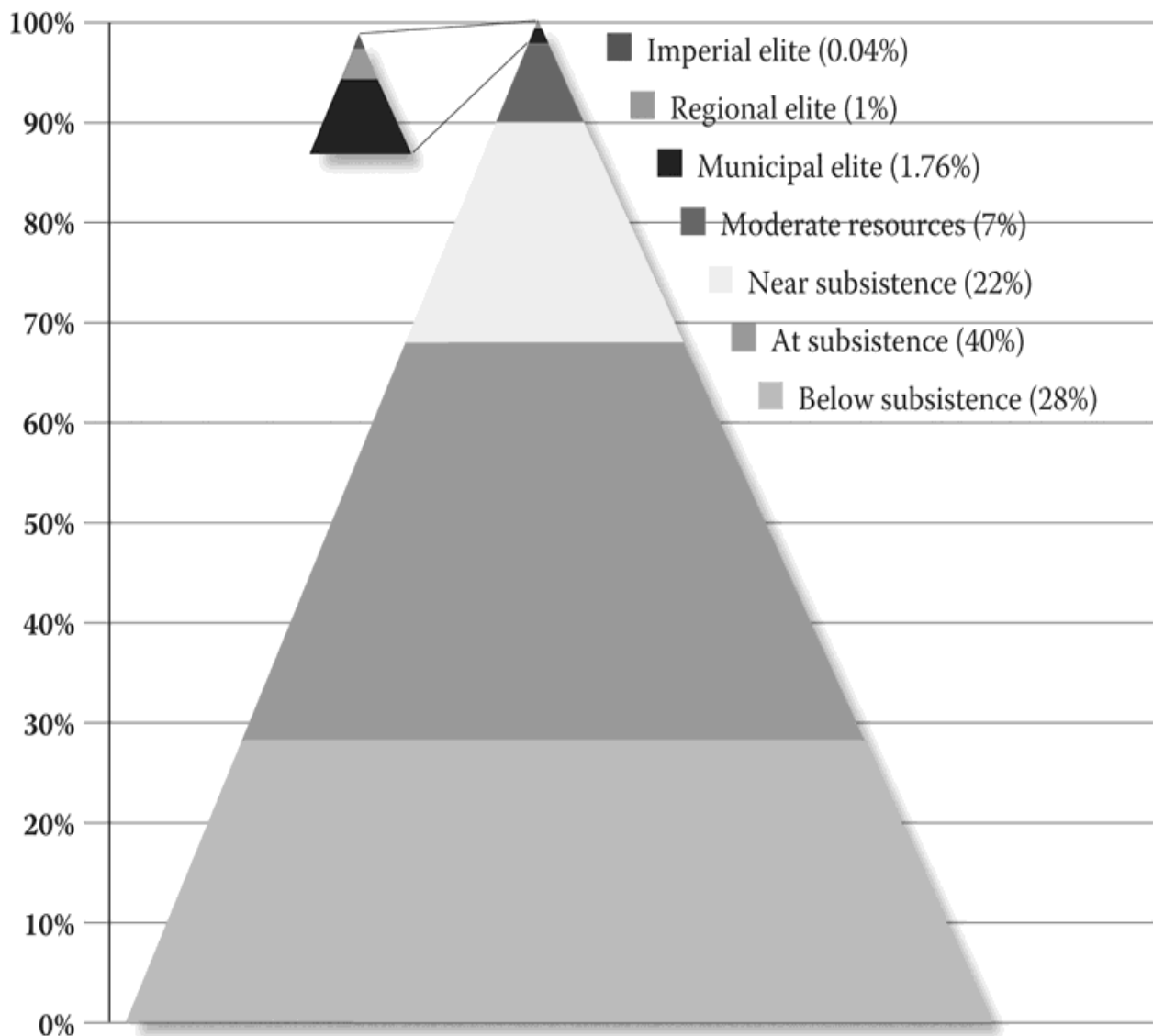
The early Christians' sense of the breadth of their new family challenges modern Christians, who tend too often to think of *the* church as their own little corner of it (that is, the local church they attend), to investigate the welfare of our family in places outside the local congregation. How can we find ways to live out our kinship with our sisters and brothers in other churches (congregations)? This is a way to test our willingness to place a shared love of God and Christ (and indeed, a shared experience of being loved by God and Christ) ahead of the differences [of opinion] about which we can become so puffed up. What about our family of faith abroad? Where are the needs that beset them?

One very important area in which our growth in this kinship ethic can make a difference is in the faith of our children and youth. In the baptismal service of many churches, the congregation responds to the newly baptized by promising to do all in their power to assist the baptized in their growth in the faith. In baptism, all the children of a church become our children. Our children's roots in the faith will be all the deeper, and their equipment to engage adult life as Christians all the more complete, if many adults take a keen interest in them, making opportunities to talk with them about God, about living a life that honors God, about the ways in which one can sink deep roots in God's love. Perhaps now more than ever, youth need solid Christian voices—and loyal Christian ears as well, to listen to the struggles of youth in a way that will always point them back to Jesus.

Recovery of the family of faith would be a timely response to one important facet of the postmodern paradigm, namely, the importance of relationship as a means of discovering truth. Studies of Generation X have shown relationship to be the way of reaching those born into a postmodern worldview, the way to show the reality of our faith.⁷

⁷ deSilva, D. A. (2012). [*Honor, patronage, kinship & purity: unlocking new testament culture*](#) (pp. 237–239). Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press.

The Early Christian Community Shared To Maintain @ Subsistence



The Blood Of Christ We Share

Christ's Blood Atonement. The crown of thorns was put upon His head, not gently but roughly. Many thorns—perhaps a dozen or more—up to one-and-a-half inches long, were jabbed into His scalp, producing such serious wounds that trickles of blood spurted out and ran into His hair and beard, matting both in dark red. The spikes were driven into the wrists of His hands, and His blood coursed down His arms and sides. Spikes were also driven through His feet, and more blood ran down the sides of the cross on behalf of the sins of the whole world. Later a spear was thrust into His side, and His blood spilled out (John 19:34) and ran down the cross onto the ground beneath. His bones were out of joint (Psalm 22:14). His face was dreadful to look at, His features unrecognizable. (See Isaiah 53.) Since He was already dead when the soldiers arrived to break His legs—which was their custom in order to hasten death—not a bone of Him was broken (Psalm 34:20; John 19:36). Those who looked on Him saw only blood. It was a spectacle of blood. His hair and beard were soaked in His own blood. His back was lacerated from the thirty-nine stripes and was covered with His own blood. The cross was soaked with blood, as well as the ground around the base of the cross. It was blood, blood everywhere.

It is important for us to grasp the fact that complete atonement is provided for us through the blood of Christ. The word atonement is a beautiful word, which is unfortunately sometimes misunderstood. One group has offered the suggestion that the word atonement means “at-one-ment.” The best we can say for this is that it is an apt play on words, but not the literal meaning. The word atonement simply means “**a covering.**” “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Romans 5:20), for with grace came the blood of Jesus, which, freely given in love, **covers all our sins.** (See Proverbs 10:12; Romans 4:7; 1 Peter 4:8.)

“Fig-Leaf” Religions

At the beginning of creation, God commanded that living creatures, greatly beloved of Adam, must be slaughtered and their blood must be shed to supply a covering for Adam and Eve’s obvious nakedness. Fig leaves were insufficient. So, animals were slaughtered, and after the blood was shed, Adam and Eve were covered with the skins. **The principle of a life-for-a life runs throughout the Bible.**

No other garments would sufficiently cover Adam and Eve except those that involved the shedding of blood. If man is left to himself, he usually invents a religion [of self-sufficiency] that does not require the shedding of blood—a “fig-leaf” religion. This is why it is exceedingly important that, in observing the Lord’s Supper, we partake of both the bread and the wine. To take of the bread only, as some groups do, would be equivalent to a bloodless offering, for there is no life in the flesh without blood.

In Perfect Harmony

In 1 John 5:8, we read, “And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.” In the Scriptures, water is often a symbol of the Word of God; it is what washes us continually, as we see in Ephesians 5:26. But the Word without the blood is ineffectual, for the life of Jesus, who is the Word of God, is in the blood. Therefore, in the Lord’s Supper, it is not proper to receive the bread alone. We are to receive both bread and wine, which speaks of Jesus, the crucified Word of God, and the blood that He willingly shed.

The Holy Spirit is also in complete agreement with the water and the blood. For this reason, when we honor the blood of Jesus, the Holy Spirit immediately manifests His life on our behalf. The Holy Spirit agrees with the Word of God and with the blood of Jesus, and all three are in agreement with the others. They are triunely one.

God’s Equations

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. (1 John 5:7–8)

There is a most wonderful equation in 1 John 5:7–8. In fact, there are two equations, one dealing with God’s operations in heaven and the second with His workings on earth.

Equation # 1: Operations in Heaven

**Three that bear record in heaven =
the Father + the Word + the Holy Ghost**

Now it isn't difficult for us to understand this. The Father is over all, the Son (the Word) sits on His right hand, and the Holy Spirit agrees with all that is done and is the One who visits earth continually to bless God's creation. The Holy Spirit is omnipresent in earth and heaven at the same time. There is complete agreement among the three persons of the Trinity.

Equation # 2: Workings in Earth

**Three that bear witness in earth =
the Spirit + the water + the blood**

This is a most remarkable triad. Notice that, where the Father was first in heaven, now He is replaced on earth by the Holy Spirit, who becomes the primary focus, and the One with whom we all must deal. In heaven, the second place was given to the second person of the Trinity, Jesus, described as the Logos or the Word of God (John 1:1). The Word in heaven becomes the water on earth in the second position, because water is the symbol of [salvation] and water flows. I refer you again to the words of Jesus, who said, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). The water of the Word in heaven flows down to earth as living water from the river of God. When this water comes into us, it must flow out of us, for we are simply to be channels, just as the vessels of the Old Testament sanctuary were for pouring out blessings, not just for containing blessings.

Notice that both the Holy Spirit and the flowing Word agree absolutely in their witness with the blood of Jesus. How can this be? The blood is living blood. It is on the mercy seat in heaven, sprinkled by the hand of Jesus when He ascended (see Hebrews 9), because in the typology in the Old Testament the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice once a year on the gold-covered mercy seat of the ark behind the veil of the temple. The mercy seat means the place of propitiation, or mercy, where God meets with us on the common ground of the shed blood of the Lamb.⁸

⁸ Whyte, H. A. M. (2005). [*The power of the blood*](#). New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House.

The Blood-Bought Church

God Chose Blood. Since man's first sin in the Garden of Eden, God has required the shedding of blood for the atonement for sin. God instructed Cain and Abel concerning the kind of sacrifice He wanted. It is said of Abel, that by faith he "offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (Heb. 11:4). This blood sacrifice must have been precisely what God wanted since faith comes by the word of God (Rom. 10:17). The first thing Noah did after he came out of the ark was offer a burnt-offering (Gen. 8:20). When Israel was delivered out of the slavery of Egypt, blood was used in their deliverance (Exodus 12:7-13).

The Int'l Standard Bible Encyclopedia says, "The rite of circumcision is an Old Testament form of blood ceremony. Apart from the probably sanitary importance of the act is the deeper meaning in the establishment of a bond of friendship between the one upon whom the act performed and (Jehovah) Himself. In order that Abraham might become 'the friend of God' he was commanded that he should be circumcised as a token of the covenant between him and God, Genesis 17:10-11". The patriarchal age was marked by sacrifices & rites of blood by those desiring to please God.

In Abraham's covenant, his own blood had to be shed. Later an atoning animal was to shed blood, but those who did appropriate the blood of animals were only ceremonially, and temporarily clean, because it was not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). In all ages, however, there must always be a shedding of blood. The covenant under Moses was dedicated by the blood of animals.

Moses took the blood of calves and goats and sprinkled both the book and the people, saying, “This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover, he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry, and almost all things by the law are purged with blood and without the shedding of blood is no remission of sins” (Heb. 9:20-22).

Since there is no salvation but by blood, and since the blood of bulls & goats could not take away sin, it naturally follows that some blood of greater merit must be applied. As the first covenant was sealed by the blood of animals, the New Covenant was sealed by more precious blood, the blood of Jesus.

The Individual Is Bought With A Price

Each child of God has been purchased. Paul wrote, “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirits, which are God’s” (1st Corinthians 6:19-20). This was accomplished by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7), something of far greater value than silver and gold (1st Pet. 1:18). Each child of God has the same hope, having been purchased by the blood of Christ.

Unto the saints in Galatia, Paul wrote, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14). Paul would not be found guilty of minimizing the cross of Christ, and what it had done for him. He would never equate the cross of the Lord, as some do today, to some \$2 ornament worn as jewelry about the neck. To Paul, the cross was the symbol of the blood which Christ had shed thereon, and this gave it the fullest meaning.

It is only when we find what the blood of the cross did for lost men that we have an appreciation for it. The view of Paul is different from those who claim such love for the blood of Christ, and sing loudly of the “Old Rugged Cross,” yet spurn the very thing which the shed blood of the cross purchased for us. To fully appreciate the cross of Christ, we must look much further than the shape of the tree on which Jesus died.

The Church Purchased By The Blood

Paul’s statement in First Corinthians 6:20 shows that every member of the church has been bought with the price of the blood of Christ; the church is composed of members; hence, the church has been purchased with the blood of Christ. He has given for it His own precious blood, therefore making it His own by the dearest of all ties. The transcendent sacredness of the church of Christ is thus made to rest on the dignity of its Lord and the consequent preciousness of that blood which He shed for it. We must maintain that, had not this Lord been God, His blood could have been no purchase for the souls of a lost world & the promise of redemption within His church would have been impossible. Since the church has cost heaven its dearest treasure, we ought to value it very highly indeed!

When Paul met the elders from Ephesus at Miletus, he discussed many important things. Included in the discussion was this thought: “Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which Christ hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Paul wanted them to know that the body of Christ owed much to the blood of the cross! This can’t be emphasized enough. Jesus gave His blood to purchase the church and it should be remembered by all that He has never complained of being defrauded in the deal.

It was by this sacrifice that the church was bought and sanctified. When Paul wrote to his friends and brethren at Ephesus, he said, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25). This divine institution was the spiritual body of Christ. Nothing is like it is in the world, and nothing else like it in the Bible. Now, if Jesus had promised to build a multiplicity of churches, then we might have the option of choosing one to our liking. But since He promised to build only one (Matthew 16:18), and added the saved to only that one (Acts 2:41-47), then no option is extended!

Since Jesus Christ loved that church so dearly that He gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:23), God “gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). You just cannot afford to down-grade any institution so important to the Lord, that it was purchased with His own blood! To belittle the church of the Lord is to belittle the very blood of the cross which bought it. Unto the saved in Christ, Peter said they were redeemed with “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1st Peter 1:19).

The Highest Price

The word, “purchase,” as used in Acts 20:28, occurs but in one other place in the New Testament – 1 Timothy 3:13: “For they that have used the office of deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree & great boldness in the faith.” The word properly means “to gain for oneself, purchase” (Vine’s, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, p. 231). This may be done by a price, or by labor. No verse in the New Testament, or other statement that could be imagined, could possibly exceed the power of Acts 20:28 in declaring the eternal importance and necessity of the Church which Christ established. Here the heretical notion of salvation by “faith alone” is shattered and counter-manded forever.

By any definition, salvation by “faith alone” means salvation without the church of Jesus Christ; and in such a view the crucifixion of our Lord is reduced to the status of a senseless murder. As James Coffman said, “If men are saved, in any sense by the blood of Jesus, they must be saved thru the church of which that blood is here declared to be the purchase price” (Commentary On Acts, p. 395).

That the church is, therefore, of peculiar value – a value to be estimated by the price paid for it-is clearly taught. This fact should make the purity and salvation of the church an object of special solicitude with the elders. They should be deeply affected in view of that blood which has been shed for the church; and they should guard and defend it as having been bought with the highest price in the universe. The chief consideration that will make elders faithful and self-denying is that the church has been bought with a price. If the Lord Jesus so loved it, if He gave Himself for it, they should be willing to deny themselves, to watch, and toil, and pray, that the great object of His death – the purity and the salvation of that church – may be obtained. Too many men like the title of elder, but do not like the work that is required; they like to see their name on a piece of stationery or bulletin, but do not want to put in the hours of labor that is required.

The Shepherd

Paul’s figure of speech to the elders is directly connected with a reference to the church as a flock; to the officers as overseers, or shepherds; and to their duty of feeding the flock. The figure as used by our Lord in John 10 should be compared with the expression in Acts 20:28. How does a shepherd purchase his sheep with his blood? The Pulpit Commentary noted, “The shepherd may actually give his life in fighting and killing the wolves. If he kills the wolves he saves the sheep, though he may himself die of his wounds; and then he plainly purchases the safety of the flock with his blood. These figures may be applied to the work of the Lord. He imperiled his life for our defense. He met our great foe in conflict.

He overcame sin and death, and plucked death's sting away. He died in the struggle, but he set us free; and so he has purchased us by his own blood. He has won, by his great act of self-sacrifice, our love and life forever" (Vol. 18, p. 168).

Implications

It is easily seen that some count the blood unholy when they have little regard for the church of the Lord & see it as just another denomination of no importance in God's scheme of redemption. Such say by their lack of respect for the church that the blood was wasted in purchasing the church.

Let it be said, in teaching and in practice, that the purchased church was not purchased to be a social club, but it has business second to none – that of saving souls. The borders of the kingdom must expand yet at the same time purity must be maintained within the church for it is Christ's desire to present it a glorious church without either spot or wrinkle.

- *Truth Magazine*

OUR BLOOD BROTHERHOOD

A Better Covenant. As children of God, we are by nature a covenant people. A covenant is often compared to a contract, but biblical covenant goes much deeper. Generally, a contract is limited to the *legal* obligations between parties. Covenant touches moral and spiritual obligations. The Bible tells how God has related to His people through two covenants: the old covenant (testament) with Abraham and his descendants, and the new covenant (testament) through Christ. Why were there two covenants? The new covenant in Christ fulfilled the old covenant and accomplished some things the old covenant could not do.

Speaking of Jesus, the writer of Hebrews said:

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second (Hebrews 8:6-7).

Jesus is the “Mediator of a better covenant.” Why is it better? It is better because Jesus *makes* it better. The first covenant was merely type and shadow; the new covenant is the “real deal.” The old covenant had no Jesus; in the new covenant, Jesus is the central character. The old covenant had only the blood of animal sacrifices, which could never take away sin; the new covenant has the precious, priceless blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

Covenant is very much an Eastern concept. The more we have Westernized it, the more we have lost its meaning. To understand covenant, we must look to its origins as an Eastern—and specifically Hebraic—concept as opposed to a Western theological idea or legal transaction.

The Hebrew word for covenant is *beriyth*, which comes from a very ancient root that means “to fetter.” Words with a similar meaning include “confederacy,” “compact” (as in: to make a compact with someone), and “league,” (as in: being in league with someone). In its Hebrew form, *beriyth* also stems from a word meaning “to cut,” from the practice of covenant parties passing between them cut pieces of meat in making the covenant. More precisely, *beriyth* means “to cut until bleeding occurs.” **The cut must be deep enough for blood to flow.** Blood, then, is at the very heart of the meaning of covenant.

The Eastern mind regards blood quite differently than the Western mind. From the Hebraic perspective as revealed and established in the Bible, **without blood, there is no covenant.** When Eastern men, Hebrews or otherwise, drew up a contract, they would **seal it by “cutting” a covenant.** The covenant was a guarantee that neither party would back out of the agreement, and it was sealed in blood. “No blood, no covenant.”

Generally, there were four ways to enter into a blood covenant in the Eastern tradition. **The first was to cut the palm of one hand of each party until blood began to flow into the palms, then the palms were brought together so the blood could mingle. That was “cutting a covenant,” and the parties participating became blood brothers.**

This act brought a bond deeper than simple friendship. Becoming blood brothers was like becoming part of the same family. At the very minimum, it meant that people would never make war on each other. In addition, it meant that each would come to the other's aid if needed. **Blood brotherhood was a lifelong relationship as strong as biological family ties and just as irreversible. That is what blood covenant is all about: a lifelong commitment between people or parties for their mutual welfare that overrides all other considerations. Today, the handshake is the visual lingering remnant of this form of sealing a blood covenant. Character was critically important, and a man's word was his bond.**

A second way of sealing a blood covenant, similar to the first, was for each person to make a cut on his own wrist and then to bring their wrists together with the other person's so their blood could mingle. Notice that both of these cases involve a mingling of the blood. By so doing, the parties cutting the covenant became "one blood."

Another Eastern tradition for sealing a blood covenant involved, again, cutting the hand or the wrist to let blood flow. Each person would then take several drops of his blood and put it in a cup filled with wine, and they would share the cup. In this way, each person indicated his willingness to enter into covenant with each of the others.

The final way to seal a blood covenant was to sacrifice an innocent animal and let its blood substitute for the blood of those who were entering into covenant. Basically, this is the method God chose in enacting the first covenant—the old covenant—with the children of Israel. An innocent lamb without spot, blemish, or defect was slaughtered, its blood sprinkled on the altar to atone for or cleanse the sin of the people, and its carcass burned on the altar. This was a type and a shadow of a greater sacrifice to come—a foreshadowing of when Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, would spill His precious and sinless blood to atone for the sins of the world.

When we enter into a blood covenant together, I regard your life—your family, time, treasure, resources—as though they were my own, and you do the same for me. That is covenant, and it is a concept poorly understood today, particularly in the West. Few people today truly comprehend the depth of commitment involved in a covenant. In our modern society we tend to shy away from commitment because we don't want to be tied down. Besides, in the eyes of many, to talk about blood this way seems downright barbaric. Blood was very important to the Hebrew mind, however, because it was very important to the Hebrew God. It remains so today, despite what society says. Without blood there is no covenant.

Under a covenant, each partner's name belongs to the other. That is why as Christians we can say that we bear the name of Christ. He is ours, and we are His. Because we are under covenant and bear His name, all His resources are ours. The Lord is very generous with His resources, and because He is generous, we can be generous also.

Covenant partnership unlocks resources. As Christians, we bear the name of Jesus. Our debts are His debts, and He paid them on the cross. His interests and priorities are ours as well because we are in covenant with Him.⁹

⁹ Chavda, M. (2011). [*The hidden power of the blood of Jesus*](#). Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image.

Blood Brothers of Jesus

What made Jesus do it anyway? What made Him go to the cross? The answer is very simple: love. Because of love, God sent His Son to die for us. Because of love, Jesus willingly suffered death on the cross, taking our sin upon Himself that we might be redeemed. He became sin for us so that we could become the righteousness of God in Him. Because of love, Jesus spilled His blood so we could be healed.

In John 15:13 Jesus says, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." Because of the blood covenant, an exchange takes place. Jesus takes our death and gives us His life in its place. There is no way we can explain this; we simply have to trust and believe.

If you have been born again, you are a blood brother to Jesus Christ. You have, in a sense, taken your wrists, placed them against His bloody, nail-pierced wrists, and entered a blood covenant with Him. That means that you have committed yourself to love Him, follow Him, obey Him, and live for His interests and purposes alone. He has already demonstrated that He loves you and has your best interests at heart by dying on the cross for you and giving you access through His Spirit to all the resources that are His.

There is another dimension to this blood brotherhood. If you are a blood brother to Jesus, that means **you are also a blood brother to every other person who is an [obedient] Christian**. Fellow believers, whether they are in your church or anywhere else, are more than just friends; they are your blood brothers, and you are theirs.

This is a very holy and special relationship that we so often take much too lightly. I am convinced that if we as Western Christians would gain a better grasp of what it really means to be in covenant with one another, much of our strife, division, and infighting would simply go away. Those who understand the concept of covenant regard it as a sober undertaking with life-changing implications.

There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is spiritual warfare, as Satan sets his sights on sowing disruption and discord among believers. I am convinced that part of the problem, however, stems from the fact that so few of us truly understand the concept of being in covenant with Christ and with each other, and all that it implies.

Once we become blood brothers and blood sisters, the covenants of God require that we act like blood brothers and blood sisters. That means loving one another, serving one another, praying for one another, never speaking evil of one another, always seeking one another's good, always seeking to build up one another, encouraging one another in the faith, and appreciating one another's gifts and unique contributions to the Body of Christ. We belong to each other just as we each belong to Christ. We have the same Father and the same destiny, and we should reflect that in the way we treat each other.

When Christians are quick to say any nasty things about each other, it is a sad commentary on our lack of understanding of what it means as the people of God to be blood brothers in Christ. As James says, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:19-20).

There is deep meaning to being a blood brother of Jesus. **A blood covenant carries a code of speech and behavior all its own.** Being in covenant means being part of a **household of faith**, and being absolutely faithful and loyal to those who are in covenant with us. It means being willing to pay the price, willing to lay down our lives for each other as Jesus laid down His life for us. Remember Jesus’ words, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Keeping covenant means placing others’ good and welfare above our own and living a lifestyle of holiness and self-giving service. Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

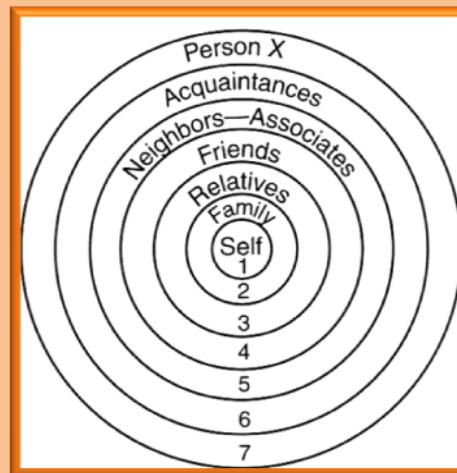
We are partakers of a new covenant in the blood of Jesus, and just as Christ has ministered that covenant to us, He has called us to minister it to others: “Our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:5b-6). As ministers of the blood covenant, we are ministers of life, because there is life in the blood of Jesus—life and power and blessings.¹⁰

¹⁰ Chavda, M. (2011). [*The hidden power of the blood of Jesus*](#). Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image.

MIRRORING THE FAMILY:

NEIGHBORHOOD

Concentric Circles of Concern



W. Oscar Thompson, Carilyn Thompson, Ritzmann, and Claude V. King, *Concentric Circles of Concern: Seven Stages for Making Disciples* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), location 325, Kindle.

Charles Spurgeon's Sermon on Christian Charity Harmonizes:

“Sympathy is especially a Christian's duty. Consider what the Christian is, and you will say that if every other man were selfish he should be disinterested; if there were nowhere else a heart that had sympathy for the needy there should be one found in every Christian breast. The Christian is a king; it becometh not a king to be meanly caring for himself. Was Alexander ever more royal than when his troops were suffering from thirst, and a soldier offered him a bowl full of the precious liquid, he put it aside, and said it was not fitting for a king to drink while his subjects were thirsty, and that he would share their sorrow with them? O ye; whom God has made kings and princes, reign royally over your own selfishness, and act with the honorable liberality which becomes the seed royal of the universe. You are sent into the world to be saviours of others, but how shall you be so if you care only for yourselves? It is yours to be lights, and doth not a light consume itself while it scatters its rays into the thick darkness? Is it not your office and privilege to have it said of you as of your Master— ‘He saved others, himself he cannot save?’

The Christian's sympathy should ever be of the widest character, because he serves a God of infinite love.

When the precious stone of love is thrown by grace into the crystal pool of a renewed heart it stirs the transparent life-floods into ever *widening circles of sympathy*: the *first ring* has no very wide circumference; we love our *own household*; for he that careth not for his own household is worse than a heathen man and a publican: but mark the next **concentric ring; we love the *household of faith* 'We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren:' look once more, for the ever-widening ring has reached the very limit of the lake, and included *all men in its area*, for 'supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks are to be made for all men.'**

If any man shall think we are not 'born for the universe' and should narrow our souls, I can only say that I have not so learned Christ, and hope never to confine to a few the sympathy which I believe to be meant for mankind. To me, **a follower of Jesus Christ means a friend of man.** A Christian is a philanthropist by profession & generous by force of grace; wide as the reign of sorrow is the out stretch of his love, and where he cannot help he pities still." – *Charles Spurgeon*

Hell's Circles of Hate vs. God's Rings of Love

Spiritual Family

Earthly Family

Positive Self

Neighbor & Local Communities

Social Group & Civic Institution

Stranger & Estranged & Enemy

GALATIANS 6: 10 – “As We Have Opportunity”

Spiritual Family

Earthly Family



Neighbor & Local Communities

Social Group & Civic Institution

Stranger & Estranged & Enemy

New Thinking on Love & Neighbor

The Good Samaritan 10:36, 37

- Jesus asked the lawyer which of the three was a neighbor to the injured man.
- The lawyer said it was the one who showed the man mercy.
- Jesus told him to do the same.



Parable of the Good Samaritan, Domenico Feti (c. 1623)

Childhood

Galilee

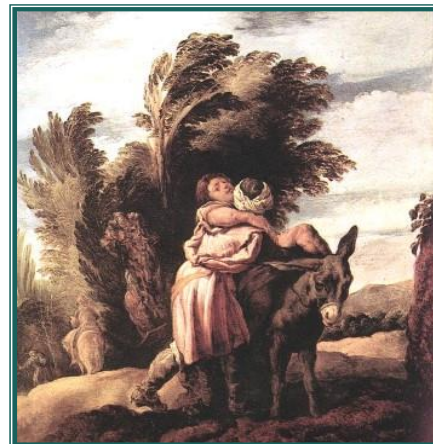
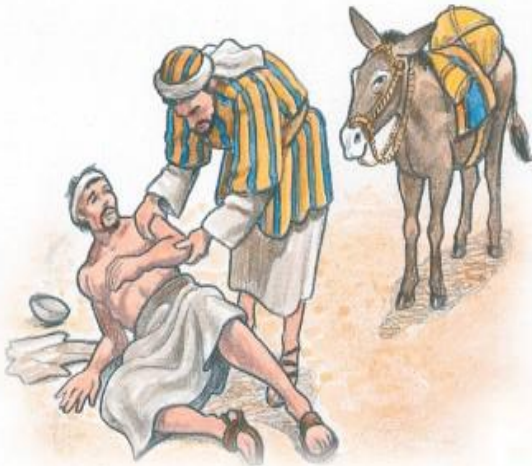
Judea

Perea

Jerusalem

FOUNDATIONS FOR A NEW SOCIETY

The Good Samaritan



Parable of the Good Samaritan, Domenico Feti (c. 1623)

Childhood

Galilee

Judea

Perea

Jerusalem

3rd Corner: Corinth Christians Were Model Neighbors

- **EARLY CHRISTIANITY WAS PRIMARILY AN URBAN FAITH, ESTABLISHING ITSELF IN THE CITY CENTERS OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE. MOST OF THE PEOPLE LIVED CLOSE TOGETHER IN CROWDED TENEMENTS. THERE WERE FEW SECRETS IN SUCH A SETTING. THE FAITH SPREAD AS NEIGHBORS SAW THE LIVES OF THE BELIEVERS CLOSE-UP, ON A DAILY BASIS. THEY ESPECIALLY NOTED THEIR EXTRAORDINARY FORBEARANCE WHEN CHEATED, AND THEIR HONESTY IN BUSINESS DEALINGS.**

“Seek the welfare of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it, for in its peace [welfare] you will have peace.” – Jeremiah 29: 5 – 7

Winter, “Seek the Welfare of the City” Excerpt, pgs. 201 - 204

The welfare of the city was seen to be two-fold. It was ‘physical’ and ‘spiritual’, and in the former case it was revolutionary in certain respects. It linked wealthy Christian members of the city into the civic benefaction convention. At the same time it [also] expanded the definition of ‘benefactor’ to encompass all those in the Christian community who had the capacity to meet the needs of others from self-generated resources.

It required all to be doers of good. This involved renunciation of the client’s full-time role in politeia forcing Christians to withdraw from unproductive existence where they were part of the paid retinue of a patron. Unlike the secular trends of the first century with the development of a welfare syndrome favoring those with status or wealth, the Christian community was to be discriminating in the distribution of ‘benefactions’ to its members, ‘honoring’ only those who were genuinely needy – the godly Christian widows without relatives.

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“Three Dimensions of Love” by Wayne Jackson



The week prior to Jesus’ crucifixion, commonly known as the Passion Week, was an emotionally charged period for the Son of God. Tuesday of that week was particularly controversial. Several members of various Jewish sects mounted argumentative assaults against Christ—with no success whatsoever, of course (see Mt. 22:15ff).

In one of these instances, a Pharisee lawyer framed a question which he doubtless believed, if answered, would provide some evidence for an indictment against the teacher from Nazareth.

“Which is the greatest commandment in the law?”

No doubt this legal expert felt this was a formidable question. The Jewish rabbis declared there were no less than 613 laws in the Old Testament. Of these, 248 were positive in thrust, while 365 were negative. They must have mused: “Which one of these would this so-called Messiah choose as the greatest?”

Christ, appealing to Deuteronomy 6:5, responded:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

Jesus declared that this was the great and first commandment of the law. Further, citing Leviticus 19:18, the Lord said there is a second commandment like unto the first:

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt. 22:36-40).

These two commandments, in fact, summarize the entire Old Testament.

All Religion Summed Up in Three Dimensions of Love

All human responsibility can be divided into three categories fundamentally.

First, there is man’s **religious responsibility** to God—the duty we owe our Creator because of his nature (Psalm 18:3). God is a being of such wonder. He is worthy of glory and honor (Rev. 4:11). Mankind should willingly express his reverence for God in divinely-prescribed worship (Mt. 4:10). To neglect loving God is to be guilty of the most egregious form of ingratitude.

Second, there is one’s **moral obligation**. This is the responsibility that human beings have to one another because every person bears the image of God and has intrinsic value.

Finally, by implication, this context suggests there is **personal obligation**—the duty that one has to self as a consequence of his own intrinsic worth.

And so the Savior indicated that the sum of man’s earthly service is to: (1) love God, (2) love neighbor, and (3) love self.

The Nature of Love

But what did Christ mean when he suggested that we must exercise love in these dimensions? To answer this question, it will be helpful to consider the meaning of “love,” as that term is employed in the Greek Testament.

There are two common words in the Greek Testament, both of which are rendered “love” in the English translation. First, there is the verb **agapao**; then there is also **phileo**. These terms are the subject of some controversy among scholars. A few allege that these words have virtually the same meaning and are mostly employed as stylistic variations.

The vast majority of New Testament scholars, however, see a distinction between the terms.

Agapao has been described as the love of the intellect, a disposition that manifests itself in devotion to the object of its interest. By way of contrast, **phileo** is viewed as being a love of “the feelings, instinctive, warm affection” (Green 1907, 377).

Barclay argued that **agapao** is the love of the mind or the will; whereas **phileo** is the love of closeness and affection (1974, 20-21).

Nigel Turner observed that **phileo** has to do with “warm and spontaneous affection,” but **agapao** connotes “a calculated disposition of regard and pious inclination” (1981, 263).

Thayer suggested that **agapao** is grounded in admiration, veneration, and esteem, while **phileo** is prompted by sense and emotion (1958, 653).

And another scholar says that **agapao** “often conveys the idea of showing love by action” (Richardson 1950, 134).

Having noted this, we now observe that **agapao** is the word employed in the passage under consideration. We are to love God, our neighbor, and even ourselves with an **agapao**-type love.

How to Love God

It is less than amazing that so many profess belief in God but don't have the remotest understanding of what that really involves. For some, “God” is but a term used in profanity, or maybe a mere matter of passing conversation, or a spare-tire measure in a moment of crisis.

The truth is, loving God is a way of life. It is a devoted commitment that consumes one's very existence.

Paul caught the spirit of this challenge when he wrote: “For me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). For the great apostle, life simply had no meaning apart from serving God through Jesus Christ.

Genuine love is demonstrated in diligent obedience (Jn. 14:15; Gal. 5:6). Love for God is not a mushy, superficial emotion. It is a vibrant lifestyle of serious dedication.

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth” (1 Jn. 3:18).

But how does one learn to love God? Surely not by accident. Since we have neither seen the Creator face to face, nor heard his voice (Jn. 1:18), how can we love him?

The answer is simple. We **learn to love him** when we are exposed to the information about how much he loves us (cf. Eph. 3:18-19) and how that love has been expressed. “We love, because he first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19).

Love is infectious! And the motivating information is found in the Scriptures.

For example, God’s love has been universally manifested to humanity (Jn. 3:16). Who, but God, loves so magnanimously? Moreover, his love is not abstract but is manifested concretely, in the gift of his Son.

“God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

Oh, such love! It is demonstrative (Gal. 1:4), unselfish (Phil. 2:5ff), inexpressible (2 Cor. 9:15), and unquenchable (cf. Rom. 8:35ff). Who can fathom it? It takes one’s breath away.

But what does this disposition involve, practically speaking? First, as suggested above, it implies an attitude which respects the voice of God as evinced in biblical revelation. One of the crucial needs of the day is a reverence for the Scriptures. A disregard for the authority of the Bible is at the root of every problem in society, and within the church as well.

Second, a love for God is characterized by a **spirit of humility** which longs for guidance.

One of the interesting words of the New Testament is the term “obedience” (cf. Rom. 1:5; 16:26). This noun derives from the Greek term **hupakoe** (from **hupo**, “under,” and **akouo**, “to hear”). The word thus suggests the idea of sitting under a teacher and eagerly listening to his words with a view to implementing the instruction.

That is the very attitude one must have toward God as he considers the message of the Bible. The noble Bereans exemplified the right mode of thinking when they received the word with all “readiness of mind” (**prothumia** — Acts 17:11). The Greek word suggests forwardness of mind, and it depicts an attitude that is ready and willing to follow God’s will.

How to Love Others

It ought to be relatively easy to learn to love God in view of his marvelous benevolence. It is harder to learn to love our fellows. Enemies care nothing for us. Our neighbors occasionally treat us badly. Even family members can disappoint us.

How can we cultivate a love for those who are so marred by the effects of sin?

First, as mentioned earlier, one must recognize, based upon historical biblical revelation, that every human being is a product of divine creation, and therefore is a **being of value**.

“The Biblical teaching about man is not that man is a collection of chemical elements, not that man is part of the brute creation, but that man is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27)” (Barclay 1957, 308).

Paul, by inspiration, presented a tremendous challenge when he admonished that we are to do nothing through faction or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind “each counting other better than himself; not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others” (Phil. 2:3-4).

How in the name of reason can we do that?

While it is a general truth that “all that a man hath will he give for his [own] life” (Job 2:4), Jesus declared: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15:13).

Tenney describes this as the “highest achievement of human love,” while noting that “divine love” goes beyond this (1948, 229; cf. Romans 5:8). The greatest lexicon on love in the history of human literature is found in 1 Corinthians 13:4ff. Read it and learn from it. It will never be surpassed. (See **The Challenge of Agape Love.**)

We must observe, however, that love is not some anemic sentimentality that overlooks wickedness and error as though such do not exist. God loves us but he does not tolerate our rebellion. Love doesn’t excuse sin, but it does exhibit kindness to others—even enemies. And it is magnanimous to those who are trying to do right. Peter declares that “love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8). The Christian is always eager to forgive his brother when that individual seeks such by means of the divinely-appointed method (cf. Lk. 17:3).

Can we possibly imagine how many human problems would be solved if only love were generously exercised? Would there be wars? Not a one. Would divorce ravage the land? It would not. And what of our prisons? They would be empty, crumbling in decay, for love does not rob, rape, or slaughter (cf. Rom. 13:8-10).

It is appropriate to observe that our love for others must attempt to pattern itself after the love that God has exhibited for us.

A certain snobbish Jew, in a verbal joust with Christ, dared to explore the meaning of “love your neighbor as yourself.” He frivolously asked: “Who is my neighbor?” For his trouble, he got the parable of the good Samaritan (see Lk. 10:25ff).

One’s neighbor is anyone—of whatever background—who needs his help. True love never discriminates. Is this more than we can bear?

How to Love Self

It is not wrong to love oneself. If one doesn’t love self, it would be unreasonable to admonish man to love his neighbor as himself. But we seem to be living in an age when numerous people deprecate themselves.

Many appear to entertain very little if any sense of personal worth. Some feel they have little value because they were conceived out of wedlock. Others imagine that they are worthless because a parent abandoned them as a child. Others have been made to feel less than whole due to their racial, economic, or social status. Then there are those individuals who languish under the burden of having been molested in their youth. These sorts of things haunt the minds of troubled souls.

What the Christian needs to convey to such folks is the fact that they do have **intrinsic worth** regardless of the unfortunate circumstances of the past. Jesus declared that every human soul has value. It is worth more than the whole world (Mt. 16:26). Christ died for the potential salvation of every person (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). Would he have given his life for that which is of no consequence?

Additionally, there is that self-depreciation that engulfs us when we sin. Our sensitive conscience is confronted with the awful reality that we have disappointed our holy Creator. Perhaps we disgraced our family and humiliated ourselves. Sin can immerse one in a terrible sea of personal disdain.

Reflect upon the agony of David when he contemplated his transgression with Bathsheba (Psa. 51). Again, though, we must remind ourselves that it was for this very reason that the Son of God entered this contaminated earthly environment. We can rejoice that we are able to find dignity, in spite of our sins, in the redeeming blood of the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29).

In light of Golgotha, any person can lift up his head with a smile on his face. Love yourself, because God does!

In the final analysis, the serious student must acknowledge that the New Testament opens up vistas of love never dreamed of by the most brilliant of human intellects. Let us revel in the sublimeness of this exalted theme, and seek to meet its challenge. – Wayne Jackson

4th Corner Intersecting Brotherhood & Neighborhood:



Ancient Corinth Road Inscription: "Erastus in return for his aedileship paved it at his own expense."

Winter, “Seek the Welfare of the City” Excerpt, pgs. 37-40

*The use of singular ‘you’ in Romans 13:4 shows that it is addressed to the individual rather than the whole church. The cost of a benefaction was very considerable & beyond the ability of some, if not most, members of the church. Benefactions include supplying grain in times of necessity by diverting the grain-carrying ships to the city, forcing down the price by selling it in the market below the asking rate, erecting public buildings or adorning old buildings with marble revetments such as in **Corinth**, refurbishing the theatre, widening roads, helping in the construction of public utilities, going on embassies to gain privileges for the city, and helping the city in times of civil upheaval...*

The picture emerges of a positive role being taken by rich Christians for the well-being of the community at large and the appropriateness and importance of due recognition by ruling authorities for their contribution. Conversion to Christianity did not mean that civic benefactors ceased to seek the welfare of their earthly cities in keeping with their Old Testament counterparts in the Exile (Jeremiah 29:7). It was an ethical imperative which Christians were commanded to fulfil within this aspect of ‘politeia,’ and as a result would have made them very visible in the public place.

Winter, "Seek the Welfare of the City" Excerpt, pgs. 48 - 60

In 1st Thessalonians 4:11 Paul is encouraging former clients to 'stand aloof from public life'. This was no similar to the Stoic stance of withdrawing from public life. Paul is here proscribing the boisterous, political rabble-rousing behavior by clients on behalf of their patrons in 'politeia.' He calls on them to be eager to live quietly, to undertake their own activities, and 'to work with their hands.' ...

In his day Paul determined to see the abolition of the patronage system in the Christian community. One of the tasks of Christians was to go beyond their own needs to the needs of others. It constituted the most visible signal to the society of its day of a new community in which the main function of all able-bodied members of this new community was to do good. This created a whole new class of benefactors. They did good because good needed to be done, and did so without expectations of reciprocity or repayment.

1st Corinthians 6:1-11 – Civil Litigation

Winter, “Seek the Welfare of the City” Excerpt, pgs. 119-120

Paradoxically, the Corinthian church had judged the outsider in ‘politeia’ when they had no right to do so (5:12) but failed dismally to judge the insider when they should have done so (5:13).

1st Corinthians 6:1-8 then reflects a typical, first-century struggle for power among the elite. This time it wasn’t arising out of a dispute between citizens who were politically active in the city’s gathering or some local association but from within the Christian gathering. What they had in common with the public arena in which such clashes occurred was that their struggle was also between the elite who were social equals or near equals. The contest between factions which had surfaced in jealousy and rivalry between factions in the Christian meeting had also split over in the secular courts of Corinth in civil actions.

The presence of Christians in civil courts taking actions against the fellow members of their 'association' was prohibited. Their conduct had nothing to do with benefactions or gospel concerns. It was simply a spill-over of divisive behavior from the Christian [assembly] into the civil courts which were regarded as a legitimate sphere in struggles for primacy in 'politeia.'

Relationships were tense because in the syndrome litigation that in Corinth, Christians had not abandoned the use of order to gain primacy in their particular association.

1st Corinthians 7:17-24 – Social Mobility

Winter, “Seek the Welfare of the City” Excerpt, pgs. 141-152

*Circumcision. Undergoing circumcision and keeping the law was one way of convincing the authorities that Christianity was a **religio licita**, for in Galatia these had become its cultural hall-marks...*

Although it was a practical means to avoid the worship requirements of the early Emperor Cult – it was not pragmatic for social advancement.

It is clear from the evidence that the purpose of reversing circumcision [or fibula disguise] related to social standing in the Roman empire, and not simply to ridicule that might be experienced in the public baths or the gymnasium. The reason for young Jewish men, (presumably shared by their parents), wanting them to participate in the latter was not solely just connected to athletics. It had to do with their status as ‘ephebi’ and the career opportunities that higher education opened for them. Financial success and social status in the Roman world were much coveted, but Jewish Christians of the Diaspora were precluded by Paul from surrendering their national identity for personal advantage.

Voluntary Slavery. *From the secular point of view, the move from freedom to slavery was for the very purpose of moving from a lesser household to a better position in a highly placed one and was undertaken for financial and social reasons. Self-enslavement was undertaken 'in order to secure the top post of **servus actor**, the chief accountant of a big household (and in due course later become their freedman procurator in the same post & eventually a rich citizen with freeborn children).'*

[Roman Law stated] 'freemen being over age twenty that allow themselves to be sold... aren't barred from proclaiming their freedom [at any time].'...

NOTE: *Those who voluntarily sold themselves into Roman slavery would've been expected to swear by the 'genius' of their master. It was just a veiled form of worship, as is evident in the case of those who swore by the 'genius' of the emperor. Free citizens had no such obligation. Paul would have had substantial reservations about a free man voluntarily putting himself in that position.*

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Winter, “Seek the Welfare of the City” Excerpt, pgs. 201 - 204

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BECOME ONE WITH OUR BLOOD BROTHERHOOD



JUDGEMENT PREPARED

FIVE STATES FIVE STEPS

Five States of the Soul:

- **EXEMPTION:**
- Ezekiel 18: 20; Matthew 18: 1 – 3
- **CONDEMNATION:**
- Galatians 3: 22
- **JUSTIFICATION:**
- Romans 5: 1, 2; 8: 1, 2
- **DAMNATION:**
- Matthew 23: 3; Mark 16: 16
- **GLORIFICATION:**
- Romans 8: 17, 30; II Thess. 1: 7 – 12

JUDGEMENT PREPARED

FIVE STATES FIVE STEPS

Five Steps For Saving:

- **HEARING:**
- **Romans 10: 17; Matthew 7: 24 - 27**
- **BELIEVING:**
- **Hebrews 11: 6; Mark 16: 15, 16**
- **REPENTING:**
- **Acts 2: 38; 17: 30; Luke 13: 3**
- **CONFESSING:**
- **Matthew 10: 32, 33; Acts 8: 36, 37**
- **BAPTISM:**
- **Romans 6: 3 – 5; Acts 8: 36 - 38**

