

God'S Pattern Of The Family

Family Hierarchy

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Just as the church has been influenced by feminism, so also has the family.

Edith and Norbert had a knock-down, drag-out battle over his inability to earn a better living. She told him that he was not forceful enough in asking the boss for a raise. "Tell him," she asked, "that you have 7 children and a sick mother, and that you have to sit up many nights and you have to clean the house because you cannot afford a maid." Several days later, Norbert came home from work, stood before his wife and calmly announced that the boss had fired him. Edith asked, "Why?" He says, "Because I have too many outside activities."

Now this a fictitious antidote, slightly humorous for its absurdity, but the sad fact is that men and women often have conflicts because of confusing relationships. This causes dysfunctional marriages and families. God is not the author of confusion, so what orderly pattern of the family does God expect humans to follow?

God made families in the first place, partly as a biological and social basis for the human race, as well as the conduit of His grace and judgment. He is also making for Himself a family of sons and daughters who will obey Him, serve Him, praise Him, revere Him, and reign with Him in His Kingdom forever and ever.

In the instructions in Leviticus 25, for observing the fiftieth year Jubilee, notice that the family unit is so important that even after fifty years those family ties were to be rekindled and solidified. The Jubilee represents liberty, the release and freedom from slavery, and in connection with the day of Atonement—freedom from Satan.

Leviticus 25:10 And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family.

Obviously the family is paramount to God's plan. Even after separations as much as fifty years, God wants them back together.

Now first I want to spend some time looking at a biblical overview of the family unit to

provide some background on the subject. The Bible begins with the biological family as the central social context of human life and as a primary means of God's communication with human beings. This social view of family becomes extended into a spiritual and heavenly reality seen in the church—the community of God's people as a sanctified family.

The Bible is in a large part, a domestic history of the family and family relationships. Moses was not only a leader, but also a brother, a husband, and a father in the epic of the Exodus. Likewise, in addition to leader, David filled the roles of son, brother, husband, and father. He was an imperfect family man, but he was a man of God. None of us can be perfect in our families. We should at least try to emulate Jesus Christ and be the best that we can.

In the New Testament, Jesus and the apostles often spent time with or referenced families. There are stories of miracles involving children as well as in the family scene of Jesus' visits to the home Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Family scenes are common in the book of Acts. In church history, we find very often families gather together in each others homes to worship God on the Sabbath.

Even though it often seems that the book of Genesis is a case book of dysfunctional families, the family theme in Genesis provides a message of hope.

The family is the unit through which God enables His covenant. An early example is the story of Noah's family as God calls Noah and his whole family into the ark to be preserved from the Flood. In this story, as well as in many other areas in Scripture, family means a whole clan or household, rather than the nuclear family, which is common here in the 21st century. The extended families are included as part of the "whole family."

In Old Testament times people lived primarily in patriarchal groups that grew as sons brought wives and children into the clan. Noah's family included his wife, his sons, and their wives. God poured out His grace on the "whole family" unit and established with them a covenant for all generations to come.

From the beginning Scripture establishes the family as the primary conduit in which God deals with us. The family is an inherently ambivalent picture of disappointment and struggle on the one hand, and on the other hand, a picture of hope and blessing.

The family in Genesis is a picture of security and protection, and at the same time a picture of conflict and victimization. So we see the family as a whole being blessed or

cursed according to the obedience or sins of individual family members. Individuals still affect other members of the family as a result of their own behavior.

The covenants of God with the patriarchs are stories of blessings to families and their descendants, generation after generation. God promised Abraham that he would be a father of many nations and his offspring would be as numerous as the dust of the earth and that from generations of his offspring would come great nations and kings.

Each divinely-ordered detail joins the larger flow of events that shapes into human history which moves along from one generation to the next. In the second of the Ten Commandments, God explains his dealings with people in the same generational terms.

Exodus 20:5-6 You shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

This puts a great deal of responsibility on the father of his family. Every father can be a blessing or a curse to his wife and children, to his children's children, and so on.

God worked through Abraham's family, as He promised, through the generations to King David and through more generations to Jesus Christ, and through Him, the conduit narrowed to one brilliant point and then burst forward into a wide stream once again.

Psalm 22:27 pictures the multitude of families from all the ends of the world finally worshipping God. This is the glorious end to which all the generations are moving. In the meantime, in any specific generation, somewhere between the beginning and the end, God consistently channels His grace and justice through family units however large or small they may be.

For example, in observing the first Passover in Egypt, God told the Israelites to sacrifice one lamb for each family. Each household in Egypt was judged or passed over according to the presence or absence of sacrificial blood on the door frame of the house. God sent His grace or judgment family by family as he visited Egypt that night.

The story of Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho, who put her trust in Israel's God and hid the other spies. She saved not only her own life, but also her family and all who belonged to her. The Israelites later destroyed the city of Jericho but spared Rahab and

her family. One person's faith saved all those people in that family.

Does our individual faith have an effect on other family members? Yes it does! By contrast we read in the very next chapter, of Achan, who stole spoils for himself from Jericho and is a frightening example of God's response to unconfessed sin. The other Israelites stoned him and all his family. So judgment came to Achan's whole family, whereas grace came to Rahab's whole family.

In the New Testament as well we see God reaching into whole family units. In Acts 11:14 we are told that Cornelius received a command to send for Peter who would bring a message through which Cornelius and all of his household would be saved.

When Lydia took to heart Paul's preaching in Philippi, she and the members of her household were baptized. In Philippi as well, the jailer of Paul and Silas came to believe in God—he and his whole family—at which point the whole household was immediately baptized.

Here then we see the family as not just a biological and social unit, but the entity through which God carries out His blessings and judgments. God does not limit Himself to the conduit however. In fact the biblical meaning of family comes to exceed its physical and social identity. Next to the physical family emerges a spiritual one.

Scripture often uses the family as a place of reconciliation and harmony. Malachi provides an encouraging promise of bringing together fathers and children.

Malachi 4:6 And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

This is the direct opposite of the picture of family discord and fragmentation that seems to be the norm in so many Old Testament illustrations and throughout human history. The family structure is not meant to be random or chaotic, it is meant to be planned and ordered and here is how. Man is the divinely-appointed head of the family. Society did not assign him this position, it was God who placed him at the head from the beginning and emphasized it to Eve.

Genesis 3:16 To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

The leadership position is one of trust in which man is accountable to God. It is not a position that we can decide that we do not want, nor can we pass it to another we may consider to be more qualified. We do not have the authority to do that, as men, fathers, or husbands.

To allow others to steal this leadership demonstrates severe weakness in character and lack of obedience to principle. There is no way a man can neglect his calling with a clear conscience. To turn aside from this sacred responsibility is a serious dereliction of duty in the eyes of God and this is especially true for husbands and fathers as well as ministers and deacons.

There are some people, even in the church today, who dislike the God-given plan for family relationship. They feel that it places too great a burden on the man or is unfair to the woman. There has been an effort underway in this society to do away with the patriarchy, substituting instead an equality of leadership between men and women.

What such advocates fail to understand is that God's plan is not one that burdens, frustrates, or deprives an individual. It is one with abundant blessings attached and it is the most ideal plan for the family to live by in obtaining order, unity, and peace. In addition, it provides the greatest opportunity for both men and women to develop as individuals. As the man assumes leadership, he grows as a man. As the woman is relieved of this position she becomes more of a woman and she is free to concentrate fully on the responsibilities in her sphere.

Not only is leadership of the family of divine origin, it follows logic and reason, and no organization can function without a responsible head. We observe this immediately in government, in business, in social groups, in the military, and so on. There must be someone to direct activities to initiate action, and there must be someone upon whom responsibility and decisions fall. Without a head, disorder and chaos result.

A family is a small social group of intelligent beings and therefore must be organized with a leader. Policies and rules must be established and decisions must be made daily. These may not be momentous decisions at times but may simply be needed to avoid confusion and keep order.

Now the household codes of duties in the New Testament define the interdependent and complementary roles, obligations, and responsibilities of the members of the family. The husband/father is the sacrificing head who loves and leads his wife and children. Then there is the wife/mother who submits to the leadership of her husband and

respects him, then their children who obey parental authority. The parents train their children in the fear of God without exasperating them.

Regarding the marriage relationship, Paul could not have stated more pointedly the divine order or hierarchy of the husband/wife relationship. In complete agreement with Peter's instruction on the wife's marital submission, Paul teaches that the husband is empowered and commanded to lead in the marriage relationship, and that the wife is instructed to submit to her husband as to the Lord. The apostle Paul elaborates on this in Ephesians 5.

Ephesians 5:22-23 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

So if there is any question as to what is intended in the phrase "head of the wife," Paul adds the analogy of Christ as the headship over the church. The word "head" is from the Greek *kephale*. This is used figuratively to mean as is its constant use: authority over; leadership, not source or origin as biblical feminists assert.

Ephesians 5:24-33 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Did you notice there how many more commands there are to the husband than to the wife? This is because God wants to make sure, through Paul, that men—husbands and fathers—understand beyond a shadow of a doubt how much they are to love and care for their wives.

A man, as leader, may be in a superior *position*, but this does not suggest that he is a superior *person*. He is merely functioning in an office or calling and the wife honors her husband's position or authority and gives him the respect deserving of a leader.

This is a matter of law and order, and if we do not learn this as part of a human family, God sees it as an indication of discord and conflict which He will not allow to exist in His Kingdom. So it is better that we learn this principle and lesson now.

The man's position as leader is not more important than the woman's supporting role. Both are equally important, yet they are different in position. Man's position is to lead. Both husband and wife cannot lead at the same time, it has never worked.

Titus 2:1 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: [then Paul gives instructions for it in verse 4]

Titus 2:4-8 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands [not other women's husbands], that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.

The father has the God-given right to establish rules of conduct, expenditure of money, laws of the household, and educational planning. He has the right to make decisions concerning the family and those decisions relate to his role as the guide, protector, and provider.

It is acceptable for the father to delegate some of his authority to his wife, especially in affairs of the household and matters concerning the children because she is closer to them than he is in their day-to-day activities. But he maintains the right to step in when necessary or when important to do so, not as a tyrant or a dictator, but as a loving husband and father.

Often the father will turn to his wife to seek her perspective and viewpoint in matters of family, planning, and decisions. She is his counselor and offers wisdom and valuable advice. Her perspective is an important one in the family and very necessary.

Colossians 3:18-20 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.

Notice how it says, "wives submit to your husbands as is fitting to the Lord." That means only as he abides by God's laws and is not telling you to do something against God's law and God's way of life.

The father may also decide to consult with his children by calling them together in a family meeting and carefully listen to his children regarding their feelings and consider their viewpoint. The responsibility ultimately lies on the father, he stands as the shepherd of the flock.

Ephesians 6:1-4 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise [there is a promise that goes with it and God states it right there]: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Again fathers are told not to be dictators or tyrants and rule with a heavy hand. The father's decision should be honored and respected by all members of the family, even when they do not agree with him. They are not honoring him in as much as they are honoring his God-given office or authority as the guide.

In this, all the members of the family learn how to function as a family in preparation for living in God's spiritual Family and in the Kingdom of God. Paul teaches that the marriage relationship is a living picture of the relationship between Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

The husband/wife relationship mirrors the relationship of Christ and the church. Christ, the bridegroom is the head of the bride; the church, the bride, is subject to Him in everything. In the same way, the husband is head in the marriage relationship and the wife submits herself to him in everything that does not go against God and His way of

life.

Therefore headship and submission in the marriage relationship is not culturally conditioned or determined, it is part of the marriage's essence design by God. It is God's pattern for the family.

Paul loves to use the household analogy when speaking in the nature and order of the local church. Just as he teaches male headship in the family, he teaches male headship in the household of God.

In the mainstream churches, more and more women are becoming elders and heads of churches, pastors, and so on, and now it is starting to creep into the greater churches of God. This is part of the reason why I am giving this sermon because feminism is affecting women in this nation, in the world, and even within God's church. So we need to be aware of what God says about these things and not just what is culturally acceptable.

Since the family is the basic social unit and the man is the established family leader, we should not be surprised that men would be elders of the larger church family. It is desirable to have men be the elders of the Christian community because the structure of leadership has to be set up in a way that supports the entire social structure of the community.

Since men are supposed to be the heads of the family, they must also be the heads of the community. It is in the family that they learn their community roles as well, and conversely, what they see in the community reinforces what they learn in the family. So to adopt different principles on the community level weakens the family and vice versa.

Have there been great women leaders of nations? Yes there have. We see that biblically and we see it in the world today, but that is not the ideal that God has established. It is a unique situation when men do not stand up, or when the men are unavailable, that women take that position. And it is sad, because it is the men who have failed and sinned.

The principle of male headship, however, does not diminish in any way the significance and necessity of active female involvement in the home or church. First century Christian women played an indispensable role in Christ's work. Many passages in the Bible give evidence of women working diligently in Christ's service.

Some of Paul's coworkers in the gospel were women, yet their active role in advancing

the gospel and caring for God's people was accomplished in ways that did not violate male headship or leadership in the home or in the church. The New Testament provides instruction on the dual rules of male headship and female subordination in the household of God.

In the same way that every individual family is governed by certain standards of conduct, so too the local church family is governed by certain principles of conduct and social arrangement. The letter of I Timothy specifically addresses the issue of proper order and behavior of men, women, and elders in the local church family. To his representative in Ephesus Paul writes:

I Timothy 3:14-15 These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

A major aspect of the churches social arrangement concerns the behavior of women in the congregation. In the church at Ephesus, as a result of false teaching which may have challenged the validity of traditional gender roles, Christian women were acting contrary to acceptable Christian behavior.

In order to counter improper female conduct in the church, Paul restates Christian principles of Christian conduct and two of those principles are found in I Timothy 2, which are:

1) Modest dress.

I Timothy 2:9-10 in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

2.) God's policy regarding submission in the church.

I Timothy 2:11-12 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.

Now I Timothy 2:11-14 should alone settle the question of women elders. God, through Paul, prohibits women from doing things in reference to the men of the church, that is: 1) teaching and 2) exercising authority over them.

This prohibition is evident in both the positive and negative statements that we just read. The positive statement, "let a woman learn," is qualified by the manner in which she is to learn: "in silence with all submission." Then the negative statement, "do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man," directly forbids women from teaching and leading men in the church.

Paul is not prohibiting women from teaching absolutely. We know from Titus 2:3 that the older women are encouraged to be teachers of good things. But the women are specifically prohibited from teaching men publicly in the household of God.

Paul concluded in I Timothy 2:12, in the same way that he began verse 11, insisting on women being silent and this silence is a concrete expression of the principle of submission. Our Sabbath services are set up on the basis of this principle.

Since I Timothy 5:17 states that elders lead and teach the church and since women are not to teach or lead men, it follows therefore that women cannot be elders in the church.

Paul's restriction on women teaching and leading men certainly caused heated criticism, as you would expect, just as it does today. So as in nearly all other passages on male/female role differences, Paul immediately supports his instruction by reminding his readers of the original creation order. He uses the Old Testament creation account to prove his point.

I Timothy 2:13-15 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

By stating in verse 13 that "Adam was created first," Paul means that in the creation design of male and female, Adam, the male, was first among equals and God uniquely designed the man to be physically, emotionally, and spiritually the head of the relationship and He created woman to complement his headship position.

It is profoundly significant that God did not create Adam and Eve at the same time, instead woman was made after the man, from the man, for the man, brought to the man,

and named by the man. This is the design that God chose from the very beginning and it does not make men any better than women.

Now in verse 14, Paul illustrates, from their fall into sin, the necessity of maintaining the creation distinctions between man and woman. Satan shrewdly circumvented Adam, the one God equipped as first among equals to lead in the relationship, and went directly to Eve, whom he rightly perceived to be the weaker in resisting his deceptions. You will find support for that in I Corinthians 11:3; I Peter 3:7; I Timothy 4:7; and II Timothy 3:6

Therefore a major reason that God insists on an all-male eldership is because godly males are more suited, by divine design, than godly females for leadership, particularly in identifying and fighting off satanic and false teaching and subtle doctrinal deceptions.

To my know knowledge God never calls men gullible, but He does say that about women in the New Testament. There is a difference between men and women. Men do not tend to be as gullible, by nature, as women tend to be.

Immediately following his instructions in I Timothy 2:11-15, prohibiting women from teaching and leading men, Paul describes the qualifications for those who oversee the local church in I Timothy 3. Therefore the qualifications of the overseer is to be the husband of one wife and one who manages his own household well.

I Timothy 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach.

I Timothy 3:4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence.

Paul gives no suggestion of women elders in this passage on the qualifications for elders. I Corinthians 11:2-16 is a superb example of how Paul supports his instruction of headship and submission with weighty, theological and biblical reasons, rather than with cultural social patterns or adaptation to a unique circumstances. Paul begins his instruction on the male/female role with an explanation of its source in I Corinthians 11.

I Corinthians 11:3 But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

Women's submission is part of a series of subordination and headship relationships:

God; Christ; Man; Woman; God is head; Christ is head; Man is head; only woman is not referred to as head. These relationships have nothing to do with local, temporal circumstances, but rather follow a divinely constituted hierarchical order.

By stating that the head of Christ is God, Paul emphasizes the hierarchical relationship that exists in the government and Family of God. Although equal in substance, Christ obeys and submits Himself to the Father within the relationship of the Family of God. This submission certainly does not imply inferiority on Jesus Christ's part. In verses 7-9 Paul reminds his readers of the original order of the creation once again.

I Corinthians 11:7-9 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.

Paul states that the woman is the glory of man which means that she was created to directly reflect man's God-created headship authority by submitting to and supporting his leadership.

Now one final text which is very similar to I Timothy 2, but is directed to a different congregation is in I Corinthians 14.

I Corinthians 14:33-35 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

You cannot get much more direct than that. Paul really nails it on the head. It is mind boggling that professing Christians out there in the mainstream ignore such a direct and obvious statement. Is it because they do not have faith and they do not believe that this is the inspired written Word of God?

Here, as in I Timothy 2, Paul prohibits women from taking the lead publicly by speaking in an open, formal church meeting. He again supports his restriction by appealing to the Old Testament scriptures and a command from God Himself. Paul's instructions to churches in Ephesus, Corinth, Colossae, and on the island of Crete, regarding women's submission remind us that, in a sinful world, even Christians struggle with the idea of

submission. Husbands, wives, and children all struggle with submission.

Paul also emphasizes male/female roles, because it is very common for males to abdicate their spiritual headship responsibility and obligations in the home and church and therefore, in one sense, forcing women to take the reins. Woman should resist the urge to take the reins and instead encourage her husband to take the reins and take responsibility.

Male responsibility and passivity is an enormous problem that has frustrated and destroyed many wives, families, and churches. Ultimately the abdication of male headship is a refusal to submit to Christ's word and Lordship. Paul therefore had to reaffirm God's original creation order as revealed in the Old Testament scriptures.

Christianity did not abolish God's original design for men and women, but rather it brought it into better focus. Proper male/female roles is a matter of faith. To this can be added the detail from the requirements for eldership, that an elder must be someone who is,

Titus 1:6 blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.

It says here the husband of one wife, not the wife of one husband in the qualifications. This is because the woman is not even considered as being in line for eldership.

Now the redeemed family is a picture of care and compassion for family members. In contrast, God warns us, through Paul, of the horrific spiritual condition we are in if we neglect our physical and spiritual families.

I Timothy 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

If we are Abraham's children, that is faithful to God, we will obey God's instruction to provide for our families. Once we are alerted to the analogy between the family and the church, it becomes evident that the symbolism is worked out in detail.

First a family had a father; each extended family or household had or has a patriarch which was the oldest living male. Abraham, for example, was the father of Israel. A

father was called the head of a clan or family, and this head of the clan was the biological source for the family and had authority over it.

In the New Testament as well, the man is called the head, as we have seen. In each of these passages the social phenomenon of a family head is linked to a spiritual certainty—the headship of Christ over the church. The husband is subservient and submissive to Christ, he has his boss just as the wife has hers. A husband must live according to God's standards, otherwise he will lead his family astray.

The Israelites initially took to heart God's covenant with Abraham. They knew that they were in his family as it was continuing through the generations and that through his family, all peoples of the earth would be blessed. When the blessing came in the form of Jesus, one of His first messages to God's people was that they must look through the earthly family to see the heavenly one.

John 8:39 They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham.

So Jesus points the Jews to God who should be their Father and, to Himself, the one who can show the way to that Father.

John 8:42 Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.

Now He points to the one everlasting family; a spiritual family; the Family of God, and to those who will not see through the physical to the spiritual, Jesus' message seemed radical. When His mother and brothers waited to see Him, He asked, "who is My mother and who are My brothers?" His question implied the existence of a family far more lasting than the physical one He had. Jesus pointed out His disciples as His family.

Matthew 12:48-49 But He answered and said to the one who told Him, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers!

The heavenly family is eternal whereas the earthly one is temporary, a distinction that

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Christ made clear. In fact He predicted that He Himself would turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother; that there would be households where conflict arises against those who belong to the Eternal Father and those who do not.

Primary commitment must go to the heavenly Father. He must be of the utmost importance in our lives.

Matthew 10:37 He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

The coming of Jesus Christ makes the call much more concrete, but in effect this call to love God and to be part of His Family is the same call that came to Abraham, the father who loved God more than he loved his own son Isaac. God made Abraham to be the physical father of many nations and, at the same time, the spiritual father of those who have faith like his in the heavenly Father.

Galatians 3:7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

So the spiritual family of Abraham emerges more distinctly with the coming of Christ, who came from Abraham's line, but who came to extend that line into all the world, starting with the firstfruits of God's Kingdom and Family.

In Hebrews 2, Paul develops Christ's picture of His brotherhood with all the faithful who belong to the same family with the one who had to be made just like His brothers. We will read verse 11.

Hebrews 2:11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

Hebrews 2:17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

As Christ's followers they were established in God's church, they saw themselves, Jew and Gentile, as members of God's household, the extended Family of God.

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

Now what are we, if we are led by and have the Spirit dwelling in us? We are sons and heirs of the Kingdom of God through Christ. Paul tells us in Ephesians 1.

Ephesians 1:5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.

Before this adoption we were like aliens or slaves, but now, being adopted, we have been taken into the family of God.

Galatians 4:1-7 Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

We must be willing to yield to the influence of the Spirit of God's Son. When we submit to Him we are adopted into His Family and we become His children, whether male or female. The name "sons of God" is a name of endearment, meaning that we are His children, His disciples, and His family. We are part of the great family of the redeemed, of whom He is the Father and protector.

Romans 8:9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

Now unless you have received the Holy Spirit and this Spirit is dwelling in you, you are not a spiritual member of God's church. You may call yourself a member of the church, but if you do not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, you are not a member of God's

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spiritual and eternal church. Joining a physical organization calling itself a church, does not make you a true Christian. Only receiving and *following* God's Spirit does. If we have God's Spirit we are heirs, but not yet inheritors.

Romans 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Romans 8:17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

So we are heirs of God and joint heirs as brethren with Christ. He has gone ahead, through a resurrection to glory as the Pioneer. He is the firstborn of many brethren and He has inherited all things in God's Kingdom.

We are heirs and our Elder Brother and High Priest supervises our spiritual development and prepares us to be kings and priests, reigning with Him. He will have made us kings and priests to our God and we will reign on earth with Christ.

Revelation 5:10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.

Isaiah 9:6-7 For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

In verse 7, "to order it" means to raise up; to confirm it; to cause it to stand. And "to establish it" means to place it on a firm foundation; to make it firm. As imitators of Christ we are given an example here of what we must do as Christians and in our own family and in God's church, to advance God's work.

In learning to be kings and priests who will rule with Christ, we must be working to order and establish God's way of life in our own families. The husband and father must lead in this as his wife submits to his efforts and direction, in working under Christ to produce a Christian household.

God's Family is characterized by order, unity, and peace and He expects us to learn this in our own Christian families and in our own membership in the household of God—the church.

God is first called Father in Deuteronomy 1:31, as Moses recalls for the Israelites how God carried them into the desert, as a father carries a son. Isaiah 63:16 continues the symbolism and tells God:

Isaiah 63:16 Doubtless You are our Father, though Abraham was ignorant of us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O Lord, are our Father; our Redeemer from everlasting is Your name.

Now in the New Testament Christ reveals that He has come to show God the Father to us which we may see by Christ's own example. God appears as Father throughout many of the pages of the New Testament and Matthew records that Jesus taught His disciples to pray first, "our Father in heaven."

The concept of God as parent communicates not only headship, but also loving care and comfort as well. He is the Father that is faithfully there for His son. God says of His chosen people in Hosea 11,

Hosea 11:1 "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.

We are members of God's church and members of spiritual Israel. To be a child of God is to know this kind of support, not just from above, but from fellow brethren as well. Paul tells us in Galatians 6,

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

God sets the lonely in families, not just in the comfort and care of human families, but ultimately in the care and fellowship of the people of God. John records Jesus' teaching in John 3, that God's Family will be known by His followers by their love for one another.

Being part of God's Family means also to originate from Him and to take His name. The tribes of Israel were named according to the patriarchal fathers who began each

biological line. Abraham's physical offspring came from his physical seed and are called his children, but Paul explains in Galatians 3, that the true seed, to which Abraham's family leads us, is Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:16-19 Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed [that is Christ] should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.

Galatians 3:29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

The faithful enter Abraham's line of promise through faith in Christ. As members of Christ's body, the church, we receive the promise of inheriting the Kingdom of God and being sons in God's Family. We take on the name of the divine family as well.

Now what do we know of the Family name? Paul tells us that the Family of God is named after God Himself.

Ephesians 3:14-15 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

The Greek word for family is *patria*, which is from the root *pater* meaning father; implying the father or patriarch as the originator of the family.

In God's Family, the one and only originator is the heavenly Father, who takes as His children, all who accept His Son, and who thereby take His name, His identity, and His reputation. Verse 15 may also be translated, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name." God is the Eternal Father; the ultimate origin.

From this we know that when the writers of the epistles refer to their fellow believers as

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brothers and sisters in the Lord more than 100 times, they are not simply using an attractive and emotionally compelling illustration, it is much more than that. The physical family is not a concrete picture of an abstract idea, but rather it is one step toward an even greater spiritual reality. These writers are addressing fellow members of an eternal, real, spiritual family, whose origin is the ultimate reality—God Himself.

The family members are united by the seed and blood of Christ, and when Paul says "keep on loving each other as brothers," in Hebrews 13:1, he does not mean that we resemble brothers. He means that we participate in the true Family of God and so must act accordingly.

The Bible is a story of God's Family from beginning to end. His plan is not one that burdens, frustrates, or deprives an individual, but rather is one with abundant blessings attached. It is the most ideal plan for the family to live by in obtaining order, unity, and peace.

Now what do we have to look forward to if we learn how to function according to the pattern of God's Family?

Revelation 3:21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Under Christ we will be given the rule over the entire vast universe, literally *all* things. That is the power that has been given to Christ, and will be ours as joint inheritors with Him. Eternal life is waiting for those who are submissive to God. A spirit life of wonderful abundance beyond our wildest dreams is waiting for us. That is the gift and desire of our merciful Father and His Son Jesus Christ. It should be our goal and desire to inherit the Kingdom of God and to be valuable members of His eternal family.

As members of the household of God, we are learning and practicing now how to live God's way of life, by imitating Jesus Christ, not only on an individual basis, but as members of a loving family. What an incredible opportunity we have been given!