

Privileges Of The Family Of God

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Given 14-Oct-11; Sermon #FT11-04

For God's people around the world, the Feast of Tabernacles is the happiest time of the entire year, in large part because God ordained the Feast to be family oriented. It is a special week-long opportunity for the entire family to be together in celebration of the coming wonderful world tomorrow and for the saints' full spiritual reality in the Kingdom of God. What could be better than that to look forward to?

Parents, youth, and singles of God's church look forward to the Feast with great anticipation all year long. As one spiritual family, whether married or single, we can enjoy this special family relationship as members of the household of God. An essential part of the spiritual nourishment of the Feast comes from concentrated Christian fellowship with our physical families and with our one great spiritual family.

We have a great deal to rejoice about being in this great spiritual family. Can anything be negative in our lives with us being members of such a wonderful, great, awesome family? Being here with God the Father, Jesus Christ our elder brother, and with our spiritual brothers and sisters...it is such a great uplifting experience; it is a foretaste of the millennium and of Gods Kingdom.

Please turn to Ephesians 2:19. Last year at the Feast of Tabernacles, I gave a couple of sermons on our heavenly citizenship. At that time, we considered the first picture the apostle Paul used in Ephesians 2:19 to show us the privilege of being members of God's church—namely that of citizens in a state.

After the Feast last year, David Wyatt-Mair [of South Africa's Capetown area Feast site in Hermanus (At this time of year there is great whale watching opportunity)] was saying that He hoped that I would continue to elaborate on the rest of verse 19. But the time did not permit me to do so at that time. So this sermon is a continuation of those sermons, but never-the-less a separate topic that stands alone. So you do not have to remember my sermons from last year to understand the privileges of the family of God that I am going to present to you today. Here, in Ephesians 2:19, Paul writes,

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.

We come now to Paul's second picture: true Christians are not only fellow citizens with the saints, but they are also of the household of God; and here is obviously something different, here is a progression of the privilege and the unity of the membership in the family.

Two things Paul wants to bring out are his principle of unity and also the greatness and the privilege, but why does he use a second figure here in this case? Why is he going to use a third figure (found in verses 21 and 22)—the habitation of God, the temple of God—which we will consider later in the Feast. The answer is quite obvious. He felt that the first figure alone, a citizenship, was not sufficient. It conveys an idea; it introduces us to a vital part of the teaching, but it does not include everything. It is not sufficiently comprehensive; it has laid down one tremendous aspect, the one we considered last year, that of citizenship. But there is much more to be said, and therefore it would be wise for us to consider and to discover why it is that he uses this second illustration.

In the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he introduces us to the idea of family.

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

Predestination is a type of assurance, a type of guarantee. We are promised complete legal adoption as sons in the family of God. Here, in Ephesians 2:19, he takes up the idea again by telling us that as born from above believers, we belong to the family of God. Household means family; and, in other words, we are children of God. Paul makes this point about the Israelites and Gentiles who have become Christians, and he says, "You are members of the household of God." All other distinctions you remember have gone, they have all been set aside, and they have all been abolished. This is a new thing God has brought into being amongst Israelites and Gentiles. The further great fact is that we are in the position of children. We are in the process of legal adoption.

What we have to do, therefore, is compare and contrast the idea of a state and the idea of a family. It is only as we do this that we will realize why it is that Paul brings in this second picture and how this second picture is a very definite advance upon the first.

It also takes us more deeply into the truth about the unity of all Christians and the greatness and the privilege we enjoy; we must consider therefore the points of contrast between a state and a family.

The first, is that the relationship that exists and sub exists between the members of the state is after all a general relationship where as the thing that characterizes the relationship between members of a family is that it is a more particular, more specific, more intimate, relationship. Just because we may be citizens of the same country, does not mean we all belong to the same family; there a number of families, and we may be all one in the state. That is what I mean by saying that the state relationship is somewhat more general than the family.

On the other hand when you come to the family you have greatly narrowed down the relationship and it is a much smaller unit. And because it is narrower and more particular, it is therefore a much more intimate relationship. In other words, we can say that the connection between us and the state is a very loose connection; there is a connection, and it is enough to divide us from people who belong to other countries and other kingdoms. We are bound together, but it is still a loose connection; and here, in the United States, it is becoming looser all the time. It is an intense, close, intimate attachment to be in unity with God's church and to be members of the household of God. We can go further by wording it like this, the second place—the unity that exists in the stat—is an external unit; whereas the whole point about family unity is that it is something internal that needs no elaboration or demonstration. You cannot think of a family without immediately thinking of that something within, something inside, that is making them one.

That is not true in the realm of the state, where we are held together by a certain type of culture, certain types of laws, and by certain types of common interests. All of which are in a final sense on the surface of our lives and outside of us. Here it is essentially something inward, internal. In other words, the relationship between members of the state is a more remote relationship, whereas that between the members of a family is a more intimate one.

What I mean by that is that we know most people in a vague and somewhat remote manner in the state, country, nation and recognize people who live on the same street or work in the same office; we are acquainted with them, but it is always remote. Whereas, in the family, the center light idea is immediately that of intimacy, of understanding, of an inner bond, and a blood bond.

Ultimately our relationship to one another in a state is an impersonal one, whereas the whole point about the family is that the relationship is intensely personal. This is a very important principle, quite apart from its application to the church; there is a tendency in the world today to emphasize and to develop impersonal relationships at the expense of personal ones. You can think of many examples of this. The state itself does it. As the

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state becomes more and more powerful and interferes more and more in our lives, it tends to depersonalize all of us. We become units, we become numbers, and the personal element has gone out. There is a great deal of evidence of that in this country, at this present time.

This is a very philosophical point and ultimately from the stand point of personality and of individualism the state always tends to depersonalize us; it is of course a part of the whole question of mass and mob psychology. Because the world depersonalizes us, it means that Satan, the god of this world, depersonalizes everything he gets involved in. So you have his demons warring against one another, depersonalizing.

You always tend to lose your identity somewhat in a crowd, and that is why crowds can be so dangerous. And look how quickly the crowds are getting violent around the world, and social unrest is used more and more as an outlet for frustration, unemployment, and the economy.

I think it is obvious that the day will come when the state more strictly regulates the number of people meeting together and the purpose of the meeting. Whether we like it or not, a crowd has an effect on us and people tend to act automatically in a crowd. We see in the years of persecution against the church that it was whole communities, whole states, whole governments, whole nations, who persecuted God's people. They would depersonalize, persecuting, personalized people.

We need to observe and watch this even in the public governmental educational systems. The more you impress loyalty to a side or to a school, the more you are tending to depersonalize children and to produce this impersonal relationship. I am not talking about the learning of team work in sports, which is a good thing (although it can be abused there and often is). This depersonalization seems to be one of the main reasons for the appalling increase of divorce in the last half century; if people thought less and less of themselves in this personal relationship manner, and the loyalties have all been general, the country, the school, the men on this side, the women on that side. It boils down to something like that. Something outside oneself.

God's church is not supposed to be generalized like that, it is a personalized family. It may work under the legalistic term of corporation, but it is a family, not a business, not a company, not a corporation. It does help in this society to be incorporated to work in an organized manner, but the day will be coming when the state will no longer allow us to preach what we must preach, and we will probably have to give up that corporate license (I guess you would call it).

If you have noticed the government is licensing everything they can. Whether you want to put a deck on the back of your house, or just want to do some plumbing work in some areas. Licenses, licenses, and more and more money.

We have to be careful we do not become selfish and self centered, since that is the natural tendency of human beings who are indeed personalized. But the tragedy is that we always seem to pass from one extreme to other as human beings, trying to teach children and others not to be selfish this society, has gone to the other extreme, making them so impersonal that they are afraid to express themselves. So they try to depersonalize them so as to become lost in the mass and in the mob. If you can depersonalize a person, you can get them to follow the popular culture.

You see then why the apostle Paul has advanced the thought in Ephesians 2:19. The attachment of the relationship in the state is impersonal; but in the family, this is the glory of the family, where all persons and relationships are all personal, direct, and immediate. Finally we can put it like this. The difference between the two relationships is the difference between the general legal relationship and a vital living blood relationship. What binds us together ultimately in the state is the law, and since immigration laws are being ignored and rewritten by treasonous people in this country, that general, legal relationship of citizenship is being destroyed. There may still be certain interest and outlooks in common, but the thing after all that makes us one and keeps us in cohesion is the process of the law. It is a general, legal relationship in the state, but it is not that way in the family relationship.

What binds in a family is blood, and it is a vital relationship. The difference can be shown very easily in this way: You will find here in this country, often called a melting pot for immigration, certain ethnic and racial groups that group together: the Hispanics group together in their neighborhoods, the Chinese group together in their neighborhoods, the Arabs group together in theirs. A century ago, it was the Italians, the Poles, the Jewish, and the Irish who grouped together in their communities. Granted, not in every case, but as a general rule they felt more comfortable being with, in a sense, their ethnic "family."

These individual groups are of one blood, and they possess certain common characteristics. A blood relationship is a more intimate, direct, vital and a living thing, than any relationship that is limited and determined by the process of the law and by the enactments of men. The Apostle Paul was not merely multiplying words when he said, in Ephesians 2:19.

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners,

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but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the house hold of God.

So he has advanced; he has taken us to a higher realm; he is narrowing it down and as you narrow a relationship; it always becomes more intense. That is why you see in some of the larger corporate groups that there is almost an isolationism or depersonalization that happens naturally from being so large. I remember in the World Wide Church Of God, the largest feast site I attended was fifteen thousand people, and it was quite often that you did not even see hundreds of people in your own congregation. That had a natural depersonalization to it, not that is necessarily wrong. I was just pointing out that it does happen, whether we want it to or not in some cases. In this we begin to see why Christ said He had a little flock, because a little group of people have a better opportunity to become more intimate and intense.

Luke 12:32 Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Having shown the difference in that way in general, let us now come to the particular application of all this to the Christian, to the members of the church. As I mentioned many times already, we are of the household of God; we belong to God's family. It is a vital part of the whole doctrine of salvation.

Let me start with the greatest and the most important thing of all, with this subject. It is important that we know this in order to understand the marvelous and wondrous grace of God. Paul described our natural state and condition earlier in his letter to the Ephesians. Here in Ephesians 2:3-5 we will read.

Ephesians 2:3-5 Among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved.).

God through Christ has been dealing with us personally by grace. He has placed us in this family. We deserve nothing but death, but it would have been a wonderful thing in and of itself if God had merely decided not to leave us in that state.

God's way of salvation does not stop at that. He elevates us to this dignity of children. He adopts us into His own family. In the story of the Prodigal Son, the son went home and said to his father, "Father I have sinned against heaven and in your sight and am no more worthy to be called your son..." and he was about to add, "Make me as one of your hired servants," but the father cannot regard his boy, though he is a prodigal, as a servant. It just cannot happen. He says, "No, you come back as my son," and he embraces him, brings out the robe and the ring, and kills the fatted calf. That is God's way of salvation. Each member of the household of God is viewed in a similar way.

It is important, therefore, that we grasp this principle in order that we are able to magnify the grace of God. What a plan of salvation this is! What a method of redemption, content with nothing but that we stand in His presence, as His children. If we do not realize this, we do not realize the greatness and the riches of God's grace.

There is the first and the most important thing that, in a sense, includes all the others. It emphasizes what I have just been saying—that we must never think of our salvation negatively. We only start with the negative; from there on it is all positive. The first thing we all need is the forgiveness of sin and deliverance from the wrath of God. He does not stop at that. We must never stop at that in our thinking. Our thinking must be positive; we must see all that to which it leads. And if we do that, we will live a joyful and positive life as a member of the household of God.

The Christian is not merely a person who is forgiven and saved from eternal death. Much more than that, he is in the process of being adopted into the family of the Eternal God. We are eagerly awaiting the adoption, the redemption of our body. You find, there, Paul speaking in Romans 8:23.

Another important point is this. You notice that this is true of us only in and through Jesus Christ. It is only true of those who are in Christ, and this is absolutely vital and pivotal. All blessing is in Jesus and none of us are true apart from Jesus Christ. We will read here in Ephesians 2:12-13.

Ephesians 2:12-13 That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were a far off have been made near by the blood of Christ. [It is now a blood relationship.]

Ephesians 2:18 For through Him [Christ] we both have access by one spirit

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to the Father.

There is no such thing as belonging to the family of God apart from Jesus Christ. Mankind is divided into two compartments: those who are outside Christ or without Christ and those who are in Christ and members of the household of God. You could say those under the sun and those that are over the sun.

God is the creator of all and there is a kind of fatherhood in that sense and that is not the

thing that the Apostle Paul is speaking about here. I am talking about the new relationship that has come into being only through Jesus Christ and His perfect work. God is not the father of those who do not believe in Christ, other than maybe in a creative type of situation which is the other way of thinking of it and not the way Paul is speaking of here. And nobody can go to God and ask for certain things and say my Father, unless he goes by the blood of Jesus Christ, relying completely on His perfect work. This is something that is grossly misunderstood by main stream Christianity.

People often talk lively and loosely and easily about going to God without even mentioning the name of Jesus Christ. Many people will awake one day to the realization that He never knew them; they are outside and that they do not belong to the family. Please turn over a few pages to Ephesians 5:20 a very familiar verse.

Ephesians 5:20 Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is not limited to just giving thanks; it always applicable as we will read in Colossians 3:17.

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

We are told in whatever and in all and everything we do. Is it not interesting that both cases, here in Ephesians 5:20 and Colossians 3:17, it talks of giving thanks in both those cases? So along with the name of Jesus Christ, we have the connection of thankfulness; there must be thankfulness when we use His name.

Without Christ, there is no relationship with the Father, and it is the will of the Father that we go through Christ. Turn if you will please to Matthew 7: 21.

Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.

So law breakers, even if they use the name of Jesus Christ, will not be in God's Kingdom. You who break the ten commandments... Who break the statues and the laws... All Christians must do the will of the Father and call upon Him in the name of Jesus Christ. There are no divisions among true Christians; there is unity of doctrine and unity of contact with God. All Christians are fellow citizens with the saints and are of that household of God. I want to emphasize this at this point. It is such a clear and obvious fact, but there is a trend in this world religiously to make all the religion's gods one. To meld them into one. We have to realize that there is only one path, to God the Father. Only one.

The Arabs do not worship the same God; the Jews do not worship the same God; neither do the Catholics or the Protestants. They all worship the God of this world. We must reject all teachings which say that there are some Christians who are not sons of God and which draw a distinction between sons and children. Children and sons are one and the same thing and you cannot be a Christian without being a child of God and a son of God. The terms apply equally to all Christians.

If you and I are the children of God, then we have no right to live as if we were only servants. We have no right to live in the kitchen of the house. We are children. All Christians who do not realize this and are living simply a servant kind of life are dishonoring God and detracting from the eternal glory of His grace.

You see this often in main stream Christianity—the super deacons, or the super elders, or the super lay members. They are always busy; they are always doing something; they are always planning, scheduling activities, and it just wears people out. And they are always finding things for people to do, but they are missing the whole point of this. That is important. We should be servants, in one sense, but we are also, personalized members of the family of God. That is why it is important that we understand this further advance in the doctrine that Paul teaches, in Ephesians 2. If we fail to do so, we are

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detracting from the glory of Jesus Christ, and we are in our own minds taking Him from His rightful place at the right hand of God making Him no longer crucial, and we are also denying Him as our elder spiritual brother.

Turn over if you will, please, to John 20. Let me put it into a more intimate way. It is only as we understand this that we ever come to enjoy the privileges of this position. Last year at the feast, we were considering the privilege of being a citizen of a kingdom. There were wonderful and glorious privileges, exciting privileges, almost enough to carry us through the rest of our lives in a joyous attitude. But as I said here Paul advances it. But in light of the distinctions, we are advancing to see how much higher the privilege is when you look at yourself as a child of God and not merely as a citizen of His kingdom.

What are these privileges? Here is the first one. God is our Father. The everlasting, eternal, and supreme God of all existence is our Father. We can go to Him as our Father and remember how Christ Himself said to Mary Magdalene in John 20:17 which we will read.

John 20:17 Jesus said to her, Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father, but go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.

A personalized, intimate, relationship, and Christ is emphasizing it here, just before ascending. Mary was converted by this time, a baptized Christian; and there was surely no greater honor and no greater dignity that can ever come into our comprehension than just this that we have on us the name of God. Of course we have to wait until the resurrection to receive or have that name placed on us. But as children of God, we await anxiously for that name which we do not know. For the time being we have to be satisfied with our last name in the sense of being God. But only in that spiritual sense of course.

It is not surprising that John in the prologue to his gospel puts it like this.

John 1:12-13 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name. Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

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We are actually members of God's own family, and this is literally the truth about us as Christians. Now turn over to I John 3:2.

I John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Right now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be; but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him. For we shall see Him as He is, right now. We do not know what we will be in all its fullness, but we do know this—that we are already now the children of God.

The apostle Peter is equally concerned about it and says. We are partakers of the divine nature in II Peter 1:4; more and more it seems that it is the failure of realizing this that causes so many people to fall away from the truth.

And then because of that, the second thing that is true about us in our relationship with God (as our Father) is that we have the right of approach to Him, which a child always has with regard to a father. We read earlier, where the apostle Paul said in Ephesians 2:18

Ephesians 2:18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Paul emphasizes the access is by the one Spiritual Father, and he did not use the term from God here. He used the term 'Father.' Let me give you a simple illustration. Think of a man that is head of a successful business with hundreds perhaps thousands of people in his employment and under his control, an exceptionally busy man. Obviously such a man cannot be handling all the little details of the business or the works or whatever it is; he only deals with great principles with the major areas of the business. He has his managers, junior managers, his supervisors and so on. They deal with the details of the things in their department; and if you take a little detail from some department to this important man, the head of all, the chairman of the company, he will just dismiss you because he does not have the time for such things. And yet you see him there one day seated in his office at his desk with all these important things on his mind and perhaps millions of dollars to handle. In this day and age it is quickly billions of dollars for which he is responsible; and he cannot even see the managers this day because he is so busy. He can only see special directors, but suddenly he hears a little tap on the door,

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and immediately he puts everything aside. He recognizes it; it is his own little child, a little toddler. He goes and opens the door for him and spends time with him and spends time talking with him, perhaps playing with him for a while, and everything has moved to the side. Why? It is his child, and that is the teaching that we are considering.

The God, who made everything out of nothing, and to whom all the stars and constellations are like marbles. The God who controls all things that are and is from eternity to eternity is your Father and my Father.

He is your Father and my Father and there is nothing, however small or trivial in your life or mine that He is not interested in. And in a sense prepared to allow the whole universe to go on by its own momentum for the moment, while He is listening to you and giving you His undivided attention. That is what this doctrinal teaching means.

This is what the apostle Paul was saying; we are not only citizens. A citizen has the right to appeal to the president, but this takes us much further. I go as a child, right into the presence of my father, through the spirit; and He is always ready to receive me.

Or to put it another way, if only we realize God's interest in us and God's loving concern about us... It is the Son of God, who Himself has told us that as children of God the very hairs on our head are all numbered. God knows about us in that kind of way, in that kind of detail, and Jesus Christ was always repeating this point. And here in Matthew, we will read. .

Matthew 6:32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

The word 'all' means all inclusive; it is huge, everything. So what are you worrying about and fretting yourselves over? If only you realize that He is your Father, who knows all about you and knows all your needs and all of your worries, much better that you do yourselves...as a parent knows more than the child knows about these things.

How often as parents have we seen a child wanting something, but knowing they needed something else and made sure they got the right thing and not what they necessarily wanted? That is the loving father or mother or parent. Why do you not have confidence in that? Why do you not trust in that? Why do you go hesitantly, doubtfully to Him?

Hopefully not, but we all do at times.

Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things, and we are members of the household of God so He certainly is going to hear us. We are members of the most powerful and wealthiest family in existence; we are just waiting for the full realization of our adoption, all the legal work is already been done. Remember what Christ said in what we call the Lord's prayer—the sample prayer that Christ taught us? “Our Father who is in heaven hallowed be your name.”

As long as you start with something like that, when you go to God the Father, there will be no easy going, unworthy, familiarity, but the full father-son relationship will remain. You can go with confidence, with assurance, with certainty knowing that because He is your Father and because of His exceedingly great and precious promises, He is always ready to receive you. And what is most wonderful is not His power, but the relationship that is the guarantee. That is the first aspect of the privilege.

The second thing is because of our relationship with the Father, there is a relationship to the Son. Christ is referred to in the scriptures as the Firstborn among many brethren; and He says My Father, your Father. There is a relationship between us and Him, a family relationship.

Hebrews 2:16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham [spiritually, we certainly are the seed of Abraham].

He did not take on Himself the nature of angels; he took on Himself of human nature. He was made a little lower than the angels; and He came down to our level so that He could show us that with the help of God's spirit, we too can resist temptation and refuse to sin. He is our spiritual brother; He is the Firstborn among many brothers.

Hebrew 2:13 Here am I and the children whom God has given Me [meaning the brothers and sisters spiritually].

As the epistle to the Hebrew shows, it does not stop at that. Because it is true that He understands us, He sympathizes with us, and He is in heaven to represent us. He is our Advocate and our Intercessor. He is always there with the Father interceding on our behalf, and the thought of that is quite overwhelming. It is in Him and through Him and by Him that we go to the Father. Let us never forget that because of our relationship to the Father and Jesus Christ, we are entitled to say this, according to apostle Paul:

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Romans 8:16-17 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 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.

As children of God, we will be glorified together personally, not depersonalized. You are an heir of God; of course I am speaking about baptized members of God church. There is a glory awaiting us that is so tremendous we are told very little about it, even in the scriptures; it is left up to our imaginations, and our human imaginations just cannot wrap themselves around what we shall be.

There are images used in the book of Revelation, but remember that they are only pictures and images. The thing itself is intimately greater than. The glory is indescribable; and you and I are heirs of that.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God; and blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. And it will be a new earth—a glorified and renovated earth, a new heaven, and a new earth wherein dwell righteousness. So we do have a responsibility that if we want to be there; and if we want to remain in the family of God, we have to produce good fruit, the fruit of righteousness.

All that is ours; we just have not experienced the reality of it yet. We are heirs of that and joint heirs with Christ. The apostle Paul points out to the young pastor, Timothy, that if indeed we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified together. And if we endure, we shall also reign with Him. So, again, what are we worried about? Paul is asking in different words, “What are you worried about, Timothy? Why are you whimpering and whining; why are you feeling so sorry for yourself, which we all do sometimes?” Do you not know that if you suffer with Him you will also reign with Him? Be glorified with Him? And if we remember this, we would talk much less, grumble much less, and we not be overwhelmed and upset about problems and difficulties.

Our failures are really all due to our failure to realize and to grasp the fact that God is our Father—that every detail of our life is of concern to Him. Take everything to Him; take it to the Lord in prayer...whatever it is. He has used the term ‘Father’ Himself. “Do not think of Me,” He says, “as some distant God away in glory and in eternity. I am there, but in Christ; and I have come to you. I am your Father. Come to Me.” As Christ Himself gave the gracious invitation and invited the weary and heavy laden to come to Him, so God invites His children. Here, in Matthew 11:28-30, we will read.

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and

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I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

Jesus Christ reflects God the Father, and so we know that these are attributes and characteristics of both of them. Now turn if you will please, to Galatians 4:6, God is ready to take us up and to enclose us in His love, and we are members of the household of God because we share the same spirit that is in Christ, because we are children.

Galatians 4:6-7 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.

So as His children, raised by God Himself and having access to His mind through His Spirit, we are guided to produce good fruit, because we want to be like Him. We want to walk with Him, and we want to think like Him. God's people are to be faithful and loyal in their dutiful response to God. God's loyalty to His covenant, demands a response of loyalty from His people. God is faithful; and therefore His people are required to respond with faithfulness to His commands.

When the Israelites were finally settled in Canaan, God renewed His covenant with them; Joshua's injunction was again that they serve God in sincerity and truth, loyalty, and faithfulness. We in the church...in spirit and in truth. Here in Joshua 24, we will read verse 14-15.

Joshua 24:14-15 Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord. And If it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell, But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Now we can say, as members of the household of God, Joshua and his household chose to loyally serve God; and he well knew that all service that is not free and voluntary would be deceitful and hypocritical. Also that God loves a cheerful giver; he

therefore called upon the people to make their choice because God Himself would not force them. They had to serve Him with all their hearts, if they serve Him at all, and to serve God in sincerity and truth can only result from a free and willing allegiance or loyalty of heart.

Samuel recounted God's faithfulness and then demanded of the people that they serve God faithfully with all their hearts. He told them to know and respect and to reverence God, to consider Him their Lord and master, and to consider themselves His willing serving children.

Samuel admonished them to be always honest and sincere with all their hearts—to be obedient, to act not merely from a principle of duty, but also from a devout concern and sense of obligation, to act toward God as an affectionate child should act toward a tender, loving, parent who has rightly disciplined them. He told the Israelites to review the history of their fathers, review their own lives as a reminder of the power and mercy and goodness and truth God had displayed on their behalf. So here in I Samuel 12, we will read it.

I Samuel 12:22-24 For the Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people, Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you, but I will teach you the good and the right way, Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart, for consider what great things He has done for you.

It says, there, that we are to pray for one another that we are able to do the things that I am teaching you in this sermon. You already know all of them, probably, but a reminder is necessary for all of us at times. Without appreciation for what another person has done for us, there can be no dedication of loyalty toward that person. Without appreciation for what another person is going through to reach the same goals that we have, there can be no dedication of loyalty toward that person, without thankfulness and appreciation for one another.

God's faithfulness in His dealings with us obligates us to be freely loyal to Him, and the same holds true between husband and wife and between, brethren. God's loyalty to us is a gracious act. Human loyalty to God is not a gracious act, but a dutiful response that is done or should be done willfully and cheerfully. The law of God is a way of faithfulness; therefore the commands of God are to be performed as a faithful and loyal response.

So God makes His claim upon both the character and the actions of human beings and He claims a total response of faithfulness and loyalty. Nehemiah 9:8 recites God's call to Abraham, Abraham response of faithfulness, the promise of land, and the fulfillment of His covenant.

Nehemiah 9:7-8 You are the Lord God, who chose Abram, and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name Abraham, You found his heart faithful before You, and made a covenant with him, to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites and the Girgashites to give it to his descendants, you have performed Your words, for You are righteous.

Someday, we hope God will personally say those things to us. Faithfulness and loyalty brings the fulfillment of God's promises and provide a basis of appeal before God. Psalm 26:3 records that David would ask for vindication on the grounds that he had walked in faithfulness to God. The relationship of faithfulness and loyalty to both the law and fulfillment of God's promises is assumed by David when he exhorts Solomon to follow God's law, lest national ruin follow, and to be faithful to God so that his reign would be blessed. It is in the context of this admonition that Solomon, seeing its truth and God's blessing upon his father David, responded by asking for wisdom.

God answered Solomon's request, but in time he showed himself to be a man who lacked loyalty to the One who gave him the great gift of wisdom and wealth. He followed the same pattern of response as the children of Israel have almost always followed: faithlessness and disloyalty to God. We do not know what the end of Solomon was... whether he repented or not. We are not sure of what his stance will be.

It is interesting that faithfulness is most often linked with steadfast love and loving kindness. When God is the subject, it is linked with other terms such as righteousness, uprightness, and sincerity when the human responds to God is being described.

Jesus Christ is the epitome of loyalty and faithfulness. It is important that the New Testament describes Jesus as faithful. He is called a merciful high priest and He fulfills the role finally and ultimately in the service of God to make expiation for the sins of the people, as Hebrews 2: 17 tells us. Jesus Christ is faithful in Moses role. He surpasses and fulfills the faithfulness and loyalty of Moses in building and ruling the Household of God and the Church of God. Here in Hebrews 3:1-13 we will read.

Hebrew 3:1-13 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling,

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consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful [or loyal] to Him [that is God the Father] who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this one [that is Christ] has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant for testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward. But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says. Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion in the day of trial in the wilderness. Where your fathers tested Me, proved Me, and saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, they always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways. So I swore in My wrath they shall not enter My rest. Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

We are in danger of being depersonalized, of having our hearts hardened—that is what depersonalization is.

Unbelief is faithlessness, and part of faith is loyalty therefore disloyalty equates to unbelief, to faithlessness. Of course it is loyalty to God and Jesus Christ first, and then to our brethren, as long we are following God and doing what He says in His inspired holy written word.

The servant owns nothing, is heir to nothing, has no authority and no right to control anything and is Himself holy at the will of another. A son, however, is the heir of all, has a perspective right to all and is looked up to by all with respect—that is if he is a good son, or righteous son.

The idea is not merely that Christ is a son; it is that as a son, He is placed over the whole arrangements of the household and is one to whom all is entrusted as if it were His own. We are part of God the Father and Jesus Christ's family. It is where we belong. We belong to the family over which Christ has been placed as the Firstborn Son.

Jesus Christ is the consummation of God's determined loyalty to His gracious covenant relationship with His people, and Christ is faithful and loyal to the Father and the Father

to Him, and we have the wonderful opportunity to be part of this faithful and loyal family. The training ground for it is here and now, in our own households, and in the household of God.

Loyalty means enduring commitment to a person over a long period of time, often with the implication of the commitment persisting in the face of obstacles that threaten the lasting commitment. Listen to Jesus Christ's words on loyalty and faithfulness; they suggest complete sacrifice for others which is exactly what Jesus Christ did. He gave all. In John 15:13-17, we will read,

John 15: 13-17 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.

We have the great privilege of being even more than Christ's friend. We have the honor and privilege of being brothers and sisters of Christ—children of the Father, the great sovereign God of all existence. Let me remind you of the responsibilities of all this in joining such a position—such a dignity, glory, participating in such privileges. Oh how great is our responsibility! Listen to what our savior, Jesus Christ, had to say about all this.

Matthew 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

We have to produce good works if we are children of God. If we are members of the household of God, we have to. There is no question.

God raised the bar for the New Testament church. He changed the law from restraint of action to restraint of motive; more is expected of us to reach Christ's standard of righteousness. A child tells us a great deal about his parents, does he not? The child does not merely tell us things about himself; he also tells us much more about his parents. As you watch the behavior of a child, you are really learning a great deal about the discipline or lack of it at home. The child proclaims the parent, and they will see your

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good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven. Christ himself again said, about us...

John 17:10 And all Mine are yours and yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them [by our works and by our witness].

So we reflect the teachings, the life style, the attributes, and the characteristics of God and glorify Him. If we produce good works, if we work with Him, so that the righteousness of Jesus Christ can develop in us.

Jesus Christ is glorified in us if we produce good works; and you remember how in the Sermon on the Mount Christ puts it like this, in talking about loving your enemies:

Matthew 5:43-48 You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. [that really raises the bar much higher than what the old covenant nation of Israel and the old covenant church, in a sense, had to do.] That you may be sons of your Father in heaven, for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, [or complete—working toward perfection] just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

It is only by the holy spirit dwelling in us that we can even attempt to work with Jesus Christ in becoming more perfect. That is why we have to do something ourselves; we have to do the works or have the faith, that we may be like our Father, that we may proclaim the family to which we belong.

So the next time you are in doubt about some course of action, whether you should do a certain thing or not. Simply ask, is this the kind of thing worthy of my Father's Son? Is it consistent with the family to which I belong to (and the Father who has put His own name on me) and whom I represent to humanity? Never forget you are no longer strangers or foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.