

The Church: God's Family

Joe Slater

By design, God places every person into a family. However, due to sinful people, many families become dysfunctional, so not all thoughts of "family" are pleasant ones. The church is a family in the very best use of the term. Scripture highlights several aspects of the Christian life in terms of family.

In a spiritually healthy family, we learn to behave properly. This applies in God's family, too. ". . . *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*" (1 Timothy 3:15). Note that the church is God's "house" – His family or household. Since God is spirit, a spiritual birth is required to become one of His children. We are begotten by the gospel (1 Corinthians 4:15); when we believe and obey the gospel in baptism, we are "born again" (see John 3:3, 5). As children of God, then, how should we behave?

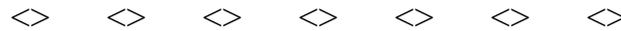
First, we ought to love our Father. Children instinctively love their earthly fathers, even when we are unworthy of their affection and loyalty. Our Heavenly Father is eminently worthy of more love than we can ever give Him. "*We love Him because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). He demonstrated that love by giving Jesus to die for us (Romans 5:8).

One way we demonstrate love for God is by obeying His word. As children must obey their earthly parents (Ephesians 6:1-3), John tells Christians, "*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments*" (1 John 5:3). Godly parents have their children's best interests at heart. Likewise, our Heavenly Father's commands reflect His love for us. As the Bible says, "*we have had human father who corrected us, and we paid*

them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?" (Hebrews 12:9).

Children go through stages where they think they are smarter than their parents and can do as they please. Do Christians ever treat God that way? Yes, they do so every time they vary from the pattern revealed in God's word. Whether the alteration is made to doctrine, worship, morality, or some other facet of our service to God, someone has placed his own ideas on a higher plane than the will of the Father!

One of God's commands is that we love each other (1 John 4:21). When we love each other, we also demonstrate our love for God. As a father, I would be offended if one of my children behaved hatefully toward a sibling; I would take it personally because that sibling is, in a very real way, a part of me. Likewise, as siblings in God's spiritual family, we must love one another. "*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God*" (1 John 4:7).



We Could Learn A Lot From Crayons

Some are sharp.

Some are dull.

Some are pretty.

Some are plain.

Some have weird names.

All are different colors.

But they all have to live in the same box.

Remembering the Days of Darkness

Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything that is to come will be futility (Ecclesiastes 11:8 NASU).

A popular holiday song has the refrain, "may all your days be happy and bright." Such is the wish of all who live. It would be nice if there were no days of stress, worry, illness, poverty and death. Reality, though, quickly destroys such a dream. Job observed that man "is short-lived and full of turmoil" (Job 14:1). In view of this harsh reality, Solomon offers two truths:

First, all will have "days of darkness." We simply cannot avoid them. This is an undeniable fact. So, what should we do with this information? We should use it to our advantage! The saying is true: "forewarned, forearmed!" If I know in advance that I will have "days of darkness," then I: (a) am not surprised or caught off guard by it; (b) have time to mentally prepare for those days of trouble (1 Peter 1:13; 4:12-13; 5:8); (c) can use those days to make me a better, stronger person (cf. James 1:2-4; Romans 5:1-4).

Second, all should remember those dark days. This point is surprising. Frequently we try to forget those low points in our lives. Solomon is saying not to do that. Rather, we should purposely call those days to mind (Heb. 10:32-34). Why? (a) It will help us and prepare us in case future troubles come; (b) It will remind us how God delivered us even in the bleakest of times; (c) It will make the present joys more valuable and enjoyable.

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