

Children of God | *Living with God as Your Father*

Family Life

Ephesians 3:14-4:16; Romans 12:9-16; Mathew 6:9

7:26-15

(Ephesians 3-4) *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. **4.1** Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." ⁹ (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) ¹¹ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

(Romans 12) *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹ not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.*

(Matthew 6) *"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.*

This summer we're looking at the doctrine of adoption – the teaching in the Bible (esp the New Testament) that “we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God” (WSC 1:34).

We're using a book by the Scottish writer Sinclair Ferguson called *Children of the Living God* but we're going to diverge a bit from THIS fifth chapter called "Family Life" and take a bit of a different approach.

Today, we simply want to know: WHAT DOES THE FACT THAT I'M ADOPTED BY GOD and YOU'RE ADOPTED BY GOD...now, through faith in Jesus Christ we have the same Father...and that makes us brothers. So, what can we say about this new family into which we've entered? What does it mean for people who may have VERY different upbringings and political leanings...different tastes in food, in music in clothing/art/entertainment...what does it mean that a very diverse group of people – some rich, some poor, some white-collar, some blue-collar, some old, some young, male, female, born in a variety of nations and regions...some very traditional and some very progressive or up-to-date... HOW will this mixed group NOT only co-exist (like that bumper sticker says) but THRIVE and LOVE ONE-ANOTHER?

For Paul and for the whole NT (as we'll see) this is not a minor point...it's almost THE point. It's the upshot of the Gospel, it's the mystery long hidden and now revealed at the end of time – that God is somehow through Jesus Christ re-making humanity into a new, international, inter-racial family...who, despite MASSIVE differences, are beginning to love one another...Let's see what this means:

- 1) The Teaching
- 2) A Case-Study that challenges the teaching
- 3) Using the teaching to addresses this challenge

If you get a core-sample of St. Paul, I mean if you drill down into the Apostle Paul's mind and heart and teaching and then analyze it...you'll find a man fixated on the Church. If you prick him with a pin, Paul bleeds church.

In this swath of teaching from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, he's fascinated by the idea...that the enemy people...the one's his mama warned him to avoid...the non-Jewish, swine-eating, unclean, idol-worshipping, pagan devils called GENTILES are being reclaimed by God. Paul learned that being Jewish doesn't make you automatically right with God.

Gentiles didn't even KNOW God's commands and so they broke them all the time – and were unclean and guilty before God. Paul had also come to see that Jewish people who know God's commands but they TOO break God's commands all the time...and in some sense that makes Jewish people even MORE guilty!

But all along...God had planned to send a New Adam into the world. This Man, Jesus Christ, the New Adam, would keep all God's commands...and do it joyfully.

And this Man, the Second Adam, would stand in for other people. He would LIVE a surrogate life ...would obey in place of disobeyers – both Jewish disobeyers and Gentile disobeyers ...And

everyone represented by this New Adam...everyone who believes and unites with Him is given His standing before God.

The believer in Jesus Christ can know that FOR ME, He, Jesus Christ lived the life of obedience I failed to live and died the death I deserved to die.

Adam sinned for us...but the New Adam, Jesus Christ obeyed for US...for all who are represented by Him, for all who believe. AND that MEANS, that Jewish people and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ are united to God and ARE also united to one another as brothers and sisters in a reconstituted humanity. AND FOR PAUL, that was outrageously, phenomenally, stupendously fantastic!

The passage we read starts with a prayer...Paul just explained what I just summarized and then Paul prayed that these Ephesian Christians could GET IT. "I pray that the Father of humankind who has come to reclaim a New Humanity from every tribe and nationality...I pray the Father would give you eyes to SEE how much He loves you! I pray that YOU could get a glimpse into the meaning of history, the whole grand story of HUMANITY LOST and now reclaimed by the New Adam...Jews and Gentiles gathered into a new International Family because of what our great Brother Jesus Christ has done for us!

"I pray you could SEE the dimensions of God's love for you who have come into this New Human race called 'the church'!"

Then Paul says, "If you SEE what God is doing in the world...what Jesus Christ's work is accomplishing and WILL accomplish...if you walk in that direction IT'LL GIVE you a new perspective on this rag-tag group called the Church! You'll cherish your unity. You'll begin to appreciate each other...as family...as those rescued out from the fallen children of the Old Adam.

You'll join God, the Father, OUR FATHER...in His work of saving, protecting, nurturing, cultivating this new tender shoot that's growing in dry soil. The Church, that in Paul's day was so small and outnumbered, will grow and fill the whole Earth...and Paul counseled those early Christians to VALUE this little sprout that would one day be like a Giant Sequoia and would shelter a new human race gathered from every tribe, nation, tongue and family.

God will equip this little group...God, the Father, will care for His family. He will give them guardians and helpers – apostles, prophets, and evangelists (at the start) and pastors and teachers at every stage so, the little plant (the church) can be nourished and grow strong.

"As a result", says Paul, "though we'll always be the beloved children of God...our Father intends to grow us UP and give us stability...that we NOT be like infants tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming... But that we come to resemble the New Adam, our older Brother...that we be

interdependent like a family, like a Body in which all the organs need one another and function in harmony and synergy and support.

And ...even though God is doing this and even though it's the meaning of history...still...we're NOT REALLY used to getting along with people different from us...and even though it's God's New Creation in Jesus Christ, we are involved and it's not so automatic that it just happens. We have to be told how this new family lives... So, Paul includes all these imperatives, "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor...practicing hospitality."

So, that's the TEACHING...it's a very representative cross-section of St. Paul's understanding of life and history: the teaching behind a call to Family Life.

Now, the case-study I have in mind, to sort of challenge this teaching. You may know the writer, Anne Rice author of *The Vampire Chronicles* and *Interview with the Vampire*, which was made into a movie with Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise and Antonio Banderas... That series was wildly successful (80 million copies sold) and she was the J.K. Rowling of her time and then she shocked the world when she announced that she was returning to the Christianity of her childhood. And...she wrote a couple Christian books and...many Christians...who want to promote Christianity (like myself!) told other people about this conversion of a very famous and popular person who was a most unexpected convert. "Anne Rice has become a Christian!"

And then...about 12 years later (5 years ago from yesterday!)...Anne Rice issued a statement:
"... I quit being a Christian. I'm out. In the name of Christ, I refuse to be anti-gay. I refuse to be anti-feminist. I refuse to be anti-artificial birth control. I refuse to be anti-Democrat. I refuse to be anti-secular humanism. I refuse to be anti-science. I refuse to be anti-life. In the name of Christ, I quit Christianity and being Christian. Amen.

For those who care, and I understand if you don't: Today I quit being a Christian. I'm out. I remain committed to Christ as always but not to being 'Christian' or to being part of Christianity. It's simply impossible for me to "belong" to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group. For ten years, I've tried. I've failed. I'm an outsider. My conscience will allow nothing else."

Now, why do I want to pick on poor Anne Rice and use her as a case-study to prove anything?

Well, first, I really don't want to pick on her. I really want to be fair to her and to hear her. She is NOT alone...as you know...and there's a good possibility that YOU know someone like her...YOU may even be on the verge of making a similar statement or may have made one like it already.

I only want to learn from her and her experience and to sort of DISCERN how to interpret her words, how to answer her and how to help, as much as we're able, people in similar circumstances.

Also, she IS well known and her story is out there on the Internet and you can interact with it – and read the comments of others too. She, has by going public in this way...sort of given us permission to see her as a representative of a whole class of people who are “pro-Jesus Christ” and also “anti-church” or simply ambivalent or disinterested toward the church.

So what do we say about Anne Rice and the many, many people like her in our day:

1) Be careful what you put on the Internet. I hope that’s enough said – I know it’s NOT (because I read YOUR stuff!) but DO remember: it stays OUT there.

2) Anne Rice was a member of the Roman Catholic Church. I am not. That should figure into this discussion but that’s beyond the scope of today’s discussion.

3) We should be discerning of celebrity culture. Live by the sword die by the sword – if Christians (or anyone else) use celebrities to gain credibility we can easily LOSE that credibility (as this case sadly illustrates).

4) When Paul says, “To God be the glory IN THE CHURCH and in Christ Jesus to all generations” (3.21) he is giving the church an amazingly high level of clout. He ties the reputation of Jesus Christ to the church...that’s very dangerous...don’t you agree? Had I been there, looking over his shoulder, I may have advised against it. “Paul, say ‘To God be the glory in Christ Jesus’ but leave the church out of it – the church is just gonna be an embarrassment.” BUT, so be it. He, Jesus Christ, is not ashamed to call us brothers (Hebrews 2.11) – He has tied Himself to us.

And if HE is not ashamed of us...who am I to walk away...as if I were better than Jesus Christ? Cyprian, the Church Father wrote the famous words, “He has not God for his Father who has not the Church for his Mother.” Church-less devotion to Jesus Christ is NOT devotion to Jesus Christ. It may be simply arrogance.

5) That said, we should always keep in mind this syllogism:

All Christians are jerks.

I am a Christian.

Ergo: I am a jerk.

Jesus Christ is not ashamed of us – NOT because we’re a bunch of above-average over-achievers but because He is friend to sinners. And He died for us and He loves us. He is committed to us and to our transformation, but “Do not be wise in your own estimation...” We may not have come as far as we think we have. And the truth is, the Church probably has become more famous for the things we oppose than for the grace of God that we hold out to fellow sinners. SO, maybe Anne Rice’s criticisms should be taken seriously. If they help us repent, then great!

6) Sometimes Christians hurt one another. Sometimes we absolutely WRECK one another. This was NOT Anne Rice’s story...but it might be YOURS or someone you know. It’s best to be as

sympathetic as we can be. People have been abused in Churches and... The Church MAY be perceived by some as an abusive mother... “Weep with those who weep and associate with the lowly”, says Paul.

7) While we can ALL sometimes be jerks...we should also know that OUR Father wants us to grow up. That’s a real emphasis here... it doesn’t happen automatically. If it were automatic, there would be no need for Paul to issue all these imperatives:

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; ... devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

As I said, last week, it’s by hoping in the Gospel – it’s by being confident that God will transform me because of what Jesus Christ did and will do...and it’s by humbling myself...and seeing my failings honestly. Believe and Repent...Believe and Repent. Believe and Repent...Believe and Repent. – That’s how these imperatives start to show up in our lives and how we begin to mature... The further we go the more we see our sin (even when we’re doing the right things) and the more we see our need for grace. Humility and Confidence.

8) We should pray for Anne Rice... I want to be a better repenter and I wish and pray the same thing for her. As I said, many of us have been where she is (and maybe she’s NOT there anymore – maybe she’s come back to the church that Jesus Christ is NOT ashamed to call His bride)... but many of us have friends, co-workers, family who have been harmed by the church. We should reach out to them. We should pray for them...and pray for one another. Being devoted to Jesus Christ without a vital connection to the church is NOT devotion to Jesus Christ at all. It’s self-deception.

God has adopted those who believe in Jesus Christ and He has become our Father... not an abusive or mean or absent father... but the Perfect Father we all long for. He invites us to ask for the “Anne” in OUR lives... He invites us to keep asking. To be devoted to prayer (Romans 12.12) so let’s not be afraid to ask our Father who loves to give good gifts to His children.

If you want to talk about the church or this sermon I’ll be up here a while...come and let’s talk.

Let’s pray (...and we pray aloud that Foundational Prayer starting with the TWO most important words...We pray for people in our lives separated from the Church in the spiritual wasteland...We pray in the way our Older Brother gave us to pray saying, “Our Father...”)