

Members of the Same Family

The Purpose of Families

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I fear that too many of us have this view of family life:

Edith and Norbert had a knock-down, drag-out battle over his inability to earn a better living. She told him he was not forceful enough in asking the boss for a raise.

"Tell him," she yelled, "that you have seven children. You also have a sick mother, you have to sit up many nights, and you have to clean 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.

"Why?" asked Edith.

"He says I have too many outside activities."

That is the way many of us sometimes feel with the amount of things that we have to do. With so many dysfunctional families coming and going in human history, why did God create families?

God made families partly as a biological and social basis for the human race 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.

In the instructions in Leviticus 25:10 for observing the 50th year of 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, a year of release, freedom from slavery, and in connection with the Day of Atonement, freedom from Satan and sin.

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, God feels that family is very important. I want to begin by spending some time looking at a biblical overview of the family unit. 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 community of God's people as a sanctified family.

The Bible is, in large part, a domestic history focused on the family and family relationships. Moses was not only leader, but also brother, husband and 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 worked hard to overcome the problems that he did have.

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

Even though it often seems that the book of Genesis is a casebook 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 of scripture, family means a whole clan or household, rather than the nuclear family that is common here in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries AD.

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 and his sons and their wives. God poured His grace on the whole family unit, and established with them "a covenant for all generations to come."

From the beginning then, scripture establishes the family as the social unit into which God put human beings and the primary conduit through which He deals with us. The family is an inherently ambivalent picture of disappointment and struggle, on the one hand, and of hope and blessing on the other. The family in Genesis is a picture of security and protection, and at one and the same time, a picture of conflict and victimization. We see the family as a whole being blessed or cursed according to the obedience or sins of individual family members. We can take this to heart: our actions have an impact on our entire families.

The covenants of God with the patriarchs are stories of blessings to families and descendants, generation after generation. God promised Abraham that 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. Speaking to Abraham, God says:

Genesis 13:16 And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered.

Genesis 17:5-6 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

God chose to work in this large way, through generations of families, in order to carry out His work through the smallest details of conception and birth.

Genesis 17:21 But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.

God has everything planned out so that His purpose and plan will be fulfilled in an orderly manner. Each divinely-ordered detail joins the larger flow of events that God 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 these same generational terms.

Exodus 20:5-6 You shall not bow down to them nor serve them [idols]. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on 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 curse to his wife and children, to his grandchildren, and to his great-grandchildren.

God worked through Abraham's family, as He promised, through the generations to King David, and through more generations to Jesus Christ. In Jesus, the conduit narrowed to one brilliant point, and then burst forward into a wide stream. Psalm 22 pictures the multitude of people "from all the ends of the earth" who will finally worship God.

Psalms 22:27 All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You.

This picture of all the families of the nations worshipping Jesus Christ is the glorious end toward 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. For the first Passover in Egypt, for example, 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.

You are very familiar with the story of Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho, when she put her trust in Israel's God and hid the other spies, she saved not only her own life, but also "her father, mother and brothers, and all who belonged to her." The Israelites later destroyed the city of Jericho, but spared Rahab with her 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 plunder for himself from Jericho. In a frightening example of God's response to unconfessed sin, the other Israelites stoned him and all of his family. Thus, judgment came to Achan's whole family, whereas grace came to Rahab's whole family. Does our individual sin have an effect on others in our families?

Yes, it does!

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, the jailer of Paul and Silas came to believe in God, and "he and his whole family" and whole household was immediately baptized. We see very clearly that God highly values the family unit.

Here then, we see the family as not just a biological and social unit, but the one through which God carries out His blessings and judgments. God does not limit Himself to this 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.

The Bible also pictures the family as a combined physical and spiritual institution in its ideal form. Scripture often uses the family as a place of reconciliation and harmony. Malachi provides a very 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.

Here is the direct opposite of the picture of family discord and fragmentation that seemed to be the norm in so many Old Testament illustrations.

Another quality of the family is that of order. The family structure is not random, but ordered. The household codes of duties in the New Testament define the interdependent and complementary roles and obligations. The husband and father is the head of the family and he loves his wife and children. The wife submits to the headship of the husband and father, and respects him. The children obey parental authority. Parents train their children in the fear of God, without exasperating them. Paul elaborates on this:

Ephesians 5:22-33 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. 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.

Ephesians 6:1-3 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "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.

We can add to this the requirements for eldership. An elder must be someone who, according to Titus 1:6, is ". . . blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination." Again, I ask, do the actions of one individual family member affect the rest of the family? Yes, they do!

The redeemed family is a picture of care and compassion for family members. In contrast, Jesus castigates the Pharisees for not contributing to the support of their parents.

Matthew 15:4-6 For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' "But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"—'then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

What it is saying here is that the Pharisees changed the commandment of God, to read something like, "The money I would have given to you I gave to God instead, even though you need help." There was neglect of father and mother there, and probably of the rest of the family as well. They said that if the money was given to the temple, there was not that requirement to honor his father and mother.

It is interesting that a major difference between mainstream Christianity, Judaism, Islam or Buddhism, and God's church, is that they base their religion on tradition, and we base ours on truth, the inspired written word of God. That is a major difference between the religions.

Paul urges that children or grandchildren put their faithfulness into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, because it is pleasing to God.

I Timothy 5:4, 8 But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. 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 instructions to provide for our families.

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 this 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."

In verse 39, 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."

He points to the one everlasting family—a spiritual family, the family of God. To those who do not "see through" the physical to the spiritual, Jesus' message seems 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. 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 Jesus made clear. In fact, He predicted that He Himself would turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother" in households where conflict arises between those who belong to the Eternal Father and those who do not. Primary commitment must go to the heavenly Father. He must be put first 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 family is put in the proper perspective there. The coming of Jesus makes the call much more concrete, but, in effect, this call to love God and be part of His family is the same call that

came to Abraham, the father who loved God more than he loved his 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.

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. 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 like His brothers in every way.

Hebrews 2:11, 17 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, 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.

The "family of believers," or the "family of God," is very important in New Testament teaching. 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,

Let us shift gears at this point and look at the process God has designed for us to move from being physical members of God's church to spiritual members of the family of God. As members of the household of God in our physical form, we are not yet born of the Spirit. Jesus plainly said, when one is born of the Spirit he will be spirit.

John 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

The Kingdom of God will be composed of spirit beings—not of humans. At birth of human flesh, we are delivered from our mother's womb into this world. When born of the Spirit, we will be delivered from where we were physical in the church of God—the mother of begotten Christians—into the Kingdom of God (a kingdom of spirit beings).

We are now composed of flesh, or in other words, material matter. When born again we will be spirit, we will be spirit beings, no longer human. We will be composed of spirit, made of spirit composition. We will have life inherent, self-containing life. We will not be required to exist by the breath of air and the circulation of blood.

During the next age, when the Kingdom of God will rule the earth, when we will have realized

life after death, in our next life, Jesus said:

Matthew 22:30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.

Marriage is a physical, fleshly union. In the age of God's Kingdom, when we are "born again," we will be spirit, not flesh; born of God as spirit beings, no longer human. Angels are spirits—composed of spirit. Jesus did not say we will then be angels—but as angels—sexless and composed of spirit.

Angels are spirit beings—created as such—but not begotten and born of God as God's own children. We, therefore, will be greater than angels. Jesus' explanation of this to Nicodemus is found in John 3.

John 3:8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

We cannot see the wind. Wind is compared to spirit. It is invisible. That is why mortal flesh, as we now are, cannot see the Kingdom of God. Those who inherit it will be spirit—normally invisible to human eyes. The apostle Paul made clear that the Kingdom of God is something a human may inherit, but not in this age—not while he is composed of material flesh.

I Corinthians 15:47-48 The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.

This is what Jesus was saying to Nicodemus. He was of the earth; he was human; he was flesh and not spirit. He was born of the flesh and that was what he was—flesh. When we are born of the Spirit, we will be spirit. Paul is explaining the same truth, that we cannot be spirit in this present age. There is a time element concerned with being born again into God's Kingdom.

I Corinthians 15:49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

As we are now flesh, we will be spirit at the resurrection. That is, we will be born again when we enter into the Kingdom of God.

I Corinthians 15:50-52 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at

the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

There is a time when we will be born again. We will enter into and inherit the Kingdom, and not before that time. So, how will we be changed?

I Corinthians 15:53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. [Immortality is to be changed from material flesh to spirit.]

To briefly summarize:

Until born again, we cannot see the Kingdom of God.

Until born again, we cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.

Until no longer flesh, but changed into spirit, we cannot enter the Kingdom of God.

While still flesh and blood, we cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.

Until the resurrection at Christ's coming, we will not be changed from corruptible flesh into incorruptible spirit.

Until the resurrection, therefore, we cannot see, enter into, or inherit the Kingdom of God. We cannot be born again until the resurrection.

Notice the status of the truly converted Christian in this world:

Romans 8:9, 11 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

Unless we have received the Holy Spirit, and this Spirit is dwelling in us, we are not a Christian. Joining a church does not make us a Christian. Receiving God's Spirit does, and we are heirs, but not yet inheritors. Just as our physical family is a type of God's spiritual family to help us understand relationships in God's family, our physical birth process has similarities to the spiritual birth process. God's Spirit entering and dwelling in us compares to the physical sperm impregnating the ovum. The imparting of eternal Spirit life later produces a spirit person. In the physical birth process life from the father has been imparted to it, he has begotten it, but neither embryo nor fetus is yet a born person. In the same manner, the spirit-begotten human is not yet a spirit person or being as Jesus said he would be when born again.

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to

your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

There is a direct comparison between having been born of the flesh and being born again of God. Jesus said that which is born of the flesh is flesh—a born human. That which is born of the Spirit (of God) is spirit—a born spirit person.

A mortal human life starts when a sperm cell from the body of the father impregnates—imparts physical life to—an egg cell in the mother. At this point, the father *begets* a child. He does not *bring forth*. The mother does that, later. His part in the process leading to final birth is then primarily done. But there is a time element. At the time of begetting, birth has not yet occurred.

The popular mainstream Christian deception is to claim that when one "receives Christ," "accepts Christ," "professes Christ," or first receives God's Holy Spirit to dwell in him, he is already "born again." But look at the physical type and comparison. In human physical reproduction, there is a time period. From impregnation (that is, begetting on the part of the father, and having conceived on the part of the mother) to birth, or being delivered from the mother's womb, is a time period of nine months.

That nine month time period is called gestation. Upon conception, the now fertilized ovum is called an embryo. A few months later, it is called a fetus. But during this nine month period of gestation, we do not speak of embryo-fetus as having been born. It is in the process toward birth. It is the child of its parents.

But, it is then the unborn child of its parents. The father has already begotten it. But, the mother has not yet given birth to it. Yet it is, during the gestation period, the unborn child of its parents.

Now in being "born again," the process of this birth begins when God's divine Spirit-life is imparted by the Holy Spirit, from His very Person, entering to dwell within us.

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

This is describing the very same thing explained in I Corinthians 15:50-53, that is, the resurrection.

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 has a father. Each extended family or household had a patriarch, the oldest living male. Abraham, for example, was the father of Israel.

A father was called the head of a family or clan. 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. In each of these passages, however, the social phenomenon of a family head is linked to a spiritual certainty—the headship of Christ of the church.

The church is called "Jerusalem above" or "the heavenly Jerusalem."

Hebrews 12:22-23 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

The analogy is this: When begotten by God the Father by receiving His Holy Spirit, we are put into the church, which during this gestation period is our mother.

Galatians 4:26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.

The human mother of the fetus within her womb serves the function of feeding her unborn child with physical food, so that it may develop and grow physically. Also she carries it where she may best protect it from physical injury or harm, until delivery from her womb.

The spiritual mother—the church—is commissioned to "feed the flock" through the ministry which God has set in the church "for the perfecting of the saints."

I Peter 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;

Ephesians 4:11-13 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

Just as the human fetus develops and grows physically during the pre-birth gestation period, so also we, after begetting by God's Spirit, develop and grow spiritually in pre-birth state.

Human life starts with what the Bible terms "corruptible seed"—physical male sperm. Divine life starts with that which is incorruptible—the Holy Spirit of God entering the human person. But as the human embryo must grow until it becomes a fetus, which must grow to the point of being born into the human family, so also the Christian, in whom divine life has been started by the gift of God's incorruptible Spirit, must grow toward perfection to be born into the God Family. He will then be perfect, unable to sin.

That perfection of holy righteous character must be developed with God's help and the infilling of His Spirit during this human life—this spiritual "gestation" stage.

Not only is the church to feed the members on the Word of God—spiritual food—but also it is to protect these conceived, yet unborn, children of God from spiritual harm, as the next verse shows:

Ephesians 4:14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and

fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

At the time of the resurrection, we in the church (the spiritual mother) will be delivered from her and born into (brought forth into) the kingdom, the spirit-composed family of God.

Although the church is sometimes pictured as our mother, and even as a bride, the more common image is that of children of a heavenly father. God is first called "Father" in Deuteronomy 1: 31, as Moses recalls for the Israelites how God carried them in the desert "as a father carries a son." We do have a loving Father anticipating His future growing family.

Isaiah continues the symbolism. He tells God, "Doubtless You are our Father," even though his physical fathers among the Israelites have repudiated him.

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.

When the child foretold in Isaiah 9 is called "Everlasting Father," the way is clear for Christ to come and show God the Father to us in Jesus' own flesh. God appears as Father on most of the pages of the New Testament. Matthew records that Jesus taught his disciples to pray first, "Our Father."

What are we if we are led by the spirit? Paul tells us in Ephesians 1: 5 that God has "adopted" us as sons through Jesus Christ. Before this adoption, a person is like an alien or slave, but an adopted child has 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, and submit to Him. When we are adopted into His family, we become His children.

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

The unborn child, in his mother's womb, is the child of his father and mother, though not yet born, delivered from the womb. So are we if God's Spirit dwells in us, and if we are being led by God's Spirit. Yet, at this time, we are in the gestation stage, not yet born, and only heirs, not

inheritors.

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.

This passage designates the resurrection into glory when we will be spirit as through a birth.

Romans 8:19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

That is the time of Christ's coming reign and of the resurrection.

Romans 8:20-22 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

We will be delivered from the world. The church is in this world, but she is not of this world. The church will be delivered into the glorious World Tomorrow and the kingdom which will rule it. The creation is waiting for this time of Christ's coming, the resurrection and the Kingdom of God. The creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption or deteriorated decay. It is not now delivered, not yet; it will be at the resurrection. Although this is not referring directly to our being born again, it is a direct comparison to the birth of a child being delivered from its mother's womb.

The resurrection is the time when we are changed to be spirit and to inherit the kingdom. It will be a time of delivery from the bondage of corruptible flesh and from this world of sin, and this is a real birth.

Romans 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Let us compare this with Romans 1:

Romans 1:3-4 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

Jesus was, in the human flesh and at His first birth, the descendant of David. But, by the

resurrection from the dead (that is, born again), Jesus became the born Son of God, now no longer human, but composed of Spirit—a Spirit Being. In this way, He became the first to be born of many brethren who are Christ's who will be born again at the time of the resurrection.

Paul knew that Jesus was also the Son of God while in the human flesh. Though Jesus was born of a human woman, He was begotten, or sired, by God. But this is comparing the two births: the one from the human Mary, as descended from the human David, and the other, by His resurrection to glory, as Son of God. This definitely does not imply that Jesus was a sinner needing salvation. He was the pioneer, setting us the example that we, too, may be born of God.

When we are born again, what will we be like?

Philippians 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Paul said our lowly body will be transformed and conformed to Christ's Spirit body.

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.

The "we" in I John 3:2 means begotten, converted Christians who are now already the sons of God. John said "we," the children of God, will be like Jesus Christ is now—an immortal Spirit Being.

We know that when Christ appears at His Second Coming to earth, we will be like Him. We will look like Christ. What does the glorified Christ look like? His eyes blaze forth like flames of fire. His feet glow like finely burnished brass. His face shines like the sun, in full strength—so bright He would blind our human eyes. We will look similarly if, and when, we are finally born of God. God is determined that we will be.

What is our magnificent potential?

Hebrews 2:6 But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him?"

Why should the Great God be concerned about us mortals? Our glorious potential is so far above and beyond anything that we have thought or imagined; it seems incredible and beyond comprehension.

Hebrew 2:7 You have made him a little lower than the angels; You

have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands.

God will set us over His creation—not just dominion over the earth, but the whole creation. The entire vast universe has been put under the authority of Jesus Christ and born sons of God will share in that responsibility under Christ. We are not yet spiritually born, except Christ only.

Hebrew 2:8 You have put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him.

So now, in this present gestation state, we do not yet see the universe put under Him, but what we do see is Jesus crowned with glory and honor.

Hebrews 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

Jesus has already been given the executive administration of God's government, the Kingdom of God, over the entire universe. Only until our time to inherit and possess the government of earth, at Christ's return, He is allowing Satan to continue on this earth and do his work of deception.

Hebrew 2:10-11 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. 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,

We are heirs of God, and joint-heirs—as brethren—with Christ. He has gone on ahead, through a resurrection, to glory as the pioneer. He is the firstborn of many brethren. He has inherited all things—the universe and beyond.

We are still heirs—still in the gestation stage of the process of being born of God. Jesus is now our Elder Brother and High Priest, supervising our spiritual development—preparing us to be kings and priests, reigning with Him.

The first thousand years we will reign on the earth. "For He will have made kings and priests to our God, and we will reign on earth," as Revelation 5:10 tells us. Jesus is to reign on the throne of His earthly ancestor David in Jerusalem.

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.

Revelation 2:26-27 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'—as I also have received from My Father;

The concept of God as parent communicates not only headship but loving care and comfort as well, as seen in Deuteronomy 1 and Isaiah 63, where the father carries and stays by his child. God says of His chosen people, in Hosea 11:1, "When Israel was a child, I loved him." 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 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

We know that we are to be imitators of Jesus Christ, to become like Him, and Jesus reflects the Father, and we should reflect Jesus Christ. As our loving Father watches over His family, we also, as loving fathers in the physical form, should properly love ours as well.

God sets the lonely in families—not just in the care and comfort of human families, but ultimately in the fellowship of the people of God. John records Jesus' teaching, in John 3:35, that God's family would be known by His followers' 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 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, 29 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 should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. 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. 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 here is *patria*, implying clearly the father or patriarch as the originator of the family. For 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 of any kind that could ever exist.

From this we know that when the writers of the epistles refer to their fellow believers as brothers and sisters "in the Lord" more than a hundred times, they are not simply using an attractive or emotionally compelling illustration.

The physical family is not a concrete picture of an abstract idea; rather, it is one step toward an even greater spiritual reality. These writers are addressing fellow members of an eternally real spiritual family, whose origin is the ultimate reality, God Himself.

The family members are unified by the seed and blood of Christ. 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 about God's family from beginning to end. God made families partly as a biological and social basis for the human race as the conduit of His grace and judgment. God is also making for Himself a family of sons and daughters who will serve Him and praise Him and reign with Him in His kingdom forever.

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.

When we are born of God, we will be spirit, no longer human flesh and blood. We will be given spiritual power. As Daniel revealed, the saints then shall take the kingdoms of earth's nations and rule them for the first thousand years—establishing real world peace and divine government under Christ.

Then again under Christ, we will be given power to 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 obedient to God—a spirit life of wonderful abundance beyond our wildest dreams! That is the gift and desire of our merciful Father and His Son Jesus Christ. It should be our goal and desire as well to inherit the Kingdom of God, and to be valuable members of His eternal family.

As members of the household of God, in our physical form we are practicing now to live God's way of life by imitating Jesus Christ, not only on an individual basis, but as members of a loving family. We have a wonderful future to look forward to, and I know that we cannot wait.