

When the apostle Paul wrote his friend Timothy, he instructed the young evangelist concerning the church, and God's intentions for it. In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul said, "I am writing these things to you ... that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." Did you notice the analogy Paul used to describe the church? He said "the church of the living God" was "the household of God." Thayer's Lexicon defines the word "household" as: "all the persons forming one family." The Bible often uses this word to describe a family, as in Acts 10:2, where Cornelius "feared God with all his household" and Hebrews 11:7, where Noah "prepared an ark for the salvation of his household." The "Family" analogy emphasizes the type of relationships which should exist in the church.

For instance, there is a "Father/Child" relationship between God and His People. Paul said, "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God ... you have received a spirit of adoption as sons ... the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom 8:14-16). It is because of God's great love that He makes us His children. The apostle John said, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are" (I Jn 3:1). Our Heavenly Father greatly desires this relationship with every person. God pleads with us to enter this relationship, "Come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord . . . and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me" (II Cor 6:17-18).

The writer of Hebrews continues this analogy by seeing Jesus Christ as the elder brother in this family (Heb 3:6). Can you imagine the benefits of being a part of God's Family? We could have a chat with our Father any time we needed (Mt 6:6). The loving discipline of the Father's hand would always be there to guide us (Heb 12:5-7). We would be heirs to the family estate, which Peter described as "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (I Pet 1:3-4). And while on earth . . . we constantly enjoy the loving fellowship with our "brothers and sisters in Christ" - those who are called "the brethren" in I Thes 4:9.

Many people will want to know how to become a part of this family . . . and it is possible for every single person. As we have seen before, it is by the process of "adoption" that we enter the family of God (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:1-7). But, what can we do to initiate this transaction? Paul answers this question very simply in Galatians 3:26-27. He said, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." There it is again . . . Faith and Baptism. The same process which places one in the church also completes the adoption process for God's family. And this should be no surprise, for "the church of the living God" **IS** "the household of God" (I Timothy 3:15).

There's no doubt that great blessings are found in the family of God. But there are expectations as well. It's a terrible mistake to believe that God has placed no responsibilities upon His children. When we enter the family of God, several family rules immediately apply to family members.

1. God expects us to be separate from the world. Our Heavenly Father is not pleased with worldly lust and boastful pride. John said, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world" (I John 2:15-16).

2. God expects His children to be obedient. Scripture says, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother . . . for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (I John 3:10; Ephesians 5:6).

3. God expects His children to care for one another & to "do good ... to those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal 6:10). A spirit of sharing and good will must permeate the family of God.

4. God expects His children to be present for family gatherings, "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another - and all the more as you see the day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:25). Because of the "Family" concept, there can be no "Lone Ranger" Christians in the kingdom of God.

5. God expects us to wear the family name with pride. You see . . . “there is no other name under heaven ... by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). It was prophesied long ago that the people of God would be given a new name when the Gentiles saw the Lord’s righteousness (Isaiah 62:2; 65:15). Fulfilling this prophecy, it was in the first Gentile church that “the disciples were first called Christians” (Acts 11:26). Here is the name which unites the church. This is the name which distinguishes the family of God. There must never be an inferior, denominational name which replaces the name of Christ.

The “Family Analogy” emphasizes the type of relationships which should exist among the People of God - just as the “Kingdom” analogy emphasizes the form of governmental authority and the “Church” analogy emphasizes their quality of sanctification. In the next “Bible Talk,” we shall find out more about the nature of God’s People.



Bible Probe

THE CHURCH: A NURTURING FAMILY

1. I Timothy 3:15 refers to the “church of the living God” as the “_____ of God.” Acts 10:2 and Hebrews 11:7 help us see that this word has reference to a _____.
2. The “Family” analogy emphasizes the kinds of _____ we find in the church. What type of relationship is stressed in Romans 8:14-16?
Do you believe that Christians are "Children of God"? (I John 3:1)
Does God want to share this relationship with you? (II Corinthians 6:17-18)
What position does Jesus occupy in the “Family Analogy”? (Hebrews 3:6)
3. Beside each of the following scriptures, list a “benefit” of being in the family of God.
Matthew 6:6 _____
Hebrews 12:5-7 _____
I Peter 1:3-4 _____
I Thessalonians 4:9 _____
4. By what process do we enter God’s Family? (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:1-7)
What can we do to initiate this process? (Galatians 3:26-27)
5. Beside each of these scriptures, list a “responsibility” expected of God’s family members.
I John 2:15-16 _____
I John 3:10; Ephesians 5:6 _____
Galatians 6:10 _____
Hebrews 10:25 _____
6. According to Isaiah 62:2, when did God predict He would give a new name to His People?
What name was coined in the first Gentile congregation of Antioch? (Acts 11:26)
Give two reasons why we should wear this name with pride. (Acts 4:10)