

God's Family.

Text: Eph 3:14-15

Suggested Hymns:

191, 194, 183, 840, 355

- 1) Every Family Has A Name Which Distinguishes It From Others
- 2) In Families You Will Find Family Resemblances
- 3) God's Family Is Rich
- 4) The Family In Heaven And Earth

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Ephesians 3:14-15, *¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

One of the most agreeable and pleasant scenes upon earth is a well-regulated and happy family. It is a little group, bone of each other's bone and flesh of each other's flesh, enclosed within the four walls of the same house, bound together by common interests and sympathy, extending to one another mutual confidence, consolation, and help. Every care is divided, every sorrow diminished, every joy redoubled, by the intimate and blessed fellowship that prevails.

But not every home answers this description. Sin and the evils that spring from sin have made havoc with domestic peace. From the beginning the enemy from hell has worked feverishly to disrupt this most blessed of God's institutions.

Since the day he broke in upon the blessedness of the first home in the Garden of Eden, he has endeavoured to turn our homes into a state resembling the place from which he comes, namely hell.

But where Satan has not had his way and the fellowship of the family is according to the Creator's intention, we have one of earth's most pleasant scenes, a reflection of man's original dwelling place and an image of our future home in heaven, the remnant of Paradise Lost and the foretaste of Paradise Regained.

To this fellowship God compares His people in our text. *“The whole family in heaven and earth.”* God’s people, Christians, are members of one household, connected by strong and inseparable ties. They are brothers and sisters, living under one roof in their Father’s house. They have similar experiences of soul. They speak the same spiritual language. They have the same features, which distinguish them from the children of this world.

We have come here today to have our Lord assure us that we are members of this spiritual family. This assurance is most necessary. For by nature we are strangers to the household of God and far from our Father’s home.

The beautiful relationship which existed at the beginning in Paradise was utterly disrupted by sin, and man became God’s enemy. But then God took human flesh and blood upon Himself and became man, gave His body into death, and shed His blood that sin might be forgiven and man reconciled to his God.

Today we shall eat this very body and drink this very blood as the pledge that the barrier of sin, which stood between us and our God, has been removed, that in Christ we are God’s children again, members of God’s family, co-heirs with the Son of God as brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus.

But we have communion not only with Christ this morning. We commune also with one another. As we come to the Lord’s Table, we declare thereby that we believe ourselves to be children of God and brothers and sisters of the Son of God.

People who have the same Father and the same Brother are brothers and sisters to each other. So Holy Communion awakens in us the consciousness that we all belong to the same family of God.

To be a member of God’s family is a priceless privilege. In order that we may truly rejoice in our family membership and fully realise its implications, we shall on this occasion meditate briefly upon some of the features of *God’s Family*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Every Family Has A Name Which Distinguishes It From Others

Every family has a name which distinguishes it from others. That name stands for the honour, character, and distinction of that family. People are proud of their Surname and jealously guard it from every blot and shame.

Likewise God's people have a name. In the text St. Paul states that this family is named after God. *"The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family is named."* God's people take their name from God, the highest good, the essence of all that is good.

In olden times the family name was mentioned first, "Smith's John." Later this was changed, and we now speak of John Smith. So when we are received into God's family, our name becomes God's children.

This family name is most honourable. It stands for the highest type of manhood and womanhood. It stands for the noblest cause under the sun. For the past twenty centuries this whole family has had one and the same occupation, and every member has been engaged in it.

Its one aim and purpose has been the highest welfare of man for time and eternity. Its sole object has been to have others born into the family by the second birth. What a noble family! What an incomparable name!

2. In Families You Will Find Family Resemblances.

The family resemblances is the family likeness. Children look like their parents. Brothers and sisters generally look alike. There is something about them which indicates that they belong to the same household.

Likewise God's family has resemblances. God's children resemble their heavenly Father. When they are born into the family, they begin to partake of His nature, and these family traits should develop more and more. The children look alike, too. They have much of their Elder Brother, Jesus Christ. They should resemble Him in their actions, words, and sentiments.

The children of the family feel alike, too. They all love their Father. Since they realise that sin is that abomination which their Father hates and punishes severely, they try to put sin out of their lives. They are all sorry for their sins, because their Father was offended by these disobediences.

They all trust in their Brother Jesus Christ for forgiveness. Not one person in the whole family tries to set things right by his own efforts and goodness. Rather, they all put their whole trust in their big Brother Jesus alone.

The whole family is alike also in holiness. All the children visit Golgotha frequently, where the Father punished sin so horribly in their Elder Brother.

They know what an awful thing sin is. It cannot be tolerated or condoned in the family.

The members must conform to the family image. No sin dare be committed wilfully and knowingly. Holiness is the family trait. When the children nevertheless fail to live up to the family requirements, and sin out of weakness, they always wash themselves in the blood of the Elder Brother. They associate much with their Father; so they cleanse themselves constantly.

The whole family eats at the same table, too, and partakes of the same food. It is a spiritual family. The life to be maintained is a spiritual life. So the food is spiritual. It is God's Word, the food from heaven, which gives life. A man would not go without food for days and expect to maintain his vitality. So members of God's household do not fail to sustain their souls. Daily they eat for the sustenance of their spiritual life by reading God's Word.

The whole family also breathes the same way. "*Prayer is the Christian's vital breath.*"¹ Physical life is impossible without breathing. So spiritual life is impossible without prayer. Praying, communing with the Father, conversation with the Elder Brother, is as natural to a child of God as breathing.

When prayer becomes laborious or irregular, the child is ill. Members of God's family find it more necessary to converse with their Father than children of an earthly family to speak to their earthly father. To their heavenly Father they make known their needs, and Him they consult as to their requirements.

In God's family everybody also has some of the same soul experiences. Repentance, faith, hope, humility, and inner spiritual conflicts, are common to all. Therefore they can understand one another.

Two Christians from opposite points of the globe meet for the first time. A brief interchange of thoughts reveals that they belong to the same family. They recognise the family traits. They see the family likeness. This often attracts more strongly than physical family likeness. There is closer affinity with members of God's family than with brothers and sisters according to the flesh.

3. God's Family Is Rich

God's family, however, is not only a distinguished and honourable family. It is also a rich family with great possessions. Every family, however poor, has

some possessions, something that belongs to it and is not shared by the community at large. So God's family has possessions which belong to it exclusively and not to the people of the world.

One exclusive possession is peace of conscience. The children of this world may possess many things, riches and property and physical comfort and ease; but among their treasures cannot be found that blessed possession which Christ gave to His brothers and sisters when He said, ***"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you."***²

Only God's family can say with St. Paul in Romans 5:1, ***"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*** Only of a family member does Isaiah say, ***"You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You."***³

It is the peace which passes understanding, the peace which is beyond the reach of earthly unrest and storms, the peace which our Brother gives to us again today when He assures us, ***"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."***⁴

Another valuable and exclusive possession of God's family is hope. The world uses the word frequently. It hopes for this or that. But the thing is uncertain and speculative.

This word is used differently by God's family. When God's children say "hope," they mean that they assuredly expect and definitely, confidently look for a thing to happen. It expresses their unquestioning expectation, without any doubt or uncertainty.

Of this kind of hope the people of this world know nothing. God says of these outsiders, that they are ***"aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."***⁵

But of the Christian hope we read in 1 Peter 1:3-4, ***"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you."*** God's family has hope, the confident

expectation of something great and glorious in the future. Without the least doubt it looks forward to that.

God's family also has its joys and sorrows. Every family has them. Every home is the scene of joyful events accompanied by happy laughter, and of sorrowful events causing pain and grief. There often is a shadow and cloud on the horizon. The children may cause heartache. Disease and pain and bereavement may disturb the tranquillity of the home. Men and women raised in the same home may quarrel over a few dollars.

So God's family has its griefs. A member turns his back upon the family and seeks other, often sinful, connections. Pride, jealousy, selfishness, disturb the peace of the Church. Beloved and honoured members are called to the eternal home.

But God's family also has its joys. When new members are born into the household by regeneration of the Holy Spirit; when one who has wandered off into a far country returns to the Father; when weak and sick members grow stronger and healthier; when the young develop promisingly and inspire hope for future days, then the whole family rejoices and laughter fills the house of God.

4. The Family In Heaven And Earth

We must, however, not overlook the fact that in our text the Apostle speaks not only of the whole family on earth, but of *the family in heaven and earth*. This puts before us another feature of God's family.

Earthly households are broken up sooner or later. The years work changes quickly, and the members of our households become fewer and fewer.

Not so God's family. It is never broken up because part of it is on earth and part in heaven. The hymnist writes,⁶

The saints on earth and those above
But one communion make;
Joined to their Lord in bonds of love,
All of His grace partake.

One family we dwell in Him,
One Church above, beneath;

Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death.

The ties of God's family are not severed by death. It is and remains one united household.

The poet Wordsworth relates in touching verse how he met a little girl of eight years and asked her how many brothers and sisters she had. *"There are seven of us. Two brothers are gone to sea, two of the family live in Conway, two are living in the churchyard, and I live with Mother."* He told her that if two out of the seven lay dead in the churchyard, then only five remained in the family now. But she would not accept the correction. *"No; we are seven!"* She could not agree with him that, because a brother and a sister had departed this life, they were not her brother and sister still. She was in perfect agreement with St. Paul as to God's family.

We give expression to this thought in our Communion liturgy. *"With angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Thy glorious name, evermore praising Thee and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts."*

Some of our family are in heaven, but they are still of the same family. The same Christ before whom they sing praises in heaven is also present here in Holy Communion, and we here join them in lauding and magnifying His glorious name.

Part of the family is in heaven; part of the family is here; but we are one family, all engaged in the family occupation of praising God.

May we, then, this morning come to the Lord's Table with a twofold purpose. First, we would receive here the pledge that we belong to God's family because our Elder Brother died for us and removed the barrier of sin, so that now we are accepted as children and heirs together with Christ.

Secondly, we would have impressed upon us that we, who have communion with each other at the Lord's Table, have the same Father and the same Elder Brother and therefore are brothers and sisters to one another.

As brothers and sisters we must cling together, protect one another, help one another, and show a kind, brotherly, forbearing, loving spirit to each other. We

are all children in the same, noble, honourable family. We must have our Father's nature. We must be like our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ. We must show the family resemblance. And we shall never be separated, but live together in the Father's house forever and ever. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Hymn 424

² John 14:27

³ Isaiah 26:3

⁴ Matthew 26:28

⁵ Ephesians 2:12

⁶ Hymn 183