

We have just begun a study of the book of Ephesians, and we began last week looking at this amazing blessing that begins the book.

It's one, long sentence that goes through v.14 that calls us to bless God because of the way He has blessed us.

So this is all about worship. For the next several Sundays we will just be learning about God with the goal of becoming better worshippers.

The Five Blessings

Blessed be God who blessed us in five ways: Sanctification, Adoption, Salvation, Revelation and Possession.

- He chose us to be holy and blameless, (sanctification)
- having predestined us to adoption (adoption)
- by grace which He freely gave us (forgiveness and riches), (salvation)
- having made known to us His plan to unite all things in Christ. (revelation)
- He made us heirs to an inheritance (possession)

1. Sanctification v.4

4 He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him

And we talked about the fact that He chose you, as an individual, not just a class of people.

And I gave my argument against class election, and I realized this week that I forgot one important point in that argument.

The idea of class election is that being in the Body of Christ is kind of like being in the Superbowl.

The NFL doesn't pick the teams that will make it. They just pick the method of getting there. The winners of the playoffs go to the Superbowl.

Some people say election is that way. God doesn't pick the individuals who will make it into Christ, He just ordained the means. Anyone who makes it into Christ is included.

So God chose the group that would be saved (anyone who end up in Christ), but it is up to the individual alone whether or not he is part of that group – it's totally up to you alone whether or not you end up in Christ.

I gave several arguments last Sunday against that view, but here is one final nail to put in the coffin of that view:

Some people think all election is is God choosing Christ, but it's up to you whether you are one of the ones who is in Christ.

But 1 Cor.1:26-30 **But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise... 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus**

This is such an amazing doctrine. As one of the elect you are loved by God with a love that had no beginning. Throughout eternity past God was thinking about you and set it in stone that you were to be holy and blameless.

In What Sense are We Holy and Blameless?

The phrase **holy and blameless** comes out of the sacrificial system. That which was holy unto the Lord had to be without blemish.

So the idea is that of being free from any moral blemish. Pure, righteous, godly, separated from evil, Christlike, etc.

Many Christians see that and think, “I may be a lot of things, but holy and blameless ain’t one of them. In fact the first words that come to my mind when I think of myself are unholy and blameworthy.”

There is no question we, as Christians, sin. And we don’t just sin once in a while either. We have a massive problem with sin.

So in what sense can we be accurately described as holy or blameless?

God’s great plan to make you holy and blameless involves three stages:

1. Justification

The first occurs at your conversion (prior to your conversion – even though you may be one of the elect, there is no sense in which you are holy or blameless).

But right at the moment you first respond to God with genuine, saving faith (belief of the truth about Him, and an entrusting of your life to the Lord Jesus Christ in repentance), at that moment a legal declaration takes place in heaven.

It’s not something you see or feel or experience. The only way we know it happens is the Bible says it happens.

It’s a legal declaration by God that Jesus’ moral perfection is credited to your account.

In God’s book, under your name were listed all your sins. Under Jesus’ name were listed none.

At the moment you believe, God, by declaration, tears out Jesus’ page and pastes it under your name, and He tears out your pages and pastes them under Jesus’ name (that’s why He had to die on the cross).

That legal declaration is called “justification,” and it completely changes your standing before God. At that moment you go from being rejected to being accepted.

Roman Catholic theologians have mocked this idea, calling it “legal fiction,” because in practice I’m still a sinner.

They say it’s like God is playing a game of make believe – pretending I’m righteous when I’m not.

But it’s not legal fiction. It is a real, actual, genuine change in my legal standing before God.

Jesus’ righteousness is really, genuinely credited to your account, so that now no one can possibly bring any charge against you before God (Ro.8:33).

Luke 18:9-14 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else (these are people who thought they were already justified – that somehow their righteous deeds cancelled out their sins), Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. (Pharisees were the most devout people and led the cleanest lives, tax collectors among the most sinful and led the dirtiest lives) 11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men-robbers, evildoers, adulterers-or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.

It doesn’t say that he began a process toward being justified. By virtue of him humbling himself before God and crying out for mercy in faith, he *went home* justified, right on the spot.

Justification is an amazing thing. It does what the law could never do.

Acts 13:38-40 "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39 Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.

The law can tell you not to sin now, and the law can tell you not to sin in the future, but the law can't do anything about the sins you have already committed in the past.

The only thing the law can do about those is declare you guilty. In justification, God declares you "not guilty."

The first 2 ½ chapters of Romans go on and on describing man's problem with sin. We are doomed to be judged by God because of our lack of righteousness.

We desperately need righteousness, and yet we are too sinful to generate it on our own through just trying to keep God's Law.

So by the time you get to Ro.3:20 there can be no doubt that man is absolutely devoid of any righteousness before God.

Ro.3:21-24 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known...!

You are hopelessly unrighteous, but there is a way for you to attain righteousness. You can have access to a righteousness that is from God.

22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

When you have faith, God justifies you in the sense that He declares you to be righteous, and in ch.4 Paul proves his point from Gn.15, showing that Abraham was justified by faith alone.

So it's not that God makes it so you never commit a sin again. It's a legal declaration – God reckoning you as righteous even though you are still committing sins in your daily life.

Ro.4:5 to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

This new legal standing we have before God doesn't eliminate the actual sins that we keep on committing.

What it does do is give us an ongoing standing before God that reconciles us to Him so that our relationship with Him is set right.

Ro.5:1-2 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

So the first stage of us becoming holy and blameless is completed in a moment of time right at your conversion. You are considered legally holy and blameless in God's sight.

2. Sanctification

The second stage is a process that only *begins* at the moment of your conversion.

This process is called sanctification. (Remember, the word "sanctified" and the word "holy" are just two different English words that translate the exact same Greek word. So if we wanted to we could call this process "holification" – it's the process of you becoming holy in practice).

It's not enough for us to be regarded by God as holy legally. He also wants us to actually be without sin in our actions as well.

And so that's a part of the great gift of salvation. God removes the actual sins from our lives.

But He doesn't do that in a moment of time. He does it over a period of time – beginning at the moment of conversion, and ending at the end of your earthly life.

So a year after becoming a Christian you are sinning less than you were one day after your conversion. Ten years later you are even more righteous in your actions.

“How does that process work?”

Here’s how God does it:

At the moment you become a Christian, God makes you a new person. Instead of reforming your old heart, He actually creates a new heart in you:

2 Co.5:17 if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

This new heart has a new nature. You are actually now a different *kind* of being.

Just as a human is a different kind of being than a dog, someone who has been born again is a different kind of being than someone who hasn’t.

It’s as though you were a weed seed, and God recreated you and made you a different kind of seed – say an apple seed.

From the outside you may not look all that different, but by nature you are completely different, and that difference will be seen by what you develop into.

The old you is gone.

Ro.6:6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with,

So right at conversion God makes you a new person with a new nature, which affects the way you live from then on.

However, you are still in this world and you still have your same body.

And as long as you remain in this world with this body, there will continue to be powerful influences from the outside that exert pressure on you to continue to live as if you were still your old self.

So the actual reduction in the amount of sin you commit comes as a result of a process – the process of setting aside that old life, and learning to live according to your new nature.

Eph.4:22-24 speaks of the time when you became a Christian and says,

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

And that process of living more and more in line with your new nature is not an issue of your efforts alone. It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

2 Thes.2:13 says God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

1 Peter 1:2 says that you have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ

And the Holy Spirit does that in countless different ways.

- He orchestrates circumstances in such a way as to bring it about (Ro.8:28).
- He brings just the right kinds of trials and suffering into your life to bring it about (Ro.5:3,4).
- He edifies you through the spiritual gifts of others in the Church (Eph.4)
- He works directly in your will and actions (Php.2:13)...

But primarily He accomplished it through Scripture.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

God sanctifies you – makes you more and more holy and blameless, through His Word.

John 15:3 **You are already clean because of the word...**

In Eph.5:26 the Lord makes the Church **holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,**

Ps.119:11 **I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.**

Ps.119:104 **I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.**

Ps.19:7-9 **The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.**

Ps.119:9 **How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.**

1 Peter 1:22-23 **Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. 23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.**

The Holy Spirit uses circumstances, trials, other people, the Church, direct work in your heart, and most of all the Holy Scriptures to make you more and more holy and blameless in practice.

And so the result is the incredible promise of 2 Cor.3:18 **we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.**

So positionally, before God, we are every bit as holy and blameless as Jesus Christ Himself...

And practically, in the way that we actually behave, is there any real difference between us and the world of unredeemed people? Absolutely.

We have a new nature and are in the process of becoming more and more like Christ.

Then there is a third stage that caps off this whole process.

This part is not yet in place. It hasn't even begun yet. It will take place when Christ returns to this earth from heaven at the rapture and resurrection.

3. Bodily redemption

Your present body is your only connection to the evil influences of this world, and those influences are the only reason you still sin.

And so Ro.8:23-24 says **we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved.**

There is a future day of redemption we are looking forward to.

In fact, that's how Paul ends this whole, gigantic sentence in Eph.1:14, where he is talking about the Holy Spirit **who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-to the praise of his glory.**

Eph.4:30 **And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**

Once that happens – once Christ returns and you receive your new, glorified body, you will be finished with sin altogether, and you will be holy and blameless in every way in every sense, not relatively but absolutely.

Heb.12:23 **You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect,**

Throughout Revelation believers who have died are pictured as being in heaven dressed in white – which is symbolic of sinlessness.

That's important, because nothing impure will even enter heaven. (Rev.21:27)

So the process is completed at the Second Coming.

1 Thes.3:12-13 **May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.**

If you are a believer, you can take all the commands in the Bible as promises. (“Thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not have any other gods before me, etc.”)

So when Eph.1:4 says He chose us in Him to be holy and blameless, that's what it's talking about – all of the wonderful richness of the wonder of justification, sanctification and bodily redemption.

Blessing #2: Predestination to Adoption

Bless God because He has blessed us...

- by choosing us to be holy and blameless
- **in love 5 having predestined us to adoption through Jesus Christ for Himself, according to the pleasure of His will**

Most of the commentaries seem to lean toward **in love** belonging with what proceeds, based on the fact that Paul repeatedly puts those kinds of prepositional phrases at the ends of clauses in this chapter and because of the parallel in 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 like this:

May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men . . . so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father.. But it seems to me that creates too awkward a structure, since it appears after the words **before Him**.

in love

The starting point of understanding predestination is that it is rooted in God's love.

If you have some understanding of the doctrine of predestination that does not highlight God's love, there is something wrong with your understanding.

A lot of people struggle with predestination for the same reason they struggle with election – they decide not to believe in it, because they don't know how to reconcile it with human freedom of choice.

But you don't decide whether or not to believe a doctrine based on whether or not you know how it fits with other beliefs. You believe a doctrine based on whether or not it's clearly taught in Scripture.

Acts 4:28 **(The Jewish leaders who had Jesus crucified)** did what Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

Ro.8:29 **those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son,**

1 Co. 2:7

we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God predestined for our glory before time began.

So if you are going to take the Bible seriously you can't argue the fact of predestination.

The problem we have with predestination is we tend to think either things are predetermined, or we can make real decisions in which the outcomes are actually determined by our own decisions.

We think it has to be one or the other, but not both. But Scripture strongly teaches both.

If you accept that both are true, then there is no problem.

Some people think they have to preserve human free will at all costs, and they end up denying God's free will (creating a bigger problem than they solve).

Others think in order to preserve God's freedom of choice we have to turn human decision making into a farce, where our decisions don't really determine anything, or we don't really have a real choice.

But the biblical view that our decisions are real decisions, made by us, and what we decide really is up to us, and yet God has also predetermined His plan.

But just as we found last week that the major point isn't just the fact of election, but rather what we were elected to – what we were chosen for (holiness and blamelessness), so here the major point isn't the predestination in itself, but what we were predestined for.

5 having predestined us to adoption through Jesus Christ for Himself

Adoption

Part of God's eternal purpose was to not only make you holy and blameless, but to give you a very unique relationship with Him.

Most of the people in the world seem to think we are all God's children. That's not true. The Bible never says that.

Being a child of God is an incredibly unique privilege that wasn't even enjoyed by Old Testament saints in the way it is by us.

As a Christian, you enjoy a much deeper and closer relationship to God than people like Moses or Abraham or even Enoch had.

J.I. Packer wrote:

"If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. "Father" is the Christian name for God." (Knowing God 182)

That's true. Your understanding of the Christian life probably isn't any better than your grasp of the doctrine of adoption.

In the OT, the nation of Israel, as a nation, was regarded as God's son. So corporately they looked to Him as their Father.

But when Jesus came along and started calling God "My Father" instead of "our Father" the Jews considered it blasphemy.

That didn't deter Jesus – in fact that's the only way Jesus ever addressed God (except for if He was quoting Scripture).

Now we have been given that kind of relationship with God. This transcends the kind of relationship OT saints had with God.

In the OT God revealed Himself to His people as Yahweh, which was an enigmatic name calculated to invoke a sense of awe.

It was God's covenant name. God's relationship to His people was best described as that of a King to vassals.

Israel, as a nation, was considered God's son. But individuals did not enjoy the intimacy of a father son relationship with God like we do.

The very giving of the Law itself was presented to the people in the form of that day known as a Suzerain-Vassal treaty (or King-Vassal treaty).

When a king conquered a city, he would make an arraignment with those people that went something like this: "I've conquered you, you now belong to me, so here are the terms:

"For my part I promise to protect you and govern you. For your part I expect loyalty and allegiance."

"If you show loyalty, I will give these benefits. If you fail to show loyalty, there will be these consequences..."

And so God used the terminology and format of one of those kind of treaties for the giving of the law in Exodus and Dt.

That's appropriate. It was fitting that God take a few thousands years of human history to teach man that He is so awesome and great that the appropriate way for a human being to relate to Him is with the kind of fear and trepidation that you experience before a great king.

But in the NT we are given a different way to refer to God the Father. The name Yahweh occurs almost 7000 times in the OT, and in the NT...zero.

When Jesus taught us how to pray, He told us to begin not by saying, "Dear Yahweh" or "Dear Jesus" or "Dear King..." He taught us to pray "Our Father..."

The OT language about God was filled with constant warnings for man to keep his distance from a holy God. Now we look to Him as Father.

Now don't think of that as a reduction in our view of God. The fearful, awesome, staggering reality of the dangerous, fearsome holiness of God remains.

In fact, that's the very thing that makes adoption such an amazing thing.

It's absolutely essential that you understand the way God revealed Himself in the OT to have any appreciation at all of our new relationship to Him in the NT.

There are people who understand the closeness and intimacy that we can now have with God, but can't appreciate it, because they don't have the background of the OT to show us of the natural response to God being that of great fear.

Heb.12:18-24 You have not come to a mountain...that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 19 to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20 because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." 21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." 22 But you have come to...the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.

The fear still remains. The NT speaks extensively of fearing God. God is just as awesome now as He ever was.

But something new has been added.

God relates to His people now not through a Suzerain-Vassal treaty but through a family relationship.

And so now the stress isn't on the difficulty and danger of approaching God. Now the stress is on the confidence and boldness with which we can now approach that very same, holy God.

The theme of sonship in the NT is a very rich theme in the NT, and there is more to it that we will get to in this message. But if you would like to read further I recommend the brilliant and fascinating chapter in the book "Knowing God" by J.I. Packer entitled "Sons of God."

He unfolds how the whole theme is developed extensively in the Gospel of John, and then throughout the rest of the NT.

If you read just about any commentary on Ephesians, it will probably say that v.5 is essentially a repeat of v.4. (Elected to be holy and predestined to be adopted are two ways of saying the same thing).

They are not the same thing. Being chosen to be justified and sanctified and redeemed is a wonderful thing. But adoption is an even more wonderful thing.

For example, justification is a legal idea, conceived in terms of the law and viewing God as the Judge making a declaration about your standing.

Adoption is a family idea, conceived in terms of love and viewing God as your Father gathering you into His arms as His child.

Adoption is the highest gift there is. Adoption is the richest aspect of your salvation. Adoption is what finally made the Apostle John burst out almost in unbelief in 1 John 3:1 **Behold! What manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!**

One of the aspects of the Gospel that was hidden in ages past was this wonderful family aspect.

Jesus was always speaking in terms of family. He would refer to His followers, very often, as His brothers rather than His disciples.

I remember years ago when I was sitting in church one Sunday and listened for the first time to the words to the hymn "Joyful Joyful."

"Thou our Father, Christ our Brother, all who live in love are Thine" – the first time I heard that I remember thinking, "Christ our brother? That's heresy!"

It seemed to me to be an over-familiarity with the Lord Jesus Christ. But I was wrong.

Heb.2:11-17 11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. 12 He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." 17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest

Jesus called His followers His brothers just as many times as He called them disciples.

In Mk.3:35 He referred to female followers as His sisters and mother. He even made the point that an older woman who was a believer was more a mother to Him than Mary herself!

Packer points out that understanding this family relationship is a key to understanding the Sermon on the Mount.

People struggle to understand that sermon, because they want to read it like a formal legal code, when it is apparent from the language that Jesus intended it in a very different way.

He gave it in the same spirit a parent will give moral instruction to a child – with concrete, vivid, imaginative concepts teaching general principles with particular examples...

The whole time seeking to bring the children to appreciate and share the parent's own attitude.

That's why you see the word "Father" 15 times in two chapters.

In the OT, when someone gets to worrying, you see language like in Isa.51:12-13 **who are you that you fear mortal men...who are but grass, 13 that you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretched out the heavens...**

But in the NT it comes out this way: Matt 7:9-11

"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

The OT saint was reminded, "You had better honor your King!" That still stands in the NT, but added to that is the statement, "You can trust your daddy."

People get confused about the role of confession and keeping God's law in relationship to justification.

They figure, "If I have been justified – all my sin is cancelled and forgiven, why do I still confess my sins? If I am no longer under the law, why do I still read about commands in the NT and make an effort to obey them?"

The answer is to stop only thinking about justification and start thinking about adoption.

I confess my sins because even though the Judge has declared that I am not subject to eternal punishment for my sins, my Father is grieved by my sin.

I confess my sins and seek to restore intimacy with God not because my sin has cancelled my justification, but it has marred the closeness of relationship I had with my Dad in heaven.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

Ro.8:15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

("Abba" was a word like "Dada, or papa, or Daddy" It's the way a very young child refers to his dad)

What does it mean that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Adoption?

This verse is a great key to unlocking the mystery of how we are to think about the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Most doctrinal statements spell out the ministry of the Holy Spirit in pretty dry terms.

For example, here is the EFCA statement on the Holy Spirit:

We believe that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ and, during this age, to convict men, regenerate the believing sinner, and indwell, guide, instruct and empower the believer for godly living and service.

Some people think that is so dry and impersonal they have gone to the opposite extreme and turned the ministry of the Holy Spirit into just a lot of subjective experiences – so the more extreme the feelings and emotions, the greater your connection with the Holy Spirit.

So the effect of the Holy Spirit ends up being similar to being on drugs or something.

Both extremes miss the point. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is not primarily a bunch of theoretical abstractions, nor is it just some emotional experience.

You can sum up the ministry of the Holy Spirit by understanding He is the Spirit of adoption.

How about this for a summary of His role in the Christian life: The Holy Spirit works to make you realize with increasing clarity the meaning of your filial relationship with God, and to lead you to respond in a deeper way to the fact that God is your Father.

Gal 4:4-7 God sent his Son...that we might receive the full rights of sons. 6 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

The Spirit's task is to bring you to the point of calling God, "Abba, Father."

"What about the work of sanctification?"

That's included in that.

The Holy Spirit works inside you to keep you aware of the fact that you are God's daughter or son. As a Christian, that awareness is always there, and it shapes the way you live your life.

You can't forget about it. You can't rid yourself of that awareness. If you want to sin, and go off the path of what a child of God should do, you have to actively suppress that awareness.

The Holy Spirit impels you to pursue more and more that family likeness (conformity to Christ), the family welfare (loving the Church), and maintaining the family honor (glorifying God).

We have talked so often in the past about how important it is that our righteousness come from the heart, rather than being a mere external exercise.

The key to that – the key to having your righteous deeds be truly genuine arising from inside your heart, is understanding sonship.

In the OT the people expressed their faith in God by adhering to the stipulations of the covenant.

Today we do it simply by living out our filial relationship to our Father.

I do what is right not because I'm trying to earn heaven, or follow religious rules. I do it just because I want to be a good son. I don't want to be a prodigal. I want to please my Dad in heaven.

Will understanding sonship purify your life? Will it cause you to sin less?

1 John 3:1-3 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! ...2 Dear friends, now we are children of God (what's coming is a relationship even closer than that) and 3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

God chose you to be one who would bear not only the family name, but the family resemblance.

The key to sinning less is understanding your adoption.

But sinning less isn't even the highest goal – there is something more important than even that.

Remember in our study of Col.3:10 we found that we are being conformed to the image of our Creator – we are becoming like God, and yet there is another goal even higher than that?

"What could be more important than becoming like God?"

You have put on the new self, which is being renewed in the image of its Creator into knowledge

That word "into" speaks of a final goal. Even greater than being like God is knowing God in a personal, family relationship.

You can't know Him that way until you are conformed to His image, because it's the kind of knowledge that comes only through resemblance. But the highest goal is relational.

Viewing Trials as a Son

Do you have trouble handling the suffering in your life? Or do you have a temper problem or do you get depressed over your trials?

Let Heb.12 revolutionize your attitude about your suffering by seeing it in terms of sonship:

Heb.12:5-13 you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Suffering = discipline.

Our tempers flare because we see hardship as an intrusion into our lives.

Don't think of it that way – think of it as loving correction and discipline and training from a caring heavenly Father.

We have anxiety and worry over the possibility of future suffering, because we see it as an unwelcome enemy.

Don't think of it like that. It's a welcome friend. It's the firm but ever-loving hand of your Father.

There is a future element

The Church is a Family

Ro.8:23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Heaven will be a family gathering.

Among the fondest memories I have from my childhood are the memories of our family reunions.

Even as a kid I wasn't a very sociable person, and didn't really like being around people or being part of social gatherings...

But I loved family reunions. I loved seeing all my cousins and aunts and uncles and grandparents.

It's funny – most memories I have are visual. But I can't really picture those reunions – they were so long ago.

But the wonderful, warm feelings of family are so embedded into my mind that the memory of the feelings linger to this day.

It's those kinds of feelings that are going to be part of what make heaven so wonderful.

So much of the language of heaven is relational – being with the Lord, seeing Him face to face, the Lord desiring that we be with Him, going to His house, eating at His table, etc.

Understanding the family aspect of your relationship to the Church goes right to the heart of what God wants from you in the area of relating to others.

What is fellowship all about? Loving your neighbor? Where does that come from? It comes from the Holy Spirit inside you making you ever aware of your family relationships.

God is your Father. You have been adopted into His family. So that woman sitting next to you or in front of you isn't just your friend or acquaintance – she is your sister.

That man in front of you is your brother.

These are relationships that surpass even natural family relationships. Tracy is my wife, which makes us very closely related. But it's more significant that she is my sister in Christ.

Last Thursday was her birthday, and I got her a card that had a picture on the front of a man sitting in a chair.

It was clearly a chair built for one, and yet the guy's wife was also in the chair with him, and they both looked very comfortable and very happy.

I chose that card, because I intended to write some things in there about how close we are to each other right now.

I feel like emotionally we are closer to each other than we have ever been, and that picture really symbolizes what our lives are like...

Our lives are all snuggled together close to each other in such a wonderful intimacy and closeness that it has really been one of the greatest sources of joy in my life lately.

That is a close relationship, but not as close and not as profoundly intimate as our relationship to each other as brother and sister in Christ.

That is an eternal relationship. Marriage is just a temporary relationship for this life only.

Nikki is my daughter, but much more importantly she is my sister in Christ.

This lifts fellowship up to a whole other plane, doesn't it?

When we go downstairs after Sunday School and eat our Fellowship Meal today, you will enjoy that not just because you are eating good food with some friends...

- but because the warmth and closeness and love you feel springs from an awareness of your adoption – your membership in God's family, that awareness constantly being generated by the Holy Spirit, which is evidence of the genuineness of your salvation.

That's what Ro.8:16 means when it says **The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.**

Four different times in the NT we are commanded to greet each other with a holy kiss. That was not the equivalent of a handshake. It was much more intimate than that.

Kisses were reserved for family or very close, intimate friends.

Any command should be taken seriously, but especially ones that are repeated 4 times. And just because our external modes of expression may have changed, the principle hasn't.

We live in a private, individualized society that guarantees everyone a huge personal space and where there is very little physical affection that is not in the category of immorality.

The Church isn't to be like that. We are to be very affectionate to each other, expressing that in physical ways – with absolute purity.

Benediction: Ro.15:5,6 **May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**