

Picture 4: The Family



Seven Pictures of God's People (Part 6)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again at the beginning of a new week, sharing with you Keys To Successful Living that God has placed in my hand through many years of personal experience and Christian ministry. This week I'm continuing with the theme that I commenced last week, "Seven Pictures of God's People."

But first, let me say "Thank you" to those of you who have been writing to me. Before I finish this talk we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. It encourages me greatly to hear how this radio ministry of mine has been helping you and blessing you, so please take time to write to me, even if it's only a brief note.

Now, back to our theme, "Seven Pictures of God's People." In our studies last week, we've been looking by faith into the mirror of God's Word to find out what kind of people we are in God's sight as God's redeemed people. We've not been looking at ourselves primarily as individuals, but rather as God's people collectively. I explained how important it is that we do not underestimate ourselves. The devil is very happy when we do this. On the other hand, God wants us to understand how important we have become as God's redeemed people and how central we are to the outworking of His purposes in the earth.

Each one of our seven pictures of God's people is taken from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. The first three pictures that we looked at last week were:

(1) The assembly, the governmental authority;

(2) the body, the agent of God's action; and

(3) the workmanship, God's creative masterpiece.

Today we're going to look at the fourth picture, the family. Now in this list of seven pictures, the fourth is, of course, central. And I believe that this is appropriate. I believe that in a certain sense, the family is central to all of our understanding of God's people. In the New Testament, Christians are very seldom actually referred to by the title "Christians" or even "believers." The commonest title used is "brothers." And that emphasizes, of course, membership of one family. The emphasis of the New Testament is on that.

Let's see now what Paul says in Ephesians 2:18–19:

> "For through him [Jesus] we both [that's Jews and Gentiles in the context] have access to the Father by one Spirit."

Notice that all three persons of the Godhead are found together in that one verse. "Through him [Jesus, the Son] we have access to the Father by the Spirit." The Son, the Father, the Spirit. And the next verse explains a great, important result:

> "Consequently, [that's because we have access to the Father] you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household." (NIV)

The word "household" would be best represented in contemporary English by "family." We're members of God's family. Now the key to this is our relationship to the Father. Because Christ has gained for us access to the Father, therefore we have become members of God's family.

You see, God's family is determined by relationship to the Father. In New Testament Greek there is a very close similarity between the words "father" and "family." The word for "father" is pater; the word for "family" is patria—directly derived from the word for "father." This is brought out by a prayer of Paul in the next chapter of Ephesians, chapter 3, verses 14 and 15, where he says this:

> "For this reason, I kneel before the Father [that's the Heavenly Father, God the Father] from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name." (NIV)

You see, there's a direct play on the words "father" (pater), "family" (patria). So it's from God the Father that His whole family (patria) in heaven and on earth derives its name. Family comes from fatherhood. What determines a family is the father. And because we have God as our Father, we are members of His family.

This is further brought out by the writer of Hebrews, in Hebrews 2:10–12:

> "For it was fitting for him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things [that's God the Father] in bringing many sons to glory [the 'many sons' are the believers] to perfect the author of their salvation [that's the Lord Jesus] through suffering."

Let me read that again so you get the meaning.

> "For it was fitting for God the Father, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons [many believers] to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation [Jesus] through suffering. For both he who sanctifies [that's Jesus] and those who are sanctified [that's the believers] are all from one father. [We have the same father as Jesus.] For which reason he [Jesus] is not ashamed to call them brethren, [and then it quotes from the Old Testament] saying, 'I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing thy praise.'" (NASB)

That's a very beautiful revelation. Because, God through Jesus has made us His sons, and because Jesus Himself is the Son of God the Father, the only begotten—therefore Jesus acknowledges us as His brothers. Why? Because of our relationship to the Father. See, Jesus never took the initiative from the Father, He never did anything without the Father leading the way. So Jesus did not call us brothers until the Father called us sons. But once His father called us sons, then He acknowledged us as His brothers.

What then, would you say, are the main features of this particular revelation? I would say two. First of all, the primary feature, the decisive feature, is a shared life-source. The father is the life-source of every family, heavenly or earthly. And when we have one life-source, when we all share the same life source, we are members of the same family. We all share the same life. It's not a matter of a denomination or a label or an organization or an institution; none of those things will accomplish it. A family is not a denomination, it's not a label, it's not an organization in the normal sense, it's not an institution. But a family is a family because it has a shared life-source.

Secondly, out of that we have certain vital basic relationships in two directions: vertical and horizontal. The vertical relationship is the relationship that each of us has to God as Father. The horizontal relationship is the relationship we all have to one another as brothers, as members of the same family. Now the vertical is primary. It's our relationship to God the Father that gives us the horizontal relationship to one another as brothers. But nevertheless, the horizontal inevitably goes with the vertical. We cannot claim to be God's sons if we do not acknowledge His other sons as our brothers. These two relationships, the vertical and the horizontal, within the family of God are beautifully exemplified

by the pattern prayer which Jesus gave His disciples and told them that was how they ought to pray, the prayer that we usually call the Lord's prayer. In Matthew 6:9, this is what Jesus says to His disciples:

> "This is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.'" (NIV)

Two very important words right at the beginning—and in the Greek, for reasons that are difficult to explain if you don't know Greek, the order is the other way around. It is, "Father, our." So the first word is "Father." That's the decisive word. Jesus says, "Remember, through me you become children of God—always approach Him as your father. Don't come to Him just as God, because He's everybody's God, but He's your father as well as your God."

And secondly, the word "our," our father. Not my father, but our father. What does that mean? "God, I come to you as father, and in doing so I acknowledge you have many other children. I'm not your only child. And all those other children are my brothers and sisters." It rules out selfishness and self-centeredness. See how much there is in those two simple introductory words to the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father."

What are the practical results of this approach to God as our Father? Well, first of all, we know we have acceptance. We are not aliens, we're not strangers, we're part of the family. We don't come as beggars, we come as children. Secondly, we must accept our fellow believers just as Jesus accepted us because God called us His sons. We have to accept our fellow believers for the same reason, because God calls them also, His sons. Somebody said once, "You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family." God has made that choice for us. We have to accept one another.

All right, each time I'm giving a twofold application. First of all, what is the essential feature of the picture; secondly, what is required of us particularly in this picture. Well, I think I've said already, quite clearly, that the essential feature of this picture is a shared life-source. God our Father, in heaven, is the life-source of his whole family. And we all share a common life. That's what binds us together. Not denominations or doctrine or labels, but a shared life-source.

What's required of us? I think I've explained that, too, but I'll say it once more, it's mutual acceptance. We have to accept one another as brothers and sisters because God has accepted us.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be speaking about the fifth picture.

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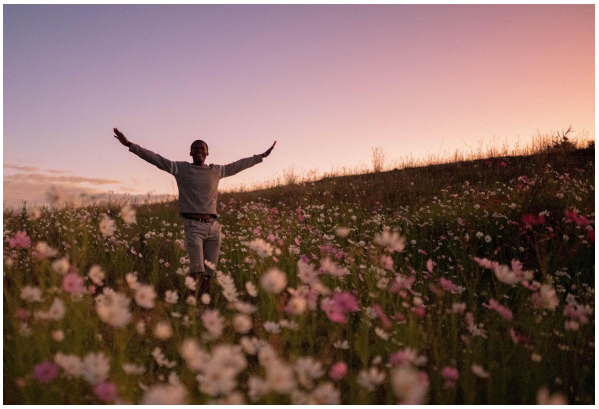

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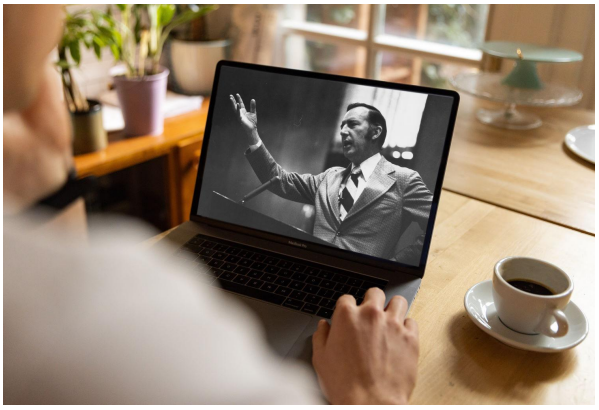

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