

LESSON 16

GREAT BIBLE THEMES

GOD'S FAMILY

For our lesson today we want to study another way of thinking about the relationship that exists between God and His people. We have previously thought of Christ as a king ruling over the citizens of his kingdom, of the citizens of this kingdom being a church or "called out" group, and in our last lesson we noticed the New Testament use of the statement that Christ is head of the body, the church, and some of the relationships suggested by this. Today we want to notice a number of ideas from the Bible centering around the teaching that God's people constitute a family. We could refer to it as the family of God.

Please do not lose sight of the fact stressed in our previous study that God had some great plans for us. These plans were gradually revealed by the Old Testament prophets and became a reality after Jesus gave his life on the cross and ascended into heaven. These plans called for a kingdom, or church, or body of believers with Jesus as head.

You may be able to anticipate many of the points we plan to study. Would you enjoy thinking about the answers given in the Bible to the following questions before we look for them?

1. Can you give several passages that refer to God's family or household?

2. There are many terms that we commonly use today that arise out of this relationship. Give several of these.
3. Children are born into our families. Does the Bible also refer to being born into God's family. Give several ideas about this birth.
4. What ideas about growth are suggested by a consideration of God's people constituting a family?

LET US LOOK TO THE BIBLE FOR OUR ANSWERS

In the first place we want to notice that the Old Testament prophets foretold of the establishment of God's house. See Isaiah 2:2-3, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain _____ shall be _____ in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and _____ shall _____. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the _____ of the _____ of Jacob." We should notice that this house was to be an exalted house into which all nations would come.

Is this house definitely identified with the church of the New Testament? Notice 1 Timothy 3:14-15 for an answer to this question. "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly, but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the _____ which is the _____ the _____ and _____ of the _____."

In addition to answering our question, we have a very fundamental truth set forth in the last expression of this verse. It was God's plan that his house would be the very _____ and _____ of the truth. Does this suggest that the church is the very support and foundation of God's revealed truth?

In the second chapter of Ephesians, Paul discussed the fact that the Gentiles were before this time (verse 12) ". . . without Christ, being _____ from the commonwealth of Israel, and _____ from the covenants of promise, having no _____, and _____ in the world." He continued by calling attention to the fact that they had been brought to God through the blood of Christ and that they and the Jews were now one body in Christ. Now notice verses 19-20. "Now therefore ye are no more _____ and _____, but _____ with the saints, and of the _____; And are built upon the foundation of the _____ and _____, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." Would it be correct to say that the household of God is made up of Jews and Gentiles who had been separated previously? Look what a substantial foundation it has because it is built upon the _____ and _____ with _____ being its chief corner stone. Notice especially that the Jews and Gentiles who are followers of Christ constitute a household of God. Does this suggest the same idea as a family of God?

Many other references could be given to show that the Bible does refer to God's people as a house or household, and that this is definitely identified with the church or kingdom. How many

commonly used terms can you give that have their origin in this family relationship? One such term is used in each of the following references: **2 Peter 3:15, And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; (AKJV); 1 Peter 5:12, By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand. (AKJV); James 1:9, Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: (AKJV); Philippians 2:25, Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. (AKJV)** and in many other places. This term is _____. This very frequently used term suggest a very close relationship that exists between members of a family. Another term that is similar to this one is used in each of these references: **Romans 12:10, Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; (AKJV); 1 Thessalonians 4:9, But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. (AKJV); and Hebrews 13:1, Let brotherly love continue. (AKJV)** It is _____.

We could speak of becoming citizens of God's kingdom or of being added by the Lord to others who have been called out of the world to serve God, that makes us the church, or of being baptized into the body of Christ, but what term would be appropriate to designate the way that people get to be members of a family? Notice the statement that Jesus made to Nicodemus early in his personal ministry. This is found in John 3:3. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee,

Except a man be _____, he cannot see _____." Nicodemus did not understand how a man could literally be born again. See verse 5 also. "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be _____ of _____ and of the _____, he cannot _____ into the _____." If we had no further information, we might not understand any more about being born again than did Nicodemus. Other passages tell us more about this new birth. Before we notice these, however, we should recall that during the personal ministry of Jesus he was making preparation for the time when God's plans for redeeming the people through his blood would become a reality. He was not admitting them to his kingdom at the time of this conversation with Nicodemus because the kingdom was not established until several years later as we have seen in previous lessons.

Let us look to other passages for some help on this subject of the new birth of which Jesus spoke. Notice first, 1 Peter 1:22-23, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; Being _____, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the _____, which liveth and abideth forever." We see then that the new birth is brought about by a living seed and that seed is _____. The term "incorruptible" means "not subject to decay". So we may think of the word of God as seed that always has the power of life in it because it will never decay. Would this mean that the words that brought salvation to people in the New Testament times could bring salvation to day on the same terms or could we consider it as a dead letter or message?

When Jesus was using parables to explain the nature of his kingdom, he also referred to the word of God as a seed planted in the hearts of the people of the earth. If you are not quite familiar with this parable you will enjoy reading it in **Luke 8:4-15, And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience. (AKJV)** We have referred to it

previously. In it Jesus pictures a man who sowed his seed in four types of soil. In explaining it he said that these represent four types of hearts into which the word of God fell. In some hearts it was not allowed to remain there to grow, in others it started to grow, but was choked out by the cares of this world, in still others it was received into good and honest hearts and grew to produce fruit. What does this teach us about the process of the new birth? Would it be correct to say that the new birth is brought about by planting in our hearts the word of God, which, if it is allowed to grow, will make of us new creatures in God's sight?

With this thought in mind, we want to look to several other expressions that suggests a new birth. First, let us examine 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be _____, he is a _____: old things are passed away: behold, all things are become _____." The expression "in Christ" refers to being in the spiritual body of Christ which is the church, as we noticed in our last lesson. According to the statement in this verse anyone who is in Christ is a new creature. We are also told how people come into the body of Christ. Notice Galatians 3:26-27 at this point. "For ye are all the _____ of God by _____ in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been _____ into _____ have put on Christ." Would it be correct to say that we become children of God through faith in God and through obedience to Christ in baptism?

Notice also how Paul related these things in his letter to the Christians at Rome. Romans 6:4, "Therefore we are buried with him by _____ into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the _____, by the _____ of the _____, even so we also should _____ in

_____ of _____." Does this last expression "newness of life" suggest the same idea of being born again or being a new creature? Did Paul also associate the act of baptism with walking in newness of life?

It is normal for parents to expect their children to grow and develop. God also expects growth from his children. 1 Peter 2:1-2, "Wherefore laying aside all _____, and all _____, and _____, and envies, and all evil speakings, As _____ desire the sincere

_____, that ye may _____ thereby." The earthly parent cares for his children and tries to give them the very best gifts. Notice that God also exercises the greatest care for his children. Matthew 7:11, "If ye then, being evil, know how to _____ unto _____, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven _____ to them _____?"

God wanted his children to help all men when it is possible to do so. Notice the special obligation in this respect given in Galatians 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us _____, especially unto them who _____."

Here is another lesson from God's word that is based upon the idea of a family relationship. That is, every child at times needs correction. The parent gives correction and punishment because he loves his children and wants them to always do the right thing and grow into honest upright citizens. Is this same idea set forth

regarding God and his family? For our answer let us look to Hebrews 12:5-7, "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto _____, My _____, despise not thou the _____ _____, nor faint when thou art _____ of him. For whom the Lord _____ he _____, and _____ every _____ whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with _____; for what son is he whom the _____ chasteneth not?" Would we expect to be corrected and chastened by the Lord today? Just what form this might take is beyond our power to know. Can we take the rebukes of life with a smile and assurance that such rebukes come our way because the Lord loves us?

This relationship that we sustain to God makes it possible for each of us to bow before him and in a very real sense call upon him as (Matthew 6:9) "Our _____."

The love of the parents for their children is also suggestive of God's love for his household. Notice how this is expressed in 1 John 3:1, "Behold, what _____ the _____ hath _____ upon _____, that we should be _____."

The term "behold" means to stop to think about, or consider. Does the verse above suggest that we stop to consider the greatness of God's love in making it possible for us to be members of his spiritual family?

We trust that this may be an introduction to a study of God's family and the blessings of membership in it.

TEST

1. This lesson deals with God's people as: (a) strangers to one another, (b) a family, (c) aliens, (d) foreigners.

2. The House of God in our lesson today was: (a) the Jewish temple, (b) heaven, (c) the tabernacle, (d) the church.

3. The chief corner stone of this house is: (a) Jesus Christ, (b) Peter, (c) John, (d) Abraham. _____
4. God's children are to do good especially to: (a) all men, (b) household of faith, (c) our enemies, (d) our relatives. All these answers are true, but only one is entirely correct.

5. In this family, its members are spoken of as: (a) brothers, (b) sons, (c) strangers, (d) children. Which is not correct?

6. God never chastens or punishes the members of His family. (True or False) _____
7. The new birth is by: (a) faith only, (b) grace only, (c) water and spirit, (d) an inner feeling. _____
8. Peter teaches that the new birth is made possible by: (a) by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, (b) through our own prayers, (c) by the word of God, (d) by appealing to our emotions. _____

9. (a) Those not born of the water and of the spirit can enter the kingdom of God, (b) Those born of the water and the spirit can enter the kingdom of God, (c) Those born of water can enter the kingdom of God, (d) Those born of the spirit can enter the kingdom of God. _____
10. In Galatians 3:26-27 and Romans 6:4 we learn that one is a new creature who is (in, not in) Christ.

Score: 10 points for each correct answer _____

Correct answers for questions in lesson 15:

1. (does)
2. (b)
3. (a)
4. (true)
5. (d)
6. (c)
7. (no)
8. (d)
9. (true)
10. (a)

List below others interested in taking this course.