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Rediscovering the Plan for God's Family



by Dr. Barbara Loach

As a professor, I am always interested in meeting the parents of my students when they come for a visit. Perhaps “intrigued” would be a better word because I’m always curious to see which parent the student resembles more. Most times the physical similarities are readily apparent, and sometimes they are remarkable! At times, certain mannerisms, personal characteristics, and even family values reveal their source as I have time to observe parents interacting with their offspring.

Obviously this illustration has a spiritual application. As children of our heavenly Father, we should be concerned about how strongly the “family resemblance” is displayed in our lives. But sometimes we have only a vague notion of what that resemblance entails. We know, for example, that “God is love,” so of course we should love as well. But what other family traits should form a part of our identity as God’s own children?

In the Gospels, a common theme that recurs is Jesus’ relationship with His Father. What can we learn from the relationship modeled between Jesus and His Father that can help us grow in resemblance to our heavenly Father? Obviously, many of the claims made by Jesus refer to His deity, equality, and oneness with the Father. But there are other assertions made by Jesus that are meant for us to follow. Of those assertions, this article will focus on four principles which describe how we should conduct ourselves as God’s children. Each principle is a challenge to live a life that sets us apart from the rest of the world.

Relationship Implies O b e d i e n c e

In Matthew 12 (see also Mark 3:31-35 and Luke 8:19-21), we have an illustration of the first principle. In verses 46-50, Jesus is talking to a crowd while His mother and brothers are standing outside waiting to talk to Him. When someone points this out, Jesus responds by saying, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” He then points to His disciples and says, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” Jesus isn’t denying the relationship He has with His earthly family, but is taking advantage of the situation to help people understand what it means to be a part of God’s family. The passage in Luke is even clearer because it adds another remark made by Jesus: “My mother and brothers are *those who hear God’s Word and put it into practice*” (emphasis added). As one of Jesus’ disciples, James, would later write, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22). We cannot honestly call ourselves God’s children if we only listen to the Word occasionally and never put it into practice in our lives.

Relationship Implies R i g h t e o u s n e s s

In the next passage, Matthew 13, Jesus tells a series of parables, including the parable of the wheat and the weeds. In this parable, the good seed (children of God) and the weeds (children of the devil) grow together in the same field until harvesttime. At that time the weeds are pulled out and burned; but of the good seed, Jesus says,



“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (verse 43). According to the parable, both the landowner and the servants can distinguish between the wheat and the weeds, but allow them to grow together until the time and the plants are ripe. As we live in this world, anyone should be able to distinguish us from the children of the evil one by the lives we live. The idea of shining like the sun is found in other verses such as Proverbs 4:18, “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the



full light of day,” and Ephesians 5:8b-9, “Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth).” If we choose to compromise our standards or if we’re drawn to imitate the world and its values, that light becomes dim. Or, returning to the parable of the plants, our lives become as useless as weeds. Righteous, holy living becomes children of the heavenly Father.

Relationship Implies R e c o n c i l i a t i o n

In Matthew 6:14-15 (see also Matthew 18:35 and Mark 11:25-26), the family characteristic presented describes our relationship with our “siblings”—the need to forgive others, to release them from their debts against us. The passages mentioned are forceful in their insistence that we must forgive others, especially if we expect God to hear us when we pray. We have no right to hold something against one of our brothers in light of the tremendous debt God has forgiven us through Christ. Family unity is clearly the characteristic that sets us apart from the world: Jesus declares



in John 13:35, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” How can we expect to reconcile others to God if we are not willing to be reconciled to one another?

Relationship Implies Compassion

As Jesus addresses His disciples and the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount, He summarizes in one phrase the plan God has for His family: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). Sounds like a tall order! According to Vine’s Dictionary, the word “perfect” as it describes God refers to His goodness without reference to development or maturity; but as it describes people, it implies people who are fully grown, mature, or complete. God’s desire for His children is that they would mature to become more like Him. Interestingly, that same verse in Luke 6:36 is expressed as “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” The idea of being merciful involves feeling pity towards someone in distress and acting on that person’s behalf, taking steps to remedy that distress—obviously, that is exactly what God did for us in sending His Son to die for us. The challenge for us is to

develop the maturity to readily exercise mercy towards others, having compassion on those around us who are in need, and taking steps to meet both the immediate and eternal needs they might have, rather than turning away in apathy or rejection.

How’s Your Family Resemblance?

Sometimes, upon seeing his or her child achieve some goal or display some positive quality, a parent will

make the remark, “That’s my boy!” or “That’s my girl!” At those times, the family resemblance becomes a special source of pride and pleasure for the parent. In the same way, we as God’s children can make a conscious choice each day to reflect clearly the family resemblance by our conduct and our words. By God’s grace we can be growing toward that goal of perfection, the maturity and completeness of reflecting the Father’s likeness in our lives. **T**



Dr. Barbara Loach, professor of Spanish, has been at Cedarville University since 1978. She earned her bachelor’s degree at Cedarville, her master’s degrees at Bowling Green State University and Wright State University, and her doctorate at The Ohio State University. When she’s not teaching about Hispanic literature and culture, she enjoys writing, working on projects around the house, gardening, and traveling. She is also active in her church, where she teaches the toddlers’ Sunday school class, and in local community outreach programs which teach English to immigrants.

