

11. Families of Faith (2Q 2019—Family Seasons)

Biblical material: John 1:12, 13; 3:7; Acts 10:1-28, 34, 35; 1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Thess. 5:21, 22; 1 John 5:1; Hebrews 12:1, 2.

Quotes

- When we blindly adopt a religion, a political system, a literary dogma, we become automatons. We cease to grow. *Anais Nin*
- Unthinking faith is a curious offering to be made to the creator of the human mind. *John A. Hutchinson*
- The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift. *Albert Einstein*
- A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*
- If you don't have solid beliefs, you cannot build a stable life. Beliefs are like the foundation of a building, and they are the foundation to build your life upon. *Alfred A. Montapert*

Questions

How do we become “born of God”? How do we go beyond our culture to rightly represent God to the world? Why is it important to think about what we believe and why? How can we be sure we have the right beliefs? What do we really worship, and how do we know? What does it mean “to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified”?

Bible summary

This lesson is about culture and change, and the consequent impact on the family of God. Above all it directs us to think about what we believe. The story of Cornelius in Acts 10 is taken to mean many things—diet, uncleanness, evangelism, cultural issues and so on. But at its heart it is a story of how God challenges our most basic beliefs, and reveals that we can make some completely unwarranted presuppositions. For Peter, the whole idea of going to the Gentiles with the gospel message was literally as impossible as eating the worst of unclean animals. The vision of the sheet full of inedible animals that he is told to kill and eat is a dramatic way of God facing us with our taboos and blind spots. It has nothing to do with the appropriateness of eating slugs!

God often has to work with us within the family of God to help us realize that all belong to it. As one Catholic textbook put it, “Jesus died for everyone, not just the people you know and like!” We need to see the totality of God’s family, and not be exclusive in any way. This means thinking beyond our world, and seeing ourselves as part of God’s family spread throughout the universe. This helps us understand our position, even if we have a special role as a spectacle to the universe.

I Thessalonians 5:21 (NIV) tells us “Test everything. Hold on to the good.” How do we do this? How do we examine what we believe so we can know what is really true,

and what is our conditioning and presuppositions. Often Christians believe because they think such beliefs are part of the faith, only to find out on further examination that it is not so. We can think of many beliefs held by the wide body of Christianity that are not really as stated. If this is so, what are we believing that could be wrong? It is so important not to accept someone else's word for it, but to examine the truth about God for ourselves.

Comment

How do we really establish “families of faith” without sounding pretentiously pious? God's use of “family imagery” tells us both about God and how we are to view family. Surely the two aspects are most important, for God is not trying to relate to us in a distant way, but in the most intimate of personal relationships. He wants to be a loving husband, a caring bridegroom, a concerned father, a protective mother, one who sticks closer than a brother...

But by the simple use of pictures of family, does God tell us how families should be? We do not seem to get the concept of a perfect family in the all-too-human stories of the Bible. Rather we have deceptive Jacob and proud Absalom and multiple-wived Solomon. It is almost as if many of the Bible families are lessons in *not* how to produce good families. Sadly we do not get God's comment on the Bible situations—we have to decide for ourselves who made the right decisions and who is a good example!

We may agree that to have a good family life is a good thing, but how? Once again the Bible does not give us a precise recipe, but it does provide the recommendations that include all the Christian virtues—honesty, truthfulness, right-doing, caring, loving etc. And most of all, the Godward connection that is all-important—for without God at the center of the family, there can be little chance of success. The fact that even the best families come apart should not dismay us, because even God's family “came apart”—all due to the God-given ability to choose. So though we may do our best, families are made up of more than one person, and neither us nor God can “make” things work out. We can only operate from true principles and like God seek to win through demonstration. That's what is happening here, and is being continually demonstrated to the universe. As we make family, may we find the joy of following God's example and show the kind of people we truly are—for the good.

Ellen White Comments

Precious light has come, appropriate for this time. It is Bible truth, showing the perils that are right upon us. This light should lead us to a diligent study of the Scriptures and a most critical examination of the positions which we hold. God would have all the bearings and positions of truth thoroughly and perseveringly searched, with prayer and fasting. Believers are not to rest in suppositions and ill-defined ideas of what constitutes truth. Their faith must be firmly founded upon the word of God so that when the testing time shall come and they are brought before councils to answer for their faith they may be able to give a reason for the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear. {5T 708}

However long men may have entertained certain views, if they are not clearly sustained by the written word, they should be discarded. Those who sincerely desire truth will not be reluctant to lay open their positions for investigation and criticism, and will not be annoyed if their opinions and ideas are crossed. {CW 36.4}

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