

A Family Affair – 10/16/2011

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Relatively Speaking, so we're starting this 6-week series on relationships and relatives, taking a break from our study on the book of Colossians a little bit to look at this topic here. It's one that is relevant to all of us because we've all got relatives, Amen, and we all have relationships, and we all struggle to some degree in different ways with our relatives and with relationships. It's going to be a series that is relevant to everybody.

For some, it might be something like the fact that it can become home, and the first thing that Mom does is ask you, "Do you have a boyfriend?" or "Do you have a girlfriend?" or "What's wrong with you? How come you don't have a boyfriend? You're 35 years old and you don't have a girlfriend." Or maybe you have a parent that you're supposed to honor because the Bible says, "Honor your mother and father," but what if there's nothing honorable about them, or issues like that. Maybe that the guy you're dating says he is a Christian and a follower of Jesus but when you're dating he tries to push you too far. Or maybe it's the spouse you can no longer trust, or the spouse you're having trouble just not despising. Maybe it's the child that's driving you absolutely crazy. Maybe it's the in-laws that think it's their job to tell you how to raise the child that's driving you crazy. Or the parent who sticks in his/her nose where it doesn't belong or the parent who won't acknowledge that you're no longer 13. I mean, all these kinds of relationships with relatives, those kinds of question, and that's what we're going to be dealing with in this series. I think this is one of the most practical series we've ever done.

But we're not just going to look at how to do things or how to resolve marriage problems and things like that. We will address those, but this is what we do too often: The church sort of accepts the common-sense, natural way of looking at a problem whether it is marriage, in-laws, or whatever. And then we say, "How does Jesus fit into the problem?" But a better, more faithful Kingdom-way of looking at these issues is to say, "Is there a distinct Kingdom-way of even defining the problem?" Because how you frame an issue completely terms the kind of questions you ask and the kind of answers you get. So, rather than packing Jesus into what's already there, we want to ask more fundamentally, "Is there a Kingdom-perspective on what is there?" And that's what we're going to be doing in this message. This series is going to be very, very practical, but this message today is going to be pretty intensely theological, and it's going to require cerebrum matter working overtime, so pay attention.

I'm going to give you a scripture. I think I'm going to set a record here for the amount of scripture I packed into a 35-minute sermon. So, if you're taking notes, prepare to write fast, and if you want to download this message and get the scriptures that we're going to be giving, I'll go over it the second time. I'm entitling this message as "A Family Affair." And if you understand what that refers to or what that is in reference to, then you're over 50. Do you know what it refers to? (GREG SINGS: *It's a Family Affair.... It's a Family Affair.*) By Sly and the Family Stone. Sly, by the way, I just read this week, is like out on the streets and he's homeless. He used to be a millionaire and famous. Now he's just a drug-addicted guy living out of his van. It's very, very sad. Stay away from drugs because it's not good, and that's my main message. We're saying it's a bad thing.

So, "It's a Family Affair." We're going to be looking at what it looks like to be in the Kingdom and be part of his family. Pray with me here for a moment as we ask God's anointing on this message.

Father, I just thank you for every person in this auditorium listening through Podcasts plus our Pod-rishioners. Bless those who are watching through television and, God, I just pray, we just pray that you'd make this a Kingdom-moment. Infuse this message with your spirit and your authority, and help us to fundamentally see the world through the lens of the Kingdom, not just have you as a footnote to what's already there, but to fundamentally change the way we think about things and change our hearts and change our minds. Holy Spirit, only you can do that. So we surrender this word to you. In Jesus' name, and all God's people said, Amen!

So, to have a Kingdom-perspective on our relationship and relative issues, that's what we're talking about here today. To have a Kingdom-perspective on this, we need to first understand something about the nature of the family in the First Century. Really, the ancient world, in general. In traditional cultures up to modern times, pre-modern cultures, generally speaking, this is particularly true in the First Century Judaism, they had what you would call a Patriarchal Structure to the family because it's all centered on the patriarch, THE FATHER. And this, by the way, isn't supposed to be at all but I'm describing it in the way it was, because this was presupposed when the Bible uses "Family-language" so we need to understand it. It was all defined by the father.

The family was the bloodline of the father, and you were first and foremost a child of your father. That was the thing that defined you most. You were the child of your father before you were the wife of somebody or the husband of somebody or the parent of somebody. You were the child of your father, and that father had complete authority over the family line. Generally

speaking, as long as the father was alive, he was the boss. And even when sons would form their own families, they were still under the authority of the eldest father. The best way, or the easiest way to think about this is sort of like “The Godfather.” Have you seen the movie “The Godfather?” The father is the eldest guy. He’s the boss. And he is the one to be brought in when there are major decisions to be made. You don’t get married without the approval of the eldest father. You don’t enter business transactions without the approval of the eldest father. Conflicts are resolved by bringing them, if the need be, to the father. He’s the authority over all this. In fact, in the ancient world, the father was even the authority on religious matters. You didn’t get to choose what you believe. You believe whatever the father told you to believe. His faith was the faith of the whole family, and if he changed the religion, everybody changed religion. That’s how it worked.

That’s why, for example, in Acts 16 you have Paul preaching to this Philippian jailer, and he says, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. You and your household.” The household would include his wife, his kids, if there are servants around, then them as well. And we would in our individualistic perspectives ask the question, “Well how does Paul know that the wife would choose to believe or that the kids are going to choose to believe?” And the answer to that is he would know that because that’s the way things worked then. If this guy is the head of the household, when he changes, everybody changes. The family is defined by the father, and the father has complete authority over the family descendants – the Lineage. It was also understood that all of the members of this family have a responsibility. Actually, there are three of them.

First, their responsibility is to bring honor to the father, to live and conduct themselves in a way that his reputation is held in a high esteem, and to honor the family because the family seems to be an extension of the father. So they have to honor the father. They understood that they had to carry out the will of the father. You can’t just do your own thing and call your own shots. Your job as the child of the father is to do the will of the father. And they understood that.

Second, it was their responsibility to propagate the family, they have to expand the family to carry on the family name. And so, when wives, when women would marry into the family, there was tremendous pressure on them to bear the family name. And so this was responsibility of all the family members in the ancient world.

The final thing is this: Third, it was understood in the ancient world that your ultimate allegiance is to your father and, therefore, to the family. Your ultimate allegiance. This was, in fact, seen as the most foundational piece of ancient society. This is what held it all together

that the strongest bond that holds society together in the ancient world was believed to be the family, allegiance to the father. And, if there's any conflict of interest, you always side with the father and the family. You side with the father and your family before you side with your spouse. You side with the father and your family before you side with the siblings of whatever family you married into. The ultimate allegiance is to the father and to his family. Now, when we read the Bible, we've got to keep that in mind. And when we read the Bible through the lens of the traditional patriarchal family, we can see here that it really adds significance and meaning to what we read.

In the Bible, we find in the New Testament that God is our Father and we are his children. We need to understand it within this framework. God is our Father and we are his children. That's not just metaphors or poetries that God is like a Father to us and we are like his children. In a real sense, not a biological sense, of course, we are children of our Father. So it says in John, for example, it says:

(John 1:12-13) "To all who did receive him, to all who believed his name, he gave them the right to become the children of God. These are children born not of human descent nor of natural decision or husband's will, but born of God."

When we put our trust in God, believe in his name and his character, and surrender our lives to him, we are born of him. Something really happens, and this isn't a metaphor portrait. We are born of him. He becomes in a unique way our father, and we become in a unique way his children. Metaphysically, ontologically, in reality. There's a change that happens. God is, in a general sense, the Father of all because he's the creator of all. And all human beings, in a general sense, are his children because he created them. But when we trust in Jesus Christ and submit to the Father's will, something changes. He's now Father in a unique way, and we're children in a unique way.

Paul, I think, captures a little bit of what this change is like when he tells us that when we believe we receive the spirit. And the spirit we receive does not make us slaves so that you fear. The spirit that is within us when we submit to him, it doesn't make us slaves. We're living in this idea that we're living in fear of him. There's no place for fear in the Kingdom of God. Reverence, yes! But no place for fear. The spirit does not make us slaves to live in fear but, instead, the spirit you receive brought about your adoption to sonship. We're brought into the family of God. We've been adopted. That's why we have the right to be called the children of God. And by him we cry Abba Father!

Now, the word Abba is an Aramaic word. It's a term of endearment. It can be translated as "Dad" or "Daddy." And so when we submit to God and the spirit of God is within us, the impulse in us through the spirit is to cry out to God not as the creator that judges that we live in fear or we'll be damned, but rather to say "Dad!" We're now his children in a dear sense, and he's our Father in a dear sense. This is Abba/Dad kind of a relationship that we have with him. There's something that changed when we submitted to our Father. There's a new relationship, a new reality that is there.

Jesus discussed this when he was talking to Nicodemus in John Chapter 3. And he said:

(John 3:5) "Truly I tell you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being borne of water and of spirit. The flesh gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit."

They shouldn't be surprised when I say you must be born again. Now, this phrase "Born-again" that we often use, the "Born-again Christian," that kind of concept, it literally has the connotation of being born from above. It also means being born-again, but the emphasis is "being born from above." And so what Jesus is saying here is that to enter into the Kingdom of God, the reign of God, that's what the Kingdom of God is, wherever he is ruling, that's his Kingdom and the domain over which he is King, and to come into that it means you need to be borne from above. There's a birth that happens here. And, as you are born from above, you take on the characteristics of the father, the one that we're born from.

It's like this. We're born of flesh, and if we are born of flesh, we inherit the identity and our basic make-up from our parents. Right? They pass on their DNA to us. They pass on their likeness to us. So the basic way and the basic shape of our bodies and our basic personalities, they're all part of the genes we inherit from our parents. We inherit a likeness from them as being born of flesh. So, also, when we are born of spirit, God has it where he passes on his DNA to us. We're birthed by him so we inherit his DNA, we inherit his likeness. To be born from above means the character of God now is birthed inside of us. It's birthed in our spirit. The spirit is the innermost part of us. It's our core identity. It's our core nature. What Jesus is saying here is that you're born of flesh, so you inherit DNA from your parents, but you're also born of the spirit, born from above, and so now you inherit the likeness of our Father. We have within us, at the core of our being, the impulse now to cry out "Daddy." We have an impulse to live like God and to manifest his DNA we have within us. This is who we are. This is our core identity when we are born from above. We have within us the impulse and the power to live holy like God, to love like God, to forgive like God, and to have a peace like God, a peace that surpasses all human understanding.

You have within you the spirit of God, this river of living water. You have within you that spirit of the King himself. That's who we are. That's our core identity. We are born of the spirit. Now, maybe you are sitting here listening to me or maybe you're a Pod-rishioner jogging while listening to me, and you're thinking to yourself, "Man! I submit to God, and I believe in Jesus, but I don't feel I look like God. I feel like I act like God, I love like God, and I forgive like God but, in fact, I feel grouchy sometimes. I wake up in the morning just like a bear. Sometimes I'm judgmental and sometimes I just fall into temptation, sometimes, blah, blah, blah. I got you!

So how can I be a child of God? How can this be true about me? I'm born of God, but I look and feel pretty much like a sinner. You see, here's the thing. The spirit gives birth to spirit and the spirit is the innermost part. But we're not just spirit. We're spirit, soul, and body. And while the spirit now is infused with the character of God, a new identity, a new reality, right, while that is what we truly are, our brains, our psyche, which in Greek is our soul, are still patterned after the flesh. And so we got this new identity of who we really are but our flesh thinking and our flesh body go on as they were before. So there's a conflict in us. Here God says, "You're my child. You're holy. You're righteous. You're blameless. You love like me. You forgive like me, and you have a peace like me."

But the identity that we have inherited from the pattern of this world, the identity that we live in and experience is maybe one that we got from our parents or the media, and it tells us we don't have any worth! We don't have any worth unless we perform, accomplish, and achieve things. Or our worth is found on how we sexually gratify, males. Or our worth is found in how pretty we are, smart we are, or whatever. But God is saying to us, "No! Who you really are is you have a worth that doesn't depend on what you accomplish, and you have a worth that doesn't depend on what men think about you. You have a worth that doesn't depend on what your parents think about you. You have a worth because you are my child. You have a right to be called the child of God. You have a worth that surpasses and an identity that's beautiful and righteous. You look like me because you're in my likeness."

So there is conflict here. And so the center of discipleship, this is, what we're called to do, is knowing who we truly are. We're to take our every thought captive to Jesus Christ, knowing who we truly are, to get our brains lined up with that truth. That's why Paul says:

(Romans 12:2) "Don't be conformed to the pattern of the world any longer, the pattern that you inherited from the flesh."

The pattern of lies in this fallen world. The pattern that's in your brain. The crap that's there. The pollution that's there. No! Don't be conformed to that any longer. You think that way,

and you act that way, but you'd rather be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Know who you are. You're a child of God, and he's your Abba Father. You're his precious child. You've inherited from him his likeness. Know that. Live that. Think that. Breathe that. As we do, we put on, more and more display the DNA of our Father in heaven.

But know this! We are not to be transformed to become holy and look more like God so that we'll be a child of God. You don't grow into being a child of God. Rather, you're a child of God, therefore, you start to be transformed into his likeness. My kids, you know, they don't have to act a certain way to be my kids. They're my kids. So I hope that they act in a certain way. It's like you're a boy. You don't do this! You're a boy. Come on! You inherited a boy-gene and this is what boy-genes do. But since you're a kid, that's why it's not your nature to act that way, so stop acting against you're nature. But it's not the case. I say, listen, if you behave a certain way and act a certain way, then you'd be my child. No! No! No! No! No! No! So also, God gives us the new birth upfront. Praise God! We don't transform our way into the Kingdom. No! We transform because we're in the Kingdom, and so you are a child of God first.

You may not look like and think like it all the time. You may not feel like that all the time. But you've got to know that you have that if you submitted your life to Christ genuinely and believe and trust in him genuinely then you're a child of God born from on high and the spirit of God is within you. I love the way John gives back the same point. He says:

"We are the children of God." God calls us his children. "See what great love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God"

Why? Because that is what we are. God, I'm thinking, usually gets things right. Would you agree with me on that? He's not wrong very often. He's never wrong. So, if he calls us children of God, it's because we are, in fact, children of God. So, dear friends, now we are children of God. Now we are, already we are, children of God. And what we will be has not yet been made known. Or it could be as a sense of how we will appear. We don't yet know. But we do know this, that when Christ appears, we will be like him. We shall see him as he is.

What we're getting is that you are a child of God. You've been born from a-high. You've been born from above. You've inherited the Father's DNA, that's why God calls you that because you are that. Now, it doesn't look like that, now, all the time. We can't even begin to imagine what we're going to look like when God wraps up this show. But we do know this, that we're going to look like him. We've got the same DNA that he has and so, when he appears, we're going to see him as he is. Even right now we see through glasses of darkness, and we're wrestling with the flesh. But in the end, we're going to see him as he is because we shall be like him. When

we get all the mud in the image of God and the children of God, all covered up with the mud and slime and sin and wounds and the pain and the scars and the callouses, covering it all up, man, someday, those things are going to be melted away by the love of God. Someday the wounds are going to be healed. Someday the scars are going to be gone. Praise God! And then we're going to see him as he really is. And we're going to be like him. We're going to shine like the new day's sun, like Jesus displaying the glory of God on the Mount of Transfiguration. Someday we're going to shine like that, radiate the DNA of Abba Father like that. We're going to need sunglasses just to look at one another because we're going to be so bright. It's going to be beautiful.

But even now we are already children of God, and our job is to be moving in that direction, to be thinking in accordance with truth, to begin to let the mud begin to fall off us. To look like, to live like and love like, more and more, the way our Father loves us and putting on his display of DNA. He is Father, and we are his children. We need to understand that within the Patriarchal Framework of the First Century. But, if we have a common Abba Father, talking about all that submitted their lives to Christ, if we have a common Abba Father and a common DNA, what does that make us? It makes us family. It makes us brothers and sisters. A family is defined by the bloodline of the Father. And, in this case, the family is defined by the "spiritual line" of the Father. In fact, this is often how the New Testament talks about the church.

And it's not speaking metaphorically. It's not like we're having a family. Oh, we're just like a family. No! We are a family, so we read this in the Book of Hebrews:

(Hebrews 2:11) Both the one who makes people holy," that's Christ, "and those who are made holy," that's us, "are of the same family."

We are family, and so Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. I love this! He's not ashamed of us. And we don't look and act all the time like brothers and sisters in Jesus, but we are because God calls us that, because we are that. We have his DNA and he is our ABBA Father. So Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. "He's my brother. She's my sister." And note, we are brothers and sisters in Jesus. This is so great! He's gone fully human. As fully God, he is our Lord. As fully human, he is our brother. He's got our DNA. When he came into this world and accepted the DNA of humanity, and now he puts on perfect display the DNA of the Father, and so he is our brother. In fact, he is the first one in the family who gets it right. He's the first one in this family who shows how the family is supposed to look, the first one in the family to display the perfect DNA of the Father.

That is why John could say that we could be like him. Why? Because we come from the same family. He's our brother. The Bible says he's the firstborn. He's the firstborn, and the firstborn manifests thoroughly what it looks like to be in the family of God. He is our brother, and he is the one who is making us holy, and he's not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. That's why in the New Testament, you may have noticed, that they always refer to each other as brothers and sisters. Brother this, sister that. They use that, and that's not just a term of having a cute way of referring to one another. That's because they understood that we are, in fact, brothers and sisters.

The first church, then, that came to Christ used to speak this way. They used to say "Brother Greg," "Brother Boyd," "Sister Shelley," "Brother Bob," "Sister Sue," and they always had their tag there. Even husbands and wives call each other brothers and sisters. That's how it happens in the New Testament. Paul refers to husbands and wives as brothers and sisters. And now that seems kind of hokey and corny, you know, and almost kind of cultish. But I think they were on to something. They were on to something because we are brothers and sisters, and maybe it's good for us to always remind ourselves of that. Whether you know the person or not, you're brothers and sisters. Now, I'm not going to come up with a rule about this that we've always got to call each other brother and sister, but why not? Would you agree with that? I mean, we're family, brothers and sisters. This is why in the New Testament Jesus is called, listen to this now, Jesus is called the second Adam, the new Adam or the second Adam, because he is the father of a new family or a new human race. See, the first Adam is the father of the first human family, and that family, as you know, the family of Adam, got pretty screwed up. That family lived in rebellion, came under a curse and under the bondage of the devil.

That family, the Adam family, "The Adam's Family," now there is a sermon title right there to get familiar...the Adam's Family... that's good! That's going to be a book someday. I can almost promise you that. That's a revelation from God right here, Adam's family!

Adam's family got screwed up! Adam's family came under a curse, came under a bondage, came under the footstool of the devil. The Adam's family got off corrupt. The DNA got corrupt to the point where we can't, Adam's Family can't, under our own power put on display the image of God. We've lost that capacity. We're just oppressed. So God's solution is say, okay, let's do overtime. So Jesus comes into this world as a new Adam. We're going to start from scratch again. And Jesus comes into this world, takes on our humanity, and now he's going to birth a new family. This is the Family of Christ. And God's goal is for the Family of Christ to infiltrate the Adam's family and to make all a part of the Family of Christ. This is a new family. It's got new DNA. It's born from above. See! The seed of this new family comes from above. It's got the character of God and the spirit of God. It's got an incorruptible seed. Adam's seed

got corrupted and screwed up. But this seed of the new family, it has got like built-in immunity to the devil. Praise God! That's why it is said in First Peter that we've been born again, but the second birth ceases with a perishable seed. That was Adam's family.

But the Christ's Family has an imperishable seed through the living and enduring Word of God. It's imperishable. Everybody say "Imperishable." See, the essence of what you have in your spirit, that seed, that reality in your spirit is imperishable, it's incorruptible, and it has got immunity to the devil, a built-in way of fighting it off. It can't be corrupted by him. Now, we also are in Adam's family. Right? We also inherit the flesh, and so we're vulnerable in a lot of other ways. But, in the core of our identity, praise God, we've got something that lasts forever and ever and ever and ever and ever because it's a birth from God who lasts forever and ever and ever and ever and ever, and it goes on and on. The Christ Family – this is a new family, a new race that's been born.

Some people think that Christianity has some sort of "tightening up" of what's already there. When, in fact, it's a complete subversion of what's already there to create a new thing. Paul gives us this new humanity in Ephesians, Chapter 2. He says this: "God's purpose..." He's talking here, by the way, of the division between Jews and Gentiles, which is the sort of paradigm of all divisions of Adam's family. Adam's family is all divided and divisions and power-babble stuff, and the conflict between the Jews and the Gentiles is the paradigm of all that. So Paul says this:

(Ephesians 2:14) God's purpose in Christ was to create in himself," look at this, "one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace."

He's tearing down the walls. Praise God! He's reversing babble because he's creating a new humanity that has the character of God on the inside and the character of God doesn't get corrupted and doesn't get divided the way the seed of Adam does.

And then four verses later says:

"Because of this, because of this new humanity, we're no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow-citizens with God's people," praise God, "and members of his household because we have inherited this birth from above and inherited the reign of God and inherited the character of God. We're now made compatible with citizens of the Kingdom of God."

This is our true citizenship. This is our true home. But more than that, that is belonging to a Kingdom. More than that, using this intimate term, we are now part of God's own household. We are family. We are family in the House of God having the same Abba Father, the same perfected elder brother, and now the same incorruptible seed, the incorruptible DNA that makes us family. Now, let's go a little deeper, still thinking about the paradigm of the Patriarchal Structure of the First Century, if we're all family, that means, of course, that we've got certain responsibilities. Right?

First responsibility: To honor our Father. So, as children of our Abba, as children of our "Dad", our first obligation is to honor our Dad and to bring honor to our family. To uphold the good reputation of Dad and his family, that's our first obligation. Honor our Father.

Second responsibility: To submit to our Father's will. Secondly, as children of Abba, we don't do our own thing or call our own shots. Our job is to carry out the will of Abba, the will of our Dad. And so, to submit everything to our Dad and carry out his will.

And third responsibility: To propagate the family. The third thing is to propagate the family. We're supposed to bear children and expand this family. Of course, that's not biological. It's spiritual. But there's this obligation to grow the family. And this is, in fact, what we find throughout the New Testament. This sums up kind of what it is to be in the Kingdom, the obligations of being in the Kingdom. For example, we see in the Lord's Prayer, "When you pray, pray this way." He's not saying always use this exact prayer, but that's okay! He's saying, "Pray with this theology. Pray with this mindset." So we are to pray "Our Father in heaven," Dad, Abba, "hallowed be your name on earth as it is in heaven." Look at this, "Hallowed be your name." That's simply saying, Dad, as your kids, we commit to keeping your honor and to keeping you holy. We commit to living in a way and conducting ourselves in a way that's going to bring honor to you and honor to our Father and honor to all about. So "Hallowed be your name," let your Kingdom come and your will be done. It's simply saying, Dad, we commit as your kids, to carry out your will. Not to do our own thing but to always be about your business and to make sure your will is being done. Because when your will is being done, that's when you reign. So let your Kingdom come, let the reign of God come that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We, as your kids, commit to doing that. It's the most fundamental job description. And then, thirdly, we commit to being the means that which your family grows, commit to bearing children.

And so Jesus, for example, the last words he says before he ascends into heaven, he says, "I want you guys to go to all the nations and make disciples." Note, he said, "Make disciples, not make believers." Making someone a believer and stopping there doesn't do a whole lot. The

Kingdom is not about people who believe the right things. The Kingdom of God is about people who have submitted because the reign of God is where he is King. If he's not King, then that's not the Kingdom. You come into the Kingdom when you submit, not when you believe certain things. But you've got to believe certain things in order to submit. But the point in being a disciple is when one is being disciplined. So make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, because baptism is the initiation ceremony of coming into the community, it's the marriage ceremony when you join the bride of Christ who is engaged to the heavenly groom. And then, "teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded," because it is so far in carrying out the Father's will and under the Father, in fact, as part of the family. So our job as Kingdom kids is to honor our Father, carry out his will, and have spiritual children. Share Christ! Live in a way that is inviting of people to come in and, eventually, having the spirit of God being born in their spirit, and they submit to God and carry out his will on earth as it is in heaven. So that's our responsibility as Kingdom kids.

Then, finally, and in some ways most importantly, and certainly most controversially, to be part of the family means that our ultimate allegiance is to Abba, which is Father. This is, in fact, one of the most scandalous aspects of Jesus' ministry. In the ancient world, the very foundation of society was understood to be this Patriarchal Family System. That's what held everything together. Your ultimate allegiance is to your father. Jesus comes along, and he says, "Nope! The ultimate allegiance is not to your earthly father but your heavenly Father, and your ultimate allegiance is not to your earthly family but to your heavenly family." And that was controversial. He was going at the most foundational aspect of society. He says, "Nope! This was one of the reasons I got crucified." It was radical! It was offensive back then, and it's going to be offensive today. So be ready to be offended, maybe. Listen to this! It comes all over the place from the gospel. He says things like this. At one point, he was teaching his disciples about the gospel, and his mother and brothers came to get him because they thought he was crazy. Jesus was saying, "No one knows God except for me and no one can go to God except through me." Stuff that would get you crucified. So his mother and brothers were concerned about this. They think he's nuts and someone comes to Jesus and says this, "Your mother and brothers," apparently his father already died at this point, "your mother and brothers are standing outside wanting to speak to you." And Jesus replied to him, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" For in his disciples he 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."

He just seriously ditched his mother and brothers. Today, that seems to be pretty rude. In the ancient world, that was just so offensive. But you see his first allegiance is to Abba Father and, therefore, to those who are about his business, the family of those who are born from the

father who seek to do his will. So anyone who does the will of God, well, that's like my brotherhood there and your sisterhood here. That's stronger in the Kingdom than it is biologically. He is putting the Family of God over the biological family. He says this all the time, and it's really controversial.

In Luke, Chapter 12, he says this:

"There are five in a family and divided against one another, three against two and two against three."

What he's saying there is this: When this message gets a footing in someone's heart and it comes to a family, two men agree and three don't. But the two that are part of the Family of God, now their ultimate allegiance is no longer to their earthly father, which really puts them outside the family. That's undermining! It's subversive to the core values of the ancient world. He's really saying that when people start aligning themselves to the Kingdom, their allegiance to the father and the father's family is such that it's going to blow apart some of the biological families.

The motif runs throughout the gospel. He says this in Matthew, Chapter 10:34:

"Do not suppose that I come to bring peace to this earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword."

Now, he doesn't mean a literal sword because he was against all sword wielding. He rebuked Peter for cutting off a guy's ear when that was the most justified act of self-defense there ever could be. So he was against violence, but he is using here a metaphor of division. And Jesus came to bring peace on earth. Mary in her magnificent, in her song in Luke, Chapter 2, he came to bring peace on earth eventually; but, to get there, that peace is going to be predicated on everyone having their ultimate allegiance on Abba and his family; but, to get there is going to be a whole lot of messy conflict along the way because you're going to have a conflict of ultimate allegiances. And, when the core conflict of ultimate allegiances will be between the biological family and the heavenly family, and then he says, here's what I mean, "A man will be against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter in law against her mother-in-law, your enemies will be the members of your own household." He's not saying he wants it this way. He's simply saying that's how it's going to be. Some will, ultimately, be giving their allegiance to their heavenly father and those whose allegiance are to their earthly father are going to be ditched. They're going to be offended. They're going to be mad at you. In fact, they may even begin to persecute you. In the ancient world and the early church, one of the

main things that the early church was known for or was accused of, and set on fire sometimes, was because they were undermining family values. They didn't respect the family. And how ironic.

In Luke 14, he says:

(Luke 14:26) "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even life itself, such a person cannot be my disciple."

Strong words. Again, Jesus isn't speaking literally here. He is using a lot of hyperbole, which is really common in the ancient world, especially in the Mediterranean culture. They use exaggerated language to state a point emphatically. Jesus tells us to honor our parents, and we're going to talk about that next week, so we can't hate them, and we're supposed to love everybody. Right? We were forbidden. We're not allowed to hate anybody. We are even to love, bless, and pray for those who are persecuting us and who are life threatening. So he doesn't mean literally, but he is saying this, "Our allegiance to Abba Father and his family has got to be greater than our allegiance to anything else that is, though, it is the difference of love and hate. You can't serve two masters, and you can't have two ultimate allegiances." And so what he is saying here is you align yourself with the Kingdom, to make the Father and his family the ultimate allegiance. Your ultimate allegiance can't be to your biological family, so coming into the Kingdom may cost you something. In fact, it may cost you everything! It may cost you your spouse. It may cost you your children. It may cost you your brothers and sisters. It may cost you your house, your reputation, your job, and all that you may have, and it may cost you life itself. But that's what it means to have ultimate allegiance to Abba and his family. And, if you're not willing to do that, then it's fine. Just go into the world and have your ultimate allegiances out there. But, if you want to be in the Kingdom of God, this is what you have to be willing to do and, throughout history, that has been required of people. So, folks, this is what it means to frame everything in the Kingdom. Our ultimate allegiance is to Abba and his family. As his kids, we commit to honoring the Father, fulfilling his will, and furthering his mission, and it means that our ultimate allegiance is there. And we need to frame everything, all of our relative-relationship stuff, and frame it in that context.

Now, I want to end by saying that I know that there are a lot of questions you probably have and the concerns that some of you have. I got that, and I understand that, and we'll be answering some of those throughout this series. I'll also respond to one concern that's very legitimate: This teaching has, at times, been viciously abused. Maybe some of you have been victims of that abuse. This is true of all truths. Any truth can be misused. The more power a truth has to transform people in a good way, in the wrong hands, it can be used to harm people

in an evil way. And so, this teaching, precisely because it's so powerful, if we learn to frame things in this framework, it changes everything. It is a game-changer. And it confronts some of the core values of our society. It confronts some of the core values of American Christianity. It's all powerful but, for this reason, it can be viciously abused, and it has been. For example, it has been misused by some who take this truth about the need for our ultimate allegiance towards the Father and his family and translate it to make people think that that means your ultimate allegiance has to be to me since I'm your preacher. Right? Or your ultimate allegiance has to be to this church because we're the ones who get it right. Or that your ultimate allegiance should be to this system of doctrine or to this denomination, so you've got to put me or this church before your family and this set of doctrines before your family. I just want to tell you that this teaching does not mean that. This teaching is saying that our ultimate allegiance is to Abba and his family. Seek first the Kingdom of God. But don't ever let anyone manipulate you into thinking that that can be translated to mean that your ultimate allegiance is to any person, any institution, or any set of doctrines. At that point, that's idolatry. It simply means this: If my sensual passion is to honor the Father and carry out his will for his family, then I will naturally align myself and develop relationships with others who have that passion because most people don't. So I would naturally align myself with that. That would be my family. But that's not something that's imposed on me. It's something that I naturally gravitate towards as this passion in me grows to seek first the Kingdom of God.

So don't let anyone manipulate you into idolatrous commitments. Another way that is sometimes abused, often abused, in fact, is you can spiritualize this and simply dump on your family. You've got pastors sometimes who, in the name of seeking first the Kingdom of God, they pour themselves in the church. They're workaholics, but they justify it by appealing to this teaching and then neglecting their wife and their kids. They're married to the church. Or it could be any worker or anybody who is serious about God but neglects his family, because you want to seek first the Kingdom of God.

Or it can be abused this way. I met a guy some years ago who was one of the God-chasers. There was a book that came out, The God Chasers, and he was one of them. I didn't know that God was running away; but, apparently, God, wait for me. Please, God, don't you walk so fast. Please, God, don't you walk so fast. Slow down, Dad, you're making me mad! I don't know where that came from! A.D.D. moment! There was a little shot of Elvis Presley in that, I guess.

So he was chasing after God and what it meant for him was this: Whenever there's a revival, Toronto or Pensacola or Brownsville, in any one of these revivals, he wanted to be there. Why? Because he wants God. He doesn't want his mediocre Christian stuff. He wants the radical Christian stuff where people turn to gold or angel dust falls down. So he chases after that. He

spends the family money on plane tickets going everywhere. Meanwhile, his wife and kids are back in a house being abandoned. She was about ready to divorce him. He counters that by saying, “She doesn’t get it because she’s just a mediocre Christian.” “I don’t want to be a radical.” She called me, and I got involved in this thing, and I’ll tell you what, I told him, “Knock it off! You’re being an idiot,” in subtle Christian language.

But here’s the thing. It’s true, and there’s no denying that in the Gospel, Abba Father and his family come first. Allegiance to God’s family trumps over allegiance to biological family. That’s true! We can’t deny that. We just read it. On the other hand, what’s also true is this: Abba Father says, first responsibility, take care of your family so that our allegiance to the King includes our family. Whether they’re believers or not, they’re our responsibility. Paul goes so far, and I love this verse, he goes so far to say this:

“Whoever doesn’t care for the relatives, and especially his own household, is denying the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

He’s better off being an unbeliever because Abba’s will is that we take responsibility for our household, provide for our household. In the First Century, he was just speaking to men because only men can go out there and do that, but it now applies to everybody. And to provide for means not just financially, but you provide emotionally, you provide spiritually, you provide intellectually, you provide physically. You’re there, invested. So this teaching should never be used to ditch the family.

On the other hand, we have to be careful of just watering this whole thing down to accept the norm of our culture. It is a radical teaching, and this is the framework, brothers and sisters. This is the framework through which we should see everything. So I end with this challenge. Very quickly, here’s the challenge. Will you just pray about this and reflect on this to let it get in? Maybe when I go through the passages that I read here, just pray over them and reflect on them, and discuss them with others. What does this mean? In the small-group adventure series, I encourage you to go deeper with this. What does this mean? What are the implications of this? And to get this into our heads.

And I encourage you to live in this question: Do you seek first the will of Abba Father? Are you being a faithful kid of the Kingdom? And are you seeking relationships with others to do that in? We’re here, as we gather all of these, we’re like a family reunion. We share Abba Father, and we share the same DNA, but we don’t know one another very well. How could we? But we need family-sized units that we carry out Abba’s will in. And so I encourage you to be praying about that. You might even want to join one of the adventure groups, and that’s going to be

your group. You might find one or two people to head off with, and they're hungry for God, and you're hungry for God, so you stay to be hungry for God together. It's got to be an organic thing that grows, but you've got to put yourself in a position where it can grow.

So I encourage you to sign up for one of the groups and do walking. If you're not in a group right now that is helping you to seek first the Kingdom, keep praying about that. God lead me to other family members that I'm supposed to be aligned with to carry out your will on earth as it is in heaven.

Alright! I want to ask the prayer teams to come up. Brothers and sisters, it's okay to call each other that. It's a bit corny, but I don't care. It's Biblical, for crying outloud. Who cares whether it's corny or not. My brothers and sisters, there'll be prayer teams up here, and if there's any need of a service that you'd like to be prayed for, I encourage you to come up here and share with these brothers and sisters because everything you share is in confidence, and that's what the body of Christ is for. All right?

Father, Abba Father, dear Father, as we leave this place, we pray you'd be helping us to be faithful children who live in a way that increasingly puts on display the beauty of your DNA, the beauty of your character, the beauty of your love. Father, I pray, God, that through the power of your Holy Spirit you've infused into our spirit, I pray, Lord, that you'd be reminding us of our obligations as your kids and purifying our hearts to seek you first. And I pray, Lord God, that you'd be helping us getting into relationships with other folks to carry out your will on earth as it is in heaven. We commit to being kids who honor your name and carry out your will and further your family. In Jesus' name, and the family said, Amen!

God bless you, brothers and sisters. Go out and honor God!