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CHAPTER I

THE FAMILY

IT WAS GOD'S PURPOSE from the beginning, not merely to redeem for Himself a people out of a world of sinners, but to bring that people into a peculiar relationship to Himself. It was His purpose to draw them nearer to Himself than any other order of His creatures, and to establish a link of the closest and most peculiar kind between them and the Godhead.

To carry out this purpose was the Word made flesh. "He took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham."¹ "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same."²

Thus a new relationship was established, such as till then could never have been conceived of as even possible. The tie of creation, though not dissolved, was now to be lost in the closer, dearer tie of kindred. "Both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren."³ He calls them brethren, and they call Him brother. Being "made of a woman," He has become partaker of our lowly humanity, so as to be bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; and we being "born of God" are made partakers of the divine nature, becoming "members of his body, of his

¹ Hebrews 2:16

³ Hebrews 2:11

² Hebrews 2:14

flesh, and of his bones." Thus the saints are the nearest kinsman of the Son of God; and if of the Son, then of the Father also, as He hath said, "I and my Father are one," "believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?"

It is thus that the family relationship is formed and God's original design carried out. For thus it is written, "As many as received him, to them gave he power [or the right] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."⁴ And again, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."⁵ We are elevated to creation's highest level. We are brought into the inner circle of the Father's love—nearer his throne, nearer his heart than angels, for we are the Body of Christ, and members in particular—"the fullness of him that filleth all in all."

Out of this new link there springs the family bond between us and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, "his Father and our Father, his God and our God." And it is especially in this name of *family* that God delights. He has many names for His redeemed. They are His chosen ones, His people, His flock, His heritage. But it is as His *family* that He speaks of them oftenest, and it is, as such, that He bends over them so fondly, as over His first-born—the children of His heart and the desire of His eyes.

But it is needful that we inquire further concerning this family and learn from God's own account of them who and what they are. By nature they are children of

⁴ John 1:12, 13

⁵ I John 3:1

wrath, even as others. And thus far there is no original difference between them and the world. But they are the eternally chosen of the Father, "chosen in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world."⁶ This is their true ancestry, and this is their chiefest glory. They are "predestinated . . . unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will."⁷ They are quickened together with Christ, from being dead in trespasses and sins, and raised up by the exceeding greatness of God's power, the same mighty power by which He wrought in Christ when He raised him from the dead.⁸ They are saved by grace through faith, and that not of themselves, it is the gift of God.⁹ They are reconciled to God by the death of His Son.¹⁰ They are delivered from a present evil world according to the will of God their Father.¹¹ They are washed in the blood of Jesus and justified by faith in His name. They are redeemed from their vain conversation, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for them.¹² They are made heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, kings and priests unto God, who are to reign with Christ forever over a redeemed and restored creation.

Such is the family. Surely they are high born. Their ancestry is from eternity. Their descent is from the King of kings. They are of the blood royal of Heaven. And though their present condition be a lowly one, their pros-

⁶ Ephesians 1:4

⁷ Ephesians 1:5

⁸ Ephesians 1:19, 20.

⁹ Ephesians 2:8

¹⁰ Romans 5:10

¹¹ Galatians 1:4

¹² I Peter 1:18-20

pects are the brightest that hope ever painted, brighter than what eye hath seen or ear hath heard. It doth not yet appear what they shall be; but they know that when He shall appear, they shall be like Him, for they shall see Him as He is.¹³

But apart from these descriptions which encircle the saved family with such peculiar glory even here, their simple condition of being God's *family* calls for a little further notice. For it is not outward circumstances that form, or give interest to, a home or a family, it is the living pulse of affection that is beating there. Neither earthly pomp nor earthly poverty can materially alter the real inward character of that little circle of human hearts which man calls a family. Bright skies and sunshine cannot weaken or sever the bond; neither can they allure them away from rejoicing in each other's joy and love. Dark days and tempests cannot sunder them; they do but make them gather more closely together then, as being all in all to each other. So it is with the family of the redeemed. It is not their outward circumstances or prospects that give them the name; it is something far tenderer and deeper than these. It is the pulse of heavenly affection, throbbing through every member and coming down from the infinite heart above; it is this that makes them what they are. It is under this aspect that God delights to look upon them. It is for this reason especially that He has given to them the name they bear.

The word "family" is a sacred one, even among the children of the world. There is a hallowed tenderness about it, which few, save the *wickedest*, do not feel in some measure. *One of their own poets has thus expressed the feeling:*

¹³ I John 3:2

Beneath the foulest mother's curse
No living thing can thrive;
A mother is a mother still,
The holiest thing alive.

I am by no means in accord with the sentiment contained in these words; the language is too strong. Still it shows the world's feeling as to the strength and sacredness of the family bond. And there is much of truth contained, or at least implied, in it. No other earthly circle can be compared with that of the family. It comprises all that a human heart most values and delights in. It is the center where all human affections meet and entwine, the vessel into which they all pour themselves with such joyous freedom. There is no one word which contains in it so many endearing associations and precious remembrances, hidden in the heart like gold. It appeals at once to the very center of man's being—his "heart of hearts." All that is sweet, soothing, tender, and true is wrapt up in that one word. It speaks not of one circle or of one bond, but of many circles and many bonds—all of them near the heart. The family home, the family hearth, the family table, family habits, family voices, family tokens, family salutations, family melodies, family joys and sorrows—what a mine of recollections lies under that one word! Take these away, and earth becomes a mere churchyard of crumbling bones; and man becomes as so many grains of loosened sand, or at best, but as the fragments of a torn flower, which the winds are scattering abroad.

All that is beautiful in human relationship, or tender in human affection, or gentle in human intercourse; all that is lovable and precious in the movements of a human heart from its lowest depth to its uppermost surface—all these are wrapt up in the one word: family. For close-knit

bonds, for steadfast faithfulness in love, for depth of sympathy, for endurance in trial and danger—where shall we find anything that can be compared with the story of earth's family circles? Conjugal love, parental love, filial love, brotherly love, sisterly love—all are here. The many streams of human affection empty themselves into it, or flow out of it, for the fertility and gladness of the earth.

We need not wonder, then, that this name should be chosen as one of the Church's peculiar names. God delights in it as the name by which His company of chosen ones is to be specially called. *The Family of God*—that is the Church's name. As such He dwells in the midst of it, cares for it, and watches over it. His dealings with it are those of a father—fond yet strict—loving yet wise—sitting among His children, having His eye on each, and ordering in His gracious wisdom all the concerns of His household.

His *heart* is there! Yes, it is in His Church that God's *heart* may be said specially to be. There it unfolds itself in a way such as it can do amid no other order of His creatures. There it shows itself in all its *manifold* fullness, such as it has no scope for elsewhere. It is in the family alone that the one thing we call affection or love is divided and spread out, like a sunbeam into the rainbow's seven-fold hues, there to display itself in all the rich tints of hidden beauty. So it is in the Church alone that the love of God is fully seen, not merely in all its intensity, but in all its varied riches. All kinds of love are unfolded there. There is room for such a wide variety of affection, both between the Head and the members, and between the members one with the other, that it seems as if there had been given new powers of loving as well as new objects to love.

No doubt there are other names for the saints besides this one. But none of them expresses what this is intended to do. God calls them His *flock*, which implies tender watchfulness on His part, and dependent helplessness on theirs. He calls them a *vine*, denoting their oneness, as well as the unceasing nourishment that is ever circulating through them from the parent stem. He calls them a *temple*, signifying their compactness of structure, symmetry of design, beauty of form, and above all, fitness for the inhabitation and worship of Jehovah. He calls them a *body*, to set forth, not merely their comely proportions, but their marvelous unity and conscious vitality of being, as well as the closeness of the binding tie, and their various serviceableness to each other. He calls them a *city*, intimating their happy community of privileges and rights and well-ordered government; the security, peace, abundance which they enjoy, the comforts of neighborhood with all its cheerful greetings and mutual offices of love. He calls them a *kingdom*, as expressive of their high and honorable estate, of the royalty, the glory, the dominion, of which they have been made the heirs.

But various and expressive as are these well-known names, they are still imperfect. They describe as it were only the outer circles, each name a circle of its own. But the inner circle—the inner region of our spiritual being—they do not touch upon. It is that well-known word, that magic name, *family*, which alone can express all that God sees of what is comely and tender, loving and lovable in the Church of Christ into which He is pouring His love *through* which He delights to see that love circulate unhindered, and *out* of which he expects that love to flow abroad.

There is one thing that strikes us much concerning this family. It is the way in which Christ speaks of the special interest which He takes in *each* member. "Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost."¹⁴ How like the family feeling! Each name, each face is known; known so familiarly that the least and youngest would at once be missed. The place where each sits, the room which each occupies, the time of his going out and coming in; his looks, his habits, his tones are so thoroughly known that the moment anyone is absent, he is missed. And then no other can supply his place. His absence makes a blank which none but he can fill. An acquaintance or fellow-townsmen may drop away and never be missed. His place is easily filled by another. Not so with a member of the family. Where there is a break in the circle, there is a dismal blank; and when death has carried off a brother, a sister, or a parent, who or what can ever fill his room? When one flower fades, another springs up, fresher perhaps and more fragrant—and we forget the faded one. But the withered family flower can have no successor: it dies, and there is a blank forever. Might it not be with some such feeling that Jesus looked around upon His vast household circle, and, while surveying each well-known face, gave thanks that not one was lost; as if He could not have spared so much as one of those whom the Father had given Him.

Oh, the deep interest which Jesus takes in *each*! Truly it is a personal and peculiar attachment for each member. Do we not lose much by forgetting this? Even in human things we are apt to overlook this. We call the feeling which the Father entertains for each of His children, love; and well we call it so, but this is not all. There is a differ-

¹⁴ John 17:12

ence in the love He bears for his eldest and His youngest born, a difference in the case of each, called forth by the peculiar character of each. It is this minute and special love which is so precious. Were it not for this, we should feel as if we had only part of our Father's heart, as if we had not all of that which rightfully belongs to us. But, realizing this, we feel as if we had His whole heart, and yet our having the whole did not rob our brothers and sisters of any. It is with a family as with the sun in the firmament. It is the property of all, and yet each has the whole of it. Even so with Jehovah, our heavenly Father; even so with Jesus, our elder brother. His is a special, personal, peculiar love, just as if He loved no other, but had His whole heart to spare for us. His is a minute and watchful care, bending over *each*, day and night, as if He had no other to care for. How sweet to think that each of us is the special object of such personal attachment, the peculiar object of such unwearied vigilance! What manner of love is this! Now we believe and are sure that we shall be fully cared for, and not one want or sorrow will be overlooked. Now we know that "all things shall work together for our good," and that the end of everything which befalls us here shall be light and glory forever! "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end."¹⁵ "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."¹⁶ "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."¹⁷

It is sweet to realize the common love flowing out of the Father's bosom to the whole happy household of His saved ones; but it is no less sweet, specially in the day of

¹⁵ Jeremiah 29:11

¹⁷ Psalm 103:13

¹⁶ Isaiah 66:13

trial, to dwell upon the personal love He bears so peculiarly to each. It is blessed to identify ourselves with such a family who are all joying in the sunshine of paternal love; but it is as blessed at times to isolate oneself and realize the individual love which is our own peculiar heritage. Thus felt the Bride when she said, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine."¹⁸ "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine."¹⁹

It was when the Holy Spirit first opened our ears to listen to the tale of love which the Gospel brought to us that we sought our Father's house and rested not until we had found ourselves in His embrace. It was when we first received "the gift of God," and understood the love which that gift declared, that we took our place in the family circle, tasting the plenty of our Father's table and enjoying the sweetness of our Father's smile. And even as we entered in, so are we to abide forever, "rooted and grounded in love," realizing the words of Jesus, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: *continue ye in my love.*"²⁰

¹⁸ Song of Solomon 1:2

¹⁹ Song of Solomon 26:3

²⁰ John 15:9