

The Dysfunctional Family

by Brian Coatney

My mother in law, Mimi, called me about a letter she received from an inmate, now in another facility, who attended our jail Bible study here for a couple of years. In his letter, he talks about his involvement with a therapy type book on getting in touch with anger, and how he is experiencing anger toward his earthly father, now dead, but an alcoholic while he was a child. Mimi asked me what I thought on this point, and I could only answer from my experience, which included rage toward my own father until I reached the age of forty-five.

I lived constantly angry at my earthly father until he abandoned our family when I was eleven, never to come back we slowly discovered, in fact disappearing for one stretch of fifteen years until a younger brother located him through a genealogy book he had done on our family. During the early years of my father's absence, I felt mostly relief over his departure, but then relief changed to a growing pain inside as I observed my school peers in regular families. This occurred in the 1960s, before the soon to come wave of acceptable divorce and blended families. Pain later turned to anger and rage, so that by my adult Christian years, I faced the need to forgive him, which I did by faith, though my persistent affirmation of forgiveness did not get to the center of my distress.

My own sins finally brought me to a miraculous place where I did experience God's complete forgiveness toward my father, no longer holding him responsible for my own choices in life. No lingering resentment remained or lack of resolution. I was little

prepared for the shock of the total answer for getting on with life after this forgiveness.

The Lord showed me that I need never attribute anything in life ever again to the actions of my family in the past, because He had taken me out of that family, placing me in a new family, the family in which God is my father and in which no dysfunction exists. I had inherited a new blood line—that of Christ, and now received everything that comes from Him.

Some may protest at this that we need therapy; we need to get in touch with the hurts of the past. This is true where denial still exists, and one lives in repression. But to continue overly long in dredging up memory after memory may really represent a refusal to leave the devil's anger and settle into the reality of our new bloodline in Christ. No longer do we trace any effect upon us from the first Adam; we take all family input instead from the last Adam. When I saw this, instantly, every bit of blame toward my parents and family departed in the light of His grace.

Does such a view minimize our earthly families and our ties to them? No. We still acknowledge our earthly families and our responsibilities to them for provision and support; but we do not look to them to meet our real needs, for now the Holy Spirit supplies all of our needs based on our union in Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. As Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." In other words, by identifying with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection—seeing

these as really we joined to him, we find ourselves taken out of the first Adam and his family line, and placed into the blood and body line of Christ.

Are you still trying to dig through endless memories and rehearse them over and over again, feeding anger that you can let go of once you see the truth of who you are united to Christ? Perhaps you are doing this in ignorance, not knowing both the futility of guilt and blame, and not knowing the truth that as a Christian, you no longer do anything you do because of your dysfunctional family.

Enjoy the grace of God in your new, heavenly family and let go of the past. If you need to bring the past to light to consciously place it all in Christ, then by all means do so, but no longer as a victim of dysfunction—no longer as one held in bondage and acting helplessly as a consequence of the dysfunctional family. “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:6).