

# The Family of God

By J.C. Ryle

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The family to which I am directing the attention of my readers this day is divided into two great parts. Each part has its own residence or dwelling place. Part of the family is in heaven, and part is on earth. For the present the two parts are entirely separated from one another. But they form one body in the sight of God, though resident in two places; and their union is sure to take place one day.

Some of God's family are safe in heaven. They are at rest in that place which the Lord Jesus expressly calls 'paradise' (Luke 23:43). They have finished their course. They have fought their battle. They have done their appointed work. They have learned their

lessons. They have carried their cross. They have passed through the waves of this troublesome world, and reached the harbour. Little as we know about them, we know that they are happy. They are no longer troubled by sin and temptation. They have said good-bye forever to poverty and anxiety, to pain and sickness, to sorrow and tears. They are with Christ himself, who loved them and gave himself for them, and in his company they must needs be happy (Phil 1:23). They have nothing to fear in looking back to the past. They have nothing to dread in looking forward to things to come. Three things only are lacking to make their happiness complete. These three are the second advent of Christ in glory, the resurrection of their own bodies, and the gathering together of all believers. And of these

three things they are sure.

Some of God's family are still upon earth. They are scattered to and fro in the midst of a wicked world, a few in one place and a few in another. All are more or less occupied in the same way, according to the measure of their grace. All are running a race, doing a work, warring a warfare, carrying a cross, striving against sin, resisting the devil, crucifying the flesh, struggling against the world, witnessing for Christ, mourning over their own hearts, hearing, reading, and praying, however feebly, for the life of their souls. Each is often disposed to think no cross so heavy as his own, no work so difficult, no heart so hard. But each and all hold on their way – a wonder to the ignorant world around them, and often a wonder to themselves.

But, however divided God's family may be at present in dwelling-place and local habitation, it is still one family. Both parts of it are still one in character, one in possessions, and one in relation to God. The part in heaven has not so much superiority over the part on earth as at first sight may appear. The difference between the two is only one of degree.

Both parts of the family love the same Saviour and delight in the same perfect will of God. But the part on earth loves with much imperfection and infirmity, and lives by faith, not by sight. The part in heaven loves without weakness, or doubt,

or distraction. It walks by sight and not by faith, and sees what it once believed.

Both parts of the family are saints. But the saints on earth are often poor weary pilgrims, who find the 'flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit lusting against the flesh, so that they cannot do the things they would' (Gal 5:17). They live in the midst of an evil world, and are often sick of themselves and of the sin they see around them. The saints in heaven, on the contrary, are delivered from the world, the flesh, and the devil, and enjoy a glorious liberty. They are called 'the spirits of just men made perfect' (Heb 12:23).

Both parts of the family are alike God's children. But the children in heaven have learned all their lessons, have finished their appointed tasks, have begun an eternal holiday. The children on earth are still at school. They are daily learning wisdom, though slowly and with much trouble, and often needing to be reminded of their past lessons by chastisement and the rod. Their holidays are yet to come.

Both parts of the family are alike God's soldiers. But the soldiers on earth are yet militant. Their warfare is not accomplished. Their fight is not over. They need every day to put on the whole armour of God. The soldiers in heaven are all triumphant. No enemy can hurt them now. No fiery dart can reach them. Helmet and shield may both be laid aside.

They may at last say to the sword of the Spirit, 'Rest and be still'. They may at length sit down, and need not to watch and stand on their guard.

Last and not least, both parts of the family are alike safe and secure. Wonderful as this may sound, it is true. Christ cares as much for his members on earth as his members in heaven. You might as well think to pluck the stars out of heaven, as to pluck one saint, however feeble, out of Christ's hand. Both parts of the family are alike secured by 'an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure (2 Sam 23:5). The members on earth, through the burden of the flesh and the dimness of their faith, may neither see, nor know, nor feel their own safety. But they are safe, though they may not see it. The whole family is 'kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation' (1 Pet 1:5). The members yet on the road are as secure as the members who have got home. Not one shall be found missing at the last day. The words of the Christian poet shall be found strictly true:

More happy, but not more secure,  
The glorified spirits in heaven.

I ask every reader to understand thoroughly the present position of God's family, and to form a just estimate of it. Learn not to measure its numbers or its privileges by what you see with your eyes. You see only a small body of believers in

this present time. But you must not forget that a great company has got safe to heaven already, and that when all are assembled at the last day they will be 'a multitude, which no man could number' (Rev 7:9). You only see that part of the family which is struggling on earth. You must never forget that the greater part of the family has got home and is resting in heaven. You see the militant part, but not the triumphant. You see the part that is carrying the cross, but not the part which is safe in paradise. The family of God is far more rich and glorious than you suppose. Believe me, it is no small thing to belong to the 'whole family in heaven and earth'.