

## **The Family Tree that Matters Most**

Years ago and for several years on and off, my late wife Bonnie and I researched our respective family trees. We relied on a number of resources, including extended family records and interviews of family members as well as electronic databases. Subsequently, we even visited some sites where our forefathers had lived decades previously. We amassed a mountain of information, copies of records and antique photographs. Everything was neatly tied together in a comprehensive computer software program or mounted on all of the available wall space in one room of our home.

Bonnie and I traced our respective families back several generations. I was able to follow my ancestry hundreds of years backward and even discover distant family members of yesteryear in Europe. We uncovered marriages, births, religious faiths, occupations, travels across the United States, government service, deaths, achievements and criminal records.

Some of it was very interesting while other bits of information were disappointing. There were some proverbial skeletons, too. The missteps of some of our ancestors and the misadventures of some of our more contemporary kinfolk diminished our formerly keen interest in our research. Today, the walls of a spare bedroom and boxes on shelves in the laundry room comprise the residue of researching our respective family trees.

However, there is another family tree of which I am a member that is more important and of greater interest to me these days. Though I was the oldest of four brothers in my immediate family growing up, now, I have a big brother, and His name is Jesus Christ. Because I am a practicing disciple of Jesus Christ, by His admission, the Lord and I are family; “And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother’” (Mark 3:34-35 NKJV). Anyone who Jesus Christ has sanctified through His Gospel is a brother or sister to the Son of God; “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Hebrews 2:11). Consequently, Christians “...are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...” (Romans 8:16-17). Christians are the “many brethren” of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29).

Furthermore, God is my Father (Matthew 5:16; 6:8-9; Philippians 4:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:1). Jesus Christ and I, along with every other Christian, have the same Father. “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God’” (John 20:17). “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! ...” (1 John 3:1).

There are no proverbial skeletons in the closet of my elder brother or our Father, either. Instead, the noblest of sacrifices for our and my wellbeing were made by our Heavenly Father who sent His Son into the world to save us (John 3:16; Matthew 1:21). Fortunately for us, our Brother, Jesus Christ, willingly came into the world to redeem us (Luke 19:10; Ephesians 5:25; 1 Timothy 2:6; Titus 2:14). Christians comprise the “family” of God (Ephesians 3:14-15). Christians are “members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

Earthly relationships will not endure beyond the terrestrial existence (Matthew 22:23-33). Achievements as well as disappointments regarding our earthly families will pale compared to our enduring, spiritual family relationship when this life is over—only if we are “baptized into Christ” (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27) and remain “faithful until death” (Revelation 2:10).

Jesus Christ Himself summarized how one obtains the forgiveness of past sins and becomes a child of God; “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will

be condemned” (Mark 16:16). This was the message of the first recorded Gospel sermon on the birthday of the church; “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...’” (Acts 2:38). Later, the apostles Peter and John conveyed how a child of God attains forgiveness of sins that creep into the lives of Christians. “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (Acts 8:22). “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Is Jesus Christ your Big Brother, yet? The Heavenly Father desires your salvation (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Jesus Christ died a terrible death on Calvary’s cross as the perfect sacrifice to make your salvation possible (Hebrews 9:26; 12:2). I repeat, “Is Jesus Christ your Big Brother, yet?” If not, why not?

*By: Louis Rushmore, Editor*