

## The Fatherhood of God

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### **Who Wants a Father?**

Suppose someone stood in front of you and said: 'I am your father'.

How would you react:

- if you were an orphan
- if you have had a good father
- if you have had an abusive father

Why?

Father is one we have come from—given us life

*We may or may not be pleased about being alive.*

Father is an authority figure over us

*We may want to be on our own, with no one over us.*

Father is a provider

*We may not want to be beholden to anyone.*

We are in the likeness of our father

*We may resent that—not want to measure up.*

If we are like that with our own fathers, we are even more so with God as our Father. As a human race, we have rejected our relationship as children with our heavenly Father. Nevertheless, God is Father.

### **God Is Father**

Of the whole human race (from the genealogy of Jesus):

... son of Enos, son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God (Luke 3:38).

Adam is son of God in the same way that Seth is son of Adam. Not biologically, but relationally, and directly:

When Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth (Gen. 5:3).

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind (Heb. *adam*) in our image, according to our likeness' (Gen. 1:26).

he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring' (Acts 17:26–28).

The whole purpose of the human race throughout human history is to know and relate with God as Father:

To tumble into the arms of God who loves us freely is the highest point of human experience. 'Abba! Father!' is the cry which indicates the return of one's true humanity (Geoffrey Bingham, *The Day of the Spirit*, NCPI, Blackwood SA, 1985, p. 287)

This is what we have refused to do:

Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me ... Ah, sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, offspring who do evil, children who deal corruptly, who have forsaken the LORD, who have despised the Holy One of Israel, who are utterly estranged! (Isa. 1:2).

This is what makes it difficult for us to consider God as Father.

### ***True Father of All***

Some claim that the word 'Father' is used of God figuratively, as one 'image' of God among many others. One reason for this could be that it is easier to reject a figurative 'Father' than an actual one. God is more than just 'like' a father (as in Psa. 103:13; in Isa. 66:13 God likens Himself to a mother)—God is essentially Father, the one from whom all fatherhood and family relationship (including motherhood) is derived:

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family [*Gk.* fatherhood] in heaven and on earth takes its name (Eph. 3:15).

one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (Eph. 4:6).

This means we need to know a different kind of Fatherhood—God's. Only that way will we also get right our relationships at the human level.

### ***False Fatherhood***

When we have rejected God's true Fatherhood, we still need to have it from somewhere because, as human beings, we are designed and structured to be children who have God as their Father. Our denial and defiance of Him leaves a 'Father-shaped blank' within us that we then seek to fill by looking elsewhere—to idols of our own making, and to the 'father of lies' himself:

As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed-- they, their kings, their officials, their priests, and their prophets, who say to a tree, "You are my father," and to a stone, "You gave me birth." For they have turned their backs to me, and not their faces (Jer. 2:26).

You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

This leaves us in a perilous situation:

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else (Eph. 2:1–3).

### ***Redeemer-Father***

God is not just Creator-Father; He is also Redeemer-Father:

you, O LORD, are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name (Isa. 63:16).

It is of the nature of the true Father not to leave His children in an unredeemed state. This redemption Jesus came to effect

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12–13)

Thus God will accomplish His purpose, which is to have a whole Family that participates actively with Him in His glory:

I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth--everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made" (Isa. 43:6–7).

he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (Eph. 1:4–5)

### ***The Father and the Son***

God did not become Father when He made us as His children. God is essentially Father because He has always been Father of the Son, who has always been Son of the Father. Creation bears the mark and has the lineaments of this relationship upon it:

He is the image of the invisible God ... in him all things in heaven and on earth were created ... all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Col. 1:15–17).

This true love-relationship between the Father and the Son has come into our human flesh in Jesus:

The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands (John 3:35).

My Father is still working, and I also am working ... the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing (John 5:17, 19–20).

Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes ... For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man (John 5:21, 26–27).

I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me (John 5:30)

The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me (John 14:10–11).

When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him (John 8:28–29)

## ***God's Fatherhood at the Cross***

Jesus' whole love-relationship with the Father, and with us, is focussed on the cross:

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again ... I have received this command from my Father (John 10:17–18).

I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father (John 14:31).

Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once (John 13:31–32).

Here we see all the glory of the Father's love for us in the Son:

Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34).

At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34).

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last (Luke 23:46).

He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? (Rom. 8:32).

This is God's true Fatherhood—of us all. If He loved His Son more than He loved us, He would have saved His Son, and left us. As it is, His love for us overreached His Son to come to us, showing that He loves us no less than He loves His own Son. As Jesus prayed before the Cross:

I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them (John 17:26).

The resurrection of Jesus displayed and secured his true status as Son of the Father:

declared to be Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 1:4).

## ***Coming into Sonship***

Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the necessity of being born again, from above, through repentance and faith, by the cleansing action of the Holy Spirit:

Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit (John 3:5).

Such a person, then, is 'born ... of God' (John 1:13), as child of the Father. The climax of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus is an allusion to the work of the cross, which is where our faith must be fixed:

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:14–17).

It is through the Holy Spirit, who 'searches ... the depths of God' (1 Cor. 2:10) that this Father-love of God in the cross is fully communicated to us:

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly ... while we still were sinners Christ died for us ... while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son (Rom. 5:5–6, 8, 10).

So we know ourselves to be the Father's children:

When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs (Rom. 8:15–16).

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are (1 John 3:1).

*Share experiences of knowing God as Father.*

### ***Our Father in Heaven***

It is in this context that Jesus speaks to us in his 'sermon on the mount':

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous (Matt. 5:44–45).

pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you ... your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven ... (Matt. 6:6, 8–9)

your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matt. 6:32–33).

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matt. 7:11).

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven (Matt. 7:21).

### ***The Father with His Family***

All this we have now by faith, living for and eagerly awaiting the time when we as the grown-up mature children of God will come into our own:

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family (Rom. 8:29).

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure (1 John 3:2–3).

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God ... and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:19, 21).

This will be at our resurrection from the dead:

they ... are children of God, being children of the resurrection (Luke 20:36).

So will begin the glorious outcome of God's great and risky enterprise:

See, the home of God is among human beings. He will dwell with them; they will be his people and God himself will be with them ... Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children (Rev. 21:3, 7).