



Research article

## THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD IN OUR BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING AND CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### *Article history:*

Received 22 Aug 2019

Accepted 07 Sep 2019

Available online: 30 Sep 2019

#### *Keywords:*

*Fatherhood,*

*Biblical Understanding*

*Christian Experience*

### ABSTRACT

Even though the Son and the Holy Spirit are equal in deity to God the Father, they subject themselves to Him in their roles. Unfortunately, in some circles, they only talk about Jesus or the Holy Spirit. The Father is forgotten! What is our answer to the age-old question in Mal. 1:6 “if then I am the FATHER, where is My honour?” This article presents the need to restore the Fatherhood of God in our Biblical understanding and Christian experience.



## Introduction

A simple and straightforward understanding of the Holy Bible teaches us that God eternally exists as three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The notion that God is a father is rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., Exod. 4:22; Deut. 32:6; Isa. 43:6; 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 31:9, 20; Hos. 11:1; Mal. 2:10). All of creation was made through the personhood of the Godhead: God commanded, the Word [Jesus] was the agent through whom all things were created, and the Spirit was the energizing work which breathed life into creation.<sup>1</sup> In fact, God's image is both based and explained on the ground of his personhood<sup>2</sup>. Wayne Grudem in Systematic Theology summarises Trinity into three statements

1. God is three Persons (Trinity)
2. Each Person is fully God (Deity)
3. There is one God (Triunity)

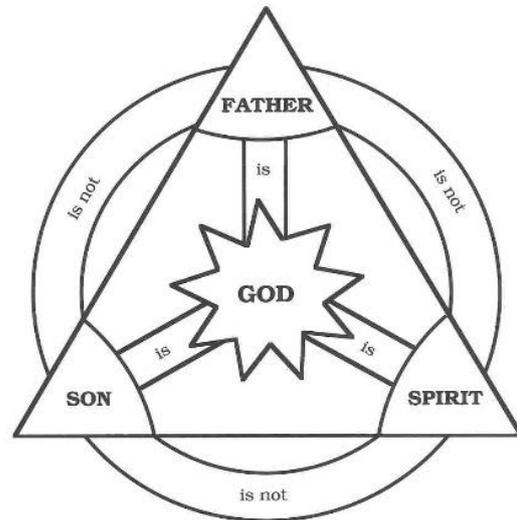
Each of these statements is equally important to keep us from going astray.

The fact that God is three persons in one is a mystery, a mystery so profoundly deep that it is endlessly rich. It is in this sense that St. Paul speaks of "the mystery of God." Without this insight our life will become little more than a moral effort through which we seek to live by the law alone. This journey begins when we seek to understand and appreciate the words of Jesus in John 17: "The world must recognize that I love the Father." Only then will we enter into this community and movement of divine love, making our life a journey of incredible joy.

<sup>1</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Who Is the Holy Spirit?*, Kindle ed. Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Pub., 2012, 12.)

<sup>2</sup> Quintus Tertullian, *Against Praxeas; In Which He Defends, in All Essential Points, the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity*, in *The Complete Works of Tertullian (33 Books With Active Table of Contents)*, Edited by Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson, and Arthur C. Coxe, Kindle ed. (2011), Kindle Location: 6635.

Through the Holy Spirit God pours his love into our hearts.



The Father is not the Son. And the Son is not the Father. But the Father dwells in the Son, and the Son dwells in the Father (Jn14:11). However, in the same passage Jesus ascribes all authority and glory to the Father (vv 10,13). In the same way, even though the Holy Spirit like Jesus is fully God, He does not attract worship towards Himself but directs it to the Father. When He came on people, He prompted them to magnify "God" for His wonderful works (Acts 2:4,11; 10:44,46). The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ; and Christ glorifies the Father (Jn 16:14; 17:4).

If the Jewish interpreters had admitted the plurality of persons in one God, they would have had no great difficulty in accepting the divine claims of Christ as the Son of God. The fatherhood of God was constantly on the lips of Christ, from the time He was 12 and told Mary and Joseph He had to be about His Father's business (Luke 2:49) until the very end of His earthly life, when, on the cross, He prayed for His



executioners and commended His spirit into His Father's hands (Luke 23:34, 46). Between those two episodes stand many dozens of affirmations concerning the fatherhood of God. Nor is Christ alone in these affirmations for, as a converted Jew, Paul also affirmed his belief in the fatherhood of God (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 8:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; 11: 31; Col. 1:3), as did all the apostles. For biblical and historic Christianity, the supreme name of God is "Father."

### **The fact of God's Fatherhood**

The fact of God's Fatherhood finds its necessary complement in divine Sonship. To deny the one is inevitably to deny the other. To deny that Christ is Son is to deny the divine revelation in Christ and is to attack Christ's authority and reliability as a teacher of doctrine. As ancient theologians such as Rufinus and others argued many centuries ago, when you hear that someone is a father, you conclude that he must have offspring. Just as no one is properly called "lord" unless he has possessions, servants, and power, and just as no one is properly called "teacher" unless he has students, so no one is properly called "father" unless he has, in this case, a son. Coupled with what we said earlier, we see that the Fatherhood of God relates to the Son by generation, to us by adoption, and to all other finite things whatever by creation. And, as children typically ought we, as Christians, to grow to resemble our Father in heaven and our Brother at His right hand (Rom. 8:29). The bond between the Father and us is no longer merely what it was in the Old Testament era. The God of Israel has become our *abba*, an

ancient Aramaic word for "Daddy" (Gal. 4:6).

Whether it suits us or not, to reject the fatherhood of God is to reject the religion of Christ, a religion in which God is not Father by mere human attribution, but who is Father both innately and eternally. True and proper fatherhood, not metaphorical fatherhood, resides in Him, not in us and then projected onto Him. Perhaps that fact stands behind Christ's command to "Call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, who is in heaven" (Matt. 23:9, KJV). Furthermore, the comparison in Matthew 7:9–11 between divine fatherhood, on the one hand, and human fatherhood, on the other, indicates that even the finest human fathers are but faint and imperfect echoes of our Father in heaven. Divine fatherhood is no chauvinistic foisting of human fatherhood onto God.

### **Fatherhood of God in the New Testament**

In some Old Testament passages, God is directly called the father of Israel. In the New Testament the fatherhood of God is a major one, promoted by the Son of God himself. Jesus Christ, the Son of God and God the Son, is the perfect revelation of God the father – of his character, his power and his plans for humanity (Heb 1:1-5). In the Gospels, Jesus primarily and consistently relates to God as his father, and their relationship is particularly highlighted in John. In John alone, Jesus "calls God 'the Father' or 'my Father' 107 times and refers to himself as 'the Son of God' or simply 'the son' in context with 'the Father' around 30 times"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "Sonship in the Gospel of John" 2016.



Jesus teaches his disciples, the new people of God, to relate to God as their Father in heaven (Mt 6:9, etc.). By faith in Jesus Christ, people become children of God (Gal 3:26). God gives them his Spirit, the Spirit of adoption to sonship, because of whom they are sons of God, because of whom they call God 'Abba' (Aramaic term for father, also used as a term of endearment (Mk 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6) and who testifies that they are children of God (Rom 8:14-16). There is continuity and progression of both the concept of God as a father and the concept of his people as his children. In fact, relating to God as a father (Lk 11:2), being his children (Gal 3:26) and acting like his children (Eph 5:1,8) seem to have come to the forefront of New Testament theology and have become foundational teachings in the Christian church today (fatherhood of God, sonship of believers, new identity in Christ, new position in Christ). In Galatians 4:1-7 and Romans 8:14-17, the text speaks about Christians as the children of God and about their inheritance as sons which continues the Old Testament theme of Israel being God's son and receiving their inheritance. As in the Old Testament, the fatherhood of God is not universal, but applies only to those who are saved, called and joined to his people. Of course, in the New Testament, Christ is the mediator of all those blessings. The Old Testament longing of God the father to be in an intimate father-son relationship with his people, whom he blesses and who love him and obey him, is fulfilled in the New Testament, through the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, creating a new people with a new spirit, relating to God as their Abba. Therefore, the love and closeness evident in the fatherhood

of God in the Old Testament is present, but also taken to a new level in the NT.

## Creation and Redemption

The universe is an expression of the power of God. He stands above it and rules over it. It exists not by necessity but comes from the total freedom of God. Augustine dealt with the work of creation more in detail than others did. He argues that creation was eternally in the will of God, and therefore brought no change in Him. There was no time before creation, since the world was brought into being with time rather than in time. The question what God did in the many ages before creation is based on a misconception of eternity."<sup>4</sup>

Through this creation God, the Father demonstrates his freedom to act and to rule. "His purpose will be fulfilled, even if it requires the miraculous drying up of streams (Isa. 44 v. 27) or the raising up of Cyrus the Persian (v. 28). But this power is not mere force. It is a directed power. It brings forth order. VanGemeren has correctly said, "The absolute power of the Creator is manifested in his continued working out in an orderly, contingent, and gracious way his plan for the world and particularly for his children".<sup>5</sup> It is through His son Jesus Christ that everything he created. With the initial creation itself one observes perfect design that demonstrates purposefulness. This continues even after the fall (Gen 8:22) in matters that are not as corrupted by the impact of sin. That is, the "created world is not unpredictable or filled with brute facts that randomly interact with

<sup>4</sup> *Systematic Theology* (4th ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939) 126

<sup>5</sup> W. VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988) 61.



each other. Scientific inquiry is not only possible but expected by the Creator, who rules over his creation in an orderly manner."<sup>6</sup> God has placed human beings at the focus of his attention, to redeem them for himself and to dwell with them forever. The plan of God the Father involves Jesus the Son as the cosmic Redeemer (Col. 1), by whom all things will be restored to himself. The Christological focus provides a sharp contrast to concepts of order, power, faithfulness, and goodness because God did not spare his Son for the sake of the redemption of humanity and creation. The biblical teaching of God's rule established in creation correlates with God's involvement in redemption. Creation anticipates a telos, or end. The God who freely, graciously, and powerfully rules creation has a goal: the new creation in his Son Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:15).<sup>7</sup>

The apostle presents Christ as the one who is Lord over creation, the one in whom the new creation comes into being, and the one for whom the new creation is made. Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. It is God the Father who planned redemption for mankind. Christ was actually 'sent' by His Father into the world (Jn 3:16,17) It was Father who conceived the plan of redemption, and the Son accomplished it (Jn 6:38-40). Repentance is primarily towards the Father God, and we receive forgiveness when we believe on the finished work of His Son (Acts 20:21). Reconciliation is to be made with the Father having Christ as the Mediator (I Tim 2:5). It was the Father who "raised" Jesus from the dead. Apostle Paul explains our redemption

graphically in Eph. 2:4-7, The Father loved us. The Father raised us up together with His Son, when we were dead in trespasses. Then the Father made us sit together in heavenly places with His Son.

### **Prayers and Worship Ascribed to the Father**

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He told them whom they must address: "Our FATHER in heaven!" (Lk 11:1, 2). In Mathew chapter six, Jesus uses the phrase "Your Father" (vv 1,4,6,8,14,15,18,26,32). He linked every spiritual discipline, like praying, forgiving, fasting and almsgiving, to the Father. After resurrection, He sent word to the disciples, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (Jn 20:27). We have access to the Father, By the Holy Spirit, Through Christ (Eph 2:18) In prayer we are to address "the Father" in the Name of Christ by the power and enablement of the Holy Spirit.

Referring to the dispensation of the New Covenant that would begin with the death of Christ, he pre-taught His disciples, "In that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. (Jn 16:23,24). The early disciples very quickly grasped this truth and we see them addressing the Father in prayer and referring to Christ as the Father's holy servant (Acts 4:24-30). This was also Paul's consistent practice. He invariably addressed the Father in prayer. "I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:14; 1:16,17). Even though all spiritual blessings come through the finished work of Christ on the Cross, we are taught to ask the "Father" in

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>7</sup> VanGemeren, Progress 62.



order that we may experience them. Every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from the “Fater” (Js 1:17)

All worship must be to the Father. We are to worship the Father ‘by’ the Spirit of God and rejoice ‘in’ Christ Jesus (phil 3:3). When we read Philippians 2:10,11, “ At the Name of Jesus every knee should bow....and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” We shouldn’t lose sight of its closing words: “To THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER” Jesus told the Samaritan woman how His FATHER was seeking for true worshipers to worship Him ( Jn 4:21-23)

### The Future Time

When the disciples enquired Jesus just before ascension concerning the time of restoration of the kingdom to Israel, He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the FATHER has put in His own authority” ( Acts 1:7). Similarly when the time of the end, He listed several signs but ended His answer saying, “But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven , nor the Son, but only the FATHER” (Mk 13:32), because it is the Father who would send His Son again (Acts 3:20). Along these words of Jesus, let’s look at the truth revealed to Apostle Paul: “Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the FATHER after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power..... When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to Him(the Father) who put everything under Him, so that GOD MAY BE ALL IN ALL!” (I Cor. 15:24-28).

### Conclusion

These insights will help restore the truth about the Forgotten Father and revolutionize our worship practices. For Christ Himself has given the fatherhood of God a definition for us in space and time. We worship the Triune God: God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We approach The Father only through Jesus, His Son. He is the only Way to the Father (Jn 14:6). Jesus ever lives to make intercession to save those who come through Him “to God” the Father (Heb 7:25). By this understanding God, through Christ and by the Holy Spirit, is all in all. Amen.

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