

THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

THE WONDER OF THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

- One of the most wonderful realities of God's nature is that he is a Father to his children
- This speaks of a close, intimate relationship...one in which his children are invited to come to him
- It speaks of the tenderness of God

- God is only referred to as "Father" 14 times in the OT...and then it is always as the corporate Father of Israel...never individually or personally
- The primary name for God in the OT was "Yahweh"...a name that referred to God as self-existent, sovereign, and entirely free from dependence on anything outside himself
- It was a statement about what Israel's God was in himself rather than of what he would be in relation to them
- It was a name meant to cause humility and awe before God
- It was communicated his utter holiness and separateness
- "The whole point of Old Testament religion was determined by the thought of God's holiness. The constant emphasis was that human beings, because of their weakness as creatures and their defilement as sinful creatures, must learn to humble themselves and be reverent before God. Religion was 'the fear of the Lord' – a matter of knowing your own littleness, of confessing your faults and abasing yourself in God's presence, of sheltering thankfully under his promises of mercy, and of taking care above all things to avoid presumptuous sins. Again and again it was stressed that we must keep our place, and our distance, in the presence of a holy God."¹

- But, there is a different emphasis in the NT...where God is referred to as "Father" hundreds of times
- Although the thought of God as holy is still there, there is a new reality...believers now deal with God as their Father
- "Father" is the name by which they call him...believers are his children, his sons and daughters, his heirs
- It's the word *pater* in Greek...but when Jesus said it, he probably used the Aramaic term *abba*...like our term "daddy" or "papa," a term reflecting trust, dependence, intimacy, and love
- To those who are Christ's, the holy God is a loving Father and they belong to his family
- Once we were sinners living in fear...now we are sons in the care of our heavenly Father
- Once we were strangers...now we are intimate friends
- Our adoption into his family means that we can come into God's majestic presence and say, "Daddy"
- Fathers usually love, protect, and provide for their children...in a similar way, all that a father is to his child, our God is to us

- **Matthew 7:9-11** ~ Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

- Clearly, God is a gracious Father who provides all that his dear children need

- One of the most staggering realities is that we get to call God our "Father"
- "What is a Christian? The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God as Father"²

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 202-203.

² *Ibid.*, 200.

- “To know the omnipotent, infinite, incomprehensible Creator and Judge as Father is a gift of grace, not a right of birth”³
- “You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one’s holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. ‘Father’ is the Christian name for God.”⁴
- The heart of the NT message is that God is a Father to his children
- Some have argued that those who lacked a good example in their earthly father cannot appreciate the fatherhood of God...that those who grew up with an abusive dad or a distant dad or an absent dad cannot relate to God as their Father
- However, “the thought of our Maker becoming our perfect parent – faithful in love and care, generous and thoughtful, interested in all we do, respecting our individuality, skillful in training us, wise in guidance, always available, helping us to find ourselves in maturity, integrity, and uprightness – is a thought which can have meaning for everybody”⁵ regardless of what their earthly father was like

THE NEED FOR THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

- The wonder we experience as believers upon realizing that God is our Father is heightened when we realize that there was a time when we were not part of his family
- The idea that all are children of God is not found in the Bible anywhere
- Sonship to God is not a universal status into which everyone enters by natural birth
- “[All] of humanity may not indiscriminately apply the title *Father* to God. Theological liberalism made popular the idea of the universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. This became virtually a summary of the gospel among Christianity’s liberal critics as they sought to preserve the Christian religion while they abandoned its specifics.”⁶
- True, all humanity is created by God and owes its existence to him...only in this limited sense is God the father of all humanity
- But only believers can truly be said to be children of God wherein they enjoy a relationship of mutual love and care within a family context

John 14:6 ~ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

- Prior to spiritual adoption, we are all excluded from God’s family

Matthew 13:38 ~ and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one;

John 8:44 ~ You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

³ Terry Johnson, *The Excellencies of God* 162.

⁴ Packer, *Knowing God*, 201.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁶ Johnson, *Excellencies of God*, 164.

Romans 9:7 ~ nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."

Ephesians 2:2-3 ~ in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Ephesians 5:6 ~ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

1 Thessalonians 5:5 ~ for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness;

1 John 3:10 ~ By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

2 Peter 2:14 ~ having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children

- Only those who experience redemption and adoption into God's family can legitimately be called sons of God

THE COMPONENTS OF THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

Fatherhood – What God is in Himself

- God is by nature Father, the original Father and the prototype of all human fatherhood
- All fatherhood is essentially an imperfect copy of his perfect fatherhood
- It is not that the idea of God's fatherhood is an extension of the human idea of fatherhood, but rather that our idea of fatherhood is a flawed reflection of His
- This is most clearly evident in the Father's relationship with his Son...he has revealed the full meaning of fatherhood through the Lord Jesus Christ
- If we really want to know what God is like as a Father, we ought to observe how he relates to his own Son

Fatherhood Implies Authority

- As Son, Christ submitted himself fully to his Father

John 4:34 ~ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."

John 5:19 ~ Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner."

John 6:38 ~ For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

John 17:4 ~ I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.

- Christ resolutely committed himself to obedience to his Father's will

Fatherhood Implies Affection

- The relationship between the first and second members of the Trinity is one of love

John 5:20 ~ For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.

John 15:9-10 ~ Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

- The Father loves his Son

Fatherhood Implies Fellowship

- There is a close relationship between God the Father and God the Son

John 8:29 ~ And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.

John 16:32 ~ Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.

Fatherhood Implies Blessing

- God determines to honor and exalt his Son

John 5:22-23 ~ For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, 23 so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

John 17:1 ~ Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You,

- These are ways God treats his own Son
- Incredibly, God intends the lives of believers to be a reflection and reproduction of Christ's own relationship with himself
- All of these evidences of the divine Father-Son relationship also extend to God's adopted children

John 20:17 ~ Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'

Adoption – The Act by Which God Becomes a Father to His Children

- "Adoption is God's act of making otherwise estranged human beings part of God's spiritual family by including them as inheritors of the riches of divine glory"⁷
- "Adoption is the authoritative translation of a believer, by Jesus Christ, from the family of this world and Satan into the family of God, with...all the privileges and advantages of that family [which entails] membership in that family, where God is the Father, Christ the elder brother, all the saints and angels brethren and fellow-children, and the inheritance a crown immortal and incorruptible."⁸
- "Adoption is a family idea, conceived in terms of love, and viewing God as father. In adoption, God takes us into his family and fellowship – he establishes us as his children and heirs. Closeness, affection and generosity are at the heart of the relationship. To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is a greater."⁹

⁷ Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms

⁸ John Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, 2:207, 209.

⁹ Packer, *Knowing God*, 207.

- The word *adoption* (*huiothesia*) means “placing as a son” and describes the rights and privileges as well as the new position of the believer in Christ.
- In adoption the believer is released from slavery into freedom and maturity in Christ
- God took children who were not his children and made them his own and treated them as if they were his children
- In short, God adopted all those who would believe in him and treated them as if they were his natural sons and daughters
- The word is taken from Roman custom where, in a legal ceremony, the adopted son was given all the rights of a natural-born son
- Adoption was not common in Jewish culture...although there are some OT examples of it (Moses by Pharaoh ...Mephibosheth the crippled son of Jonathan adopted by David)
- Adoption was common in the Roman Empire...adopted sons were often chosen to deliberately by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate
- In that sense, the adopted son was in no way inferior to a son born in the ordinary way...in fact, in many cases the adopted son sometimes had a greater prestige and privilege than the natural children
- Under Roman rule, if a father was disappointed in his natural son’s skill or character, he would search diligently for a boy available for adoption who demonstrated the qualities he desired
- If the boy proved himself worthy, the father would take the necessary legal steps for adoption
- Adopted sons enjoyed the same privileges as natural born sons....and at death of the father, the adopted son would often inherit the estate
- In this rite, four things happened:
 1. The adopted person lost all rights in his old family, and gained all the rights of a fully legitimate son in his new family
 2. He became heir to his new father’s estate
 3. The old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out. For instance, legally all debts were cancelled; they were wiped out as if they had never been.
 4. By the law, the adopted person was literally and absolutely the son of his new father
- Paul employs this Roman background to describe the Christian’s new status in Christ.

Romans 8:14-17 ~ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are **sons of God**. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as **sons** by which we cry out, “Abba! **Father!**” 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are **children of God**, 17 and if **children**, **heirs** also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

- There is clear “family” terminology reflected in this passage
- The Holy Spirit leads us (v. 14) – He leads us unto holiness (cf. Gal 5:18)
- The Holy Spirit adopts us (v. 15) – believers are adopted sons, not slaves...so we are not enslaved to fear...which is why we can refer to God as “Abba Father”...we can call God Father in the same way Christ did
- The Holy Spirit confirms us (v. 16) – He testifies and bears witness with and through our spirits that we belong to God...this is part of his ministry of assuring us that we are truly saved...he confirms the validity of our adoption by the fruit he produces in us
- The Holy Spirit promises us (v. 17) – He guarantees that we are both “heirs of God” (we get to inherit God himself) and “heirs with Christ” (we share in the inheritance God gives to Christ)

Galatians 4:1-7 ~ Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. 3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. 4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive **the adoption as sons**. 6 Because you are **sons**, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a **son**; and if a **son**, then an heir through God.

- This text makes it clear that the goal of redemption is that we should know God as Father
- In vv. 1-2, Paul describes OT saints as children “under guardians and managers”...the situation is that of a child to whom his deceased father had left an estate...he was under guardians (like a slave) until he reached an age of maturity
- This is what OT believers were like (v. 3)...they were God’s children, but they enjoyed none of the liberties or privileges of sonship because the Law obligated them and could not adequately convey gospel privileges
- But, according to vv. 4-5, God intervened into their situation and brought about a true adoption and sonship through redemption
- The purpose of the incarnation of Christ is that we might be redeemed and adopted as children into the family of God and know God as Father
- God waited for the perfect moment to provide the perfect Savior, One who would adopt people into his family
- In adoption, those who are not natural children become as if they are natural children with all its blessings
- Those who have no right to be in God’s family are adopted in such that they have all the blessings that come from being in the family of God
- As a result of this adoption, we receive the Spirit (v. 6)
- The Roman process of adoption requires the presence of seven witnesses
- Their testimony was important because if, after the adoptive parent’s death, his natural children contested the validity of the adoption, the witnesses had to testify that a valid adoption had taken place
- In the same way, we have a witness that testifies to the validity of our adoption by God
- The one who testifies that our adoption is valid and true is none other than God Himself
- God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts
- The Holy Spirit is present in every true child of God to give evidence of their position in God’s family
- Another blessing of adoption is that we get to call God “Father” (v. 6)
- The crying here in this verse is done by the Holy Spirit
- Because the Spirit is God, He can call out to God and call Him “Father”
- Because the Holy Spirit lives in us and has taken us residence in our hearts as a confirmation that we have been adopted by God, we also can cry out to God “Abba Father”
- The result of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is that we have a close intimate relationship with God the Father
- And we stand to receive an inheritance as God’s children (v. 7)
- We become fellow heirs with Christ and stand to inherit everything the Christ possesses
- The sons of God get to inherit everything the Son of God gets to inherit → salvation, glory, heaven, the universe, and God himself
- Notice that there is a subtle transition in this text: vv. 1 and 3 refer to children...vv. 4-7 refer to sons
- “children” refers to young children...“son” refers to adult children
- “children” refers to us when we were unbelievers...when we were dead in our sin and slaves to it (v. 3)
- But “sons” refer to us when we were adopted by God through the work of Christ
- So once we were helpless little children stumbling around in a dark world trying to earn our way to God through our own works...but now in Christ, we are adopted as sons and fully complete in Christ
- The theme of this whole section is sonship...adoption as sons (and daughters) of God
- In four verses (vv. 4-7) the word “son” occurs six times (2x it refers to Christ – vv. 4, 6...4x it refers to believers – vv. 5, 6, 7)
- Don’t miss the connection between these uses of the word “son”...God sent his one and only natural Son so that we could become God’s adopted sons

- The glorious truth of the Bible is that God is an adopting God...he lovingly takes those who are not his own children and he places them in His family as if they are His children
- We who were not God's children have been adopted by him and given all the rights and privileges of natural children
- By the way, this adoption spans the ages...it began in eternity past and reaches its final fulfillment in eternity future

Ephesians 1:4-5 ~ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

Romans 8:23 ~ And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

Sonship – What Believers Experience of God's Fatherhood

- God's children are those who have put their faith in Christ and have been brought into God's family
- Sonship is the believer's right and it belongs to no one else

John 1:12 ~ But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become **children of God**, even to those who believe in His name 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

- Notice that John uses three negatives to eliminate any vestige of human contribution to salvation:
 - "not of blood" – not by physical birth
 - "nor of the will of the flesh" – not a result of natural desire
 - "nor of the will of man" – not by human decision
- Thus, the gift of sonship becomes ours not through being born, but through being born again
- It not a natural sonship, but an adoptive sonship
- Charlie Wingard, seminary professor and pastor: "A decision made in 1958 proved to be the defining moment of my life. Of course, I played no part in it; I was only a few months old. My Dad and Mother's decision to adopt me and take me out of an orphanage in Arkansas was theirs alone. No decision since than had had more significance for me: it placed me in a home where I was taught Christ, and set the trajectory for my entire life. Everything most dear to me – my salvation, my family, my vocation, and my church – have come to me, humanly speaking, through my parents' decision to adopt. So you'll forgive me if I find the word adoption one of the most beautiful in scripture. I made no contribution to the most important decision ever made about me – my adoption...a good truth for a future minister to keep in mind."¹⁰

Galatians 3:26 ~ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:19 ~ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,

Hebrews 2:11-12 ~ For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE."

1 John 2:13 ~ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.

1 John 2:23-23 ~ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. 24 As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.

¹⁰ Cited in Johnson, *Excellencies of God*, 169.

1 John 3:1 ~ See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called **children of God**; and *such* we are.

- It is amazing to consider...because of our adoption and sonship, the whole realm of family love and care and privilege has been given to us as God's children

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

- The Fatherhood of God and his work of adoption is so foundational that the entire Christian life can be understood in terms of it

Confidence

- The love with which the Father has loved the Son is the love with which the Father loves us

John 17:26 ~ and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.

- "Indeed, fatherly love is imponderable...Yet all the fatherly love that ever was and ever will be is but a drop from the ocean of God's Father-love."¹¹

Comfort

- Having God as our Father provides great comfort as we face eternity

Romans 8:38-39 ~ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Pleasing the Lord

- Knowing that God is my Father is the key to understanding everything about the Christian life and conduct

2 Corinthians 5:9 ~ Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

Colossians 1:10 ~ so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Prayer

- Because God is our Father, we can freely come to him in prayer

Matthew 6:9 ~ Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

One-Anothers

- Fellow brothers and sisters in Christ are fellow family members...love is the implication of common paternity

1 John 2:10 ~ The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

1 John 4:7 ~ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

¹¹ Ibid., 173.