

OUR FATHER

By

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“In a time when the common belief of a modern society is that any belief in any god, and any belief in the existence of God should be accepted, when God is seen in everything created, when it is accepted that man himself is God, when He is described as ‘the force’ or ‘the man upstairs’ and when religious leaders refer to God as being ‘about six foot tall’ (Kenneth Copeland) and a God made up of nine trinities (Benny Hinn), when the common belief in the religious world is that God is a Trinity that cannot be understood or explained, and many sincere Christians believe the God of Islam is the God of the Christian, it is time we looked at the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.” This is the way Harry J. Bowers of the Antioch Christian Church in Asheville, N.C. began his newsletter of February 2003.

According to the polls almost everyone believes in God but as Bowers notes, “Just to believe that there is a God is not enough; the demons believe this and tremble.” Then he adds, “Our conception of God must be based upon the person of Jesus Christ.” This is true because Jesus revealed the mind of God by perfectly obeying Him in every facet of life, and then demonstrating his own relationship to God as an example for us to follow. (1 Pet. 2:21)

Jesus addressed God as “Father,” and taught us to pray to “our Father.” In the Sermon on the Mount He used the word “God” five times and “Father” sixteen times. In the Gospel of John He used the word “God” eleven times and “Father” sixty-six times. It is a sad reflection on our own generation that we so seldom hear this wonderful fact that almighty God wants us to relate to Him as our Father.

Jesus consistently addressed his prayers to the Father. At the tomb of Lazarus: “Father, I thank thee that thou heard me.” As John’s disciples came questioning Him: “I thank thee O Father... yes Father, for so it was well pleasing in thy sight.” In His prayer in Gethsemane: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” In the temple during his last public discourse: “Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?”

In the Sermon on the Mount He instructed us to “pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who sees in secret shall recompense thee” (Matt 6:7). Note that He said to “thy” Father, telling us that God is our Father, as well as His, even though He was miraculously begotten by God through His virgin birth to Mary. Other examples: In the model prayer: “Our Father, which art in heaven.” In His solemn promise concerning prayer: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, if you shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name” (John 16:23).

The apostle Paul often reminded us to think of God as our Father: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:3). “For though there be

that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth; as there are gods many, and lords many; yet to us there is one God, the Father...and one Lord, Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 8:5-6).

The apostle John wrote of the fellowship we have with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” This fellowship is unique to Christians but foreign to the world. “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this cause the world knows us not, because it knew him not” (1 John. 1:3, 3:1-2).

Jesus taught us about a relationship to God as our Father in the way He lived in such a relationship. He was filled with God’s holy spirit at his baptism, when “he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him; and lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, ‘This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased’” (Matt. 3:17). It is not hard to imagine the pleasure God feels at each baptism. We wonder how so many can make light of baptism, knowing that it pleases our heavenly Father.

The Father/Son relationship is best exemplified in the way Jesus passionately sought to please God and obey Him in every detail. “I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things...I do always the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8:28-29). “I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30). Jesus did not obey God out of fear of loss or punishment as a consequence of disobedience, nor in order to earn a reward. Rather, it was His delight to please the Father by doing His will. He said, “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34). “My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me” (John 12:17; 12:48-49). By His works and His teaching Jesus revealed the mind of God, and thus could say, “He that has seen me has seen the father” (John 14.9).

One of the best loved parables that Jesus told is the one found in Luke chapter 15. Which some have called the greatest short story in the world. In it Jesus portrays a father’s deep and abiding love for his son who selfishly had taken his inheritance before it was due and recklessly wasted it in riotous living. In his degradation he finally realized that he was no longer worthy to be his father’s son, but decided to return to his father’s house and beg to become a hired servant. But his father, in extreme mercy and fervent love received him back with open arms. He put a robe on him to honor him, and gave him a ring of authority. Then, instead of allowing him to go barefoot, as became slaves, he ordered shoes for his feet. Finally he called for a great celebration to show his son his delight in having him back in his home and in his fellowship.

William Barclay said of this parable, “It should never have been called the parable of the Prodigal Son, for the son is not the hero. It should be called the parable of the Loving Father, for it tells us rather about a father’s love than a son’s sin.” Indeed, this story is about the mercy and forgiveness of God, but even more, it is a description of God as our loving Father.

It is easy to see how God could have such love for Jesus, a son who was always seeking to please his Father, one who was tempted in all points and yet never once surrendered to the temptation, a son who was “obedient even unto death, yes, the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). But what extreme love and mercy it takes to love a prodigal who willfully

rejects his Father's counsel to please himself and have his own sinful way, then welcome him home with honor and rich rewards. Jesus said that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents.

This is our Heavenly Father. His forgiveness is without threats or reproach. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isa. 1:18). He forgives and forgets, as He promised: "I will forgive their iniquity and their sin will I remember no more" (Jer. 31:34). What anxieties and emotional burdens we avoid when we freely forgive, as our Father has forgiven us.

A father's love is not only manifested in his love and forgiveness, but is shown in the way he disciplines his children. We are reminded in the book of Hebrews that God never neglects His children in this regard. "For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives. It is for chastening that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father chastens not?...Be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live" (Heb. 12:5-9). This may explain some of the trials and difficulties we endure, and make them easier to bear, knowing that God is our Father who watches over us more tenderly than He does the lilies of the field and the birds of the air.

Having God as our Father is a rare and precious privilege. While God is Creator of all humanity, He is Father only to those who are made His children through Christ, His Son. "He came to His own, and they that were his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name"(John 1:11-12). Belief on his name is more than acknowledging that Christ is called Jesus. Rather it means to put our trust in who He is and what He has done to cleanse us from sin. "When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God sent forth the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So that you are no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal.4:4-7).

In His infinite grace God offers us the right to become His children, but we must accept and appropriate that relationship made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Like the prodigal son, one must repent of sin and present himself to the Father in humble and willing submission

God is love, and we are to bask in that love and live as those richly blessed to be God's children. *Thank you, Father.*

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