

The Fatherhood of God

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The Fatherhood of God is a commonly mentioned truth in the Scriptures, especially in the New Testament. It is one of the grandest and most endearing truths about God that the Scriptures teach us. The Fatherhood of God engenders in us both reverence and affection towards Him.

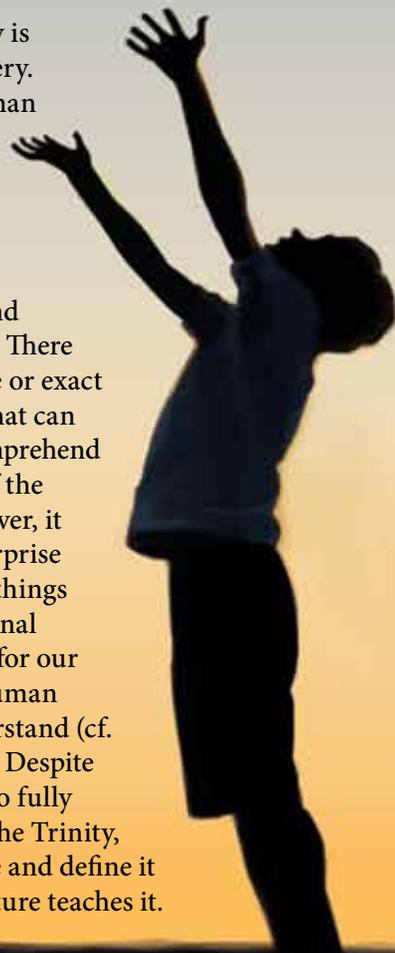
While the title “the Father” designates the First Person of the Holy Trinity, “the Fatherhood of God” refers to the essential, divine nature (or attribute) of the blessed Triune God. It further reveals God’s nature as Creator of all things, as God of the covenant and as Adopter of a people whom He has redeemed through the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God, the Father: The First Person of the Trinity

There is one and only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Isaiah 44:6-8; 45:5-6, 21-22; Romans 3:30; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Corinthians 8:6; James 2:19). Yet, Scripture clearly indicates that there are three distinct Persons in the Godhead, namely the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:4-

6; 1 Peter 1:2). In the Godhead, there is Trinity of the three divine Persons.

The Trinity is a sacred mystery. From our human viewpoint, we cannot fully understand how God can be one God and three Persons. There is no complete or exact comparison that can help us to comprehend the concept of the Trinity. However, it should not surprise us that many things about our eternal God are hard for our puny, finite human mind to understand (cf. Isaiah 55:8-9). Despite our inability to fully comprehend the Trinity, we can believe and define it because Scripture teaches it.



In the Trinity, the Father is not the Son; the Father is also not the Holy Spirit – these three are distinct Persons. These distinctions are clearly seen in the passages cited above. However, there is a oneness in essence in the Trinity. The apostle John recorded, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” (1 John 5:7). The three Persons are of the same divine nature and substance, so there are no degrees in the Godhead – one Person is not God more than the other. The three Persons of the Trinity are co-eternal and co-equal: all alike are uncreated, omnipotent and eternal. Each one of the three Persons is fully God.

The three Persons are so united that one Person is in the other, and with one another. Hence, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has said, “the Father is in me, and I in him” (John 10:38; cf. John 14:9-11; 17:21). Jesus also said, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30); “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

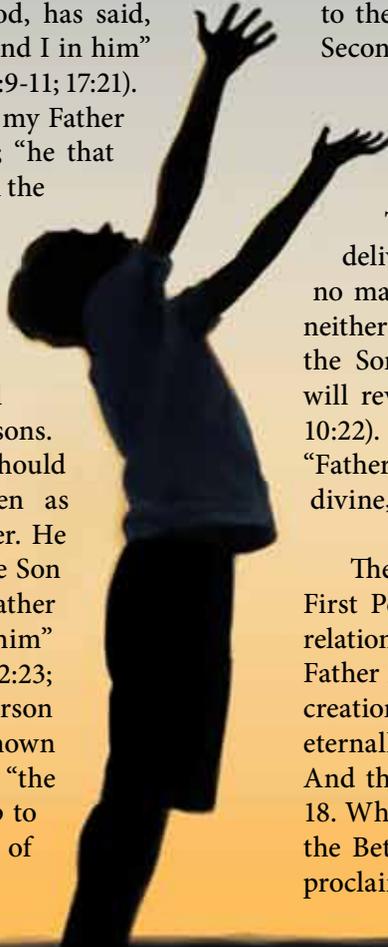
There is an order in the Godhead, but no degrees, hence we must give equal worship to all the Persons. “That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him” (John 5:23; cf. 1 John 2:23; 2 John 9). The First Person of the Trinity is known in the Scriptures as “the Father” in relationship to the other two Persons of the Trinity.

Eternal Fatherhood of God to the Son

During His earthly life, Jesus Christ frequently addressed or referred to the First Person of the Trinity as “My Father”. It was His most common designation for God, but He used it to designate a relationship that was uniquely His. In the Gospels, Christ referred to the First Person of the Trinity as “My Father” more than 60 times. Jesus also called Him “Abba” (Mark 14:36), an Aramaic word that denotes filial affection and tenderness. Also, in the epistles, God as Father and Christ as Son often occur together, as in the phrase “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus” (cf. Romans 15:6; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:3; 11:31; Ephesians 1:3, 17; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Peter 1:3). We understand from our reading that the name ‘Father’ very particularly belongs to the First Person in His relation to the Second Person.

Jesus used the term “Father” to express His intimate relationship with the First Person of the Trinity. He said, “All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Matthew 11:27; cf. Luke 10:22). Here, Christ’s triple reference to His “Father” emphasises the uniqueness of their divine, eternal relationship.

The name “the Father” is applied to the First Person of the Trinity in His eternal relation to the Second Person. God the Father is Father not merely by virtue of His creation of us and of the world, but He is eternally Father because of His eternal Son! And this truth is made clear in John 5:17-18. When Jesus healed the impotent man at the Bethesda pool on the sabbath day, He proclaimed, “My Father worketh hitherto,



and I work.” This made the Jews fume with murderous anger “because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.” By saying that God was His Father, and that He was the Son of God, He was claiming to be divine. The words “My Father” asserted the unique, divine relationship and thus His perfect equality with the Father!

We must not think about the Father’s begetting of the Son like that of a human father begetting a son. It is not a relationship assumed at a particular stage of time: it is an eternal relationship. God the Father begets His Son from eternity of His own essence and nature. The Son is begotten of the Father eternally and hence, is “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person” (Hebrews 1:3). In theological terminology, this is referred to as the eternal generation of the Son. The Father’s begetting of the Son should not be viewed as His creative activity, which some have erroneously taught. As the Father eternally begets the Son, He also (with the Son) eternally sends forth the Holy Spirit. The three Persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – are of the same divine essence, not divided or separated.

Theologian Louis Berkhof says, “The first person is the Father of the second in a metaphysical sense. This is the original fatherhood of God, of which all earthly fatherhood is but a faint reflection.”

General or Creational Fatherhood of God over His Creation

Scripture teaches that God is the Father of all things, being the Creator, Provider and Sustainer of everything in existence. The general Fatherhood of God based on His creational relationship with His creatures is

an undeniable Scriptural truth. God asked Job rhetorically, referring to Himself, “Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew” (Job 38:28)? No man can claim to have caused the rain, or regard it as his offspring. The idea is that rain is caused by the wisdom and power of God. In that regard, God is the Father of rain and all such phenomena in the universe.

The creational Fatherhood of God over all of mankind is also emphasised in the Scriptures. In Numbers 16:22, He is called “the God of the spirits of all flesh” and in Hebrews 12:9, “the Father of spirits”. When Isaiah pleaded with God, he acknowledged the creational Fatherhood of God – “But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand” (Isaiah 64:8). Malachi wrote, “Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us” (Malachi 2:10)? The apostle Paul declared, “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things” (1 Corinthians 8:6a).

However, man has not honoured God’s creational Fatherhood. In Malachi 1:6, the LORD God frowned at the sins of the people: “A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour?” Scripture makes it perfectly clear that God is the Father of even unbelievers by virtue of creation. But alas, by their rebellion, they have become His enemies (cf. Romans 1:28-32; 8:7-8; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Colossians 1:21a), even “children of disobedience” (Ephesians 5:6) and “children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3; cf. Colossians 3:6).

At Mar’s Hill, in order to show the absurdity of the Athenians’ worship of idols made of wood and stone, the apostle Paul mentioned God’s paternal relationship to them as their Maker. Quoting one of their

poets, he said, “we are also his offspring” (Acts 17:28). Then he went on to say, “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:29-30).

However, the unrepentant unbelievers are said to have another father. The devil is spoken of as being the father of unregenerate men. In His severest condemnation of the Jewish leaders who opposed Him, Jesus said, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:44). The apostle John delineates the two mutually exclusive “families”, the children of God and the children of the devil, in 1 John 3:8-10 – “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

National or Covenantal Fatherhood of God over Israel

God has declared over and over again His paternal relationship to Israel, based on His covenant with them. He instructed Moses to tell Pharaoh, “Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn” (Exodus 4:22). Through Moses, God said to Israel, “Is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee”

(Deuteronomy 32:6)? By the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD said, “For I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn” (Jeremiah 31:9).

God told the nation of Israel that “as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee” (Deuteronomy 8:5; cf. Proverbs 3:12). Like as a father, He told them how their conduct and practice should be different from other people (cf. Deuteronomy 14:1).

King David blessed the LORD, acknowledging Israel as His covenant people: “Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever” (1 Chronicles 29:10). Isaiah, on behalf of the nation of Israel, confessed, “Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting” (Isaiah 63:16).

God also promised that Israel will return from all her backsliding and will enjoy the future blessings of His paternal, covenantal relationship. “Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me” (Jeremiah 3:19b).

Redemptive Fatherhood of God over All in Christ

The Scriptures record wonderful good news for man, who had gone astray from the Father through his rebellious ways and had become a child of His wrath. God has planned to redeem a lost people and adopt them as His own children. Galatians 4:4-6 delineates the divine plan to redeem us so that we may have God as our Father – “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were

under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

Ephesians 1:3-5 declares, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will”. Likewise Galatians 3:26 affirms, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” John 1:12 repeats that joyful message, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”

Only to those who receive Jesus Christ by faith as their Saviour and Lord, is the right to become children of God given. It is through the work of Christ that God invites us to call Him “Abba, Father” (cf. Romans 8:12-16; 1 Peter 1:3-4). Christ is by nature the Son; we are “sons” through adoption. What great news it is that the Father-Creator is also the Father-Redeemer, and that He adopts every sinner who believes on His Son! So the apostle John exclaimed, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1).

The Son of God teaches us to call God, “Our Father which art in heaven” (Matthew 6:9). Likewise, the Spirit of God also teaches us to come to God by calling Him “Abba,

Father”. Galatians 4:6 tells us, “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” Furthermore, Romans 8:15 reiterates, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” The word “Abba” is an Aramaic word that expresses an intimate relationship of a child to his father. It is a child’s appeal to all that is paternal and loving in his father. It was used by Christ in prayer to the Father (cf. Mark 14:36). We are further reminded that it is the Spirit who maintains the consciousness of this relationship in our hearts: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16).

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Oh, what glorious profound truths are depicted in the Fatherhood of God! God’s Fatherhood is much more than just in the creational sense. Wonder of wonders, God is Father in a special sense to His redeemed people! Jesus assures us in Matthew 6:31-32, “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (cf. Matthew 6:8; Psalm 103:13; Luke 11:11-13; 12:30). Truly, “what manner of love” this is indeed!

