

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Number:	9	Gary L.W. Johnson
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BEGOTTEN OF HIS FATHER (Part 1)

Fatherhood is under attack, and not just in our social and cultural context, but especially in its theological dimension. Over the last couple of decades we have, as a society, been assaulted by the pervasive influence of feminism, and the ecclesiastical landscape has been drastically altered. Thomas Harrington, writing for The Brownstone Institute, recently observed, "Have you gotten the memo yet? If not, you must be pretty good at willful blindness as it has been pumped into our homes several times an hour by our mainstream media and its advertising apparatus over the last quarter century or so. While it has several stylistic variations, its central message is the following: American fathers are amiable doofuses who mostly care about getting and sitting in front of big screen TVs while their much savvier wives scurry around for them, and provide almost everything of lasting value that the children might need. Then there's the other part. You know, the one that says that when they're not being puerilely useless watching football as they are, of course, venting their well-known and preternatural penchant for verbal and physical violence on the world around them. Watching this non-stop line of messaging you'd almost believe there are some powerful people out there in media-land who fantasize quite actively about a world without men, or at the very least, a world in which 49 percent of the culture would come to feel tentative and a little stupid about exercising the roles they have played in all healthy societies since the beginning of time. And what might those be? Silly little things like modeling essential values like courage and forbearance, or of providing, through their carefully observed and loving knowledge of each of their children's unique personalities, the accurate parameters for that unique and growing person's spirited exploration of the world outside the home. Or counter-balancing the laudable maternal tendency to protect the child at all costs with an ethos of greater intrepidity that acknowledges the constant existence of fear and danger, but that posits them as problems to be managed rather than avoided. And last but not least, of being, by dint of their generally more physically imposing, and when necessary, aggressive nature the last line of defense against those outside the family who might openly threaten the moral or physical development of his children."¹ On the social and cultural front, the concept of the father figure is equally confused and convoluted. Sigmund Freud, the guiding light to so much of modern psychology, has foisted on the Western world the Oedipus theory of the father figure.² Regrettably, many evangelicals have succumbed to the influence of radical feminism and the distorted theories of Freud.³ You have probably heard from well-meaning Christians the often-made remark, "You can't really appreciate God as Father if you had a poor relationship with your human

father.”⁴ What does Scripture mean when it refers to God the Father? In what sense can we call God our Father?

- I. **THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD.** The fatherhood of God is spoken of in Scripture in a threefold sense.
 - A. **The Fatherhood of God with Relation to the Son** (1 Corinthians 8:6; 1 John 1:3). There are many passages in the New Testament where the titles “the Son” and “the Father” appear in juxtaposition. In the Gospel records, we find Jesus using the term “Father” in a unique way (Matthew 11:27; Mark 12:6, 13:32, 14:41; Luke 2:44, 10:22; John 3:35, 5:20, 10:15, 14:9). Jesus called God *His own Father* (John 5:17-18). This means, as John Murray has noted, “That no other but the Father stood in this relation to Jesus the Son. Paul says *His own Son* (Romans 8:32), and this means that no other stands in this relation to the Father. God the Father has many sons by adoption, and He will bring them all to glory. They are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. But divine revelation permits no confusion to exist between the sonship of the only begotten and that of the adopted. No other but the eternal Son is the Father’s *own Son*. Here is an ineffable and incomparable sonship (cf. John 1:14, 18, 3:16; 1 John 4:9).”⁵
 - B. **The Fatherhood of God as the Creator** (Malachi 2:10; James 1:17). God is the Father of all things by creation (Isaiah 64:8 and especially Acts 17:24-28). “There is,” wrote the Puritan William Bates, “an indelible character of dignity engraven in the reasonable nature by the hand of God. But since man turned rebel to his Creator and Father, this endearing, obliging relation aggravates his rebellion, but gives him no interest in the paternal love of God, of which he has made a deadly forfeiture.”⁶
 - C. **The Fatherhood of God with Relation to Believers in Christ.** God is not, in the redemptive sense, the Father of all men, but only of believers. On the contrary, we are by *nature* not children of light, but of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). “When a penitent sinner trusts in the expiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ, then the triune God becomes his Father in the high and endearing signification of the term, and the man becomes a child of God in the same signification”⁷ (cf. Romans 8:14; Galatians 4:6-7; 1 John 3:9).
- II. **THE ETERNAL FATHER AND HIS SON.** In Hebrews 1:1-3, Jesus, the Son, is declared to be *the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being*. The Son is the only begotten of the Father (John 1:18). The Scriptures, from beginning to end, unite in declaring that God is an eternal Father with relation to the Son.
 - A. **The Teachings of the Gospels.** When we examine the gospel records, we find that our Lord took great care in how He expressed Himself when He instructed the disciples about the Father and His Fatherhood. Listen to the words of Abraham Kuyper: “He never confused the relations but spoke distinctly about *my Father* and *your Father*. Never did He draw human beings, even if they were His beloved friends, into that unique relationship between the Father and Himself. He never spoke about *our God* and *our Father*, but always clearly distinguished between *my* and *your Father*. Only once did He use the expression: *Our Father, Who art in Heaven*. But we know that was to be the disciples’ prayer, not His

own”⁸ (cf. John 20:17; Matthew 27:46; Revelation 3:12). It is in John’s Gospel in particular that the Fatherhood of God is seen most clearly in relation to Jesus and His teachings (cf. John 1:14, 18, 3:16, 18, 4:22-26, 5:20, 36, 38, 7:29, 10:17, 11:42, 13:34, 14:31, 15:10, 17:1-24; et. al. Jesus uses the expression “My Father” nearly thirty times in John’s record).⁹

B. ***The Teaching of the Epistles.*** “The title *Father*,” writes Guthrie, “is sometimes qualified to give added richness to the concept. God is many times described as the Father of Jesus Christ, but He is also Father of glory (Ephesians 1:17), Father of Spirits (Hebrews 12:9), Father of lights (James 1:17). All human fatherhood is seen to derive from the fatherhood of God (Ephesians 3:15, 15), which shows that God is not called Father on the basis of human analogy, as if human fatherhood was the nearest approximation to the relationship between God and man. Fatherhood is seen rather to be inherent in the nature of God.”¹⁰ In 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, the Apostle Paul underscored the unique relationship that believers have with God through the Son. God is distinctively represented under the title of a father. “God,” wrote the Puritan Thomas Manton, “is a word of power; Father expresseth his goodwill. God standeth in both relations to us, as He did also to Christ: John 20:17, *I go to my God and your God, my Father and your Father*. Both joined together signify His power and readiness to do good. He that is our Father is true God also, and He that is true God is also our Father; and therefore we may depend on Him. That which we are to open is the term Father, which speaketh both comfort and duty to us.”¹¹

III. ***THE ETERNAL FATHER AND WORSHIP.*** In the well-known exchange between Jesus and the woman at the well (John 4:4-26), our Lord gives us a direct and concise understanding of true worship (and thus true worshipers as contrasted with false worship and false worshipers).

A. ***Definition of True Worship.*** Note how this is connected with a right view of God, which is directly linked with a correct understanding of God (v. 22). True worship is directed to the Father and is done in *spirit and truth*. What does this mean? I believe D. A. Carson has accurately interpreted this. “This God who is spirit can be worshiped only *in spirit and truth*. Both in verse 23 and verse 24, the one preposition *in* governs both nouns (a point obscured by the NIV of verse 24). There are not two separable characteristics of the worship that must be offered: it must be *in spirit and truth*, i.e., essentially God-centered, made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in personal knowledge of and conformity to God’s Word – made flesh, the one who is God’s *truth*, the faithful exposition and fulfillment of God and His saving purposes.”¹² It needs to be said that Jesus says nothing here (or elsewhere) about the *style* of worship being celebrative, informal and spontaneous.¹³

CONCLUSION: “I have often found,” says good old John Bunyan, “that when I can say but this word, *Father*, it doth me more good that if I called Him by any other Scripture name. It is worth your noting that to call God by this title was rare among the saints in the Old Testament times. Seldom do you find Him called by this name – no, sometimes not in three or four books; but now, in New Testament times, he is called by no name so often as this, both by the Lord Jesus Himself, and by the apostles afterwards. Indeed, the Lord Jesus was He that first made the name common among the saints, and that taught them, both in their discourse, their prayers, and their writings, so much to use it; it being more

pleasing to God, and discovering more plainly our interest in God, than any other expression. For by this one name, we are made to understand that all our mercies are the offspring of God, and that we also that are called are His children by adoption.”¹⁴ Our psychologized culture conditions us to view fatherhood exclusively in terms of our personal experiences with our human fathers – and, of course, if your father was a bad father figure, then you supposedly cannot relate to God as a Father. Worst of all, good Christians have bought into this dreadful notion! May God Himself give us wisdom and understanding that we may grasp the truth of God as our Father, the Father of all compassion and the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3).

ENDNOTES

¹ T. Harrington, “Those Silly Dads on TV,” Brownstone Institute, June 18, 2023.

² Oedipus, a tragic figure in Greek mythology, had incestuous longings for his mother Jocasta. He eventually killed his father and married Jocasta. Freud developed this theory as the basis for all religion and morals. He contended that this concept of the repressed father, whose figure each one of us internalizes (and thereby makes into a source for authority) is the actual power that drives humans in their religious beliefs. This thesis is advanced and defended by R. Hamerton-Kelly in his *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus* (Fortress Press, 1979).

³ Martin and Deidre Bobgan have documented the Freudian nature of much that passes itself off as being “Christian” psychology. See their *Prophets of Psychoheresy* in two volumes (East Gate Publishers, 1989).

⁴ David Powlison has analyzed this widespread mindset among Christians in an article entitled “What if Your Father Didn’t Love You?” in *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Vol. XII, No. 1, Fall, 1993), pp. 2-7.

⁵ *Collected Writings of John Murray III* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), p. 215.

⁶ *The Complete Works of William Bates IV* (rpt. Sprinkle, 1990), p. 298.

⁷ W. G. T. Shedd, *Sermons to the Spiritual Man* (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), p. 54.

⁸ As cited by Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism I* (Reformed Free, 1970), p. 372.

⁹ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (IVP, 1981), p. 313.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹¹ *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton III* (rpt. Maranatha, N. D.), p. 141.

¹² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 225.

¹³ Some of you are old enough to remember *Woodstock*. Some of us come from the generation that saw Woodstock as the symbol of the turbulent 60’s. The myth of Woodstock has been perpetuated by many in the mainstream liberal media, and especially among the Hollywood elite, now mid-age baby-boomers, who nostalgically would very much like to recapture their youth by glorifying Woodstock as the personification of freedom. To them, the event represented informality, spontaneity, self-expression and a liberating sense of personal freedom. In reality, it was nothing of the sort. “A muddy, disgusting mess,” is what folk-singer Judy Collins called it. More graphic was the assessment of Keith Richards, a member of the Rolling Stones, who said, “Woodstock was one hundred thousand people stoned out of their heads wanting to get laid.” Woodstock was, in fact, a tragic and demoralizing event that actually expressed the emptiness and sense of alienation that epitomized the times. It is alarming and disturbing, then, to hear a well-known church growth leader make this amazing statement: “We baby boomers aren’t coming to church to become members. We’re coming to experience something. Yes, even to get something. What we’re hoping for is some kind, human touch . . . Secretly, I think we thirty something folks believe the myth of Woodstock is what the Church, in a certain sense, ought to emulate. The Church ought to be celebrative, informal and spontaneous . . . The theology of Woodstock is the dream of a generation . . . The Church’s failure to appreciate the impact of Woodstock could cause it to miss a wonderful opportunity in communicating the gospel intelligibly to an entire generation.” Doug Murren, *The Baby Boomerang* (Regal Books, 1990), p. 52. Is true worship really supposed to be characterized in Woodstock fashion as celebrative, informal, and spontaneous? Much *false* worship is done in that way. In fact, if one examines the religions of the ancient and modern world, it is not at all unusual to find worship characterized as being Woodstockian! True worship *must* (note the “must” of John 4:24) stem from a knowledge of the Triune God and offered up to Him exclusively.

¹⁴ *The Works of John Bunyan I* (rpt. Baker, 1977), p. 244.