

Study 1 of 9. The Prayer That Can Change The World. The Lord's Prayer. The Fatherhood of God. "Our Father in Heaven." Based on blog 173.

"Our Father in heaven hallowed be your name." These words must have shocked all those who heard Jesus speak. He was teaching His followers how to pray. He taught that they should address God in this way. Many would have seen Him as guilty of blasphemy. The Jews were monotheistic, so how could God have a Son or children? We will get some answers as we look at what the Bible says about this phrase.

1). GOD AS "FATHER" IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

i). The term "Father" was used in a general sense of God as the creator of humans. Moses rebuked the people of Israel, *Deut 32:6 Is this the way you repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?* God is the creator of all peoples. All owe their origin to Him. But His own people had acted like disobedient children and missed out on much of what God wanted to give them. So do all who do not recognise Him as a loving Heavenly Father who delights to bless and protect all who come to Him in faith.

ii). The word was also used to describe God as a Father to His people. He described Himself as such. *Jer 31:9 "They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel's father."* To sin against God was a breach of love against a Heavenly Father. It was not just breaking a command. *Deut 32:6 "... Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?"* Malachi issued the same challenge, *"Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?" (2:10).*

Isaiah called God "Father" in his prayers in *63:16, "But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name."* And in *Isaiah 64:8, "Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand."*

God would even be a father to the King, *1 Chron 17:12-13, "He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his Father, and he will be my son."*

iii). God had Father-like qualities. As a father carries a son. *Deut 1:31 and in the wilderness. There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place."*

He cared for the disadvantaged, *Psa 68:5 "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling."*

His love was more accepting and forgiving than that of human parents. *Psa 27:10 "Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me."*

He would mould and fashion the lives of those who placed themselves in His loving care, *Isa 64:8 "Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand."*

God is compassionate like a father. *Psa 103:13 "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him."*

He disciplines in love as a true father should. *Prov 3:11-12, "My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, (12) because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in."*

Throughout the Old Testament we see those 2 features, the need for God's children to respect Him as the one who had brought them into being, and also God's promise that He would care and provide for His children.

2). GOD AS "FATHER" IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. The concept of God in the secular philosophies of Jesus' day saw God as detached from the world, indifferent, uncaring and unmoved. But the NT writers describe God as a Father who knows, who cares, and who is motivated by love to do something for the needs of His children..

i). Jesus taught His followers to see God as their Heavenly Father. As we have seen they were to address God as 'Our Father' in the Lord's Prayer. He also taught them that their Heavenly Father

was interested in hearing and answering their prayers. The promises of God about answers to prayer are particularly for those who are His children.

He encourages us as the children of God to ask so that we will receive, to seek so that we find it in Him, and to knock so that doors are opened to us. As Jesus said, if human fathers actually do give good things to their children, then how much more is God as Father motivated to give, *Luk 11:13* "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

ii). Jesus taught His followers to expect answers to prayer from Him because He is a giving God. He gave us His Son, *Jn 3:16*, "for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that those who believe in Him might not perish but have eternal life. (St Paul later added to that concept by writing in *Rom 8:31-32*, "What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?") God can't be a Father to us if we are not willing to become His child. He can't pour out all the blessing He has for us as His children if we won't receive His Son in whom all those blessings are to be found. *Eph 1:3*.

Jesus also encouraged His followers to pray to a Father who answers prayer. We see this in the following verses, *Mat 18:19* "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven." AND *John 15:16* "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. AND *John 16:23* "In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."

iii). God is seen as a compassionate Father, unchanging and impartial. Compassionate *2 Cor 1:3* "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort." Unchanging. *James 1:17* "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change." Impartial. *1 Pet 1:17* "you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially"

iv). The Fatherhood of God for believers is different to the Fatherhood of God as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus told us so. He spoke of God in His teaching, as "My Father". When He addressed God in prayer, He normally prayed, "Father." Eg., *Lk 10:21, 22:42, 23:34*. His last prayer was on the cross, *Luke 23:46* ... "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

We are children of God in a different sense to Jesus who is the eternal Son of God. That's why Jesus said after His resurrection from the dead, "I am ascending to My Father, and your Father, to My God and your God." *Jn 20:17*. We are children of a Heavenly Father, not by natural birth but through adoption by Him. *Rom 8:23* "Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies." And *Eph 1:5* "he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."

v). How could sinful people become children of God? By believing in Jesus and thus being born into God's family. *Jn 1:11* "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." However some did, *12* "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, *13* who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

vi). Most New Testament writers described God as "our Father". Paul did so in all his epistles except 1 and 2 Timothy. The term "our Father" is not found in Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John and Jude though the concept of God as the Father certainly is.

vii). God the Father is seen as the source of our creation and salvation. *1 Cor 8:6* "yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

viii). God the Father is seen as the One who so loved the world that He gave us His Son to die for us on the cross, to get rid of our sin and to reconcile us to Himself as His children. Not only is that true in John 3:16, but the same concept is seen in other places in the New Testament. For example, *1 John 4:14 "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world."* As we read the words in 1 John 3:1, we're reminded of the incredible costliness of that love for us, *"How great is the love (what manner of love) the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"*

Paul also put it like this in Gal 1:3-4, *"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father."*

ix). He is seen as the Father who bestows His Spirit on us. Jesus promised in John 14:26 *"But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."* Peter saw this as fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. *Acts 2:33 "Exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."*

Paul wrote of the Father's gift in Gal 4:6 *"Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'" (cf., Rom 8:15).* Perhaps we need to note those words from Gal 4:6. As we receive Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us, and to make God near and dear to us. It's the Spirit within us who produces the desire to cry out "Abba Father". Those words are intimate words, and even the most conservative scholars have to admit that the best English translation is "Daddy! "Others dilute it to "Father, dear Father." But it's the cry of a young dependent child who loves his or her father and who expresses that love and dependence in this simple cry.

There are perhaps other passages in the scriptures we could turn to that would add to the truths above. But suffice to say that there is enough information about God as Father to recognise Him as such and also to be confident in coming before Him in prayer and addressing Him as "Father" or corporately, "Our Father".

But it raises a question. Why is it that many find it so hard to trust God or to speak to Him in such personal, intimate language? All of us are affected by our backgrounds. If our family background was that our earthly father or parent was loving, accepting, forgiving, always reliable and dependable, and surrounded us with a wonderful sense of security, then we can more easily relate to God in that way. If our experience of a father (or a mother) was that he was unloving, rejecting, unforgiving, never reliable, undependable, and he surrounded us with insecurity, then we will find it harder to relate to God as a Heavenly Father who loves us and wants the best for us. Harder but not impossible!

The point I make in Seminars is that we need to thank God for everything good or helpful we experienced in our relationship with a parent. They may not have been perfect, but there were things that we can be grateful for. Then we need to forgive them for everything that wasn't good or helpful, and that damaged us in any way. We may never have realised that our inability to trust people or to love someone deeply, began in our early childhood when the person who should have been loving and trustworthy, wasn't. But forgiving them and asking God to heal us, releases His wonderful healing into us. But more about that in future articles!

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION. Study 1.

- 1). As you look at section 1, how could you encourage someone to recognise from the Old Testament that God is caring?
- 2). Which verse describing God as "Father" most appeals to you? Why?
- 3). Why do some folk find it difficult to pray "Our Father" as Jesus encouraged them to do so?
- 4). How would you try to help someone understand that God loves them as parents love their children?
- 5). Why do you think that some people go to pieces as they sing songs about God as Father? How could we try to help them?

Blog No.173. Jim Holbeck. Posted on Saturday 30th January 2016