

7. One God and Father of All

We come now to the last of the seven uniting attributes mentioned by Paul in his exhortation to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. His final element draws our eyes to God, and specifically to the attribute of God as Father of all believers, we are reminded that the church is a family with God at its head. Of course God is no ordinary human father, He is the Almighty God who is above, through, and in all; but like a human father, he has children, and as human children bear the image of their father, likewise God's children are bearers of the image of God their heavenly Father. Paul brings out this familial aspect several times in Ephesians: in 1:5 noting that believers are adopted sons of God; in 2:19 noting that believers are members of the household of God; and in 5:1 with the exhortation that as dear children believers should be imitators of God. In human families there is a fundamental uniting link between all the members, so it is in God's family, each member is intrinsically linked to the others. The predominant aspect of that link is Jesus the Son of God, adoption into God's family being possible only through faith in Jesus.

Children of God

The Bible makes it very clear that not all human beings are children of God. It is true that God is our Creator, and in that sense we are all His offspring (Acts 17:28,29), but fatherhood involves relationship, and sin separates from God, there can be no real relationship with God while sin is present. All have sinned, and all are therefore alienated from God, and in need of reconciliation (Rom. 3:23; Col. 1:21). It is only through faith in Jesus that we can be reconciled to God, and can enter into relationship with Him and know Him as Father. This Biblical fact was made very clear in John's gospel when he wrote,

But as many as received Him [Jesus], to them He gave the right to become the children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (Jn. 1:12,13)

This is elementary Christian teaching, and is emphasised by the very well known teaching of Jesus in John 3 about the necessity of being born-again for entrance into the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3-7). Scripture uses some very strong language to describe the natural state of human beings, for example the first few verses of Ephesians chapter 2 which describes unsaved people as, "sons of disobedience" and "children of wrath," they walk according to the ways of the world and of the devil, fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and desires of the mind. That state is called, "being without Christ" and characterised as, "having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). We must, as Bible-believing Christians, be fully convinced of the testimony of Scripture to the wicked natural state of mankind, and equally convinced that none is righteous, and that no one has a place in heaven among God's family unless there has been that radical and dramatic change of life which Jesus called being born again.

The current trend in the church to preach a God who loves all regardless of their conduct,

and to do away with teaching about sin, wrath, judgment and repentance is a wicked perversion of the gospel of grace. Yes, God loves the world according to John 3:16, but we must never forget that in order to show His love, God sent His son to pay the penalty for our sins; personal and meaningful participation in God's love and blessing is only for those who by faith have repented and accepted His Son as their Saviour (see Eph. 2:13-18). Sin has to be dealt with, or relationship with God is not possible. We must give people the same message the Lord gave: He preached, "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk. 1:15), and He instructed his disciples to preach repentance and remission of sins (Lk. 24:47), he taught that all will perish unless they repent (Lk. 13:3). The apostle Paul stated that, "God ... now commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30), and he wrote that, "the goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Rom. 2:4). We cannot, without disobedience to the Lord, withhold from people the message of sin and repentance.

We must be rid of the fear of talking about sin and repentance, and of the notion that to talk about such things is somehow an affront to people. It is an act of God's great mercy to reveal our sinfulness to us, He sends the Holy Spirit to convict of sin, righteousness and judgment (Jn. 16:8). Why? So that we may understand our awful plight, and that we may comprehend our need of a Saviour, and that then with such understanding we may look to the cross, and see Jesus taking the penalty for our sins, and we may cry to Him and receive forgiveness and salvation, and so be adopted into God's family. God longs to be reconciled and be a Father to all the people of this earth, what a grievous dis-service is done to Him when those who call themselves Christians fail to present the only way of salvation, and in so doing actually deny sinners the opportunity of a place in God's family.

God the Father

There are very few mentions in the Old Testament of the Fatherhood of God, and mostly of a nationalistic nature in seeing God as the father of the nation of Israel (cf. Ex. 4:22,23; Deut. 14:1,2). It is in the New Testament with the teaching of Jesus that the personal nature of the relationship is presented. Jesus, Himself being the only begotten Son of God, made it clear that relationship with God as Father was only possible through belief in the Son (Jn. 16:27; Mt. 11:27). He rebuked the Jews who considered their physical descent from Abraham as the basis of relationship with God, telling them that if God was truly their Father they would love His Son, and not reject Him (Jn. 8:37-47). In similar vein John the Baptist had warned his Jewish listeners not to trust in descent from Abraham, telling them that God was able to raise up children to Abraham from the stones (Mt. 3:9). All this emphasised the need for faith and repentance, and conversion to become a true child of God (Mt. 18:3). Jesus presented the relationship in very personal and intimate terms, and talked about the love and abiding presence of the Father for the believer:

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come and make Our home with him. (Jn. 14:23)

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. (Jn. 17:21)

This is the effect of reconciliation with God the Father through the cross of His Son. No longer alienated from God, the believer has promise of a very real, precious, intimate relationship with the Father. That relationship is something to be extremely thankful for, and to cherish as something very special. God Himself sees it as a special relationship, and New Testament believers are spoken of in terms of being a chosen, holy, beloved and special people, who receive an abundance of grace, love and blessings from God the Father and His Son (cf. Eph. 1:2-6; Eph. 3:14-19; Col. 3:12; Titus 2:11-14; 1Pet. 2:9,10). On the believer's side this relationship is something to treasure, there are wonderful benefits such as peace, membership of God's household and access to the Father (Eph. 2:17-19). On God's side He seeks to abundantly bless and care for those who are His children, believers are exhorted to trust their Heavenly Father completely; He knows their every need, and is able to meet every need, in the light of such promises the believer is exhorted to be anxious for nothing (Mt. 6:8; 25-34).

Perfect Children

There are conditions to the relationship, God like any father, being the head of the household, requires certain things from the family members, in consideration of which we here mention four important points:

i) Perfection

Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Mt. 5:48)

Jesus spoke these words in the course of teaching His disciples, and it must be seen in context. The perfection He is talking about follows on from His words in 5:20, that "unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus was speaking of a level of righteousness which goes far beyond compliance to a set of religious rules. In the following verses Jesus pointed to the attitudes of the heart, and other practical aspects of true discipleship such as love of enemies, all of which raised the standard of righteousness to a level unattainable by human effort. Jesus was showing that there must first be perfect righteousness in the heart before perfect deeds can be performed. Such righteousness is attainable only to those who have been redeemed by Jesus, who having accepted His substitutionary death on their behalf, have been declared righteous by God (2Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:21,22). The sinful heart must be purified by the blood of Jesus, and a clean heart created that contains the laws of God (Ps. 51:10; Ezk. 18:31; Heb. 9:14; Heb. 10:16), only then can a new righteous life which is pleasing to God be lived. That new life, initiated at conversion, depends on and receives the help and power of the Holy Spirit in order to fulfil God's righteous requirements (Rom. 8:4).

ii) *Imitation*

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. (Eph. 5:1)

The new man is exhorted to behave very differently to the old sinful man. Peter exhorts believers as “obedient children” to “be holy in all your conduct” (1Pet. 1:14-16). As it is in the natural, and children bear the likeness of the parents, so it is in the spiritual, children of God are being renewed in the image of God and bear the likeness of their Heavenly Father (Col. 3:10). That likeness is not physical, but moral and spiritual, and the inner work accomplished in the heart manifests itself in righteous and holy conduct. It is another aspect of being perfect, those who have been cleansed and made perfectly righteous in Jesus, are fit to serve the living God (Heb. 9:14), and do the good works He prepared for them (Eph. 2:10), those good works will bring glory to God, and show the world what He is like (Matt. 5:16).

iii) *Separation*

Come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. (2Cor. 6:17,18)

Here the promise of God’s Fatherhood is conditional upon obedience to His command to be separate. Paul wrote that believers are not to be yoked together with unbelievers, not to fellowship with unrighteousness, not to have communion with darkness, etc. (2Cor. 6:14-16), he demanded a pulling back from any kind of deep associations which could lead the believer into doing things which would be defiling. The redeemed believer’s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, a dwelling place of God, and should be used for God and for His glory (cf. 1Cor. 6:19,20). In reminding his readers of the great blessing of knowing God as Father he encourages them to keep themselves separate, because only then can they know the fullness of blessings promised within the Father and child relationship. God will not and cannot bless sin, He desires cleansed and purified vessels that are consecrated to Him and for Him. The believer who wishes to know the fullness of relationship with the Heavenly Father must therefore remain separate from all defiling influences, keep himself pure, and commit to perfecting a life of holiness before God (2Cor. 7:1).

iv) *Discipline*

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten. (Heb. 12:7)

Many believers seem to feel uncomfortable with the thought that God chastens and disciplines, it seems to them something that a loving God would not do. Hebrews 12:3-11 gives the right understanding of this aspect of the Father and child relationship. A loving father must discipline his children when they do things wrong, to do otherwise would not be loving, if a natural father does so, Hebrews argues, then our Heavenly Father must also. There is a difference however, because the

natural father will act according to what seems best to him, whereas the Father does it for the profit of His children - that they may partake of His holiness. The Father wants His children to be holy, and to be perfect representatives of His holy character. If any of us can say we are perfect in holiness then we can be confident that we should suffer no chastening, however, who can honestly declare with confidence that they are perfectly holy? God's chastening of His children is an act of love, not designed to discourage, but to assure of His love. His chastening should not be despised, but welcomed, knowing that God is working in our lives to make us more like Himself.

Above All, Through All, In You All

It stands to reason, that as there is one God the Father, His family is one also. There is one natural Son, the Lord Jesus who is the image of the invisible God, the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). There is a great multitude of adopted children, all those who have received Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, Jesus is pleased to call them His brethren (Heb. 2:12). What a privilege to be a member of God's most wonderful family!

Above All

God the Father is above all because He is the Almighty God, the Creator of all things. The Father has put all things into the hands of His Son, and Jesus reigns over all until the end of the age when He will deliver the kingdom to the Father (1Cor. 15:24,25), Jesus is the head of the body, the church, and has the preeminence (Col. 1:18). In submitting their lives to the Lordship of Jesus, the redeemed also submit to the Father because He is in the Son, the Son is in the Father, and the redeemed are one with them (Jn. 17:21). The children of God have great assurance and confidence, knowing their Heavenly Father loves them and cares for them, and that because He is Almighty God, He is able to meet every need and take them through every circumstance.

Through All

God the Father is through all because He reveals Himself in His children, and it is through His children that He makes Himself known to the world. God's children are vessels of His glory (2Cor. 4:6), called out of the darkness into His marvellous light to proclaim His praises, and to declare His glory to the nations (1Pet. 2:9; Ps. 96:2,3). Their lives are to be lived in such a way as to shine the light of the kingdom of God, and bring glory to the Father (Mt. 5:14-16).

In All

God the Father is in all because He abides in His children, true disciples love His Son Jesus, and the Father loves them, and because they love Jesus and keep His commandments, they receive the Holy Spirit. The faithful and obedient child of God has assurance of a very blessed and precious relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The blessings of that relationship are conditional on obedience to the Lord and His word (Jn. 14:23), and on living a holy life free from the taint of the world and sin (2Cor. 6:17 - 7:1). Partaking of such a wonderful blessed relationship is the privilege of the faithful child of God, and should serve as a powerful incentive to keep oneself holy unto the

Lord.

In consideration of the Fatherhood of God we are led into thoughts of family. God has a family of which Jesus is Head, the members of God's family are the redeemed who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Like any other family, there are uniting influences, and family resemblances; members of God's family are united by their love for Jesus, by the desire to be obedient to Him, in trusting Him, in seeking to live holy lives free from sin and wickedness, and in seeking to give glory to Him in all they do. They resemble God their Father because, having been born again, they are being renewed in His image, are vessels of His glory; they are His representatives on the earth.

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1Jn. 3:1,2)