

God as Father

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There is today a rapidly growing movement in religious circles which has for its object the establishing of a common ground for worship, upon which professing Christians, Jews, Muslims and others may meet. Implicit in this is the recognition of the universal Fatherhood of God and, in consequence, the universal brotherhood of men. These are doctrines which carry an appeal, and have an attractiveness to the natural mind, and such passages as Malachi 2: 10 and 1 Corinthians 8: 6 are torn from their context to support what is asserted. We propose to examine the question in the light of Scripture, in which, and in which alone, is revealed the true basis of man's approach to God in worship.

First, let us consider briefly the awful errors to which such a path way would, if followed, lead. If all men (we use the word as expressive of men and women — mankind) are the children of God and He is their Father, then quite obviously the doctrine of eternal punishment must be cast aside, for there is no suggestion in Scripture that one of God's children will ever eternally perish. This in turn makes the atonement unnecessary, and thus the Cross — the glorious centre and outstanding theme of Christianity — is no longer needed. The atoning work of Christ is belittled, if accepted at all, and He is stripped of glories which are unique to Himself. We shall refer to this point later.

Now we concede at once that all men are the offspring of God. This is made perfectly clear in Paul's address to the Athenians (Acts 17). It is also made abundantly clear in that chapter that Paul is referring to men as being part of God's creation, and as standing in *the relation of creatures to God as Creator*. It is also clear that the Athenians had no knowledge of God as their Father; He was "unknown" to them; they were "ignorant" of the way of approach to Him, but in infinite mercy He had made it possible for them to "seek the Lord" and to "feel (to "search for") after Him". The context shows that man had become estranged from His Creator and the whole tenor of Scripture makes this clear beyond doubt. It is this *creatorial* relationship which Malachi refers to, in a book where men are strewn to have lost reverence for God.

The reference in 1 Corinthians 8 completely refutes the suggestion of "universal Fatherhood" — in no way does it support such a heresy. The apostle says, "To us there is but one God, the Father." Who are the "us"? We are left in no doubt at all! In chapter 1 of the same Epistle Paul tells us to whom he is writing. "All that . . . call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord." Those who are "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ", and have been "called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord". These are they who stand in relation to God as Father. Thus the *touchstone* of the relationship is the One who is completely left out by those who propound these errors, *Jesus Christ our Lord*.

In 2 Corinthians 6: 14, the Apostle writes, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers", and then goes on to describe the outstanding features of both believers and unbelievers — urging believers to separate themselves from the company of unbelievers in order that they might know the blessedness of God's promise — "I will . . . be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters." Again therefore we see that the thought of God's universal Fatherhood is not in accordance with Scripture.

If the Fatherhood of God applies to all men, why did the Lord say to the religious leaders of His day "If God were your Father", adding those terribly solemn words "Ye are of your father the devil"

(John 8: 42-44). Note carefully that these are the words of "a Man that hath told you the truth" (verse 40).

Unquestionably the most serious feature of this teaching is the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ is left out, and this in the face of the Scripture "All men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father" (John 5: 23).

Let us then enquire from God's Word as to the way in which we may know God as Father, and rejoice in the consciousness of relationship to Him as children. The Scriptures are abundantly clear as to this.

In John chapter 1 we read, "As many as received Him (the Lord Jesus) to them gave He power (or right) to become the sons (children) of God, even to them that believe on His Name." In the previous verse (11) He had presented Himself to "His own, and His own (the Jewish people) *received* Him not". Galatians 3: 26 reads, "Ye are all, the children of God by *faith in Christ Jesus*." Thus we see that our relationship to God as Father is dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ having His place, through faith, in our hearts.

Let us now consider the actual words of Christ Himself in reference to this vital question. Matthew 11: 27 reads — "Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him". Further in John 14: 6 we find these conclusive words "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me". Thus for the knowledge of the Father, and for the way to Him, we are dependent absolutely upon the Person of the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and there is no other way to *God as Father*.

We must ever remember that He who is to be known in the blessed relationship of Father is God, and the dwelling place of Deity is "in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Tim. 6: 16). God is righteous and holy — ever was such and ever will be; He has "purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab. 1: 13); the stars in their scintillating beauty "are not pure in His sight" (Job 25: 5). Many scriptures show the moral distance between man and his God because of sin. Perhaps Romans chapter 1 portrays it in its clearest form, man actually preferring to worship the lowest creation and indulge in the most revolting sin, rather than retain and appreciate the knowledge of God. Of His earthly people — the Jew — God has to say "they are all estranged (foreigners) from Me through their idols" (Ezk. 14: 4); and of the Gentiles Paul writes "being alienated (non-participant) from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them" (Eph. 4: 18). Foreigners and non-participants — this is the condition of mankind as in sin — idolaters and ignorant of God. We do well to face the truth of Scripture, solemn and searching though it be!

Into this dark scene of moral departure from and ignorance of God, there came One — God's blessed Son, He who in speaking to God as Father could say, "Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17: 24). As God looked upon Him here in Manhood He opened the heavens and said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3: 17). He, and He alone, could remove the distance existing between man and his God. "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2: 5, 6). It is through Him and His finished work on Calvary's cross that man can be reconciled to God. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom. 5: 10 cf also 2 Cor. 5: 18; Col. 1: 21 ; Eph. 2: 16). This glorious Person is presented in the Gospel to men as Saviour and Lord, and we have already noticed that it is "by faith in Christ Jesus" that we are made the "children of God".

Having completed the work of Calvary the Lord Jesus has "risen from among the dead" ascended from this earth to the Father. Before He left the scene in which He had suffered, He uttered those

memorable words to Mary Magdalene, "Go to My *brethren*, and say unto *them*, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the *disciples* that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things unto her" (John 20: 17, 18). The link between these lovers of Christ had been forged in His precious death and victorious rising — and they were now to be introduced through Him, *and as in association with Him*, to His Father as their Father, to His God as their God. Thus we see the truth of the verse already quoted:

"No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14: 6).

"For *through Him* we both (Jew and Gentile) have access by one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2: 18). Commg to, and knowing the Father, is one of the most precious privileges enjoyed by those "who love *our* Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity". It is a privilege open to all Christians — it is the possession of the "little children" in the family of God, those of whom it is said, "Your sins are forgiven you for His Name's sake" (1 John 2: 12). "I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father ". Blessed knowledge! to be shared by every redeemed heart. Yet completely unknown by the unregenerate whatever their ecclesiastical pretension may be.

The blessings connected with the knowledge of the Father are boundless. In Luke chapter 12 the Lord Jesus tells us that the Father knows all that we have need of in our pathway through this world; but there is much more than this! "Every good and perfect gift . . . cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness". Unchanging in His constant love the Father delights to flood our hearts with the bounty of His own affections from the boundless resources which are His in that scene of unclouded light (James 1: 17). He is "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (1 Cor. 1: 3). No sorrow, no care, no anxiety, no pressure upon spirit or body — escapes His eye, and from Himself as Father comes the needed sense of mercy and comfort. He is the "Father of glory", and as in affectionate communion with Himself He would flood our hearts with the wisdom and intelligence of His glorious purpose in Christ, and of the "exceeding greatness of His power", which give us to know our place as an integral part of that vast inheritance of glory (Eph. 1). He is the "Father of spirits" and as such is engaged with the inward refining of our affections, having in view the blessed fact "that we might be made partakers of His holiness" (Hebrews 12: 9, 10).

As in the enjoyment of this precious relationship to God as our Father may the features of the children of God be manifested in our walk. "In this the children of God are manifest . . . that we should love one another" (1 John 3: 10, 11). "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour" (Eph. 5: 1, 2).