

Happy Father's day, God Galatians 4:1-7

Today is Father's day. What will you get for father's day? More socks and jocks! For some of us, our fathers are deceased and so today is a mixture of feelings and memories. For the wives, their husbands are not their fathers and so they take a back seat on this occasion though they do not mind going out for lunch or dinner to celebrate. For the children it starts with drawings and other artistic creations as well as breakfast in bed. My children gave me breakfast in bed on the Saturday as on Sunday I was up for church. It then progresses to socks and jocks then aftershave and many other items that the stores advertise that a father must have. It seems that there is a range of men's tools and toys that is just right for father's day.

While some of us have fathers that are deceased, we all have one Father; our heavenly Father.

For at least the past 40 years, traditional language for God has come under fire. While formal feminist theologians disagree about what language to use instead, they are unanimous that masculine words for God, especially *Father*, must be expunged from our theological vocabulary. For the church to be inclusive, they argue, it must replace man-centered language with language that accounts for both male and female.

Furthermore, since our human words cannot adequately portray God's fullness, no single characterization will suffice. God could be addressed as *father* and/or *mother* in order to bring out his multifaceted nature.

Underlying this view is a belief that terms like *father* and *mother* are mere human characterizations of God, shaped by specific cultural and backgrounds. The predominantly masculine images of God in the Bible reflect an ancient patriarchal society. As a consequence, critics say, biblical religion has absorbed patriarchal values, which in turn are used to justify beliefs and institutions that harm or subjugate women. Theology, therefore, must be reconstructed to yield a valid religion for women based on women's experience.

To claim, as many feminist theologians do, that the very presence of masculine metaphors for

God excludes women simply does not square with the way Scripture uses them. Masculine images of God do not always convey exclusively "masculine" qualities. For example, Isaiah 54:5–7 refers to God as the Husband who with "deep compassion" (a stereotypically "feminine" quality) called estranged Israel back to himself (see also Isa. 49:13). The term *father*, then, excludes not feminine qualities, but rather the idea of a distant and impersonal deity, which is precisely the picture of the supreme being still seen in many primal religions.

GOD THE FATHER

In Scripture God is described as a Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In theology God the Father is called the First Person of the Trinity because in the nature of the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Father sends the Son and the Spirit, rather than the Son sending the Father. As Father, He is Father over all creation. He is Father in the sense that He is the originator of everything that has been made.

In Malachi 2:10, for instance, the questions are asked, "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?" In the sense that God the Father is our Creator, it is proper to speak of the universal fatherhood of God. This must not be understood, however, in the sense that all men are the spiritual children of God because this is true only of those who are born again, and the universal fatherhood of God does not bring with it any sense of salvation for all men as some have taught.

In the Old Testament God was also the father of Israel in that he established a relationship wherein He had a special place for Israel in His plan for humankind. In keeping with this, Moses told Pharaoh in Exodus 4:22, "This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, 'Let my son go, so he may worship me.' But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son." As in the universal fatherhood of God, the special Sonship that Israel enjoyed did not assure to them individual salvation but did assure to them the promises that God had made to the nation as such.

God is also revealed in Scripture as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as stated in Ephesians 1:3. Though the father and son relationship is not the same as human fathers and sons in that Jesus existed from eternity past as well as God the Father, it does indicate a relationship where the Son accomplishes a work on earth on behalf of the Father. This is embodied in the familiar text of John 3:16, where it says that God, that is, God the Father, gave

His Son to provide a Saviour for humanity.

Accordingly, while the Scriptures are clear that God is the Father of Jesus Christ, the Son is not subsequent to, inferior to, or in any way less God than God the Father. As the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, God has a peculiar relationship to Him that differs from His relationship to any other person. In John 3:16 the Son is referred to as "his one and only Son," or, literally, "His only begotten Son." Likewise, in other passages, such as Colossians 1:15, He is declared to be "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." Firstborn does not indicate that He was born in His deity but that He was firstborn in the sense that He was before anything that was created, being eternal like God the Father.

A final aspect of the fatherhood of God is that He is the Father of all who believe in Christ as Saviour. This is based upon spiritual birth, not natural birth, but it pictures the believer as belonging to the family of God in which God is Christ's Father. As believers in Christ, they are declared to be "children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12-13). This is affirmed in Galatians 3:26, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

That God is the Heavenly Father of believers in Christ leads to the wonderful truth that as the sons of God, Christians are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (John 1:12-13; 3:3-6; Rom. 8:16-17; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 1:4). The Fatherhood of God is, accordingly, an important aspect of Christian faith and is supported by many Scriptures (John 20:17; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:3; 2:18; 4:6; Col. 1:12-13; 1 Peter 1:3; 1 John 1:3; 2:1, 22; 3:1). The fact that God is our Father, a God who is infinitely loving, gracious, powerful, and all-wise is a comfort to believers as they seek to find the Lord's will for their life and understand the meaning of spiritual experience.

But the crucial thing that we note is that Jesus taught his disciples to call God "our heavenly Father." Therefore, the loving relationship he has with the Father from eternity now extends to those adopted into God's family (Rom. 8:15). The father-son relationship is the most intimate personal relationship, one marked by reciprocal love and respect, and it is God's supremely personal and loving nature that the term *father* is meant to underscore.

Loving Continually, Abundantly

God says,

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!
And that is what we are! 1 Jn. 3:1

I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness. Jer. 31:3.

Just as a good earthly father, God delights in lavishing His love on us, pouring His love into our lives in generous, plentiful, and even extravagant ways. As your Heavenly Father, God's love goes far beyond the capabilities of a human father in that His love is everlasting, never-ending.

Compassionate, Comforting, and Loyal

God says,

As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him. Ps. 103:13

The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort...2 Cor. 1:3

For the LORD comforts His people and will have compassion on those who are afflicted. But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget or forsake you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." Is. 49:13-16

Just as a good earthly father feels compassionate toward his children — even the more challenging ones — and responds to their needs in compassionate, comforting manners, God says that He will be comforting and compassionate in His responses to His children. God purposely makes a distinction between Himself and earthly parents, admitting that some parents are not good and lack in the normal paternal devotion, and, as a result, abandon their children. God says, referring to a mother as an example (as mothers are typically considered by society to be even more devoted than fathers), that even if our own earthly mother (or likewise, a father) would abandon us, God will never abandon us. His loyalty and devotion cannot end, as sometimes happens with earthly parents.

Nurturing

God says,

The LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place. Deut. 1:31

This is a beautiful visual illustration that God gives us, describing Himself as a father who is literally carrying his son, caring for the son's every need when he is unable to care for himself. Historically, it refers to God caring for the Israelites every need as He brought them out of 400 years of slavery to a land of their own. But as Scripture tells us that God is no respecter of persons — doesn't show favoritism (Acts 10:34) — and that all the promises of God are "yes" for those who are in Him (in Christ, 2 Cor. 1:20), He cannot show less care for us than what He has shown to someone else. We can rely on His intimate nurturing of us, especially at times when we are unable to care for ourselves.

Warm, Affectionate, Familial

God says,

God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father. Gal. 4:6

In this quote, God is describing how He causes His Spirit that lives within us to enable us to cry out to Him as a father, with the sense of intimate closeness, warmth, affection, and complete trust with which a very small child calls out to his parent. "Abba," is Aramaic and Arabic for "Daddy." While researching the term, I discovered that "Abba" is impossible to concisely describe in the English language. Easton's Bible Dictionary says of the term, "It is a term expressing warm affection and filial confidence. It has no perfect equivalent in our language." ATS Dictionary describes the term this way, "It expressed the peculiar tenderness, familiarity, and confidence of the love between parent and child." So we see that God's Spirit works within us to create, between Father God and us, the same natural bond of affection, trust, warmth, and closeness as exists with small child and its parent. Once we become aware of this fact, it should enable us to let down our guard and allow God's Spirit within us to further develop the intimate feelings that are intended to exist between us and Father God.

Giving

God says,

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father, who does not change like shifting shadows. James. 1:17

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 good gifts to those who ask him! Mt. 7:11

As with any good father, God delights in giving to His children, doing things for them that bring joy and excitement to their hearts. God says that only “good and perfect” gifts come from Him. This tells us 2 things: (1) God gives or does things that are considered as gifts from Him to us. (2) He only gives good gifts, again rejecting the theory that evil comes from Father God. In the second quote, God compares Himself to earthly parents to again illustrate His superiority as a parent. We as good, earthly parents love to give good gifts to our children. Even so, we each know that our character, even at its best, is flawed. Since God’s character is flawless, how much more does His heart delight in doing good to us and giving good things to us!

Protector

God says,

Ps 68:5 A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling.

There are countless passages that describe Father God as our protector, such as the ones that refer to Him as our Rock, Shelter, a shield around us, etc. But this quote is especially beautiful because God remarks that He is particularly concerned and protective of those who are normally neglected by society. As this was written approximately 2500 years ago, it was obviously during a period in earth’s history where the job market was male dominated; neither were there the infrastructures for welfare assistance that are available in financially stable countries now. For the most part, orphans and widows back then were without a source of income and without hope. God describes Himself as the Father/Protector of each person who looks to Him, those without hope, and particularly those whom society has let fall through the cracks.

Disciplines Us for our Good

God says,

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good. Heb. 12:7,10

God does disciplines us to develop our spirits and character but He is careful to contrast His discipline of us with that of an earthly father. Notice God says that an earthly father disciplines us the best that he knows how, “but” He disciplines us for our good. His knowledge of the situation and wisdom of how to deal with it are never lacking, so His discipline does always bring about good in us, whereas an earthly father’s discipline may be overbearing, not strict enough, or lacking in wisdom or effectiveness in some other way.

Forgiving

God says,

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 Jn. 1:9

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Col. 3:13

Unlike what many of us were taught as children, God describes Himself as faithful to forgive. When we come to Him and confess our failings, He faithfully forgives us. Notice in the second quote, it tells us to be patient with each other and forgive whatever grievances we have against each other because that is the same way God responds with His forgiveness towards us. The Greek for forgive, *aphete*, means to let go, leave behind, dismiss, or cancel the debt (pg. 1430 FLSB). God is not unforgiving. He does not hold on to bad attitudes toward us when we fail. Just as He tells us to do with each other, when we ask for forgiveness, He “lets it go,” leaving the past in the past.

.Finally this all adds up to the fact that God is a good, good father.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His faithful love endures forever. Psalm 107:1 NLT

Happy Father's day God.