

The Father

When the risen Jesus made Himself known to Mary Magdalene in the garden on the first Easter Sunday He said to her

John 20:17 "Don't cling to me," Jesus told her, "since I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

Jesus spoke of the Father as God of both Himself and His followers, but made a distinction between Himself and His followers – "my Father and your Father, my God and your God."

As we continue to consider the Christian confession of God as One God, Father, Son, and Spirit by working our way through the Nicene Creed we will today think about God the Father, confessed as 'the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, visible and invisible' under those two aspects

Firstly, the Father as the Father of the Son, the Lord Jesus, and

secondly, and wonderfully, the Father as the Father of Jesus' followers, our Father.

These two aspects of our confession are inseparable, bound together by our confession of Jesus as the eternal Son of God. We can only know the Father as the Father of the Son, and only as the Father of the Son can He be our Father.

We are wholly dependent on God for this knowledge, for we have no access to knowledge of God, to the relationship between the Father and the Son, other than what God says of Himself

So As we listen to the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture and as we hear things that we all struggle to understand fully, recognise that this is God talking of Himself, and in Himself He exceeds infinitely our capacity to comprehend His fulness.

We Can hear, and as we understand what is written we can know God as He makes Himself known, know Him in truth, but He is always bigger

And that is as it should be, for a God we could comprehend, know in His entirety, hold His being in our finite understanding, would not be God

So let's humbly receive what we are taught of the Father of the Son by God in His word, and receive it with thankfulness

For as our Lord said

John 17:3 This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent —Jesus Christ.

And as I know these are different kinds of sermons, and require a little more work from you, I want to again encourage you to give yourself to knowing God, and work at it by meditating on His word.

I read in an article someone expressing their discontent with the sermons they were getting.

"It was not an application based sermon", she said. "it was more like knowledge than life-changing, spirit-guided teaching." The Melbourne Anglican 6th August 2022

Now I don't know the particulars of the causes of their dissatisfaction, but I do know it expresses a very short-sighted view of what to look for in a sermon.

If all you are looking for is the take home message, the 'what's in it for me', how I can live better or have a better life, you are short-changing yourself and maybe reflecting our ages preoccupation with this world.

And it is a very bad basis for a relationship.

Imagine you were on a date and you were opening up, telling the other person about yourself, and they said 'Thanks, but that's just information. My present need is I'm hungry, so I just want you to tell me what you want to order so we can keep this meal moving along.'

You'd think – not much future for a relationship here.

Or a group of you were about to start a journey in unfamiliar country and a local had got out a map and was trying to orient you, explain what you could possibly meet on the way to your destination, and someone said – look just tell me if I should turn right or left at the intersection ahead

You'd think that impatience could get us into trouble

The living God has told us about Himself, and HE has done it by the eternal Son, the eternal Word, entering our world, done it to draw us into relationship with Himself

That is extraordinary

We should want to listen to Him, listen to what HE thinks it is important we know about Him, so we can relate to Him in truth

Not show the rudeness of those who only want to know how it effects them, or the impatience of those who have no time to learn

And besides, Knowledge of God is Spirit given and life changing

Knowing God brings us to the heart of reality, and as we will see today knowing God as Father is the source of Christian identity and life, of knowing who we are and how we should live, and the foundation of our hope

And Giving ourselves to what He has said of Himself will deepen us – take us well beyond ourselves, and it is something we can always give ourselves to in this age, where in Paul's words we see in a mirror dimly, where we are all, always, learning

So if you are tempted to just listen for the take home message pray for what we should all have, a thirst to know the living God by meditating on His word, humility to receive what He has said of Himself, and the patience to wait for understanding

So what are we told of the Father in the revelation of the Son

The Father of the Son

The relationship between the Father and the Son is A unique relationship as an eternal relationship

John 1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning.

The Word is with God in the beginning.

The Son, the Lord Jesus, could pray,

John 17:⁵ Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with that glory I had with you before the world existed.

And know Himself known and loved by the Father before the world's foundation.

John 17:²⁴ "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they will see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the world's foundation.

The Son is always the Son of the Father, and The Father is always the Father of the Son.

He doesn't become the Father of the Son when Jesus is born

He doesn't become the Father of the Son at any point in time

He is, and always is, the Father of the Son

So He doesn't need you or I or any creature to be Father, and if He becomes our Father it is by His choice to bestow His love on you, to bring you into His family

And if He is called Father in Scripture it isn't because He approximates to human fatherhood and people project that onto Him, but because human fatherhood has been fashioned as a vehicle for His revelation [Eph. 3:14-15]

In this relationship the incarnate Son tells us He comes from the Father, sent by the Father to do the Father's work

*John 3:*¹³

*John 8:*⁴² *Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, because I came from God and I am here. For I didn't come on my own, but he sent me.*

To those who objected to the way He spoke of Himself and His relationship to the Father, Jesus, recalling Psalm 82:6, said

*John 10:*³⁵ *If he called those to whom the word of God came 'gods'—and the Scripture cannot be broken—³⁶ do you say, 'You are blaspheming' to the one the Father set apart and sent into the world, because I said: I am the Son of God?*

And to bring home the magnitude of Jesus' humbling himself to wash His disciples' feet John writes

*John 13:*³ *Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into his hands, that he had come from God, and that he was going back to God.*

Jesus knows He comes from the Father, and that He has come to do the work and to fulfill the will of His Father

*John 6:*³⁸ *For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.*

*John 4:*³⁴ *My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work," Jesus told them.*

[*John 9:*⁴ *We must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work.*]

And in His prayer on the night He was arrested Jesus said

*John 17:*⁴ *I have glorified you on the earth by completing the work you gave me to do.*

The Son's work is the Father's work, they are one in that work, and so in the Son's work we know the Father, His love – the love that would give the Son to die for sinners, His power, His determination to save

It is never a case of an angry Father and a loving Son, or the God of the Old Testament pitted against the God of the New Testament

In this relationship the Son shares the Father's life, work and honour

*John 5:*¹⁹ *Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, the Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son likewise does these things. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing, and he will show him greater works than these so that you will be amazed. ²¹ And just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to whom he wants. ²² The Father, in fact, judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ so that all people may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.*

²⁴ *"Truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life.*

²⁵ "Truly I tell you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he has granted to the Son to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has granted him the right to pass judgment, because he is the Son of Man.

The Father is always to be worshipped with the Son, and cannot be worshipped where the Son is not honoured

You cannot say you are right with God while denying Jesus and His claims

And life, work and honour are shared because the relationship between the Father and the Son is one of love and giving.

A relationship of love

The Father loves the Son – and the Son knows it. HE is the beloved Son [Matthew 3:17, 17:5]

John 3: ³⁴ For the one whom God sent speaks God's words, since he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands.

John 5: ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing, and he will show him greater works than these so that you will be amazed.

John 17: ²⁴ "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they will see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the world's foundation.

The Father Loves the Son – gives Him all things [John 16:15], shows Him all things – all their work is shared, and glorifies the Son

The Son loves the Father

John 14: ³¹ On the contrary, so that the world may know that I love the Father, and just as the Father commands me, even so I do.

John 15: 10, John 7: 18

The Son loves the Father, and so obeys, glorifies and honours the Father by doing His work

John 17: ⁴ I have glorified you on the earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

John 8: ⁴⁹ "I do not have a demon," Jesus answered. "On the contrary, I honor my Father and you dishonor me.

And so it is in the relationship between the Father and the Son that the Father is uniquely revealed

Matthew 11: ²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to infants. ²⁶ Yes, Father, because this was your good pleasure. ²⁷ All things have been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal him.

John 1: ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father's side—he has revealed him.

John 14: ⁶ Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

⁸ "Lord," said Philip, "show us the Father, and that's enough for us."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been among you all this time and you do not know me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who lives in me does his works.

You can only know the Father as you know the Son who is uniquely equipped by His relationship with the Father to make Him known, and the Father we confess is the Father revealed by the Son.

Say again, that any claim to know God that does not honour Jesus as the Son is a false claim. You cannot claim to know the almighty Father, the Creator, unless you know the Son

But knowing the Son – we do know the Father

And what we see in the relationship of the Father and the Son is that it is an ordered relationship between those who are equally God

As you heard in John 14

John 14: ²⁸ You have heard me tell you, 'I am going away and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ³¹ On the contrary, so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do as the Father commanded me.

The Father, says our Lord, is greater than I

There is an asymmetry in the relationship

The Father commands, the Son obeys

The Father sends, the Son is sent

The Father gives, the Son is given

The Son prays to the Father [Matthew 11, John 12, John 11, John 17] and teaches His followers to do likewise

And this is an irreversible order in a relationship of eternal love.

The Father is never sent, the Father never obeys.

Think first What this order doesn't mean

It doesn't mean the Son's deity is derived from or dependent on the Father

He is not a lesser God

It doesn't mean That the Father is the God of the Old Testament, and the Son and Spirit elaborations of God for the new era of salvation, a temporary emergence for a new task, of lesser, dependent beings [that would mean change in God]

The Son, like the Father, is God in Himself, Creator, not creature – and we will think more of this next week [John 1:1-18, Phil. 2:6, Col. 2:9]

His divinity is expressed in relation to, but not derived, from, the Father, just as the Father's is expressed in relation to the Son and the Spirit

But it does mean God, Father, Son and Spirit is greater, and more glorious and beautiful in Himself, than we imagine

WE often configure relationships in terms of power, and so have difficulty thinking there can be both order and equality of persons. In fact we often see order, one commanding and the other obeying, as a denial of equality, for we know that order based in power gives rise to competition that divides – one being above making the other different and lesser

But in the eternal God the relationships are of self-giving, other person centred, uniting, love, not competitive dividing power

Where each freely gives, and

Where each is glorified in the other in their giving, glorified as each is - Father, Son and Spirit – without division

And it is this revelation of His being – relational order in equality of being expressed in love – that makes us confident whatever happens that love will triumph

The LORD of the Old Testament is not just the Father, but has revealed Himself clearly in saving through the Son as He always is, as Father, Son and Spirit,

For it is Father, Son and Spirit who fulfill the Scriptures of the LORD saving His people

But what we see in Scripture is that within the order it is the person of the Father who safeguards the unity and the transcendence of God

The Father is the relational centre

The Son is the Son of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father

And the Father remains transcendent, in heaven, above, the one to whom the Son will return, and who comes to His people in the Spirit

The One no-one can see in this life, but can be known as the Son makes Him known. [John 1:18, 1 Tim. 6:13-16]

This Order the key to the way the New Testament talks of the Father and the Son

You may have noticed that repeatedly the New Testament speaks of God as the Father

Consider

Romans 15:⁶ so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with one mind and one voice.

1 Peter 1:³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead

Ephesians 1:² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 1:² To Timothy, my true son in the faith.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

This way of speaking is not denying that the Son, the Lord Jesus, is God.

It is recognising and honouring the order the Lord Jesus taught, as well as reinforcing that God is our Father because He is first the Father of the Son

And this order is reason the Creed ascribes almightiness and Creation to the Father, when the Son and Spirit are almighty, and the Son and Spirit are also involved in creating [Heb. 1:2, Col. 1:15-17]

Because the Father is the Father of the Son trusting the Son we can know the Father and be adopted into God's family, become His children, and share in the family relationship and character

Our Father

That this is the privilege of believers is clearly taught in Scripture. We are adopted in Christ through faith in Christ on the basis of His work.

John writes

John 1: ¹² But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, ¹³ who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.

The apostle Paul also speaks of this great reality

Romans 8: ¹⁴ For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, ¹⁷ and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Or again in Galatians

Galatians 4: ⁴ When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then God has made you an heir.

This privilege is not earned, it is not our because we are somehow worthy of being included in God's family

It is the gracious gift of God, forgiving our sins through the death of the Son and joining us to Christ by faith

But it is a wonderful gift, giving every believer an enduring and privileged identity

Believer – you should know who you are, not by looking in, to your feelings and desires, but by looking out to the gospel of our Lord Jesus

Adoption Anchors our identity in our relationship with the eternal, almighty God – we are His children

It gives us an Assured identity by the work of His Spirit

Hopeful identity – for its continuation does not depend on us, but on God who raises the dead, and in the resurrection we are told we will be coheirs with Christ, have a legal right to the new heaven and earth and all its joys and riches

And it is an identity that guides us in the present, as it finds expression in our lives now – in every minute of every day.

I'm about to talk about that expression – but before I do

Believer, have you savoured the goodness of being a child of God – a gift to you, undeserved

Does thanking God your Father for this gift get you out of bed every day, no matter how tiresome or trying the day to come may be

It's hard to understand a Christian not excited and thankful to be God's child

TO have the word Father on our lips and spoken in our hearts.

Many of our struggles in the faith come from letting our problems dwarf this reality, as if it is a small thing to be God's child, to know He is committed to you in love, that He has brought you into His family by the rich mercy and kindness that gave the Son to die for you, that HE has given you a forever identity and a secure eternity

IF you are not thankful for that – do you really believe it?

Or perhaps you are trying to dictate to God what being His child should look like in your life, wanting a life different from the life of the true Son, who suffered for doing His Father's will

Struggling with thankfulness and joy, recover the wonder of being God's adopted child – draw near to Him, meditate on His promises, on how you have become a member of His family, remember the greatness of your Father

And the best way to let that reality stay big in your consciousness is to express it each day, to live in the world as God's child

How?

Here I want to remind you of two ways Scripture says this reality is to find expression in our lives – firstly by exercising the privilege of prayer, and secondly the purposeful pursuit of holiness.

The Privilege of prayer

Firstly, the privilege of confident prayer, assured access where we know our Father hears us, not because we use the right formula, not because we have done something to get his attention, but because we are in relationship to Him

This was taught by Jesus

Matthew 6: ⁶ But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁷ When you pray, don't babble like the Gentiles, since they imagine they'll be heard for their many words. ⁸ Don't be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him.

⁹ *"Therefore, you should pray like this:*

*Our Father in heaven,
your name be honored as holy.*

¹⁰ *Your kingdom come.*

Your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ *Give us today our daily bread.*

¹² *And forgive us our debts,*

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ *And do not bring us into temptation,*

but deliver us from the evil one.

We express the reality that believing in Jesus we are the Father's children by Simple, confident prayer, where we seek our Father's glory and commit our needs into His hands

Prayer to the Father was Practiced by the apostles. Consider Paul's great prayer in Ephesians

Ephesians 1: ¹⁷ I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

Ephesians 3: ¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

¹⁶ I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit,

*Ephesians 2:*¹⁸ *For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*

Prayer to the Father should be our prayer, and as you pray remember the encouragement of the context of our confession of the Father in the Creed. We are praying to the one who is almighty – for whom nothing is too hard, the Maker of heaven and earth, whom all things serve

John 16: 23-27

Daily prayer to our Father sustains and shapes our identity and hope as His children, submits our will and plans to His will, and lets us rest in His generous love for all we need.

The Purposeful pursuit of Purity

And the second way our identity as God’s children is expressed in our lives is by the purposeful pursuit of purity. Listen to John

*1 John 3: See what great love the Father has given us that we should be called God’s children—and we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it didn’t know him.*² *Dear friends, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is.*³ *And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure.*

There is an expectation that we should bear the family likeness – pure, just as He is pure.

And in 1 John 3 he guides us in what that purity looks like - Practicing righteousness and fleeing lawlessness – it is a life directed by God through His word [1 John 3:4-10]

Fleeing hate, and embracing love – loving in deed and truth, a life shaped by the example of the Lord Jesus and knowing His love [1 John 3:11-24]

This expectation that we should show the family likeness as God’s children is repeated. When teaching us to love our enemies and pray for them our Lord concludes

*Matthew 5:*⁴³ *“You have heard that it was said, **Love your neighbor** and hate your enemy.*⁴⁴ *But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*⁴⁵ *so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*⁴⁶ *For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same?*⁴⁷ *And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same?*⁴⁸ *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

When Peter calls us to holy lives, different from the world around us, the reason is that our Father is holy.

*1 Peter 1:*¹⁴ *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance.*¹⁵ *But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct;*¹⁶ *for it is written, **Be holy, because I am holy.***¹⁷ *If you appeal to the Father who judges impartially according to each one’s work, you are to conduct yourselves in reverence during your time living as strangers.*

To live as a child of God is to pursue that Pure, perfect, and holy life that shows you belong to God’s family, that you value and prize what your Father prizes, that the family’s values shape all your relating in the world

And our Father can call us to this because He has given us the Spirit of His Son, by which we can put to death sin, and expect to see the fruit of His work in our lives – love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control

Knowing who we are, we know how to live in the world,

Living as children of the Father

It is a wonderful thing to confess God as Father because you know God as the Father of the Son, and as your Father through faith in the Son.

That confession says you know Him as the Father who sent His Son into the world in love so that you could have eternal life

That you know you are loved

It says that you know who you are - now a child of God – one who can draw near to the almighty God, born into a family of brothers and sisters, who has a secure future, and who is committed to living out the family values in the world

Honour our Father by holding fast to our confession, and we do that by confessing the Lord Jesus to be the eternal Son, sent by the Father into the world to save

By thanking Him each day for His grace that allows you to call Him 'Father' and consciously committing yourself to do what pleases Him

And so bringing Him glory like the true Son by doing His will in the world, trusting His Son the Lord Jesus and loving one another [1 John 3:23]