

FATHERHOOD, SONSHIP & FAMILY – HEAVENLY AND HUMAN

1. Introduction

There can be no subject more vital and significant than this. God is Father. His authority over the universe is primary. All authorities, and all relationships must spring from Him, and relate to Him. Therefore He is, naturally, the key to all things. Not to understand Him is not to understand anything. To know Him, is, in the ultimate, to be truly man, and to relate to all things, however little of that may be consciously comprehended. Not to relate to Him is not to relate to anything, in the ultimate way.

Our mode of operation will be first to see that the Scriptures posit God, not only as the Father of the incarnate Christ, but as eternally Father of the (eternal) Son. Then we shall proceed to see that He is truly the God and Father of His elect, not merely 'like a Father', or only figuratively Father. We will see the Fatherhood in its planned action of creation, redemption, and the ultimate sonship and family-hood of man. This will involve understanding the self-revelation of God as Father through the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of His Son, as well as the coming of the Holy Spirit as ultimate Revelator of the Father, Son, and Family. We will then see the true nature of man as a son, of the family of man under the Son and the Father, especially with a view to the plan of God, in history. We will see how this works out in the human situation of relationships and authorities, and then look to the ultimate – the Father with His family, and their function in the new world of the new creation.

Any mode which is more restricted than this will fail to do justice to the marvellous nature of God in His eternal purposes of revealing Himself in His true Being. Likewise, naturally, it will also fail to show the true nature of man and the goals which God has for him.

2. God Is Father

It has been said that 'Abba!' is the most intimate, indeed the highest utterance that a man can make addressing God as 'Father!' or 'Dear Father' It is the highest because this relationship automatically places man at his highest point, that of being a son of the Father. To make this claim authentic we need to show that God is truly Father. It is a fact that, almost without exception, the epistles of the N.T. speak of 'God our Father' in their opening salutations. This is a clear claim, and nowhere is it suggested that this use is merely metaphorical. The Gospels make a clear distinction between earthly fatherhood, and heavenly Fatherhood. Jesus constantly speaks of 'Your heavenly Father', or 'Your Father who is in heaven', and this is obviously to mark out the difference in quality of the two fatherhoods. It is a very simple distinction. Whilst the heavenly order is higher than that of the earthly, yet the earthly and heavenly are not analogous, but homologous, that is, of the same order.

This is borne out in Ephes. 3:14f where it has been translated, '.... the Father, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is derived.' It can also be translated, 'Of whom all family-hood in heaven and earth is named' (or, 'derived'). The meaning is simply that fatherhood and family-hood derive from God.

(i) Fatherhood in the Old Testament

Occasionally in the Old Testament God is likened to a father, Psalm 103: 13 says, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him.' God is often likened to other things, even a mother, but that does not make him, say, a mother. In the account of Creation we do not have any statement that man is a son. Luke 3:38 says 'Adam was the son of God', and this is stated as a part of a genealogy.

Nevertheless to say, 'Let us make man in our image' must speak of man as having close affinity with God, and we shall see later that the doctrine of creation comes very close to that of making man a son. However we will not press this at this moment.

Israel, as a people, is referred to as God's son. Exod. 4:22, 'Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you (Pharaoh), 'Let my son go that he may serve me.' Again in Hosea 11:1 we read, 'When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt have I called my son.'

Israel, as a people, took up this idea many times. In exile Israel cried, 'Thou art our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. Thou O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer from of old is thy name.' This thought is repeated in Isaiah 64, 'O Lord, thou art our Father.' Again in Malachi 2:10 Israel asks, 'Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?' There are similar passages. For example in Deut. 14:1-2, 'You are the sons of God....you are a people holy to the Lord your God.' In Jeremiah 3:14, 19, 22, we have such statements as, 'Return, oh faithless children....' I thought you would call me, 'My Father' '....Return oh faithless sons.' In Hosea it is predicted that although Israel, in exile, has been seemingly rejected of God, yet ultimately it will be said of Israel 'Sons of the living God.'

It can be said that although the idea of Fatherhood is present in the Old Testament, it is not in fact explicit. It is when we come to the New Testament that the idea is both explicit and undeniable. It does not mean then that in the Old Testament God is not Father, but that the understanding there is not clear. Even there we could be wrong. There are one or two points which have to be considered: (a) God, in creation was truly Father, but in rejecting Him as God, men naturally rejected Him as Father. (b) the concept was always known to God's true people – His elect – but it was not an understanding which as yet was, of necessity prominent, and (c) His Fatherhood was ever, only, to be fully revealed in salvation, for God had planned that His Fatherhood should be seen salvifically, and not primarily creationally. There is the further thought (d) That since all history moves forward to its appointed culmination, true Fatherhood and sonship is reserved, as a revelation for the last days, these beginning with the incarnation of the Son, and concluding with the Day of the Lord.

(ii) Fatherhood in the New Testament

Here the material is profuse, and we can by no means deal with it. We will take it under various headings:

(a) Creational Fatherhood

We could say that this is included under the statement of Luke 3:38 'Adam was the son of God.' This primarily refers to origination, but seeing it is part of a genealogy it accords the same fatherhood to Adam, as others in

the genealogy had from their fathers. However, it is from the passage of Acts 17:24–30 that we get the greatest insight. Paul points out that in contrast to the pagan gods, God has created all men of one blood (Adam), and has arranged all men's circumstances, that they might know God. Taking two quotes from pagan poetry he makes the statements, 'In him (God) we live and move and have our being', and 'We are his (God's) offspring'. He then goes on to show that men ought not to worship images, for virtually images would be 'Father'. He says God commands repentance from this idolatrous practice. Without doubt Paul has Jer. 2:26f at the back of his mind, where it is said there will be those in Israel who will be ashamed who say to a tree, 'You are my father' and to a stone 'You have begotten me'. This needs to be examined closely. Wood and stone were used for making idols. Israel should have said only to (the true) God, 'You are my Father'

We see now, that by creation all men were intended to be children of God, and that all ought to worship Him as such. Not to do this is to change His Fatherhood into (wrong) idolatrous forms. Conclusion: God is Father, creationally.

Next we can see that Jesus' use of 'Father', whilst unique to him, since he says, 'Father' or, 'My Father', as against 'Your (plural) Father', nevertheless expects them to see God as (their) Father.

If we say that this was only for Israel in general, and for the close disciples in particular, the case does not alter. God can be, indeed is, the Father of some men. Matthew's Gospel abounds in references to 'Your heavenly Father', or, 'Your Father who is in heaven'. This is important because it teaches that God's Fatherhood is greater and better than that of man's fatherhood, whilst at the same time having affinity with it. Hence in the Lord's prayer we have reference to 'our Father in heaven' to whom we pray for our daily bread, thus linking Fatherhood with both creation and providence. Again in the Sermon on the Mount men are not to seek for the things of creation – food and clothing – since their heavenly Father knows they have need of these. Again this refers to creation and providence.

If this were not enough, then Matt. 5:44–48 speaks of God having love to all men, and that for men to be like their Father, they must love even their enemies, and do them good. This will make them like their Father who is in heaven'

It has to be acknowledged that there are some difficulties in this form of interpretation, for many claim that not all men are the children of God. This is obvious for John 1:12 says 'To as many as received him (Jesus) to them he (God) gave authority to become the children of God'. If they had already been children, they could not then become children. Nevertheless that is not all the story.

One theologian has said, 'God is the Father of all men, but not all men are the children of God'. He meant, 'God has created all, in His image, to be the children of God, but man has rebelled, has denied the image and the relationship with the Creator–Father, and so has abdicated his sonship'. Others would put it in another way. 'In Adam all mankind denied its sonship, as Adam denied that sonship'. This, of course would explain the failure for man to see the Fatherhood of God.

Later we will see how fierce is man's rejection of any idea of God being Father.

(b) Essential Fatherhood

In our next section we will speak of 'redemptional Fatherhood', taking our starting points at Isaiah 63:16, and Ephes. 1:47. However by essential Fatherhood we are seeking to see that God is, by nature, Father. Hence we say that there never was a time when the 'Son was not Son.' We mean that whereas man becomes a father when he procreates, yet God was Father prior to creation. It is clear from such passages as John 1:1–4, Col. 1:15–17, that God created through the Word, the One who was later called Jesus, or the Christ. That he was pre-existent to time is presupposed by the grammar of these passages. However in them he is not called the Son. This is inferred in the first chapter of John when it is said in John 1:14 that 'The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only son of the Father...'

More clearly is it seen in Hebrews 1:1–3, where it is said that He created the worlds (ages) through (a) Son. This shows his pre-existence as the Son. Hence God has always been Father, and the Son always Son. God then is essentially Father. His Son is essentially Son. At this point we cannot more fully develop this idea, which will have to be seen in its many aspects of creation, redemption, and the ultimate family-hood, to be fully appreciated.

(c) Fatherhood, Sonship, and Creation

We now have to double back to the fact of creation. God creates as Father. If this statement is true, then it is enormously important. The Son, as we have seen is Mediator of creation, as indeed the Holy Spirit – the creative Spirit of life – is the Agent of creation. When the Word creates as the Son it presupposes that the Father creates as Father. In fact it does more. It presupposes that in creation there is a Father–Son creating of things.

When we come to the doctrine of redemption, we will see that the creation must (can) only ever be understood in the light of God's ultimate goal and purpose for it. From Ephes. 1:4–11, we see that redemption of fallen man is planned with a view to his becoming a son of God, and that the ultimate God has for His universe is the unified harmony of all things, this being expressed in the family of the sons.

If, then, we go back to creation we will see that God creates man in a manner wholly different from that of the rest of creation. 'Let us make man in our own image', He says, and this implies a very special relationship between him and man. So special in fact that when His own Son becomes incarnate, this is possible only because already man is in the image of God. This goes very close to saying that man is so much a son by creation that had he not sinned, nothing other than sonship could be predicated of him. Otherwise the Son could not naturally have expressed sonship in the medium of his humanity.

(d) Redemptional Fatherhood

'... Thou art our Father, our Redeemer from eternity' was the cry of exiled Israel. Paraphrased, the whole verse says, in essence, 'We have earthly fatherhood from Abraham and Jacob. They, disgusted, may reject us as sons. However You are essentially Father, and this is borne out by the fact that you must redeem us. There is no such thing as true (heavenly) Fatherhood, which does not redeem'.

When we place the purposive work of God, with His redemptive work then we come to this conclusion. (a) In Ephesians 1:4–14 it is shown clearly that God had planned prior to creation that His elect would become sons of God by

redemption. This would include both Jews and Gentiles. However this would be 'through Christ Jesus', for it was not in Adam, but in Christ that God had planned this. (b) In Isaiah 43:6–7, as also in Ephes. 1:4–14 and Romans 8: 14–25 (cf. I John 3:1–3, Rom. 8:30), it can be seen that these redeemed children are to be to the praise of the glory of the Father. It is for this purpose He has both created and redeemed them.

One further, powerful insight is that this whole plan is the actual expression of His Fatherhood. We can say it is the 'realisation' of that Fatherhood, rightly understood.

(e) Glorifying Fatherhood

This thought is difficult to develop here, since we have to explore material which we have not yet presented. However we can say that in the work of glorifying man there is first crisis, then process, and finally, climax, or consummation. Whilst undoubtedly the primary purpose of creation, redemption and glorification is that of glorifying God, yet that glory is the very grace and love of God, and these are embodied and explicated in the ultimate sonship of man. God's aim is to reproduce multitudinous sons, like His own Son. Hence His Fatherhood personally relates to all elements of crisis, process and consummation. His Fatherhood expresses itself in all these elements.

None of this will be intelligible unless we realise that God is love. If we see His Fatherhood as transcendent, cold and impersonal, then we will have missed the entire thrust of Scripture. Matt. 5:43-48, with other passages of the Sermon on the Mount are intended to show us the magnificence and warmth of that (unique) Fatherhood.

3. The Father and The Home

It may, at first sight, seem fanciful to speak of the universe, and particularly of this world as 'the home of humanity'. The clear facts are that it is so. However the teaching of the apostles, in Acts, was that God's benign intentions for man can be read in this world, its seasons, providence, and so on. This is also the basic message of the Sermon on the Mount. In fact Romans 1:19ff. indicates that the whole creation continually spells out the message of God. God is present to, in, and through His creation, and it vitally expresses His nature and His action by what it is and what it is being and doing.

Be that as it may, we can work back from the eschatological climax. There will be new heavens, and new earth, all morally purged, pure and sound. In these shall the children of God dwell. These will constitute their home. Hence we can assume that by creation this world was intended to be the home of mankind. Because he has fouled it, or uses it inappropriately does not mean that essentially it is spoiled or evil. It is not. It is the true home, albeit it has been abused or misused.

A deep study as to the nature of the universe is needed in order to see the true nature of God in his roles of Creator, Father, and Redeemer. We will see that these are not separate roles of God, nor even modes of His operations. He is at once all of these, never just one of them in particular.

Finally we will see the importance of the home as God has prepared it for His family, as also mansions for each of His children, in particular. In fact we will need to see what the family is all about in eternity before we fully realise

the nature of God as Father, the Son as Son, and the Spirit as the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

4. Man Created As Son: His Sonship

It is evident from Genesis chs. 1–2, that man was created as the following:

- (i) A creature of the Creator. This can never be otherwise than it is.
- (ii) A servant of the King. He was given a commandment and purpose to fulfil.
- (iii) A son. He is uniquely in the image of God, having affinity with Him as none other of the creatures.
- (iv) Pertaining to his universe he is a lord, commanding creation. He is, pertaining to God, a servant, as we have seen. All these elements constitute a real man, a true person.

If we hold a static view of creation, or think of man, and the remainder of creation as upholding a constant status quo then we are wrong. It is clear that God has always been purposive in regard to creation; therefore everything is ever-becoming. That is we cannot fully understand the nature of anything in creation just by studying what it was. We must think of it also in terms of what it will be and so what it is in the process of becoming. In this sense we will never know what man truly is until the end – ‘it does not yet appear what we shall be’.

Sonship then must be understood as purposeful, man sharing the will and plan of God as it is outworked. The mandate of Genesis 1:28ff shows us what man is about as God commands him. However, we must admit that it is not, as such, spelled out in terms of sonship as such. Not, say, as it is in Revelation 21:7.

One important thing must be noted; that the whole state of man as a person, and mankind as a whole must be dependent upon man's relationship with God. His own relationship with his own family will be directly dependent upon his relationship with God.

5. Man's Loss of Sonship

The passage of Genesis 3 shows us that man sought independence and autonomy. This meant a break in relationship with God which is named as ‘death’. Romans 1:18–32 is a very important passage showing that rebellion against God immediately resulted in idolatry. It is here that Paul's disquisition on idolatry in Acts 17 is most valuable. He is virtually saying that God should be worshipped as Father seeing He created us from one blood (Adam: Did he mean as our father?). Idols then are the substitute for the true Fatherhood. The Genesis passage shows us there was a break in relationships; a refusal to depend upon God. The Romans 1 passage shows us that this resulted in all kinds of perversion – as we might say, creational and relational.

The dreadful result of this was a break in human relationships; hence the perverse and horrible uses of the body for sex, and other matters. It would be impossible to describe the tensions and anguish that such dislocation of the creational order – as also the relational order – must have brought to man.

His rejection of creaturehood, servanthood, and sonship is seen in his refusal to be obedient in God's plan to God's mandate. Hence man is most perverted. He is not man. Also he makes plans other than those of God, as well as opposing any plan of God which may become apparent. It is to be seen that the prophets 'which have been since the world began' have always told the plan. It is easy then to understand why they have been hated and opposed, and mostly, slain. It is also evident that man must refuse to hear the essential message of creation God's. Hence man, to escape this must 'worship and serve the creation, rather than the Creator'. He gives a different rationale to the universe, one other than that of God.

We have to say, nevertheless, that although he has abdicated from his essential (created) sonship, and like the prodigal has gone to a far country, and has died and is lost, yet his anguish is that he is not by creation what he is seeking to be. He bears this existential anguish as part of his twisted (unnatural) humanity. He cannot know what it is to be truly man.

6. The Revelation of The Father

It is often said that Adam was in some way in a probationary state. When tested (tempted) he had real choice, and chose evil. Had he voluntarily remained loyal to God then his obedience would have been true. We cannot speculate beyond this point.

The plan of God evidently took in this fact of Adam's rebellion. In any case man's sonship was envisaged in Christ, and not in Adam. Hence man's full sonship includes experience of good and evil, and redemption and the glorification of created man (cf. I Cor. 2:6f., II Tim. 1:9).

We do not say – in the light of Luke 3:38 that Adam did not know, in some measure that he was a son of God. Nor do we say that he did. Whatever he did know, was lost to man as total knowledge. On the one hand God was planning to make us His sons– 'to the praise of His glorious grace' which must mean that sonship, as it was intended to be would essentially come out of grace, rather than primarily out of creation. Hence the full revelation of God was to come at a point in history. The prophets, as such do not speak in terms of Fatherhood. In fact most of what they prophesy is rarely explicit when compared to the clarified doctrines of which we speak, having seen many of the prophecies eventuate.

In the New Testament we have a pattern which we will follow. It is as follows:

The Father teaches concerning the Son, and so leads to the Son. He does this: (a) By the scriptures, and (b) By sending the Holy Spirit who interprets the Scriptures, and the acts and events of Jesus.

Before we examine this we have an important point with which we have to deal.

Man's Refusal to Know God Makes Revelation Essential

Whenever we discuss man's knowledge of God we have to see the following:

- (i) To Know God is relational, rather than intellectual.
- (ii) Man's knowledge is limited to his humanity. This is how it is, and man need not be frustrated by it. The secret things belong to God; the things that are revealed belong to us to do them.'
- (iii) Man's thoughts are not as God's. Not only is He higher than man, and has

wider knowledge (Himself being truth), but the disposition of man is never matured to its full degree. Man is ever learning. He has to learn the ways of God.

- (iv) Sinful man is clearly against knowing God and the order of His universe, as it is essentially in God. He has rejected the knowledge of God, being aware that to know God is to obey Him. Hence no argumentation, however brilliant or logical will meet with his acceptance. When man would claim to be seeking such knowledge he would inevitably temper it with his own presuppositions and predilections in order to guard himself against Divine confrontation.

God's method of getting to man is revelation. This is done through many channels, but as this is not the subject of our paper we must confine ourselves to the principle rather than the modes. Through the prophets, through His Word (his utterances, and His revelation of history), His own actions, through Christ and the Spirit, He has revealed Himself as Father.

Man may not care to be confronted by such revelation – which is the task of the church – but confrontation will always result either in man seeing the truth and submitting to God, or refusing the truth, in which case he faces the finality of judgement.

The Revelation of the Father

In I Cor. 8:4–6 Paul takes up the ever-important matter of the world system. He contrasts two systems – that of idolatry, and that of the true creation. He says, ‘For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth, – as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’, – yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we exist.’

He is saying that there is one God, the Father. He does not mean that this has just happened, or even with the advent of Christ. He means this has ever been. Therefore God's Fatherhood does not come to be in the New Testament, but it comes to be revealed. Let us look at the modes pointed out above:

(a) The Prophets Teach of the Son to Come

This can be seen from John 6:44–46. In essence Jesus says, ‘No one can come to me unless the Father draws him. The Father first teaches him, Himself, as the prophets have said.’ Not only do the prophets say that the Father teaches, but they are also the means by which the Father teaches. Not the only means, since God the Father witnesses to His Son continually in his earthly life, often explicitly saying (as at the baptism and transfiguration) ‘This is my beloved SON: Hear him.’ Also the Holy Spirit is present both in the life and action of Jesus, as also later in more direct manner, from Pentecost onwards, to revealate the Son.

(b) The Son Comes to Revelate the Father

This is the whole thrust of the Gospels, rightly understood. If we bear in mind the fact that man does not wish to know God as Father, then the immediate confrontation of man by the Son would be the most electrifying event in man's history. It would, of course constitute a confrontation of man by the Father, since he who has seen the Son has seen the Father. We will see later that when man acknowledges God as Father and submits to Him as such, then his autonomy is

destroyed, and he comes under the authority of the Father, which of course is repugnant to fallen man.

We will, also, see later that the revelation of the Father by the Son is simply the Son working out true Sonship before men. It is evident that sonship as we know it in the human sphere is deficient, even between sons and their fathers. Man's obedience to God as Father is non est and only the perversion of the original relationship would be evident. Hence the Son teaches us such new things of sonship, that we see them as either curious or radical, or conclude that they are not of man's true and essential sonship.

To put it another way we say that true sonship, as lived by the Son, is spelled out in human terms. That is the Word (the Son) becomes flesh, and dwells among us and we behold his glory, as of the only Son of the Father. Thus we see spelled out in human terms, those terms which alone are intelligible to us what is true fatherhood and true sonship. We see the source and power of human sonship and fatherhood as they reside in the Father and the Son from whom we must derive them in order to be true human fathers and sons.

As we might well suspect, fatherhood and sonship take on modes and forms and expressions which we cannot know in fallen human experience because the true knowledge of these has been lost, or has not been arrived at prior to the coming of the Son.

Hence we say that the revelation of God as Father is the most dynamic event of all history. Man's individualistic view of salvation has even blinded his eyes to the fact that the ultimate of redemption is not forgiveness, justification, or even sanctification, but sonship, that is adoption and the fullness of glorification. It is being, personally, sons of the living God, and corporately, the family of God.

(c) The Son's Knowledge of the Father is Unique and Distinctive

In John 3:35 it is said that the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hands. This means, in terms of John 5:22–29, that both life and death have been committed to the Son. 'All things' were originally created by the Son (John 1:1–3, Col. 1:15–17, Hebrews 1:2–3) and they will be ultimately unified by him (Ephes. 1:9–11), but in practical fact it means that all authority is committed to the Son.

Similarly in Matt. 11:27 Jesus says, 'All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son save the Father, and no one knows the Father save the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him'. This is a powerful statement for it means that God as Father is unknowable apart from the revelation of the Son. The unknowability of the Father is a dictum we do not easily receive for we assume that what we wish to know we may if only we will to do so' Nor do we realise that the Son is equally unknowable. It must be the Father who teaches us concerning the Son before we can hope to know him. The classic passage relating to this is John 14:1–10 in which Jesus says that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father, and that no one can come to the Father but by him, since he is the way to the Father, the truth of the Father, and the life of the Father.

This would seem incomprehensible until we realise that truly knowledge is a matter of relationship. One does not learn about a person and so know him, but one knows in the relationship. Also this relationship is literally a working relationship. The Son works with the Father, and the Father with the Son. In action they know one another, and this continuously. This is explicated in John 5:19ff where the Son works with the Father, and the Father shows him all

that He is doing by including him in its action. From this it is easy to see that seeing the Son is actually seeing the Father.

There is a third significant passage. It is in Matt. 23:1–11. Here Jesus points the Pharisees and the Rabbis who claim certain rights over men. We may call them moral rights. He says that all men are brethren, and goes on to say, ‘Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father who is in heaven’. He does not mean that normal fatherly ties are forbidden, but that no man, not even a human father of any description should usurp the rights and prerogatives of the true, the heavenly Father. He was making a most powerful statement, for he was saying that primacy in relationship and authority belongs to the Father.

This is why we must see the distinctiveness of the Son's relationship to the Father and his personal knowledge of him. It then is very clear that only the Son can reveal the Father, and he alone can show the distinctive Fatherhood in God. To work from human fatherhood, and thus see a metaphorical fatherhood in God would be disastrous. It would be equally disastrous to work analogically from human father to that of God. It goes without saying that anthropomorphism is also quite hopeless.

(d) The Holy Spirit reveals the Father

The Holy Spirit's work of revealing the Father must be seen to commence before the advent of Christ. We may say that the spirit of prophecy has ever been the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 19:10). Abel being the first prophet it is safe to say that the Holy Spirit has ever taught concerning the plan of God and His Messiah. All history, viewed from one angle is dynamic prophecy. In this sense the Spirit has been revealing God. More particularly in the prophecies which were so intimately linked with the action and history of Israel, he has prepared man for the advent of Messiah the Son.

He has done more than this. All the events of Christ, from his birth to his ascension were by virtue of the Holy Spirit. This is the clear reading of the New Testament. The Son was, in human terms, the Son by the Spirit. Hence it is not surprising that the Spirit is called ‘The Spirit of His Son’ (Gal. 4:6), as also ‘the Spirit of Christ’ (cf. Rom. 8:9–11, I Peter 1:10–12), and ‘the Spirit of Jesus’ (Acts 16:7), as also, many times ‘the Spirit of the Lord’ (cf. especially II Cor. 3:16–18). He is also called ‘the Spirit of your Father’ (Matt. 10:20) which is a significant title.

In so far as the incarnate Son is concerned the Spirit aids him in all his work of sonship (cf. Matt. 12:28, Acts 10:38), and in this sense reveals the Father. However he comes in a new epochal manner at Pentecost for he is to bring to the apostles' remembrance all that Jesus has said to them. He is to lead them into all the truth, and he is to show them all the things of the Son, which are at the same time all the things of the Father. (cf. John 14:16–17, 26, 15:26–27, 16:12–15. Since this revelation comes at Pentecost, and continues post-pentecostally the Spirit is really the one who now reveals the Father, through revealing the Son.

What we should remember about revelation is that it is not deep, esoteric, a matter of intellectual grasp, so much as it is the basic reality which can only be grasped when the will is open to the truth, and the truth is seen as that which has to be obeyed. That is, true revelation relates to the action of obedience. ‘He who has an ear to hear, let him hear’, always means, ‘He who has a will to obey, let him obey’, since the Word never comes simply as information, but as command.

The ‘testimony of Jesus’ is still proceeding. That is his work is still continuing and his Sonship is still active. It can still be seen, and it must. The Holy Spirit reveals, but he does so by causing the revelatee to share in what he sees. Hence the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are always working on this revelation. That is why both the Father and the Son send the Spirit, and the Son, himself, outpours the Spirit at Pentecost, and later upon the Samaritans and the Gentiles.

This fact of the Father leading to the Son must be understood as the Spirit leading to the Son. The Son leading to the Father cannot be apart from the revelatory Spirit. Hence the amazing goodness of God is seen in that He does not hide the great truth of Fatherhood, Sonship, and the Family from man, especially His elect people. This gives great significance to the word of John 1:18, ‘No man has ever seen God. The Son who is in the bosom of the Father he has revealed Him’.

7. The True Sonship: Jesus The Messiah

(i) ‘Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten Thee’

This is a quote from Psalm 2. It needs to be seen in its context, that is of the whole Psalm. In this Psalm the kings, rulers and nations are gathered against the Lord and his anointed (literally ‘Messiah’), who is also called the king, and then is declared to be the son. This son, with his father will defeat the nations who rebel. The Messiah–Son–King will have his throne above all.

‘This day’ cannot mean ‘as regards generation’. The son comes to full maturity and is anointed king on that day. In the New Testament (e.g. Matt. 3:17) the words, ‘Thou art my (beloved) son’ are said to Jesus, by the Father at his baptism. Some Lukan MSS. have ‘Today I have begotten thee’. Most scholars see the baptismal affirmation of sonship as a conflation of Psalm 2:7 and Isa. 42:1.

What we have to see is that Messiah and Son of God are virtually synonymous terms. (cf. Matt. 16:16, and 26:63). Jesus is again spoken of as Son in terms of Psalm two at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:5), crucifixion (cf. Acts 4:25ff.) resurrection (Acts 13:33, cf. Rom. 1:4), and ascension (cf. Heb. ch. 1). This psalm also relates to his later work of cosmic victory over evil (Rev. 19:15).

In the New Testament the Son of Psalm 2 is related to the victor of Psalm 110. For this truth Hebrews ch. 1 and Hebrews 5:57 should be studied, together with all references to enthronement at the right hand of God.

For our purposes, this study of Sonship lifts it out of the understanding which we derive from human father–son relationships, and places it in a new dimension. This is the reason why Jesus constantly emphasised ‘your Father which is in heaven’ and spoke of the Son being sent from heaven, or ‘the bread which comes down from heaven’. Heavenly Fatherhood and Sonship is distinctive. Human fatherhood and sonship, when derived from this heavenly source, must also be distinctive, transcending that of all fathers and sons.

(ii) The Outworking of Messianic Sonship

A whole new world opens up to us with a sight of the obedience the Son rendered to the Father. Without pausing to ask ourselves whether this was the obedience which Adam should have rendered or man is required, by creation, to

render to God, we can examine the purpose for which the Son came to do the will of the Father. The purpose was primarily salvific. In accordance with the plan set out in Ephesians 1 God was to fulfil His plan to make man his sons, to make them 'holy and blameless', especially by the forgiveness of sins, making them to be 'to the praise of his glorious grace'. Likewise, through Messiah He was to unify all things as the culmination of that plan, and so both Jew and Gentile would be 'to the praise of His glory' as well as to the praise of the glory of His grace.

There are, of course many other Scriptures which give us aspects of why he came. He himself spoke of the purpose of liberating man (cf. Luke 4:17–18), but John's Gospel clearly defines his coming as being sent by the Father to do His will, and to reveal Him, and all of this in accordance with the prophetic Scriptures. It is not as though the Father, Son and Spirit have not been working before the incarnation, for they have, but it is that through the incarnation this work has become visible, and is the evident fulfilment of the prophetic plan. In fact its elements are so numerous that they would need a special treatment of their own, which is outside the scope of this paper.

Briefly, then, the Son came to reveal the Father, so that man who had abdicated that sonship, might come to it in Jesus Christ. For this to happen man needed to be redeemed and liberated from 'the works of the devil' (I John 3:8), from the bondage of sin, the world, the flesh, and ultimate wrath. Gripped as he was in guilt he could not extricate himself. His rebellion would ever keep him in hostility to God, and the existential anguish and grief of which we have spoken. This act of liberation would mean that Jesus was Messiah, King of the Kingdom of God, and Redeemer of his people. It would also mean the ascendancy of God's Kingdom over that of Satan, and the defeat of evil. It would mean also that God would be revealed as love, and the wills of men gripped by this, thus coming into voluntary submission to God, through repentance and faith, as also the remission of sins.

All of this work would at once be the work of the Father and of the Son, in accordance with John 3:3, 5:17ff and similar passages. If then we refer back to the work of Jesus as the Son we see it under the following categories:

(a) Incarnation

This is not, of course, a work of the Son, but Scriptures referring to his incarnation (e.g. Phil. 2:5f, II Cor. 8:9, John 1:14) speak of his submission of will in order to actively participate in the will of the Father. The angel's word to Mary that he would be called 'the son of God', referred to the birth.

(b) Baptism

This could be called 'messianic inauguration' and was really part, if not all of his coronation. It affirmed him as Son, and committed him to the action of God.

(c) Temptation

This was principal, determining for all time that the incarnate Son refused the modes of evil, and chose the only way of true operation – that of the Father. Remember that the primary temptation was 'if thou be the Son of God'.

(d) Ministry

This was by the power of the Spirit (Matt. 12:28), only ever in the will of God in absolute obedience (John 4:34, 9:4, 5:19f), and against all evil (Acts 10:38). This was true sonship.

(e) The Cross

The conflict at Gesthemane underlines the obedience to the Father's will. The Cross, by which the Father's will is done, and the salvation of mankind sealed is not only the Son in action, but is virtually the action of the Father. The New Testament Scriptures all speak of this act being initiated by the Father. Hence 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself', and 'he set him forth as a propitiation.

(f) The Resurrection

This is spoken of variously as Jesus rising from the dead by virtue of his own holiness (Rom. 1:43 and as being raised from the dead by the Father, and by the Spirit (Rom. 6:4, Acts 2:24, Rom. 8:11).

(g) Ascension

God seats the Son at His right hand. The Spirit raises him there (cf. Acts 2:33, Rom. 8:11, Ephes. 1:19–20). Heb. 1:2–3 speaks of his victory because he has 'made purification for sin', and other Scriptures see his place at the Father's right hand as being that of present continuing Lordship, both protecting the redeemed, interceding for them, and thwarting the powers of evil, against whom he is working, and whom he ultimately defeats.

To conclude – this is true Sonship. That is sonship is not merely a sentimental relationship with the Father, nor even only an affectionate one, but one of obedience, one of co-operation with the Father in working out His plan. The parallel for human sonship to the Father is seen in Rev. 21:7 and should be compared with Rev. 2:26, 27 and 3:21.

We might add one observation which will ultimately prove valuable for the practice of sonship. It is this – God's Fatherhood is purposive. It plans its goal, and pursues it. Equally so Sonship is involvement with this plan and its fulfilment. Man's sonship will thus involve goal, purpose, meaning, and congruous action.

8. The Fatherhood of God and The Sonship of Man

If we go back to our initial point that God is Father essentially, and that His plan for creation is to create His elect sons and family, as also to renew the habitat of the family, and so make the new heavens and the new earth the true habitat of the family, then we can see how significant is the family to the Fatherhood of God. In Ephesians 1:17 He is called 'the Father of glory', and this must mean, amongst other things, that He Fathers all the glory that is and will be. In Ephesians 1:12–14, as in Isaiah 43:6–7, His children (Jews and Gentiles) are to be to the praise of His glory. Hence the glory that will cover the earth, as the waters that cover the sea will be no less than His children, even if it may constitute more.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians we have God's plan for His family outlined. In the second chapter we see that family is born of the Cross, when

the enmity between Jew and Gentile is dissolved, and when in the crucible of his suffering a new humanity is born. This is the family, 'the household of God', for each is a living stone in the great structure which is builded as an habitation for God Himself, through the Holy Spirit. This oneness of Jew and Gentile is the mystery which Paul has been given to reveal, as we see in the third chapter, whilst the saints, for their part are to be one, rooted and grounded together in love, sharing as 'all saints' the love of Christ and being filled unto all the fullness of God. In the fourth chapter the unity of the family, as also its growth in love is stressed, this love-growth taking them all on, together, to the fullness of maturity. In the 5th chapter the practical outworking of this love is stressed in the community, in the families within the family, in parent-child, servant-master relationships, as also in the primary husband-wife relationship.

We look at this because it tells us what God is about as Father. However not all believers understand what is the mystery of Fatherhood, and it is at that we must look.

Man: A son of God

We have seen that man could be said to be created to be a son of God, even through creation itself, but that he abdicated from the position God had given him, exchanging it for his imagined autonomy. We have also seen that God planned man's redemption, and so his salvation, and thus his ultimate glorification. The completion of this will both vindicate and explicate the full Fatherhood of God. Both the Son and the Spirit work with Him in this venture.

From man's point of view, because of rebellion, he is in existential anguish, having the created lineaments of sonship, but no actual sonship, for such is only known in union with God. The closest substitute he can get to Fatherhood is that of idolatry, and this proves to be a dreadful bondage. Man has no rightful claim to liberation from this bondage by God, and he certainly cannot effect it himself.

We have also seen that man does not desire to know God because this means a total change in his life style, and a coming under the authority of the Father, and into submission to His world-system, rather than the alternative world-system that man has devised.

This brings us to a further theme, which to date we have not discussed. It is that of the fatherhood of Satan, and the subjection of man to his authority. It must be observed that Satan seeks to create a counterpart for every attribute of God, and all that He has created and planned. John 8:44 tells us that many who think they are children of God are actually children of their father, the Devil. They do his will and purpose. Ephes. 2:1-3 tells us that in fact these children of disobedience are bound to do the will of their father, whilst I John 3:10 gives the hall-mark of such evil children – they do not love and do not do righteousness.

If it is anguish not to be truly a child of God, it is deeper, more dreadful anguish to be subject to this evil father – Satan. Moreover this Satanic system is not a simple one. It relates to the evil powers and authorities, it relates to an entire world system which rebelliously opposes that created by God. So far, are fallen men away from their true being.

This evil system cannot, ultimately succeed. The essential nature of the unity cannot be destroyed. God is present to all His creation, however sinful

fallen man and fallen angelic powers may be. Hostility to the fulfilment of God's plan is great, and Satan seeks to set up his counter system of prophets (diviners, sorcerers, etc.), and even to have a son of his own, 'the son of perdition'.

The system of evil, typified in Psalm Two by the kings leaders and nations—which oppose God and His Messiah, is in reality the system which seeks to oppose the Kingdom of God, the plan of God, and the work of God which will bring man to his glorified state and so glorify the Father of glory. The evil system seeks to exalt Satan and his princes and establish the Kingdom of darkness, meanwhile giving out that it is the Kingdom of light.

Having seen these things we can now see the plan of God to bring man from lost, or abdicated, or unattained sonship, to the place of true and ultimate sonship. The Son whom He sends comes to bear the guilt of the world. It is only man's guilt which alienates him from God, himself, and others. It is only his guilt which keeps him in bondage to the evil system, the world, the flesh and the devil. Because of guilt he fears the wrath of God, hates the God of judgement, and dreads the judgement of the law.

When Christ bears the sins of the world, becomes sin for man, becomes and bears the curse of wrath upon sin, then man is set free. When the love of God is revealed to him, and in repentance and faith he tastes the grace of God, his heart is captured. He is washed, he is sanctified, he is justified. Proleptically he is glorified. Best of all he comes to see God as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the same Jesus Christ, the Son he comes to know sonship, which is often called adoption.

Galatians 4:4–6 describes the action of God

- (a) God sends His son, placing him under the law, and
- (b) The Son redeems man from the guilt and judgement of law by his own sin-bearing.
- (c) This is in order that man may receive the sonship – which he does through faith and repentance – and so be a son of God.
- (d) He is not only a son by adoption, but God sends the Spirit of His Son into man's heart, and the Spirit, when he comes is crying 'Abba' (i.e. Father'). Man is now truly man. He is part of the total family of God. He relates to the Father through the Son. He relates through the Father, the Son, and the Spirit to the family.

9. The Nature of Man's Sonship

We have already seen that man, as a son, must be like the Son himself. In the Son he has seen true sonship. It is because he is a child of God that he is motivated to do what such a child should do. Hence Ephes. 5:1–2 gives the principle of being children of God – we are to imitate the Father. Only he who is a child can truly imitate the Father.

The marks of such children will be those of the Son. Matt. 5:9 says, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God'. Jesus was such a peacemaker. Matt. 5:43–48 says those who love their enemies are truly children of God. Such was Jesus; such should all children be. Romans 8:14 says 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God'. Jesus was primarily led by the same Spirit.

In Galatians chapter three we see that men of faith are the children of Abraham, and they are also the sons of God. In Rev. 21:7 it is the conqueror who is the true son of God. Such was Jesus.

Beyond such plain Scriptures we have the whole witness of the life of the Son in his obedience to the Father's will, in his participation in the Father's plan, in his life of prayer as he related personally to the Father, seeking to know Him, and keep abreast of his will. He was dependent upon the Father, knowing he could only do that which he saw the Father do as He showed him what it was, (John 5:19). All of this indicates the nature of true sonship. In essence it is man returning to his relationship with God as son, servant and creature, and becoming a lord within his universe.

More than that it is being part of the people of God, the Kingdom of God and the family of the church – the household of God. We can see that relating to God, as Father, Son and Spirit, and relating to others, and so himself, man becomes what he never could be when in rebellion against God. He is not existentially awry, nor in that former anguish. Now he is at peace with God.

At the same time he faces the problems of a world in which the evil world system, though doomed, is still active. He sees the weaknesses within himself and others, and knows the anguish of living in a universe which has not yet visibly been purified and renewed. Hence as a child of God he is to seek purity, to live holily, and to do battle against the evil powers. However he is not without the Spirit of the Son, who is also the Spirit of the Father. He is equipped for warfare. He is empowered to overcome the enemy. (Ephes. 6:10–18, Rom. 7:14–25, 8:18–25, I Peter 1:14f. Heb. 12:14, Gal. 5:16–18, II Cor. 10:3–5).

Finally he is, as a child of God, necessarily the child of love. He is given gifts which are to be used in love. He is taught of God to love. He is part of the family, where the children love one another. He is indwelt by the (dynamic) Spirit of love. Love is the essential note and mark of the true children of God – love for God, for others, for one's self. (I Cor. 7:4f, Rom. 1:3f, I Peter 4:10f, I Thess. 4:9, I John 2:7f, 3:10f, 4:7–5:2 etc.).

10. The Father and The Family

The aim of God, as stated in Ephes. 1:3f is that God's children shall be holy and blameless, before Him. In Romans 8:29 it is that every son shall be in the image of His only (unique) Son, Jesus Christ. I John 3:1–3 states that we are such sons, but it does not yet appear what we shall be. We shall be like Him, the Son. Romans 8:18ff. says that the sons will ultimately be unveiled in glory. I Cor. 2:6ff says that such ultimate glory, which God has planned surpasses man's present imagination. We can see that the nature of the children, as well as the wholeness of the family is what the Father plans, and is at present fulfilling. (Ephes. 2:11–18).

We saw above that this family was created at the Cross. Hitherto hostile races – Jew and Gentile have lost their hostility in the suffering of the Son on the Cross. John 11:51–52 shows that only through the Cross could the children of God, scattered abroad be gathered together into (one) family.

The working out of that Cross came with the revelation brought by the Holy Spirit, first to the Jews at Pentecost, then to the Samaritans at Samaria, and then to the Gentiles at Caesarea. This family-hood and body – unity came with the forgiveness of sins, which when it swept away guilt destroyed the barriers, not only between God and man, but also between man and man. At the

same time the Spirit of love was poured upon them, and into their hearts, and they were naturally one family. (Rom. 5:5, Eph. 4:16).

Another way of saying it is in John's words, 'Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ, and these things we write unto you that your (and our) joy may be full'. He means, 'When we relate to the Father and the Son, we have eternal life, and this life is a matter of relationships, commencing first with the Father and the Sons and then working out to all the children of God'.

11. The Father, The Family, and The Families

Whilst it is certain that the plan of God is to glorify Himself, or show forth His excellency as Father by the family before Himself, yet that must not be seen as a static end. The family will be seen quantitatively in that 'multitude which no man can number, out of every nation, and people, and kindred, and tribe'. If we can speak about Fatherhood being quantitative, then we mean that His Fatherhood is shown only in the totality of His elect people, as indeed any fatherhood is shown by the total membership of the family. At the same time His Fatherhood will be shown qualitatively in the quality of the character and person of each son. Each will be in the likeness or image of His own Son.

Thus the family must not be seen just as 'the final result' of God's plan, and His redemptive action. It must be seen as something quite beautiful and amazing in itself. We will see later that there is purpose in what we call eternity, for this family. We will also see that its very being, constitutes in itself the lavish expression of God in His love. The family will constitute a most wonderful dynamic expression of that love.

Yet, to be most practical, the family is also the current event of God. It is always being that current event. It is now. Eschatologically its perfection is assured. In the present era it is being in the midst of all humanity, not only as a witness but as an operational community. It is in and through the family that we see and experience the nature and triumph of God. Hence the Family is the really important fact within the world. For this reason we must extend our observations of family, namely those given under 'The Nature of Man's Sonship'. In addition we must seek to understand the structures and hierarchies of the Family and its constituent families.

God's Authorities in the World¹

We have already noted that one of man's reasons for rejecting the nature of God as Father is because fatherhood of any kind suggests authority. The child's rebellion against the parent-father may be rationalised by pointing to the personal defects and deficiencies of that one, but in fact this is only a rationalisation for rebellion. The reason for rebellion is that in rejecting the authority of the Father the child rejects the authority of its father. Much could be said along these lines, but is doubtful whether empirical proof could be given for this statement. The statement, nevertheless may well be true, since the psychological facts of God-rejection and father-rejection would be too complex to admit of an objective survey of the whole problem.

¹ The Reader is referred to Living Faith Study No. 5 'The Nature of Authority and Obedience'.

The Scriptures teach that authority of God is delegated throughout the various authorities which God constitutes in His universe. Commencing with the Godhead, there are descending orders of authorities, involving heavenly creatures, angelic and human beings. At the apex, of course is God, yet rebellion against 'the powers that be (which) are ordained of God', is rebellion against God Himself.

When then we come to the Family of God, the living Church, we find that Christ is its Head, although he himself is subject to the Father. Other authorities are present in the forms of leaders, elders, deacons, pastor-teachers, and so on. Man also seems to have authority above that exercised by woman. The whole organism of the church functions vitally under this living hierarchy. Nevertheless this will be misunderstood where members have not come to terms with God Himself. Also it is necessary to understand the purpose and function of authority.*

Authority is derived from author which speaks of 'bringing forth' or creativity. It also presupposes goal, purpose and direction. Authority does not exist merely to maintain some status quo but rather to act in manners directive, protective, corrective and maturative. Rightly understood authority is truly dynamic, and wholly indispensable. Rarely, however, is it seen in this light. This is partly because few in authority know how to use the gift (and office) of authority, and because man has become depraved in and by the use of authority. We mean that his rebellion against God has made it difficult, if not impossible for him to understand the nature of authority and obedience.

We can see then, the enormous problem that confronts us in presenting man with the truth of God's Fatherhood. He must reject it absolutely, or rationalise it as simply being analogical or anthropomorphic, or somewhat. However, the Scripture presents us with a dynamic view of God as Father, and does not neglect on the one hand to point to His authority, His demand for full obedience, and holiness of life, and on the other hand it deals powerfully with the motivating power of the love of the Father. In all the universe, celestial and terrestrial there is nothing to equal the love of the Father. One of Christ's most significant (and powerful) prayers was, 'That they may know that thou hast loved them even as thou hast loved me'.

The Family

We have seen Sonship revealed, and we expect that sonship will be similar; in fact of the same order. The Son loved the Father, obeyed Him, watched to see what He was doing, and even claimed that he did nothing from (of) himself, because the Father who dwelt (dwells) in him does the works. Thus the Son knows nothing of himself, does nothing of himself, and is utterly dependent upon the Father. It is difficult to think of human sonship under human fatherhood, in these terms. Yet that is how it must be. The only explanation of how it is with the Father and the Son is the mutual love, and that is only how it can be with human fatherhood and sonship. Is such love possible? The answer is: Yes, and it is also mandatory. However there can be no such human love of a son to a father or father to a son, no such mutual love, except first each, and both, be related in love to the Father.

To diverge for a moment, let us look at the modern (sic') problem of rebellion against authority. Modern rationalisations speak of a changing order, or of any order being simply utilitarian or adaptive. When all things are relative, then nothing is absolute. This, however is not the Biblical order. When we add to this fact that all true life is purposive, and true purposiveness

and meaning can only be found within obedience, then we can see that authority is positive, and obedience to it is imperative.

By the same token we see that man's continual rebellion against God, expressed in his rebellion against authority, must give man a deep-seated problem of guilt. Only the cross can relieve that, and at the same time give man a thrust of love so that he obeys gladly, relates richly to God, man and self, and enters the new realm of obedience. Simultaneously he enters the new realm of family-hood and sets about the business of the Family. Within the family there are, as we have observed, functional orders of authority, though never authoritarianism, as such.

The Family and the Families

Whilst our study is not primarily related to the human family yet certain observations have to be made. The nature of the human family – the nuclear family in particular – depends upon its relation to the Family of God. Primarily it depends upon its relationships with God, but then every Christian family is a constituent unit of the whole family of God. Even unredeemed mankind is not excused from the responsibility to exercise love and obedience towards God, and within its family units, since this is the creational, functional order set for the universe.

We have seen that when man does not relate truly to God as Father he impairs true relationships on the human level. We cannot estimate or compute the enormous psychic damage done within the complex of all relationships. Doubtless it is out of, and because of this, that man forms his jaundiced view of God and the universe. Men, universally fear fate, and look with apprehension to the events which are coming towards them.

We are suggesting that all ills, sociological, and otherwise, spring from the distortions and perversions of family life, particularly when the authority orders change, or are rejected. When the father is not a father, because primarily he is not truly a husband, then a harmful imbalance of relationships will occur, affecting what would otherwise be obedience and purposeful action. It may be quickly seen that for various reasons a poor (or bad) son, will make a poor husband, father, and brother. Likewise a poor daughter will make a deficient sister, wife, mother. The complex of relationships within the parental family will greatly affect those within the children's new family units. Tempting as this subject is for further comment, it is more profitable to see that healing of these damaging relationships must first come through the absolute forgiveness of the Cross, with the consequent reconciliation within the relational complex. The work of maturing persons, and evoking full relationships springs from the Spirit and the Gospel, particularly as they operate in the wide field of the family.

Yet another observation must be made. Modern psychological pre-determinism often lays the blame not on the child but on the parents, on heredity and circumstances. The answer to this is clearly set forth in Ezekiel 18 where it is shown that the child makes, and is responsible for its own moral decisions. Whilst the child is not responsible for the circumstances which comes upon him he is responsible for his reactions to them. Likewise he cannot blame his parents, however remiss they may be in their parenthood, Man, being a moral creature is under obligation to make decision in conformity with the way God created him. Nor can he plead the 'fall' as an excuse. Created in the image of God Who is love, man is expected to love, and since love bears all things, believes and hopes all things as well as endures all things, then man must live after this manner.

The facts are that he does not. Complaining about the entail of his parents' imperfections, he reproduces them for his own children. Only when he comes to the Father through the Son will he receive remission of his past, and the necessary supply of power he needs to live and relate aright.

Conclusion on Relationships

We conclude, then, that all human relationships spring from, are dependent upon, and have their fullness from that primary relationship with the Father. Secondly, we see that the grace of God planned and effected redemption so that man, being reconciled with God could, also be reconciled with himself and others and live those relationships with others which are consonant with true love. There is no healing which cannot take place, if only man will have God to heal it. Also, within this peerless plan of God, creation, redemption, and the final glorification are actions of the entire Godhead, the Father always initiating, the Son mediating, and the Spirit acting as the Agent.

All the information help and understanding we need in regard to the details of this matter of true relationships and obedience, can be found within the Scriptures. It is, however, worked out in the context of the church, so that maturation comes from the Gospel, and the Spirit in the context of the Family, this of course including goal, meaning, purpose, and action which are essential for, and indispensable to, true human being and living.

12. The Family of The Future, and The Future of The Family

We observed before that it is not possible to fully understand what man truly is, until he is seen in his state of glorification. That is what God had intended for His elect, before even creation was made. Adam does not represent man in total but man as created, and in one sense, man-in-probation. His fall into rebellion does not mean man was essentially faulty or sinful, but that man had real choice, and chose not to remain what a man really is God's creature, strong as a man when dependent upon God, but when out of God, weak and sinful.

Hence what God had planned for man's ultimate glory constitutes what the completed matured humanity really is. As we are seeing, there is no such thing as a separate glorified individual, so much as there is a person who is part of the full family, who has his being from the Father, and this being is filled out in the context of his relationships within the Family, as he does the will of the Father, along with them.

We mean, by all of this that man is always becoming, although from God's point of view he has become what he intended. Hence Romans 8:30 'And those whom He predestined He also called; and those whom He called he also justified: and those whom, He justified He also glorified'. This accords with I Cor. 2:6f., whilst Phil. 1:6 says that 'He who has begun a good work in you will also complete it (right) up to the day of Jesus Christ'. If the elect are to be like the Son (Rom. 8:3), and to be the praise of the Father (Ephes. 1:12-14) then the work of glorification would have to be total, which of course is what it will be. Now we can explore what this glorification constitutes, and this as far as possible in terms which are intelligible to us.

(i) 'Like the Son'

As we saw in Romans 8:30 we will be like Christ the Son, and he will be

the first born among many (such) brethren. Again in I John 3:1–3 the writer says that what we will be is not now apparent. He means by this that there is no criterion that is normal to human experience whereby we can assess what we will be, and as yet we are certainly not yet what we will be. Again, in I Corinthians 2:6–11 the writer says that we cannot even imagine – far less have we ever seen and heard – what we will be. This is all so startling, not only as to be exciting, but to be powerfully motivating. We may also observe that the coming glorification– is often spoken about, and it is always a source of motivation to present good living, moral effort, and holiness of life. Only for those who will not be glorified, but rather will be judged, does this teaching bring repugnance and fear.

Whilst it is true we have no sensible criteria for what we will be, and do, yet we have many aids to understanding. In Romans 8:17 Paul tells us that as sons and children of God we are ‘heirs of God and fellow–heirs with Christ’. Hebrews 1:3 says that God has appointed Christ ‘the heir of all things’. Heir in its effect means owner. Messiah is owner of all things. This is obvious since first he has created them and secondly he has redeemed or renewed and will ultimately unify them. Man, of himself, is heir to nothing. Redeemed man is said to be a joint–heir with Christ. Inasmuch as we can understand the criterion of Christ's heirship, so we can understand our own. It is stunning to think that we, with Christ, shall own all things.

This thought is used many times in Scripture. Abraham through covenant is said, with his descendants, to inherit the world (Rom. 4:13). In Ephesians Paul talks about ‘His glorious inheritance in the saints’, a statement which may be taken in one of two ways, either that the saints are God's glorious inheritance (the fruits of His salvific work) or the saints will receive an inheritance of glory. In Matt. 5:5 we are told ‘Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth’. Whilst it is true that certain conditions are set down for inheriting such as suffering with Christ, being, overcoming – yet the inheritance surely means that all creation shall belong to the family of God.

(ii) ‘Sons of the Kingdom’

The term ‘sons of the Kingdom’ (cf. Matt. 8:12) denoted the true Israelite. Hence John the Baptist's preaching was most significant, seeing it pertained to the Kingdom. The indignant Pharisees and Sadducees believed themselves to be the children of Abraham, which was the equivalent of ‘children of the Kingdom’. Whilst the Kingdom had originally embraced only Israel, it later, under the teaching of Jesus became cosmic in its embrace. The Kingdom of heaven was more than just any Kingdom of the earth, as the Kingdom of God was more than any Kingdom of man or men. Hence Jesus could say, ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’.

John promised the kingdom. Jesus encouraged his disciples with ‘Fear not little flock for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom’. Later, he said, ‘I appoint to you a kingdom, as my Father appointed to me a Kingdom’. After the resurrection he talked with the disciples for forty days, concerning the Kingdom, and Acts 1:6–8 signifies that he saw the Kingdom as embracing Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts.

Still later, as the apostles preach concerning the Kingdom, it is seen that this Kingdom will be established fully, only at Christ's coming, and is such that ‘flesh and blood cannot inherit it’. However, following on what we have said above, the term ‘inherit (or, enter) the Kingdom’ explains what we mean by our inheritance. Rev. 5:10 says we shall be a kingdom of priests,

and reign on the earth. This is much the same as inheriting the world. This kingdom is so to be valued that we are prepared to go through much tribulation to enter it.

One of the most telling stories is that of Jesus in Matt. 25:31ff, where Jesus tells those who have truly served him, 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' By this we see the ultimate is to be in the Kingdom, and that God has prepared that as his plan for the glorification of man and His universe. This is what Jesus meant when he said, 'My kingdom is not of this world', and verifies what is written in Daniel chapter 7 concerning the kingdom which will be everlasting, and given to the Son of Man, and to the saints of the most high. (Cf. Matt. 25:34, I Cor. 6:9, 15:50, Gal. 5:21, Ephes. 5:5).

Thus the 'sons of God' will really be 'the children of Abraham' who are 'men of Faith'. They will be the 'sons of the Kingdom'. We may add then I Cor. 15:24–28 and Phil. 2:9–11, which when conflated give us the picture of Christ subduing all kingdoms until they are the Kingdom of God, and giving this Kingdom to the Father. When, he, Christ is obeyed by all, it is to the glory of the Father.

From our point of view we can see that the family of the future, and the future of the family is all related to the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, and this is the inheritance. In this, the sons, unveiled in their fulfilment, are truly glorious.

(iii) The Home of the Future

In John 14:1–14 Jesus is speaking of the home of the future. He says that his departure from them is to prepare a place for each of them, there being many mansions or resting places in his Father's house (home). This is a very beautiful picture. In John 8:35 he speaks of the Son living freely in the Father's house, and promises those who believe that they likewise shall range free in that home. The picture in Ephesians 2:14–22 is of the household of God, and of sinners, through the Cross, Christ and the Spirit having access to the Father, and being welcomed into the family, and the household.

It would be pleasant to speculate what this all might be, but as we have seen the human equivalent of home and family cannot conduct one to true understanding of the ultimate. There are passages which suggest that we are the very habitation of God, such as in Ephes. 2:21–22, and Revelation 21:1–5. These two are related and have their origin in Ezekiel 37:26–27. All through the covenant promises to His people God has said, 'I will be their God, and they shall be my people'. Now He dwells among them, and so there will be no more death, no more pain, no more tears, but only the presence of God and the Lamb. Revelation 7:9 speaks of the love of the Lamb, and the provision of eternal life, whilst Rev. 22:3–5 promises that His people shall see His (God's) face. As these concepts unfold, and melt, one into the other, we are presented with views which are indescribably beautiful. No wonder they motivate all His children to live in preparation for that great event.

(iv) The Glory Which Shall be Revealed

At the end of Romans 7 Paul cries out in anguish, 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death'. Man has always been ashamed of that death which is the result, of his sin. The corrupting body is mortifying to man's proud

spirit. Yet the promise of eternal life to the true believer is a glorious one. Scripture after Scripture speaks in anticipation of the final defeat of corruption. True, the whole creation groans in anguish, waiting for its coming. The sons of God eagerly anticipate their glorification. They wait in eager hope. Their Saviour will appear from heaven changing their bodies of humiliation so that it will be made like unto his (Christ's) body of glory with the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself, even death.

Revelation 7:9–14 speaks of the redeemed elect, that vast uncountable multitude who have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb, serving him day and night in the temple. Here 'serving' Him means both worshipping Him, and doing deeds in His service. Doubtless eternity will be no less dynamic and actional than we have known in our universe in time. It will be even more powerful, since the entire family will be equipped with the total love of God.

As we contemplate it, it becomes even more incredible, indeed unspeakable. Call it 'sanctified imagination' if you will, but in that day all things will have been reconciled, all purged to pristine purity, all harmonised by Love Himself, and all will be the Family, before the Father, every child of the Father being gloriously pure, perfect, and immortal, so that their presence glories the Father of Glory. The earth and the heavens, too, will be filled with the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

This is how He will show 'in the ages to come, the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness to us in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:7). This is the 'praise and glory and honour' which comes with the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is indeed the Kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world. This is the true Father, and His Son, and His Spirit, and His Family.

May what is yet to be, greatly influence what is now. Our light affliction will be counted no great burden, seeing it works for us a far more and exceeding weight of glory.

To be before the Father – that will transcend all things. To share the Father together as His children, and as brethren – that will be the ultimate'

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APPENDIX ONE

ANGELS ARE SONS OF GOD

This paper has not treated the terms ‘father’, ‘son’, ‘brethren’ from a philological, or semantic point of view. It has presupposed a general understanding of fatherhood, sonship, brotherhood, family-hood, etc., whilst recognising that such an understanding will be marred by nature of the case man being a rebellious fallen creature.

Ephes. 3:14f speaks of God as being the Father by whom every family, or all families in heaven and earth are named. This can be taken to mean that God’s elect form one family, or the whole creation forms one family, including men, angels and others. It may mean all who are redeemed and/or godly amongst men and celestial beings, or it may mean that there are many families (undefined), and whether they be rebellious or submissive family-hood and fatherhood derive from the Father (*pater*) ‘family’ being *patria*.

In the case of angels, they are many times called the sons of God. The question is whether the sonship of man is unique, distinct from, and transcending that of angels. The answer is, ‘Yes’. Hebrews chapter one makes it clear that Jesus, as man, was superior to angels. At the best angels are servants to the heirs of salvation. No angel has been given lordship over the universe, but man has been given such (Psalm 2, Heb. 2:5f). Man has even been made head over the ‘age to come’ – Heb. 2:5, cf. Ephes. 1:21. Whilst the angelic order constitutes an hierarchy of princes, authorities etc. who reign over the functional order of the universe, yet man is only made a little less than God, or a little lower than the angels, or for a while a little lower than the angels – whichever way Psalm 2:3, and Heb. 2:5f. is exegeted.

What is clear is that ultimately men will judge angels (I Cor. 6:2–3). In Christ man rules over the world (cf. Ephes. 2:6, Rev. 2:26–27, 3:21, 5:10). In this sense men will prove to be superior to angels. However angels are not, as such, created in the image of God, whereas man is (Gen. 1:26, I Cor. 11:7, etc.). As to origination and service angels can well be called ‘sons of God’. As to that affinity which enables man to say ‘Abba’ – that is not the right or property of angels. Man is unique in that order, so much so that the very Son of God can become incarnate without losing any of his Sonship, since humanity is its sufficient vehicle.

APPENDIX TWO

THE RECOVERY OF SONSHIP

This paper has not taken the view, dogmatically that man was, by creation, so much son, that he could not be other than that, for Ephes. 1:4–14 makes it clear that the ultimate sonship God has for man is not through Adam, but through Jesus Christ. Nevertheless the functional structures of man, we believe, are

creationally filial. Hence man, estranged from God is 'not himself'. We point this out because much theology speaks of God's salvific purpose and action as though it were God's specific for man's fall, and almost His expedient to meet the contingency (foreseen, of course) of man's sin. However the true picture is not this. God's predestination purpose relates to his glorification rather than just to the intermediate step of salvation. Whilst God is Redeemer, He is Father prior to Redeemer. Redemption is a step to sonship, since justification precedes and leads to, adoption. This is the order of Gal. 4:4–6. The ultimate is not salvation but sonship. Of course if we take sonship to be included in the entirety of salvation, then that is acceptable, provided we see that to redeem man is to restore him to, or give him the gift of sonship, for only by this is he made the glorified man God had planned him to be.

What we have not emphasised in our study is the all-embracing and radical nature of man's move from rebellion and guilt to forgiveness and sonship. The story of the prodigal son, the story of the two sons who both have rebellion against the Father, needs to be read as to the emotional change caused by forgiveness. It is positive in the case of the younger son, negative in the case of the older. Likewise in the significant story of the two sons sent by the Father to work in the vineyard. One works after repentance; the other submits, but is inwardly rebellious and does not work.

If heaven rings with joy, and the angels rejoice over one sinner that repents (the prodigal returns), then man himself must undergo an indescribable experience in coming to truly relate (and submit) to the Father. This alone explains the new and powerful drive which makes him submissive, obedient, useful, and whole. Sonship has its impetus from loving forgiveness, and the indwelling Spirit who causes the 'Abba' cry to well up in the new son. If we have not stressed this in the paper it is not because it has been neglected in the life of the church. We have been interested in gathering a wider range of materials on the paternal-filialfraternal complex.

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