

- *Who loves a father—a human father?*
- *What is patriarchy? Is it good, bad, irrelevant, or the very best of all?*
- *Who loves the Father—God? What is His Patriarchy?*
- *Is God really Father? If so, what does His Fatherhood mean?*

The answer to the last question is that God's Fatherhood means everything. In the face of rebellion against authority, the drive for egalitarian structures, the rejection of masculism and the assertion of feminism, there is the mystery of God as Father. Refuse this and we may find true sociality will eventually evaporate, leaving in its place a society more confused and less integrated than ever.

In this book Geoffrey Bingham has taken up the heart of the Trinitarian Godhead, and shown its biblical reality in that man must have God as Father, and have Him at the centre of his being. Anything less leaves man as dehumanized. The book has a strong prophetic ring, and it sounds a tocsin of urgency. A return to God's Fatherhood—the central mystery and meaning of all life and sociality—is urgently demanded.

About the author . . .

Geoffrey Bingham is an Anglican minister. His experience as soldier, prisoner of war, farmer, writer, missionary, and family man, as well as theologian, has given him grounds for writing material which is Australian in tone, and relevant to the society in which we live.



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I LOVE THE FATHER

Geoffrey C. Bingham

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Angry Heart or Tranquil Mind? (2nd ed)
Christ the Conquering King!
Christ's Cross over Man's Abyss
Clash of the Kingdoms (The)
Come! Let Us Go To Calvary!
Come Let Us Pray
Everlasting Presence (The)
Father! My Father!
God and Father of Us All (The)
Great and Glorious Grace
Oh Father! Our Father!
Way and Wonder of Worship (The)

I LOVE THE FATHER

The discovery of God as Father, of Jesus as the Son,
and of ourselves as the children, the Family of God,
and as mutual brethren.

Geoffrey C. Bingham

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'... I love the Father ...'

John 14:31

'See what love the Father has given us,
that we should be called the children of God.'

I John 3:1

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FOREWORD

***AN EXCITED FOREWORD
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In an introduction to the volume of *Phantastes and Lilith* by the writer George MacDonald (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, reprinted 1975), C. S. Lewis says, 'We have learned from Freud and others about those distortions in character and errors in thought which result from a man's early conflicts with his father. Far the most important thing we can know about George MacDonald is that his whole life illustrates the opposite process. An almost perfect relationship with his father was the earthly root of all his wisdom. From his own father, he said, he first learned that *Fatherhood must be at the core of the universe*. He was thus prepared in an unusual way to teach *that religion in which* the relation of the Father and the Son is of all relations the most central.' (Emphasis is mine.)

One of the exciting things about researching a subject

is to discover those who have walked the track prior to one's own investigations. Undoubtedly there is a wealth of material available on this subject. The surprising thing, however, is *how comparatively little material there is* when it is contrasted with the wealth of material available on other elements of theology. For example, the resource materials on Christology (the person and work of Christ) and Pneumatology (the person and work of the Holy Spirit) are abundant. Prolific investigation in these disciplines is rich in volume, and is currently increasing its spate.

One asks then, 'Why is there not a discipline called Pateriology? If we have the person and work of the Son, why not the person and work of the Father? If we deal with the person and work of the Spirit (who is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, and that simultaneously), then why not, naturally, a similar theological treatment of the Father?'

To the general layman the questions just asked will sound puzzling. He scarcely knows what theologians are up to, and cares little anyway. A layman reading this foreword will want some stimulation to read this title he has in his hands. He may be frightened off by talk about Christology, Pneumatology and Pateriology. Even the terms are foreign to him. What he must realize is that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are not foreign to him, or at least need not be. He may have dynamic experience of, and rich relationship with, these Persons of the Triune Godhead. That is his right and privilege as a child of God.

If what Lewis says is true—'Fatherhood must be at the core of the universe'—then in his insight man may find

the key to the whole of creation, and to the whole of man. If this Fatherhood is ignored or treated in a cavalier fashion, then we do so at our own peril. In human affairs, fatherhood (which includes motherhood) is deeply significant. Most psychotherapies seek to correct or enhance, or come to terms with, those relationships of early life which have brought damage to the persons in their childhood. Doubtless also the Fatherhood of God and the fatherhood of man are directly related.

This book, then, is an attempt to etch something of the nature of God as Father, of Christ as His Son, and of us as His children and His family. To be honest, the book is something in the nature of a stop gap. I am working at the moment on a wider, finer and more detailed treatment of the subject. The first edition of *I Love The Father* was published in 1974. It sold well, and the feedback concerning it was gratifying. (Some who had never picked up the book were highly critical, which is puzzling.) In 1977 a more popular treatment of the subject was published under the title of *Father! My Father!* This also has sold very well and may soon call for a reprint or revised edition.

Some examples of how the first edition of *I Love The Father* was received are printed in the text of this new edition. I cannot, however, refrain from mentioning another. A man visited me one day with a very worn copy of the title, wishing to buy another copy. 'It belongs to your daughter, Anne,' he said. 'I have just about worn it out, and I want a fresh copy for her. I read this book every day, but never more than a few sentences and at the most a paragraph. All day long I ponder it, and it brings immense blessing to me. It has changed my outlook on

life, on the world, and in my relationships. I am not a clever or intellectual person, but I love what I read and I want to understand it.' This, of course, is no justification of the book as a viable treatment of the theme, but it does indicate how absorbing is the subject itself.

READING THE BOOK

How, then, should we read this book? The original edition comprised chapters 1 to 12. The other material has been added to motivate readers to tackle the material previously published, as also to supplement it. It is one thing to discover the practical outworking of the biblical materials and to apply them. It is another to understand and absorb them. For the most part we are active feeling and doing persons. Most of us are too restless or impatient to read theology. We think it is for the academics. In that we are very wrong. We need to grasp certain principles of truth so that we can apply them, and when we do, it is greatly to our advantage.

I plead with the layman to stick at reading, discovering, understanding. He will be greatly rewarded if he habituates himself in this practice. A whole new world may well open up to him in the materials which will become available to him. So far as the theological pundit is concerned, I am deeply aware of the shortcomings of this current volume. The revision is not a technical theological treatment. It is aimed mostly at the heart, and is an attempt to show how relevant the subject is to our current living. Hence, the first chapters are aimed at motivating the reader, and hints that a fuller exposition of

the theme could prove of immense value in understanding ourselves as persons, in enhancing our relations, and in aiding our counsel and care of others. I believe the implications of a true Pateriology are enormous, and the ramifications endless.

For example, how can we speak of a true treatment of the person and work of the Son if it does not issue from a comprehensive knowledge of the person and work of the Father? Any Christology and Pneumatology which is not Pateriological must also be defective. And so on.

Quirks of history, especially church history, have set us on certain tracks. The Christological controversies linked with church Councils and the hammering out of creeds found the church defending the 'one substance' of the Father and the Son. Anything which smacked of subordinationism and adoptionism was rejected. In order to defend the equality of the Father and the Son, the true humanity of Christ was often not only neglected, but some doctrine tended towards Docetism, i.e. that Christ was not truly man, but only—and that temporarily—in the *appearance* of man. Sadly enough the same Docetism is no less evident today. Likewise the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been sadly neglected. The resurgence of interest because of the current charismatic issues has led to some fine theology on the theme, though not necessarily by charismatic theologians as such.

The writer, then, urges the layman to apply himself to a theological enrichment, if not by this current title, then by other reading. Go ahead and work at the book. To the more theological the Bibliography will reveal two things, (i) the paucity in English of full treatments of the subject up to the end of the nineteenth century, and (ii) the

sudden resurgence of interest in this subject over the past decade. Hence, one is tempted to make the observation that we may be approaching one of the richest eras of Christian history. When the disciplines of Pateriology, Christology and Pneumatology supplement and complement one another, and a rich unity is achieved, i.e. a true Trinitarian theology, then a living devotion may also expand and mature. The author humbly admits the inadequacy of his treatment of the theme but defends stoutly his right to share it in such volumes as this current title. One day he may even approach doing it justice.

Meanwhile he increasingly exults in the nature of the Triune God, and in the three discrete Persons Who constitute that Godhead of love and holiness. He increasingly is enriched by the human relationships which issue from the love and holiness of God, and finds an increase of pity for those alienated from true Fatherhood, Sonship and Family. Evangelistically he is spurred on—with so many others—to teach that ‘Fatherhood must be at the core of the universe’.

‘No man has ever seen God at any time. The Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has revealed him.’

‘Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God.’

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEED OF REVELATION OF THE FATHER

LOVE OF HUMAN AND DIVINE FATHERHOOD

A fair test of how or whether we love the Father is whether we love our earthly fathers and mothers. Some would consider this an unfair test, pointing out that God the Father is easy to love, so to speak. That is, He does not have the imperfections common to earthly fathers. This is weak reasoning. Loving has nothing, really, to do with loveliness. At least divine love has no regard for how lovable or unlovable a person is.

John says in his first Epistle, ‘If any one says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar.’ Every man is my brother: even my father! Hence, if I do not love my father I do not love *the* Father. In any case my father’s fatherhood is derived from the Father’s Fatherhood, and

is a matter of delegated authority and loving care. Hence, if I reject the person, I (even if unwittingly) reject the source.

It may well be that given the key—love of fatherhood—we may have the power to open up vistas of life, and effect mental and spiritual healing in many lives. Doubtless most schools of psychology link the growth and maturity, or lack of growth and associated retardation, with the family life of the given person. Indeed in filial, paternal, maternal and familial relationships we may well have the key to a rich life or one that is filled with hurt, pain and anger.

Doubtless Jesus is the paradigm of true sonship. We may say that his revealed Sonship is really revealed sonship. He expressed his Sonship of God in simple ways. On one occasion he said, 'The Son does nothing but what the Father shows him.' He then added, 'The Father loves the Son and shows him all things.' If we ponder these two statements we see intuitively that this is what true sonship and fatherhood really are. However, in life we never see it just like this. We may see approximations in rare cases, but never wholly in this way. Sons habitually do *not* do what their fathers say, and fathers habitually have little time to spare for teaching their sons *all* that they themselves know.

In writing this book, which originally contained twelve of the present chapters, the aim was to give some reasonable theological statement about divine Fatherhood, Christ's Sonship, and the given sonship of man. The treatment is not wholly theological, and it will be no wonder if it is treated by certain scholars as simplistic. However, the aim of the previous book was to open up

the subject to folk in all walks of life. My contention as the writer was (and still is) that few people understand a great deal concerning the Fatherhood of God. For this reason there must be some biblical treatment.

Perhaps what emboldened me to write those twelve chapters was the amazing results which came when one preached on the theme. I would like to share some of these stories simply in order to whet the appetite of those who may not consider the theme overly stimulating or richly relevant. Because the stories are of the *experiences* of people they are not intended in any sense to be either an explication or proof of the subject. They are written to show how deeply the theme has affected certain persons. For obvious reasons it will not affect all in the same way. Some will have experienced the Fatherhood of God over a period of time, and others may have certain personal reasons for being opposed to it. Here, anyway, are some of the stories.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE WRITER

Many years ago in Calcutta I was speaking at a Keswick Convention. The language interpreter was a fine Christian, a Baptist pastor from Assam whose name was Sabodh Sahu. He was at that time the Indian pastor at Carey Baptist Church. He had knowledge of many languages. I could speak Urdu, but in Calcutta folk primarily speak Bengalese. The studies were on the Cross, and after one meeting we sat in our room at the Manse, sharing this very theme—the Cross—until we both flowed with tears. It was most moving.

Sabodh decided to sleep, and after changing went to bed. We were in the same room. He was soon asleep. I sat reading for a short time, then slipped down at the side of the bed with a view to praying. Without thinking I uttered the words, 'Oh Father!' Suddenly a sense of shock came to me. Of course, *God is my Father!* Now in one way there was nothing new in this fact, but suddenly the fact was very new to me. I had preached on the Fatherhood many times. John's Gospel had always been a delight to me. I had often explained how the Father could not be known apart from the Son. Also that the Holy Spirit had to show us both the things of the Father and of the Son in accordance with John 16:12-15.

Something unusual happened when I articulated that cry. It was as though *fatherhood* whether divine or human had been a *concept*. It may even have been a personal concept. Now it was a rich *reality*. What was more, I was relating richly to the Father. I kept crying out, 'Oh, Father! Oh, Father!', and each cry seemed to reinforce my understanding of Him and my relationship with Him.

How long that period of experience lasted I do not know. I could feel, so to speak, waves of light, waves of joy, and the flowing of serenity about me, enveloping me wholly. After a time I felt that the intensity of what I can only describe as ecstasy was so rich that I could scarcely sustain it. I thought, 'I must get on to the bed and back to normality.' I am aware that a thing called the beatific vision has been the experience of saints down through the centuries. Most of them were unable to cope with it. So I lay on the bed.

The curious thing is that I could not physically feel the

bed beneath me. It was as though I were in a cocoon of light, joy and serenity, and normal emotional feelings had been enhanced, yet also I could not feel the bed. The phrase kept mouthing itself, 'Oh Father!' How long I lay like that I do not know. What I do know is that it was an experience which is easily recalled. At this very moment of writing it is as vivid to me as it was on that night.

Such experiences may be called subjective, but to me it was a rich apprehension of the objective, the reality of God's Fatherhood. Even so, the feelings and ecstasy were not the important elements. From that point of time onwards the matter of God's Fatherhood has been richly and vitally present with me. It is natural one should wish to share this fact with others, i.e. the fact of the Fatherhood. It is not, of course, to say that one only knows the Fatherhood through ecstatic experience. All Godly knowledge is primarily by faith but faith does not have to be exclusive of feelings.

There will not be lacking critics who will say that any emphasis on one Person of the Trinity to the expulsion of the Others is really practical Unitarianism. I thoroughly agree. Fatherhood cannot be known without Sonship, and these both cannot be known apart from the Holy Spirit. I have had two other experiences equally powerful, one of the Lordship of Christ and the other of the sovereignty and power of the Holy Spirit. Doubtless all Christians have had such, but I mean definitive experiences such as this one of the Father. Interestingly enough they were in the sequence of the Spirit, the Son and the Father.

What conclusions do I draw from such? None! It is life eternal to *know* the Father and the Son. One knows

that one knows. The danger of recounting these happenings is that others may think they need to know God through similar visions or special states of awareness. That is not the case. All our knowledge is *by faith* and not *by sight*. At times, nevertheless, God visits in a way which is almost sight. Even so, it still requires faith to accept the 'sight' happening.

PRAYING HYDE AND THE FATHER

Early in the twentieth century the famous missionary John Hyde, later known as 'Praying Hyde', was one of the founders of the Sialkot Convention—then in North India, now in Pakistan. This Convention is still held annually, and I myself have preached at it many times, often to audiences of 6,000.

Praying Hyde was a man who knew what it was to be quiet and with God. Often he would separate himself from work, from others, and remain for days in prayer. At one of the first Conventions he was in his prayer tent, and it came time for him to speak at a session. Someone approached the tent to call him to speak, but silence met him. When he entered the tent it seemed that Hyde was in a trance. Certainly nothing could bring him to a conscious state. Time and again he was approached, but without success. Finally someone managed to impress him that he must come to the Convention Tent.

He arrived on its edge. All eyes were fixed on him. He seemed not to see the crowd. He appeared still to be in his trance. Then he lifted eyes upward and said three times in English, and three times in Urdu, 'Oh Father!' There was

a great hush over the congregation, but the effect of the prayer was electric. Some began to weep, some went into serene silence. Others, we are told, fell to the ground in deep emotion. Others began prayer as though it were a new and wonderful exercise.

So much for the *experience*. What was the outcome? The answer is, 'Revival!' From that moment a wave of reality swept across the crowd at the Convention. It spread into the district. The days that followed saw a rich and useful revival. Some claim that after eighty years the waves are still flowing. This may well be true. In three utterances Hyde had preached a magnificent sermon. He had unconsciously revealed the Father in all His glory, His compassion, His beauty and His saving grace. Hyde himself was a magnificent evangelist. He must have constantly communicated the filial nature of Christ and the paternal nature of the God of the Scriptures.

SOME HINDUS AND THE FATHER

Not long after my experience in Calcutta I had the opportunity to take a series of studies on the Fatherhood, the Sonship and the Family at Hyderabad Sindh at the church where I assisted the Pastor. I noticed that folk were puzzled about the theme, although they responded graciously. Shortly after that a revival broke out in the Rahim Yar Khan area in the State of Bahawalpur. Those at the centre of it were students of the Bible College where I was Principal. Just prior to this outbreak I was teaching a group of Hindus near the city of Sukkur in Upper Sind. Each day, in the broiling sun,

with temperatures which were upwards of 110 degrees Fahrenheit, I shared the message of God the Father-Creator, His Son the Revelator of the Father, and His love through the work of the Cross and Resurrection, and the Spirit of the Father who drew men and women to salvation and gave them the status and being of sons by adoption and regeneration.

This last may sound like a theological mouthful. Especially it may seem difficult to teach such to untutored Hindus of the lower castes. One of those Hindus had been so antagonistic as a priest of his people that he had tied up a new convert to the Gospel in his temple. He had done this so that the man might not witness. The witness had drawn him, doubtlessly, to hear the Gospel. Unused to such things as meetings and sermons, the small group persisted in listening. Women were also present, a matter quite unusual, and after some days they discarded their veils and stared at me in eye-to-eye relationship. As I spoke on the Father a number came to Christ and so to the Father.

A group of these folk was baptized. Among them was the Hindu priest. He rarely left me in those days, so close was our relationship. We travelled on the train together. When he had to leave me he embraced me with deep feeling. 'In Christ,' he said, 'You are my father. In the Father you are my brother. It is wonderful. We all belong to the family of God.' He gestured towards the former Hindus and our Christian group. He clung with great warmth. Then he said with a touch of sadness, 'Why did you not come to us before? How could you restrain yourself from telling such wonderful news?' I know that has been said by so many converts, but it was actually

said to me, and I was deeply moved.

What I marvelled at in this event was that Hindus, knowing little or nothing about Christianity, could immediately respond to the truth of the Fatherhood of God, whereas at our local church the issue was not so clear. I am sure there are nameable reasons for this. One of them is certain to be the fact that we have stressed salvation through Christ, and the fact that he said, 'I am the way, and the truth and the life.' There we have left it, when in fact he said, in whole, 'I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes *to the Father* but by me,' i.e. 'I am *the way to the Father, the truth of the Father, the life of the Father.*'

CHAPTER TWO

MORE ABOUT FATHER DISCOVERY

SOME STUDENTS AND THE FATHER

In both Pakistan and Australia I have held positions as Principal of Bible Colleges. One of my most graphic experiences was in Adelaide, South Australia, where I addressed new students at the commencement of orientation week. I explained that we did not look upon ourselves as an institution but rather as a family. Hence we shared the work and duties and principles of living *as a family*. Feeling rather warm and mellow about it all I returned to my study. After a few moments there was a knock at the door in a manner which can only be called irate. Anyway the student who knocked was irate. He advanced into the study with anger showing in his face.

'So this College is a home, and staff and students are a family?', he asked angrily.

I nodded in agreement. He drew breath. 'So then,' he said heavily, 'you are the father?!' It was both a question

and statement.

I thought about that. 'Well, to be truthful I hadn't thought of it that way. Not consciously.' I suppose I had thought of the Father being the father.

His face went white with rage. 'Let me tell you,' he said heatedly, 'that some of us have been trying to get away from our fathers for years, and now . . . '—he was stuttering in his rage—'and *now we have to pay to have a father!*' His voice was between a hoot and a shriek.

I confess I was stunned. I really didn't have any answer for him. In the years that have followed I have come to understand that boy. The concept of Father and Family does not have much appeal to a person who cannot come to terms with his own father. I need scarcely say that the lad was subject to no one. He had no time for any one's authority except his own. My knowledge of him now is that he is a rather useful person in the Kingdom of God.

In vacations or on special occasions we took teams with us on teaching missions to churches or groups of churches. The experience was a very warming one, and as demanding as warming. So often I would lead in teaching the Fatherhood. Rarely did it fail to touch folk who listened, but most of all the students were moved. One lad whose family had ten children said to me, 'I have never really loved my Dad. I'm going home this vacation to do just that.' When he came back his eyes shone as he shared a new experience of sonship. 'My Dad is really a great fellow,' he said. 'I never realized, but he's been

trying to cope with all the family for years. I never really saw what he put into that work until this vacation. He nearly died when I hugged him. We're very close together now.'

One woman student who had always been an introverted and prim type of person came to me after the same vacation. 'You know,' she said, 'I have really come to know my parents. I always thought they were persecuting me. When I told them I loved them they came to tears. They said, "Lass, when you were converted we wanted to know all about it, but you never told us a word. When you went to Bible College we wanted to help you, but you buttoned yourself up tightly. When you told us you were going to the mission-field and in a faith-mission, we were the proudest couple on earth. But you wouldn't tell us anything. We have always wanted to help materially, but you would not let us. Now everything is different. You have accepted us."'

How different was the student. She was glowing. She saw that in fact she had never understood her parents, but had read them through the attitude of her own prejudices. It was not a long time before this young woman who rarely was considered by young men received a proposal of marriage. Married, she now has a devoted husband and children, and they are doing a fine job as missionaries.

One day an ordained minister who is a past student of the Bible College rang me. He is a fine theologian, and

lectures in a theological college in addition to his pastoral work and ministry amongst university students. He was excited but his habitual nature as a growler also came through in his voice. 'How come,' he demanded, 'that you never gave us this sort of stuff in College?' He had just read the first edition of *I Love The Father*.

I said calmly, 'How come you never heard it? What about the series I did in chapel, and what about theology and some other work on it in our New Testament Exegesis?'

He wasn't really on for debate. He said, 'This is amazing. It alters all of theology when that theology becomes Pateriological.' So we had a high time working out the implications.

Even more excited was a student who lived some 300 miles away. He rang through one Sunday afternoon when I was about to have my weekly nap. He shouted over the phone, 'My mind is blown!' He seemed to be in a great tempest with the high wind all about him. His mind was blown without doubt. 'Some weeks ago I began reading *I Love The Father*,' he said, 'and something began to happen to me. I became more thoughtful, more gentle, more understanding.' He paused. 'Hey, Principal, do you know what is happening in my congregation? People are having tears in their eyes! Then today it all came together. It's fantastic! Just that God is my Father and I am His son.' The line was silent for a moment. 'Do you think,' he asked, 'that that is why you always seemed like a father to me? Is it because you are on about this thing, and do you think that my people are beginning to see me

differently?’

After a period of silence on his long-distance and costly line he said gently, ‘You know, you were always on about this at College, but I never really heard you.’

One of the students who began to understand the magnificence of the Trinity was a student who was a carpenter. He was an ordinary man you might say, but he had a thing about the Holy Spirit. He had had some experience of the Spirit which made him just about Binitarian. He also had had two of his children die under rather tragic circumstances. I met him before College opened, just when I had come to South Australia. We were both fishing on the same wharf. He had a sense of fun. When we began talking I sensed his delight in the Third Person of the Trinity. When I said that one of the chief ministries of the Spirit was to help us cry involuntarily, ‘Abba! Father!’, he saw it in a flash.

‘Incredible!’ he said delightedly. ‘Of course—the Father!’ After that he always spoke in endearing terms of the Father. He and his wife sought their guidance from the Father. He had become Trinitarian in his living. He had to. They lived in a tiny cottage with their daughter. His wife was quite brilliant, and this without consciously knowing it. She scored credits where he barely made passes. He slogged on. She flew where he walked. If it hadn’t been for the Father there would have been an explosion in their marriage.

Years later he and his wife were travelling down river in a small boat. It was in Thailand where they were missionaries. Another boat came too close, and his wife

was knocked on the head and died. It was his closeness to the Father, his love of Christ, and the personal comfort of the Spirit that helped him in the grief of losing this third member of his family, and the closest.

One could multiply these tales. What I am convinced of, and will later write about, is the fact that Fatherhood is wholly indispensable to man. Without it he can never experience total fulfilment. Without emotion I say calmly that emotional fulfilment is what man needs most of all. I know that emotional fulfilment demands an informed mind and a rational relationship with God and man, but it is Fatherhood which supplies these. I also see why it is dangerous to call any man ‘Father!’, if by so doing we are giving to any human person that office, category and worship relationship which alone belongs to God.¹

I meet many past students in many countries of the world, who trace a change in their understanding and life-patterns from the point where they saw God as Father. Far from minimizing their devotion and obedience to the Son it has increased them. It has also made them more dependent upon the Spirit of the Son.

OTHERS AND THE FATHER

Hundreds of memories crowd into my mind at this present time. I see the faces of persons rapt with wonder,

¹ See Matthew 23:1–12 and a work written around this passage, namely *True God or New Guru?* (G. C. Bingham, NCPI, Adelaide, 1979).

full of adoration and a sense of security as they have come to know God as Father. One woman said, 'You did not mention earthly fathers today, but your talk took away a hang-up I have had with my father for twenty-five years.' She would be representative of hundreds of others who have said similar things.

Every year I counsel hundreds of persons about their marriages, most of which are breaking up, for people come for help only when a crisis has happened. At this critical period they will listen. I have discovered that almost without exception the break in relationships is associated with the attitudes the husband and wife (or one of the two) have with their parents. When the relational lines are cleared between the spouses and their parents (sometimes only one parent) then the relationships between husband and wife change dramatically. Yet I assume it is coming to grips with the love of God which helps them to come to grips with their parents—in love.

One man in late middle age came to me one night. He was a small man in height and weight, but what he lacked in these he more than made up for in a frightening aggressiveness. His wife was a devoted Christian who had left him because she could not handle the relationship. He was to some degree shaken by the fact of her leaving him, but he was nevertheless still aggressive. His sons had suggested he see me, so there was a degree of trust.

As I listened to him one fact came through clearly to me. *He really believed that Jesus had saved him from God!* His view of God was quite twisted. God was fierce, grim, remote, vengeful, severely and rigidly

righteous, and One who punished severely. In Bible study groups this man acted as though the God he feared was now on his side because of what Jesus had done. Hence, he himself was moralistic, rigidly righteous. He did not care to see persons bathing in what they called God's love. He saw any kind of enjoyment as a sin against the tragedy of man and evil.

I asked him whether he knew God as his Father. He looked confused. 'God as Father?' he said. He stared at me. 'I had one hell of a father,' he said bitterly. 'No, I don't know God as Father. I know Jesus, and he saved me.' There it was again. Jesus was warm, helpful, even friendly and intimate, *but not God!* I realized as I talked to him that many Christians have this view of God, and really believe Jesus came to pacify God. They fail to understand that the Father initiated the world, the incarnation of His Son, as also his death and resurrection. They fail to see that the Son simply obeyed. God's love was manifested in all the work of the Son.

When we finished that night this severe-visaged man almost floated out of my study. 'God is my Father, eh?', he kept saying in wonder. Tenderness had come to him. His attitudes had changed towards his sons and his wife. He was heartbroken at things he had said and done. Their marriage was eventually healed.

A woman came and shared how she was greatly blessed as a wife and mother, yet now, suddenly and unaccountably, she found she was hating her husband and even her children, most of whom were reaching adulthood. Also she knew irrational fear which was pervading

every part of her life. I asked her whether she was afraid of her father. She was surprised but answered that now I mentioned it, yes she was, and that in fact she hated him for this. When I pointed out that her growing hatred for her husband was really a hatred for masculinity linked with her father, she could see that. We talked for a time and she admitted that there was nothing really terrifying about her father: she had no rational need to fear or hate him. As we talked she saw she had the same view of God in spite of her Christian claims and protestations. When she was shown, through the work of the Cross, the love and the forgiveness of the Father, she suddenly lost her fear of her father. Some time later she reported everything had become renewed, and she had found a genuine and deep love for her father and of course for her husband and children.

One could multiply these cases greatly. Daughters who hated fathers because they were not strong and authoritative, mothers because they were, and sons who found it difficult to be strong husbands and fathers because of anger against one or both parents. In each case a revelation of the love of God as Father changed relational attitudes.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE OF FATHERHOOD

IS GOD MOTHER AND NOT FATHER?

In what we have said little seems to relate to motherhood as distinct from fatherhood. Feminists might be permitted their anger when we seem to place so much emphasis upon the Fatherhood of God. Some feminists speak of God as Mother. Whilst I think this is unwise I can understand it as a gesture. It raises the whole subject of male authority and responsibility. For certain reasons it appears many men have opted out of their responsibility as husbands and fathers. Prior to that they must have opted out of their responsibility and obedience as sons. However, that subject requires a treatment of its own.¹ The point is that there is motherhood in God. A number

¹ See G. C. Bingham, *Man, Woman and Sexuality* NCPI, 1980. Also *God's Glory, Man's Sexuality*, NCPI, 1988.

of times God is referred to in such terms.²

Even so that does not make God Mother and not Father. When the Genesis accounts show that God made man in His image and made them male and female, it certainly infers, if not insists, that male–female duality exists in God. This duality in God must be monistic. God is One. We have a problem because the male–female concept in the thinking of most people always relates to sexuality. We use the terms male and female that way. Our problem is that we work back from man to God and think that sexuality in man is parallel with sexuality in God, which is not the case. God is Creator, and we can only procreate. In fact we create nothing, since creation is out of nothing. We ‘create’ (so to speak) out of something. Hence the male–female of God is creative, and of us, procreative. The male–female of God is called Father, given that God is often likened to a mother but is never as such called mother. Yet the word Father embraces both.

WE ALWAYS NEED THE IMAGE

This leads us to the fact that the image of God comes from the male–female duality of man. Genesis 5:1, 2 says, ‘he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female created he them . . . *and named them Man*’. The term ‘man’ then has two uses, (a) generically for all males, and (b) specifically for male–female duality, i.e. for all humans. The confusion of these two has caused indignation amongst the feminists. To give the attributes

and office to the human male as over and against the human male–female duality is where we have been wrong.

Given these things, we see that the image of God is complete only in the male–female duality. This duality is itself an entity. God is One: man, made in His image, is one. There are not two races—male and female—but one race, male–female. In the case of the ‘one-flesh’ unity of man and wife, there is presented to the offspring the image of God. In other words, the child knows God through the image it sees, that is, through the parents. If we take into account the matter of man being born in sin, and his bias against authority, we see that the child must rationalize the parents as having shortcomings and being deficient. This is a psychological counter to the need to obey the parents, i.e. the image of God, and so God Himself.

As we have suggested, human parenthood is a dual matter, but the duality is an entity, a unity. It is a mother–father thing, because it is primarily a husband–wife matter. If then we speak of ‘fatherhood’ we are saying ‘father–motherhood’. The image is always there before the child even though the child does not read it correctly because of its sinfulness. The image, being that of God, is always alive, always active, always dynamic. If it were the true, full image of God then God would be communicated as He really is. Man prejudiced his opportunity to make such communication when he fell for the ploy ‘You shall be *as God!*’ He (they) can only communicate the image truly when they are wholly dependent upon God. It is then they bring through Fatherhood (Father–Motherhood). It is then they bring through true Sonship.

² See Isa. 66:13; Ps. 131:2; cf. Ps. 27:10.

It is then the nature of the Spirit as the Spirit-of-the-Father-and-the-Son is communicated, and so love, joy, peace are experienced by the receptive child.

THE IMAGE INDISPENSABLE TO EMOTIONAL FULLNESS

Man, because of the Fall and because of his own incorrigible nature, does not receive the satisfaction he needs from the father-mother image of God. Because this relationship is essential for his fulfilment, man must seek another image or images. This he does, and the practice of so doing is called idolatry. Idols are generally the projection from within him of what he believes will satisfy him, and provide him with an object for his inner drives to love and to worship and so receive satisfaction. Idols have no essential (i.e. ontological) being. By nature of the case they cannot fulfil human needs but must, to the contrary, lead the human spirit to disillusionment and disaster. In fact they become tyrants and they bring warping to the personhood of man.

Anger increases with each frustration, and of course God is blamed for the fact that His world does not yield the delights essential to the well-being of man. Materialism is the dreary alternative to pure love, pure peace and pure joy. Guilt is compounded as man does not obey the true functional laws of the creation. Desire is also compounded until it is a fierce driving force which ever dooms man to further frustration. Man needs the true even whilst he creates the false or listens to the delusions of the Evil Father, Satan himself.

We can see, then, that the revelation of the true Father is what is required. We shall see later that when Christ came to be 'the visible expression of the invisible God'—a ministry originally given to created man—then he was not accepted by his people. For one thing they had set up their own authority structure over and against the true authority structure of God. This is a historical fact. The leaders of Israel should have recognized the Hope of Israel, but they did not, and they feared he would destroy their structure. The temple, which was 'My Father's house,' was used commercially and legalistically. The religionists were rigid moralists and unwholesome hypocrites, whilst the Sadducees were theologically liberal and personally avaricious. Jesus commented that they were of their father, the Devil! Of course not all the leaders of Israel were in this category.

THE TRUE IMAGE OF GOD IS CHRIST THE SON

In Old Testament days God had been known as Father, at least in some sense. The Scriptures we will examine surely show this. Basically, however, He was Covenant-Father (cf. Mal. 2:10) and this primarily to Israel. Whilst the Abrahamic covenant had universal connotation, He is specifically spoken of as being Father to Israel, and this within the parameters of the Mosaic Covenant. *Israel, then, could not truly know God as Father until, in fact, His very Son came to earth and walked and talked Sonship and Fatherhood to them in terms that any human mind can understand and any human spirit recognize.*

This, of course, is what Jesus the Son did. He said, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me.' He said, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father.' John said, 'No man has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made Him known.' Hence, Jesus said, 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him,' and on another occasion said, 'All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and *no one knows the Son except the Father*, and no one knows the Father except the Son and *anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him*.' The Son has exclusive knowledge of the Father, the Father of the Son. Outside Them *no one can reveal either of the Two*. That means human beings cannot have true and fulfilled personhood until they have a revelation and experience of both the true Sonship and (so) the true Fatherhood.

HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS CONTINGENT UPON THE TRUE IMAGE

When a person comes to the revelation of the Father through the Son, via the agency of the Holy Spirit, then —and only then—he is fulfilled. What he has needed becomes his gift. He has needed, always, to correlate with God in a contingent manner. This is what makes his creaturehood, sonship and servanthood whole and authentic, and so he becomes a true, viable person. He is no longer frustrated, thwarted, unfulfilled. Moreover, he can now—indeed he must now—relate to others. He relates through the Father via the Son and via the love-fellowship-unity gifts of the Spirit. *He has come into Family!*

This must be seen wholly. Whatever ideas and plans God has for the whole of humanity, He always works these out in and through the local contexts in which human beings live. There is the Family just where repentant and redeemed men live. Be it called the covenant-people, the sons of the Kingdom or the church of God, it is the same principle. Hence Paul writes two Letters to a church in Europe and says, 'To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' In all his Letters he also says, 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' These are significant and not merely conventional, salutations.

We can see that the love of God, revealed through Christ in his atoning work and communicated in the gifts of repentance, faith, forgiveness, justification, sanctification and healing of the personhood, then becomes real, personal and intimately related. Fatherhood has a wholly different look from the old version of an angry, remote and severe King who allows His tender, warm and personal Son to pacify Him by the work of the Cross! In all things the Father is shown as the Initiator and the Executor who thus reconciles the world unto Himself, not counting their trespasses against them.

It is this Fatherhood we need to see in our following chapters, and this, I trust, we will see.

CHAPTER FOUR

GOD IS FATHER

'I am not alone,' said Jesus on one occasion, 'for the Father is with me.' These simple words point to the wonderful truth of a man who was never alone. In fact he of all men was never alone. He, of all men, knew what it was to be fully a man, living unseparated from his Father.

How many men know God as Father? How many live in that warm relationship which we call filial? That is, how many of us live truly as sons of God? Many of us have never considered such a proposition or situation. We are too busy keeping alive, filling in our days. The thought of God being Father is too distant or it just seems 'religious'.

The Bible teaches clearly that God is Father. It gives various aspects of His Fatherhood, and all of these relate to man. Some of them at first do not seem connected with man, but on closer examination we discover that they are related to him.

GOD IS ESSENTIALLY FATHER

Our argument here is a simple one. The Scriptures contend that the man Jesus was once not the man Jesus, but the eternal Son of God. We say, quaintly, 'There never was a time when the Son was not the Son.' That is, he always was. Even in the first chapter of John's Gospel we read, 'In the beginning was the Word'. In fact the verse really is, 'When the beginning began, the Word who always was, was already there'. It seems a little complicated but means that the Son was before time. He ever, always was. He was always the Son.

Jesus, in his last long prayer prior to his betrayal, said to God, 'Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made.' In calling God 'Father', and in pointing to the non-time before time, he makes himself always to have been the Son. We conclude in the same quaint way of speaking, 'There never was a time when the Father was not Father'. God has always been essentially Father.

By using the word 'essentially' we mean that Fatherhood is His very essence. Take away Fatherhood from God—if you could—and God would not be God. This is a most important conclusion. It means that before anything else God is Father. When we say 'before anything else' we mean even before His Creatorhood is His Fatherhood. As we shall see, the Creatorhood cannot be apart from His Fatherhood.

Because, in time, a man becomes a father by having a son, we think of God 'begetting' His Son. Indeed Jesus is spoken of as 'the only begotten Son'. But this begetting must be of a different order in the divine realm. The

Son is not begotten in a time process. More than this we cannot say. The Son could not always have been the Son if the Father had not always been the Father, and vice versa.

We agree that the argument is somewhat curious. Its truth, nevertheless, is borne out in Scripture. Many passages refer to the eternal being of the Son, as also to the eternal being of the Father. What means more to us as persons is that God expresses His Fatherhood in creating many more sons and daughters. Whilst it is true that angels are called 'sons of God', it is best to see men and women as sons and daughters in a higher sense. For example, men will judge angels, and angels are servants to God's true children as we see in I Corinthians 6:3 and Hebrews 1:13–14.

GOD EXPRESSING HIMSELF AS FATHER

One of the quirks of history is that men think of religion abstractly. That is, they do not think of it in terms of acts and practical facts. Theologians tend to speak in abstractions. For this reason words like 'love' and 'truth' are ideas in the mind rather than things we experience. Hence God seems to be formed for us out of ideas. His Person is never very real. Above all God is 'religious'. We keep Him in a religious compartment. When we say 'God is Father', we mean He can be likened to a father. Human fathers are real to us, but God is somewhat 'airy-fairy'. He is only the 'idea' of fatherhood.

So much the worse for us. God in fact is not like a father. If He were, then He would be of little use to us,

since most human fathers are weak and inadequate. No, God is not *like* a father. Nor is He *a* father, that is to say, one among many. He *is* Father. His is true Fatherhood. The most we can say for any human father is that he is 'somewhat like God the Father'. However, when we examine the fatherhood a man should exercise, we find it to be very deficient. So we discover the truth that the true essential Fatherhood is God. This is exactly what Paul meant when he wrote '... the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named'. This can be translated, 'from whom all fatherhood [as familyhood] in heaven and on earth derives'. That is, whatever fatherhood (or familyhood) exists in the created universe, it has its origin in God the Father. Had He not been Father there could be no Fatherhood.

We have by no means exhausted our theme—'God expressing Himself as Father'. We see it in so many ways. We are going to look at these briefly under their sub-headings:

God's Fatherhood Expressed in Intention

In the Letter to the Ephesians we read, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined [or, predestined] us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will . . .' This passage shows that God's purpose, even before creation, was that men and women should be His sons and daughters. That is, they

are not just to be human, creatures above other creatures, but they are to be His children, His sons and daughters.

There are other passages of Scripture which show us that at the end of the age when God will have completed history and so His own intention for time, men and women will be His children. In those passages, as in this one, all men and women are not included but only His elect people. At the moment we should not concern ourselves about this point but see the principle; men will ultimately be the sons of God.

God's Fatherhood Expressed in Action

Paul, the follower of Jesus Christ, preached to pagans of his day. They were not illiterate and ignorant men. One of their poets had said of God, 'In him we live and move and have our being.' Life, movement and being are three great essentials we experience. Paul quoted this poet with approval. He also quoted another pagan poet who said of God, 'We are indeed his offspring.' He used a word which could simply mean, 'We are originated by God', but Paul seemed to place a deeper emphasis, that God created men to be His children. Unfortunately they had made idols of Him in the forms of birds and animals and things. Such they could not really call 'Father!'

Paul's point was, 'You are children of God. You surely do not think your idols depict God's true Father-hood!'

Even more to the point is the statement in Luke 3:38, 'Adam, the son of God'. This is simple enough. Yet it needs to be supplemented by showing what Adam was, as created, for such a son does not exist today. God had s

aid in regard to Adam's creation, 'Let us make man in our image.' In chapter five we will develop this thought, but it is enough to say here that he was *like* God in every respect but not *as* God in those respects. Had he been *as* God he would have been God. To be *like* God is to be of a very high order. No other created being was said to be thus; not even angels. This surely shows God expressing His Fatherhood in creating a true son in Adam.

Sadly enough, as we shall see, man lost his sonship. What God had expressed, man had rejected.

Wonderfully enough, God's action in expressing His Fatherhood does not cease with the failure of Adam. We read of Israel being called His son corporately. That is, the whole body of His people is called His son. In other places they are called severally His sons. We find that this kind of Fatherhood is related to the covenants God makes with His people. He is the Covenant-God (e.g. Mal. 2:10).

His covenants express grace and love. In this sense His Fatherhood is expressed. This point is so important that we will have to give it special examination.

Nor again does God's action of His Fatherhood operate only on this level. When we come to the New Testament it is rich with phrases and descriptions which speak of men and women now becoming the children of God. One of them used is 'regeneration' or 're-birth'. It infers that there had been a 'birth' which was either rejected or inadequate, and that now there is a new birth by which men and women enter into a new state or possibly a 'renewed' state. There is also another term 'adoption' which has as its root-origin, 'sonship'. God makes men His sons by adoption. We will see that

regeneration and adoption are linked with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They are states into which men and women come because of what Christ and His Spirit have done and do.

Nor have we exhausted the action of God in regard to sonship. He not only brings men and women into this realm of sonship, but He develops them in it. At the crisis of becoming sons, or children, He sends the Spirit of His Son into their hearts. This Spirit who is the Holy Spirit, cries, 'Abba! [Father!]' and causes the new sons to cry the same thing. Their potential as sons is now developed through action and obedience. The Father gives commands; the sons obey the commands. By so doing they both grow and mature in their sonship.

This lends point to the *intention* of God, i.e. that He shall have sons who are completely so by the end of the age. Hence we have passages of Scripture which speak of the ultimate climax of history when the full work of God is unveiled in the 'manifestation [showing forth] of the sons of God' (e.g. Rom. 8:18–23, 28–30; and I John 3:1–3).

We may, then, reasonably conclude that from the beginning of man's creation until the climax of the end-time God is expressing His Fatherhood by making men and women His sons. We shall see clearly that none of this takes place apart from His own Son and the Holy Spirit, who is called both 'the Spirit of his Son' and 'the Spirit of your Father'.

We should not be deluded by the simplicity of the matter into thinking that there is no great significance in sonship and God's Fatherhood. It is certainly no over-statement to say that it is the very 'be-all' and 'end-all' of

the universe; that it is the very purpose of creation itself. Without sonship man is not man, as without Fatherhood God is not God. Nothing is more important than that man should come into full sonship of the eternal Fatherhood. Then his humanity will become true and realized. Then he will truly live.

CHAPTER FIVE

MAN'S SONSHIP

Is man truly a son of God?¹ The biblical answer is this: 'At the end of the age, those whom God has chosen will surely be His sons. He will reveal them as such'. These will not only be sons in status, but in practical fact, for they will be exactly in the image of His own Son.

The question then arises, 'Have all men been created as sons, and are they sons, essentially?' Various schools of thought have various answers. They may be classified generally, as follows: (i) All humans created by God have been created by Him who is essentially Father. Therefore they are sons. It follows that His Fatherhood will reject none of His sons. Hence, we can formulate the doctrine of the universal Fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man. (ii) God has created no one as His son. However, He has planned, through certain processes, that men who have sinned shall become His sons. Only those who go through this process or processes²

will become sons of God. Such are His elect. (iii) All men were created to be sons of God, but in the Fall lost that sonship entirely. Only in Christ shall they regain their sonship. (iv) In Adam, who was created a son of God, were all men brought into sonship. In the fall of Adam they lost this sonship in the sense that they have rejected their relationship as sons with the Father, God. It was always God's intention that this sonship should be regained through Christ and the Spirit, and this sonship be brought to fullness by the end of the age. The word 'regained', however, does not do justice to the grace act of God, whereby in a sense they become even more sons than in creation. It is—as it were—that the potential for sonship is filled out and made complete.

These four views can be seen to be different. *View One* cannot be maintained in that form, for John 1:12 speaks of those receiving Christ as being given the authority to *become* the children of God. Galatians 3:26 speaks of men becoming sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus. *View Two* has quite a problem to solve since it speaks of man as never being, in any sense, a son. It must mean that through redemption man becomes what he never was, in any sense—a son. *View Three* speaks of losing sonship entirely, and in the light of John 1:12 and Galatians 3:26 this seems reasonable. This view seeks to preserve the truth against *View One* which is universalistic, and does not really meet the problems of God's holiness and His wrath in judgement. *View One* infers that none can be lost, finally. *View Four*, which is the view taken in this book, believes that whilst in a real sense sonship is lost, yet it is not obliterated. The view is best expressed by the statement, 'God is the Father of all men,

¹ See Appendix where the whole matter is discussed in detail.

² By 'processes' we mean of redemption and ultimate glorification.

but not all men are the children of God'. This view seeks to preserve the fact of God's Fatherhood, but does not make God the object of His own Fatherhood, but rather the subject of it. That is, God goes on being Father as He wills, but man in rejecting his own sonship cannot make claims upon the Fatherhood of God.

MAN CREATED AS A SON

When God said, 'Let us make man in our image,' He meant, 'Let us make man exactly like everything we are.' The use of the plural, 'us', 'our', should be seen in its full meaning. All that God is as Father, as Son and as Holy Spirit, man is like that. Thus when God is called 'the fountain of living waters', man is told to 'keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs [issues] of life'. Out of God flows all that supplies life, and out of man flows that which is derived life. These 'springs' or 'issues' are those of God's great being, such as love, holiness, righteousness, truth and goodness. They are not, however, mere abstract ideas but powerful, practical and actional elements.

We mean, in modern terms, that God is dynamic. God is known in the action. God is experienced in an actional relationship. He is not a set of ideas or attributes. He is powerful, purposeful, and constantly operating. So, for that matter, is created man. He draws his powers from God. He is like God. All that God is, man is like that.

'Adam, the son of God'. What that means, surely, is that Adam was not only like God in His attributes, but

that he related personally to God as Father. Adam to be like God had to be more than an imitative creature. He had to be a very son. God, because always Father, expresses His Fatherhood through creation. Indeed His Fatherhood is what demands the creation. If before creation He intends to have sons, then it is through creation that He creates sons.

We will see, later, that true sonship was only ever expressed through the unique Son, the one who became man and expressed his Sonship in his manhood. That manhood *can* be the vehicle for sonship surely shows that true manhood *is* true sonship.

Let us make the point simple: Everything that Adam is truly because of creation is totally his sonship. Had he not rebelled and sinned, he would always have exhibited true sonship. This leads us on to see what he was and what he did exhibit. The answer is that he had great authority over the entire universe. This is seen in Genesis 1:28 and verses following, as also in Psalm 8.

MAN, THE SON, AS CREATED

When we see the Sonship of Christ we see clearly what it means for a man to be a son to God. This Jesus had great authority, exemplified perfect obedience, did the very acts which His Father commanded, and so accomplished the Father's will. All this he did from the resources given to him as a man, especially the endowment of the Holy Spirit.

Adam was given a command or mandate to 'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over [it]'. If we examine this order in detail we

see that Adam, as a son, had to obey his Father by covering the face of the earth with his progeny. In doing so he was to command all creation, exercising constant authority. This required what we today call 'great moral resources'.

That man could do this is implied in Genesis 2:7 where we are told that God formed man of the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life. From Himself God endowed man with what he needed to carry out God's purpose.

Elsewhere we are given other insights. Ecclesiastes 7:29 says, 'God hath made man upright'. This means he has the likeness of God's righteousness. Ecclesiastes 3:10-11, 'I have seen the business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end'. This surely means that God has put the very structures of His universe into man's mind, but has set limits to man's understanding. Man will never come to the end of his explorations and actions.

Add to this the fact that everything created by God is good, and that He has given man all things richly to enjoy, and we see a universe that is wholly functional, created by God so that man and all His creation, both animate and inanimate, may operate happily and purposefully. To put it in another way is to say that man is in God's image and is structured to operate within God's perfect universe as a son of God should and may.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 points out that man will never get to the end of all that God is or has created. Thus when

Jeremiah adds, 'I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in a man who walks to direct his steps,' he is saying that man, in himself and of himself, is not complete. He needs God to make full his creaturehood. He needs the Father to make full his sonship.

We can see there are limits to creaturehood and sonship, and this is right. Yet the scope of true rational creaturehood and full sonship are quite breathtaking to see. Surely, inherent in this true sonship, is God's including man in the accomplishment of His purpose in and for creation. He requires, in fact He demands, man's obedience in order that He may fulfil His plan. This does not mean that God is not all-powerful, that He may not succeed without man. It simply means God has insisted that His plan be fulfilled by the inclusion of man. Hence, Proverbs 16:4 says, 'The Lord has made everything for its purpose . . .'

LOST SONSHIP

The father of the prodigal son said, 'my son was dead . . . he was lost.' Jesus told the story with the background of criticism from the 'elder brothers' of Israel. They despised the tax-gatherers and sinners, and Jesus also for consorting with them. Jesus told them that there was immense joy in heaven when a sinner repents. He likened a sinner repenting to a lost son returning. He underlined the lostness of the son, and death of the wayward child. He also emphasized the new sonship of the sinner returned and repenting.

Was the son's going away simply mild rebellion? We would sometimes think that Adam was bewildered by the fact that he had sinned, as though it happened almost without his knowing. Whilst we admit to the treacherous 'deceit of sin', yet Paul says firmly, 'Adam was not deceived,' meaning Adam knew what he was about. He wanted to be *as* God, and probably saw no great evil in this but only a high aspiration. Yet he had deliberately disobeyed God. Hence one theologian's comment, 'God does not find us as straying sheep, but as rebels with weapons in our hands.'

If we think of the son as the very image of God, then we can see the nature of his sin and rebellion. Being endued with love, he should have loved God and kept His commandments. Being endued with righteousness, he should have gladly kept the law God placed before him. He should not have rejected goodness, and he should have done the truth. In other words, he should have fulfilled his sonship and continued being like God, but he rejected this pattern for another. He wanted to be *as* God. It was rebellion by the creature against the Creator, the created son against the Creator-Father.

THE EFFECTS OF LOST SONSHIP

The parable of the lost son, if graphic, is nevertheless only a rough guide in assessing the loss of sonship, as also the effects. The father said quite clearly, 'my son was dead . . . he was lost . . .' The true Son is like the Father: 'Like Father—like Son'. Indeed as a true son, he is in total obedience to, and conformity with, the

Father. In this sense the prodigal ceased to be truly the son of his father.

In this sense also Adam ceased to be truly a son of God. It would be difficult to assess or compute the effects. Some theologians say that the image of God in man was effaced. Others say it was defaced. However, I Corinthians 11:7 states simply, '[Man] is the image and glory of God'. Some might argue that this is redeemed man, but it does not say so. It is best to understand that God sees humanity as He made it, not as it perverted itself.

What, then, did happen? One writer has said, 'The image of God in man is irreducible, but reversible.' He means that the image remains, but its use is in reverse or is perverse. This is all so much talk in theory until we understand that the image of God is dynamic. As God is dynamic—or, as we saw, always operational—so also is His image in man. The great attributes of God, such as righteousness, holiness, goodness, truth and love, are not—as we have observed—mere abstractions but they are dynamic elements. We can now further observe that they are dynamic because they have to do with relationships. Man normally relates to God, to himself, to his fellow-man and also to the universe about him. Rightly in the image of God, he rightly relates. Perversely using the image of God, he has wrong relationships, i.e. with everyone, everything.

This leads us to the heart of our whole book. When personal being is a matter of relationships, then it is essential for man to relate to God as Creator-Father (or Father-Creator), otherwise he cannot be truly man. Man cannot be truly himself when he is not a creature and a son,

or a creature-son. He cannot relate to God, himself, others and his universe. He is in actual misery.

DISCERN THE EFFECTS OF NON-SONSHIP

We will see in another place, that all creation is Trinitarian. That is, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit combine to produce this universe as it is, and man as he is. They have an aim in so doing. What they do is not reversible. Man's total harmony, his absolute serenity and his complete experience of being, is in the context of the dynamic relationships of love. What we have just said should be thoughtfully studied. If you hurry over this thought you miss the basis for what will now be said. That is, man is awry in every way when he is not a son. Jesus could say that he was never alone because the Father was always with him. Thus he knew completeness of being, even as a human. This no man can know, except when he is in total union with God the Father, as a son.

It is a pity that modern psychology and psychiatry do not take this more into consideration. If they could understand that man is made by the Trinity, and that this makes man constitutionally and essentially a son, then they would understand much of man's 'lostness' and his 'deadness', and they would have a key to his misery, or as we say 'existential guilt, emptiness and despair'.

Let us then take up that phrase, 'existential guilt, emptiness and despair', and explain it in the light of man's true being, and then the loss of that being. We say that man was made not only a son, but that his sonship

was functional. That is, in a world in which man is placed to do the will of the Father, his relationships with God are in the context of obedience and accomplishment. His ties with the Father are not merely sentimental or emotional, but relate to his functional operation in the world. He derives joy, peace and satisfaction from *being, by doing*. Outside of this *being-doing* he is not truly himself. This *being-doing* involves the entire range of his relationships which are not static but dynamic, that is, they are operational or actional.

Take from him his dependence on God (or, rather, let him reject that), and man is awry. As an existent, placed in the world for a purpose, he is now lost. His own plans, his own self-seeking actions and his own devised relationships, cannot by nature of the case satisfy him. He is awry. Words such as 'distorted', 'perverted', 'out of focus', 'disharmonious' can now be used of him. The glory that he is, and exhibits as a son of God, is lost. The experience of that glory is denied him. Thus he is in intolerable misery, in existential anguish and despair. His sin is really a refusal of filial relationships and responsibilities. What he has lost places him in that dread which the German calls '*angst*'. He is no longer at one with God, himself, his fellow-beings or the universe. Thus the terms 'lost' and 'dead' are not too strong to apply to him.

'Man the son' has now become 'man the non-son'. In one sense he is a son, because he is structured to be so. In another sense he is no son because he denies what he has been created essentially to be. No creature in the entire universe is envious of him. Because of him was the tragic murder of Abel and the prophets from Abel to

Zechariah and to the last two great witnesses.³ Because of him the very creation is frustrated, subjected to futility, because of this Father-denying man. Because of him the creation groans in deep travail. Why this should be so is explainable only on the principle of man's functional responsibility in and for the universe. It needed a true son to bring back the idea and experience of the Father and the family. Such a one, the only one, was the Son.

CHAPTER SIX

***THE TRUE SONSHIP
OF THE SON—I***

There were no sons from Adam to Jesus. Is that true? No, it is not. To be a child of God—Jesus told Nicodemus—is to be born of the Spirit. In Galatians 4:29 Paul tells us that Isaac was born of the Spirit. Isaac was the true son of Abraham. Again, in Galatians 3:7 Paul says that men of faith are the sons of Abraham. Ishmael was not a man of faith. He was born of the flesh. All men of faith are men of the Spirit, and they are the true children of God.

Again Paul says in Galatians 3:26 '... in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.' 'Abraham,' said Jesus, 'saw [my day] and was glad.' Abraham had faith. By it he was justified. He was a son of God. All men of faith are sons of Abraham, and like him, sons of God. Abel was a child of God. The contrast is made clear in I John 3:10 and verses following. Those who love the brethren are children of God. Those who hate are not the children of God. We conclude, then, that there has been a

³ i.e. the two witnesses or prophets of Revelation 11:1–13.

stream of those who are truly the children of God, reaching from Abraham to John the Baptist. We need to emphasize, of course, that this sonship even as far back as Abel, was of grace, through faith. Natural sonship had been forfeited in the Fall.

ISRAEL THE SON

Those of Israel, by Christ's time, were sure they were the children of God. They were proud of their blood descent from Abraham. Jesus had to teach them that blood descent of itself meant nothing. He had to say, 'Do not presume to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.' On another occasion he told them that men would come from east and west and sit down at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the *sons of the kingdom* (Israelites by blood descent) will be cast out into outer darkness where men will weep and gnash their teeth. Again, on yet another occasion, Jews claimed to be the children of Abraham. They said, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus denied this, and they said bluntly, 'We have one Father, even God,' thus showing that children of Abraham were children of God.

Whilst Jesus did not deny the *principle* of this claim, he denied *their personal right* to claim it, telling them that their father was in fact not God but the devil. He said, 'You are of your father, the devil.'

This does not deny that true Israelites were truly children of Abraham and children of God. The Old

Testament has much to say about this fact. We see that in electing Israel to be His people, He demanded that they fulfil His functional use and purpose by their sonship. He said, 'Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' They had high privilege as also heavy responsibility. Paul said later, 'To them belong the sonship . . .' That sonship is spoken of by God to Pharaoh, 'Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me;" if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son.'¹ This statement makes it clear that God regards Israel, as a nation, to be His son.

Moses reminded them of their high calling. 'Do you thus requite the Lord, you foolish and senseless people?' He asks, 'Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?' Nor does the corporate idea of Israel (as a whole) being His son exclude the personal sonship of each member of Israel. Hence again Moses says:

You are the sons of the Lord your God; you shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth.²

Israel in exile appeals to the Fatherhood of God:

¹ Exod. 19:5-6; 4:22; Rom. 9:4.

² Deut. 32:6; 14:1-2.

Look down from heaven and see, from thy holy and glorious habitation. Where are thy zeal and thy might? The yearning of thy heart and thy compassion are withheld from me. For 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.

By the same prophet, Isaiah, Israel is admonished, ‘Woe to him who strives with his Maker, an earthen vessel with the potter! Does the clay say to him who fashions it, “What are you making?” or, “Your work has no handles?” Woe to him who says to a father, “What are you begetting?”’ Or again, ‘Yet, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou art our potter; we are all the work of thy hand.’³

In Jeremiah the thought is no less intimate. This is a suggestion, in the third chapter, of Israel as a prodigal son. Opening with descriptions of Israel’s evil, God says, ‘Have you not just now called to me, “My father, thou art the friend of my youth—will he be angry for ever, will he be indignant to the end?”’ God further meditates, ‘I thought how I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beautiful of all nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me.’ Jeremiah adds, ‘A voice on the bare heights is heard, the weeping and pleading of Israel’s sons, because they have perverted their way, they have forgotten the Lord their God. “Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness.”’

Malachi, as the voice of God, says, ‘A son honours his father . . . If then I am a father, where is my honour?’

³ Isa. 63:15–16; 45:9–10; 64:8.

‘Have we not all one Father?’ asks the prophet, ‘Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?’⁴

Certainly the burden of evidence is that Israel was called to be a son and to fulfil the purpose of God. Each true child of Israel could also be called a son, were he faithful to the covenant-making God and His purposes. Not without deep significance was God’s pronouncement, ‘When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.’ He had to add, however, sadly, ‘The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and burning incense to idols’⁵

No wonder, then, that this prophecy of Hosea had to wait a greater fulfilment in the true Son, the One who rendered total obedience, and fully perfected the will of the Father—Jesus!

JESUS THE SON

‘Out of Egypt have I called my Son’. Matthew applies this prophecy of Hosea 11:1 to Jesus. Israel of itself has not fulfilled sonship. Stephen makes this very clear in his commentary on the perpetually idolatrous Israel in Acts 7:39–53. This Jesus is a Son after a manner Israel has never been.

In order to understand Jesus the Son, we have to see various aspects of his Sonship as prior to incarnation,

⁴ Mal. 1:6; 2:10.

⁵ Hosea 11:1.

both in eternity and in the prophetic purposes of God, as also in his incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension. Then we will be able to trace with understanding the process of his Sonship as it operates in the universe now, and moves toward its appointed climax. To do this we shall treat the various aspects under headings:

The Pre-Incarnation Sonship

When we come to study the True Son, we should do so on our knees. This is when the intellect should beg to be a servant, and not an overlord of the personality. Ideas, even theological ideas, may detach us from the realities they purport to communicate to us. Our spirits should be awed when we understand that the One who became flesh, was in fact the Creator of all flesh.

There are passages of the New Testament which use this world's languages, but they tell of a realm which our minds, of themselves, cannot grasp let alone contain and retain. The marvel is not that the Son of that Realm is the full Son in this realm of man, but that he could so lay aside his greatness, as to become man, one of his own created beings. Perhaps we will understand one day, that his greatness is that he can be so humble.

Great as the Son he was; so John says, 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.' Then John adds, 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only

Son from the *Father*.' To go back again to his ministry of creation; Paul says, 'In him all things were created . . .' That is, out of the resources of himself, all things came into being, and as we have said elsewhere, dynamic being. No one has grasped the mystery of being.⁶ 'All things,' adds Paul, 'in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions principalities or or authorities . . .' He means that the great structures of the universe, mostly unseen to our eyes, but having being no less, and perhaps even more, these were created in him. Incredible!

'In these last days,' says the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews, 'he has spoken to us by a Son.' Then he adds, 'through whom also he created the world.' What then are the resources of this Eternal Son? No wonder Jesus prayed in the hours before his betrayal, 'Father, glorify thou me . . . with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made.' An ancient glory, which if man were to see it, he would be consumed by its very wonder. This was the Son! 'He was rich,' says Paul, 'yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.' The mystery deepens, the wonder grows, the adoration enlarges. Wonderful Son of the Father!

The Son of the Incarnation

The mystery of his deity only deepens the mystery of his becoming man. There was a time when he was not man.

⁶ The nature of being is a mystery. Acts 17:28; I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 2:10; and John 1:4 show that man has being only in and by virtue of God.

The *manner* of his becoming man is hidden from us. ‘Behold,’ said the angel to Mary, ‘you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High . . . The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.’ If the mode of his becoming man—‘the Word became flesh’—is mysterious, yet the *fact* is even more wonderful. He did not think it a thing to be grasped at to retain and use his prerogatives of deity. God became man. In becoming man he truly became man. He became true Son of God, not now simply because of his deity, but in his humanity.

Sonship by Attestation

‘Out of Egypt have I called my son!’ What sonly powers lay inherent in Israel, as God chose him to do and be what Adam abdicated. How his prophets are filled with power by the Spirit of the Lord, and make marvellous prophecy of God’s intentions, His great plan and purpose. How they speak of Messiah to come: Psalm 2 speaks of the ‘anointed one’, the King, set on the holy hill of Zion. To him God says, ‘Thou art my son. This day I have begotten thee.’

That this ancient prophecy should be fulfilled by the Jordan, in the presence of John the Baptist and the people, is a great marvel. That the very heavens should part and God declare, ‘This is [or, Thou art] my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,’ is startling to say the least. It is high attestation. It is the Son declared.

But notice that the Sonship is not only one of *relationship*. It is also, even perhaps primarily, one of *function*. Jesus before this attestation had said, ‘It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.’ The king of Psalm 2 is the same Messianic one of Psalm 89, where God says of the Messiah-King whom He crowns, ‘He shall cry to me, “Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.” And I will make him the first born, the highest of the kings of the earth.’ Just as Psalm 2 is repeated many times in the New Testament, so this latter phrase is echoed in Revelation 1:5, ‘Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth’.

Again, with the attestation of Psalm 2:7, ‘this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased,’ is conflated Isaiah 42:1, ‘Behold my servant, whom I uphold, mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth’. Both Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42:1 and following, speak of *action* and of *function*. Messiah’s reign will spread to the end of the earth when the great Spirit is set upon him. Hence Peter’s description in Acts 10:38, ‘how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil.’

God’s attestation of His Son is not only one event. The three disciples heard the voice of the Father again at the Transfiguration. ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’ Solemn asseveration directed to three men who almost slept as the Son’s glory shone about them. Twice Jesus says, ‘The Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me,’ and adds to this the witness of John, the witness of the Scriptures and the witness of his own

works. He later shows that the works which he does, are in fact those which the Father Himself does through His Son.⁷

The Sonship by Relationship and Action

Philosophical minds eagerly seek to understand the ‘how’ of the Sonship. Hence, this kind of mind deals in metaphysics and the science of being. Yet it has to be said again that this line of approach cannot be entirely productive. In speaking of Jesus’ Sonship we have seen that he is truly man. Whilst not denying the fact of his deity, we must insist that he was truly man, and never drew upon the resources of his own deity in order to be man for this would be a contradiction in terms.

We conclude, then, that his Sonship was truly human. It is the sort of Sonship men need to have. We do not call it ‘ideal’ sonship so much as the ‘norm’ of sonship. If we understand this, then we can see that Jesus’ relationship with the Father does not have to be thought of in philosophical terms but in terms of action, or if you like, obedience.

Let us pause a moment to look at this matter of obedience. As humans we generally react to the word ‘command’, and our reaction is negative. We do not like being commanded. Often, too, our guilt prevents us from being rational about commands. We refuse to see that the universe operates on principles and laws, or if we recognize this fact we do so with regret. In order

to understand obedience we need to see the following: (i) God has created the universe to be functional. Every element within it relates to every other element, and all normally function as a whole, harmoniously. (ii) God has purpose behind all things, and everything is created for a purpose. In that sense nothing is disposable or dispensable. (iii) The principles or laws which control the universe relate to the will of God and His purpose for His universe. (iv) Man is called to be a son and to work with the Father in this plan. Hence, he is truly man when he accepts this fact and works gladly with the Father.

If we grasp this principle we will understand both the relationship of Jesus to the Father, and his works or actions which he did. They are both in the one bundle. Of course his Father was the true Father, and Jesus the true Son. Hence there was no tyranny exercised by the Father, and thus no rebellion by the Son. It would not be helpful here to use the example of human father–son relationships, which are always faulty.

Now we are ready to hear what the Son says of the Father. Jesus who said, ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments,’ exemplifies perfectly this principle in relation to his Father. So he says, ‘My Father loves me because I lay down my life [for the sheep].’ ‘The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand.’ ‘That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.’ ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work.’ ‘I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.’ ‘I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.’ ‘The works which the Father has granted me to

⁷ Cf. John 5:33, 36, 37, 39, 45 for various ‘witnesses’.

accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear me witness that the Father has sent me.’⁸

That is why Jesus can say, ‘I and the Father are one.’ He means not only one of the same ‘quality’ or ‘substance’, but one in the action which God is doing. Hence, on one occasion Jesus said, ‘My Father is working still, and I am working.’ This could be expanded: ‘My Father has always been working, and is going on working, and I have always been working, and go on working.’ That is, as Father and Son they are one in the work they are doing. God is only known in and by what He is doing, for in His action we understand His being. Doubtless we need to reflect on what He is doing in order to know who He is, and in this exercise we are assisted by the marvellous record of all His acts—the Bible—and the Recorder or Revelator of those events—the Holy Spirit. Men’s unaided minds, in the days of Jesus, just could not understand, any more than they can today—unaided by the Word and the Spirit.

Nor are we yet finished in this matter of relationship and action. We have to see the utter dependence of the Son upon the Father—another great and general principle. In John 5:19 Jesus says, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise.’ He adds, ‘For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing.’ This is repeated in principle in John 5:30, ‘I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him

who sent me.’ In the same Gospel, 8:28, he says, ‘I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me.’ This is repeated in 12:49, and then again in 14:10, ‘The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; *but the Father who dwells in me does his works.*’ Here we see the intimacy of Father and Son in relationship and action, and are able, then, to understand the truth of Jesus’ statement, ‘I and the Father are one.’

⁸ These are quotes from John's Gospel.

THE TRUE SONSHIP OF THE SON—II

THE REVELATION OF THE FATHER BY THE SON

‘No one has ever seen God;’ says John. He adds, ‘the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made him known.’ The question is, ‘Declared whom?’ The answer is, ‘God, yes, but God as Father.’

An interesting question is, ‘Can one know God as God, and not know Him as Father?’ It means that if the Fatherhood is the very being of God then not to know the Fatherhood is really not to know God, not as a man may, anyway.

This is why the unique matter of the Gospel is the revelation of the Father by the Son. It is not a metaphysical, philosophical, nor even a religious revelation. It

is an actual revelation in terms of God’s action, and therefore God’s true being. Hence Jesus could say, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.’ He meant, ‘I am the way to the Father. I am the truth of the Father. I am the life of the Father. To know and experience this you have to come to me.’

In human reckoning no person can know the fatherhood of a man unless he is that father’s son. The best he can do to know another father is to learn of his fatherhood through that one’s son. This is why John writes, ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory *as of the only Son from the Father.*’ There we have it—God is full of grace and truth. Jesus is full of grace and truth. Like Father—like Son. ‘And from his fullness,’ adds John ‘have we all received, grace upon grace.’ He means, ‘We have actually been involved in his action, and drawn from it. We have experienced the Fatherhood in and by the Sonship.’ This is what Jesus means when he says to Philip, ‘He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.’

THE IMPEDIMENT TO SEEING THE FATHER AND THE SON

Almost two thousand years have passed since Jesus displayed the Father. How is it, then, that humanity has not recognized the Sonship of Jesus and so the Father-hood of God? It is because there is an impediment.

On one occasion Jesus said to Jews who did not understand him:

If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word . . . He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.

He explained in simple but terrible terms:

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

We see, then, that man must belong to one or other of two families; one of two father-son systems; one of two action systems, both having purpose. One is true, the other false. One is good, the other evil. Each is energized by its father. This is surely the picture of the New Testament. Those who do good and love the brethren are of God and the Father. Those who commit sin and hate the brethren are of Satan. God energizes and works His will through His children who walk as dear children of God. Satan energizes his children of disobedience and wrath, and they follow him. It is interesting to note that Satan in his pathological desire to be like the Most High God, has also to be a father, and to seek to gather a family.¹

Paul says, 'The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, *who is the*

likeness of God.' Satan, we are told, goes out to deceive the whole world. He is spoken of as the one who deceived the whole world. Those who are his are called 'natural men'. Paul tells us that 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him'. This is why Jesus says, 'Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.'

We understand, then, that men do not see the ministry of Jesus the Son as the very action of the Father through him. Man is so far gone from his original sonship as to recognize neither the Father nor the Son. The acts and events of Christ are unintelligible to him until a revelation comes from God. Mercifully God gives this to human beings.

THE ACTS OF THE SON WHICH REVEAL THE FATHER

There is no act that Jesus did which does not reveal the Father. The very intimacy of their wills and operations makes everything that Jesus did the works of the Father. 'I do not speak on my own authority,' said Jesus, 'the Father who dwells in me, *does his works.*' For this reason there is no need to specify any act as specially revealing the Father. In all things 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them'.

We must all take time out of our busyness to see and examine every work that Jesus did. We will in this way discover more of the Father. We will discover in the baptism at the Jordan that Jesus was commissioned and

¹ Cf. I John 3:11f.; John 8:44f.; Eph. 2:1-3; Phil. 2:12-13

equipped for his great task. Notice that he was commissioned as Son. In the temptation by Satan in the wilderness he was proven strong and invincible. Notice again his Sonship as such was contested. Satan said—‘If thou be the Son of God.’ In his ministry the very nature of God was at work by the power of the Holy Spirit. Men and women were released from the bondage of Satan, for Satan had many varied forms of bondage. Bondage of fear, of guilt, of sickness, of demonic powers. The Father, through the Son, released men from this dreadful oppression. He also sent light of truth to flood men’s minds. Men were given freedom from oppression, and authority to unseat the powers of darkness.

At the Transfiguration the Son had his eyes set finally to Jerusalem and the Cross, and the mighty events of the Resurrection and Ascension. He was transfigured that he might be disfigured, that we who were disfigured might be transfigured. It was ‘grace and truth’ of the Father coming through into the world of needy men and women. Finally there were the events of the Passion Week, the cleansing of the Temple when the divine Fatherly wrath showed through the Son. The Fatherly love showed through the Cross as forgiveness established its basis in the suffering of the Son. In the Resurrection, death was scouted for ever. Guilt had its bondage broken, and man shook off the chains of his imprisonment. Unfettered, he was free!

Nor was this the end of the Father–Son action. The mighty redemptive acts were still sealed to the mind of man. It needed the Son to ask the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit. He, the Son, had worked in the power of this Spirit, and the world needed him. The Father gives

the Spirit to the Son, and seated at the right hand of God, the Son sends forth the Spirit to be the Revelator of the Father and the Son. Men’s surprised eyes will be opened to see, and understand and acknowledge ‘the wonderful works of God!’ They will be as drunken men, suddenly understanding. Then no power of earth or hell will prevent their lips from being opened in enormous and delighted praise to God.

COMING TO THE SON

Large volumes have been written on Christology—the study of the Person and work of Christ. In a few paragraphs we have covered this subject. Obviously the treatment is most inadequate. As suggested, we should personally study the acts of the Son and the Father in detail. They will be the material which the Holy Spirit uses to enlighten us concerning the Father and the Son. They are important. Yet it is also true that the events will be closed to us without the sovereign act of God in revealing them. He must draw us to the Son.

This is why we must speak of the ‘circuit’ of revelation. The circuit is simple enough. The Father draws us to the Son by the Holy Spirit, and the Son, also by the Holy Spirit, then reveals to us the Father. Such a circuit may seem puzzling to us. For this reason we should see what the Scripture tells us.

Jesus made it plain that only he could reveal the Father. In Matthew 11:27 he says, ‘All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the

Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.’ That is why Jesus said on another occasion, and to a hostile audience, ‘You know neither me nor my Father; if you knew me, you would know my Father also.’ Hence his statement to Philip, ‘He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.’ As we have said, no one may know the father of a son unless he is that son or is informed by that son. By the same token no one can know a son unless he is the father of the son or is informed by that father.

This is why Jesus said to his disciples, ‘No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.’ In the same conversation he added, ‘. . . no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.’ He explained this mystery by saying, ‘It is written in the prophets, “And they shall all be taught by God.” Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father.’ ‘They shall be taught by God’, is from Isaiah 54:13. The thought is repeated in Jeremiah 31:33–34. Jesus, then, is really saying that through the prophets—the Scriptures—the Father has taught men concerning the Son, and so He draws them to the Son at that point of time which He has chosen for them. When men are drawn to the Son they really see the Son and understand who he is. Thus they come to know the Father.

In our discussion we are apt to become complicated; prone to juggle ideas. So we must remind ourselves that we are speaking of the greatest experience man can know—coming to God as Father. Once that happens, man emerges from his state of frustration, unfulfilment and awryness into a place of release and fullness. Life begins

as true life when he meets the Father through the Son. One thing we must be alerted against is thinking that an intellectual grasp of the reasoning concerning the Father and the Son is necessarily the experience of the same. We may need the idea in order to approach the experience, but we need to advance beyond the idea into the experience. Hence, ‘This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent’. ‘And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life’. It is at this point we need to know something of the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

COMING TO THE SON AND FATHER BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe it was in the upper room, on the night of his betrayal that Jesus said, ‘The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, every man to his home, and will leave me alone; yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.’ This not being alone is the experience of a relationship which is total. Our human minds, unaided, cannot comprehend it. Yet far from glorying in his unique experience, Jesus had said, ‘I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you.’ The word ‘desolate’ is really ‘as orphans’. To be an orphan is perhaps the most lonely of all states. Jesus had said, ‘I will come to you.’

In the same breath he said, ‘. . . I will pray the Father, and he shall give you *another* Comforter.’ He

meant, 'I will send another such one as I am.' Then later, he proceeded to describe the work of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. He said:

I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot hear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

The matter is quite simple; no one can really understand Jesus apart from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, by his revelatory powers will reveal Jesus. He will reveal the *things* of Jesus. These are obviously his acts. He will interpret them. Jesus had said, '*All that the Father has is mine.*' So, in revealing the Son, the Spirit reveals the Father. We can even say, 'In revealing the Father the Spirit reveals the Son.'

This is precisely what happened at Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit came in great power, and as great power, he revealed the 'wonderful works of God'.² Far from being speechless through wonder, the believers became articulate in their wonder, telling out what the Spirit was revealing to them. In Peter's sermon it is condensed to the mighty acts of God in Christ—the accomplishment by the Son and the Father of their mighty plan for man and God's universe. The Spirit proved himself to be the mighty Revelator.

That men come to be sons of God via the circuit we

have examined is clearly so from the statements of the New Testament. 'As many as received him [Jesus] to them gave he power to become the sons of God.' 'In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.' 'Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying "Abba! Father!"' 'For through him [Christ] we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access in one Spirit to the Father.' 'In whom [Christ] we have boldness and confidence of access [to the Father] through our faith in him.' 'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.'

Man, surely, through Christ and the Spirit has been brought to the Father, and is constituted a son of God. What glory!

² See Acts 2:11-36.

THE PLAN OF GOD; FAMILY AND SONSHIP

That God has a plan in history is not in doubt; not at least in the Bible. We do not understand the Bible if we look at it as a mere record of events. To put it a little more quaintly, we do not understand the Fall without the Creation, nor the Flood without the Fall, nor the Abrahamic Covenant without the Flood, nor God's progressive action without the Abrahamic Covenant, nor the climax of history without His progressive action. Simply put, we mean that the original creation was with a view to the new creation, the final restoration of all things.¹

This sort of reasoning comes as a surprise to Bible readers who traverse Genesis to Revelation without ever seeing a plan. We need to look at this plan. So let us.

In Revelation 4:1–11 we have a description of heaven as John saw it. The great powers around the throne are

caught up in adoration of God as Creator. That is the sum of their song; God is Creator. Hence they sing, 'Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created.'

Whilst many of us enjoy being created and living, we perhaps wonder why this should cause such adoration until we understand the principle of creation. It has a beginning and an end; a commencement and a conclusion. Nothing is arbitrary, by chance, but all is purposive. Part of this purpose is revealed in Revelation chapter 5 where Jesus, as the Slain Lamb, is adored because he is able to control and unfold history. The same ones who adored God adore the Son. They sing:

Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth.

This should be enough to show us that history is not haphazard. God is in control; God has planned. Christ is seeing to it that God's people—His family if you like—will one day reign upon the earth in which man has been shamed and disgraced. On that earth man will reign as a kingdom and as priests to God.

That there is a plan is clear from Revelation 10:1–7. Here we hear a special angel pronouncing that 'the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled.' In this situation there is to be no delay; the plan is to be concluded. The term 'his servants the prophets' reminds us that such have been

¹ Acts 3:21

‘since the world began’. Jesus nominated the first prophet as Abel. It is clear from Luke 1:70 and Acts 3:21 that the plan which God has in His Messiah—Christ Jesus, the Son of the living God—is as ancient as the creation. That it is even more ancient is clear from John 17:5, I Peter 1:19–20, Revelation 13:8, I Corinthians 2:7 and many other passages. These indicate that God set about His creation with one mighty end in view—a renewed heavens and earth, and the glorious liberty of the sons of Himself. In fact I Corinthians 15:28 and Philippians 2:11 both indicate that in that day God shall be ‘all in all’ (*RSV* ‘everything to everyone’), and what His Son shall have done, and what His Son shall be, will be ‘to the glory of God the Father’.

That this plan includes His family is clear from the Letter to the Ephesians. This needs to be read in detail, but the message is unmistakable. Before the foundation of the world He planned that we (His elect) should be *before Him*—holy and blameless. Just as the Son is ever with Him or before Him, so shall be His redeemed children. ‘So,’ says Paul, ‘he predestined us, in love, to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.’

We need to see in this passage that the purpose of His will is that we shall be sons. It is also necessary that this is accomplished only ‘through Jesus Christ’. With this we should realize that the key to God’s plan and its fulfilment is the Son, Jesus Christ. This is made plain in Ephesians 3:1–12. In verses 9 to 11 Paul speaks of the ‘plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things’. The clause ‘who created all things’ reveals that

in some sense the plan is inherent in the very creation itself.² In verse 11 Paul says all this was ‘according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord’. That is, God’s plan which was prepared before time, is fulfilled in time through Christ.

CREATION: ITS MODE AND PURPOSE

There is no inherent flaw in creation. This is evident from Genesis 1:31 which tells us that when God had created all things, including man, He saw creation was ‘very good’. ‘Very good’ as we have seen means ‘functionally good’. There is no evil inherent in creation. As Proverbs 16:4 says, ‘The Lord has made everything for its purpose’.

Creation issued from God. It issued from the Father. It issued likewise from the Son. It issued also from the Holy Spirit. It had upon it the Father’s creative touch. It had upon it the Son’s creative action. It had on it the life-giving action of the Holy Spirit who is called, later, ‘the Spirit of his Son’, and ‘the Spirit of your Father’. What we are saying is that God creates not as a mere artisan or a detached architect, but as Father.³ The Son creates as the Son, and the Spirit of life as one relating to the Father and the Son.

We go as far as to say the universe, particularly the world, is created as the home for the family. John 1:11, speaking of Jesus coming into the world, says, ‘He came

² The same principle is implied in Rev. 10:1–7 especially in verse 6.

³ Deism sees God in this way. He does not relate to His own world except to supply the energy necessary for its continuance.

to his own home . . .’ In fact this is the very word used of John as he took Mary to his own home at the time of the crucifixion (John 19:27). At the end of the age, in the new age, the universe shall surely be a cleansed and joyful home. Yet whatever its state because of man’s sin, it is still structurally and essentially home.

This principle is brought out in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is talking to Jews who are, at least in principle, sons of the Father. Jesus makes it clear that God’s Fatherhood is tender and caring. Gentiles seek to live apart from the Fatherhood, but the one living under the Father should have no care for anything, for his heavenly Father knows he has need of these things. In fact the entire Sermon on the Mount should be studied afresh in order to see the great truth of God’s powerful Fatherhood. Men should live every detail of their lives in the light of the Fatherhood of God.

If the universe is the home, then even more men and women are the family. Made of one (Adam) to dwell on all the face of the earth (Acts 17:26), man is by birth brother to every other man. He is by pure creation a child of God, offspring to the Eternal. Hence he should repent wholly of making God in any other image than that of Father-Creator. He should return to his creaturely dependence upon God and explore the great relationship of son to Father. Even if by his fallenness he cannot do so, yet the fact remains that he was created to be a son. As we have said, great is his anguish in the experience of existence until he is released into sonship.

We have come back to this powerful practical truth that we cannot understand man, nor can he understand himself, until it is seen that he is structurally a child of God.

He must relate to God or perish. Anything he calls life is not, unless he is son.

However, it is the functional purpose of sonship which here concerns us. Man was made to be a son, by doing what a son does. That is, he was to obey his Father and ‘be about his Father’s business’. This was defined for him as being fruitful, multiplying, replenishing the earth, subduing it and having lordship over it. He was to be a son, a creature, a servant and a lord—all in one.⁴ It was from this glory, activity, demand and authority that he abdicated. He rejected the principle of sonship for the principle of autonomy or self-rule. He wanted to be as God without being subject to God. His individual plan for himself shattered also the structure of the family. This is seen practically in the case of Cain and Abel. It is also interesting to see that this is the beginning of the Satanic family, as John tells us in his first Letter, in chapter 3 from verse 11 following.

THE SONS, THE FAMILY AND THE SON

We saw in chapter 3 that men from Abel to Abraham, who were men of faith, were sons of God. From Abraham through to Israel, and then in Israel, men of faith within God’s covenant continued to be sons of God. Israel was called a son of God. In this context of sonship God was certainly working out His plan. It is extremely doubtful that there has ever been any period in history

⁴ These details are adduced from Gen. 1:26ff.; 2:7, 17; Psa 8:3ff.; Eccl.; 3:11; 7:29 17; Ps. 8:3ff; 3:11; 7:29

where sonship was not existent. Whilst God is not confined to His sons for the outworking of His plan, yet it is through the sons that He designs, primarily, to work out that plan.

When we come to the New Testament, this is very evident. The idea of Fatherhood was never absent from Israel. Documents show us that in the period of some hundreds of years between the last Book of the Old Testament and the first of the New, references to God as Father had become common among the Jews. Jesus taught no new truth when he taught the Fatherhood of God. He nevertheless made the truth to be new, and for many a revelation.

Says John, 'We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world.' In other words, where the sons failed to be obedient and fell into sin, and where even men of faith did not fully accomplish God's will, the true Son came and fully accomplished the will of God He brought men and women to God. He established the family. He completed the work which the Father had sent him to do. By what he did, the plan of God may proceed to its eventual fulfilment.

This is true. In Jesus the true Sonship was evidenced and actuated. God's goals were achieved. The obedience of Jesus was perfect. The plan was perfected. What was intended in the creation now had its fruition in and by the Son. His, we repeat, is the true Sonship.

In these few paragraphs we have telescoped millenniums. One man's suffering may occupy dimensions we cannot compute. God's infinite patience in dealing with man in his creational days, in the days we call the times of the patriarchs, and His care and concern for Israel in her

tumultuous experiences, demand that we should look at sonship more particularly. In each case it represented God's special concern. For this reason we ought to seek to plumb the depths of Jesus' Sonship. The reason for doing this is that this Sonship has not ceased. It is still the great force in the universe. It is still true that '[The] Father is working still, and I [Jesus] am working'.

Christ was not raised to the right hand of God in order to rest, but in order to exercise the fruits of his victory. Having been declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, the Son reigns. This *man* Jesus is now head over all powers, not only by virtue of his eternal deity, but also by virtue of his victory as the man Jesus Christ, Son of man, and yet Son of God.

In Acts 1:1–2 Luke speaks of what Jesus 'began to do and teach' as recorded in his Gospel. He infers that this doing and teaching is still going on. Jesus promises his disciples that he will be with his people until the consummation of the age (aeon). In Acts 7:55 Stephen sees him standing at the right hand of God. In Acts he appears to Paul, and is constantly accompanying his brethren as they obey the will of the Father. In I Corinthians 15:24–28 he is putting down every enemy. In Revelation 11:15 the battle is completed—the kingdom of this world has now become the Father's and his. To achieve this result he leads his people against the enemy (Rev. 19:11–15). Without doubt his Sonship is still issuing in acts of ruling and victory. Without doubt it is moving towards a point—its goal—when it shall have fulfilled all things that constitute the Father's will.

What will that point be? Surely the final ingathering of

the family, the purging and renewal of the universe so that it may be the true home of the family. In that hour will come the manifestation of the sons of God when they shall be unveiled, and seen to be utterly in the likeness of the Son himself. In that great hour all will be glory. There will be no more pain, no more tears, no more suffering, no more death. God will be all in all, and everything will be to His glory.

What eternity will constitute we do not know fully. We do know that nothing of evil will be present. We know it will be joy and peace and love. We know that worship will be prominent for those whom the Father has sought to worship Him in spirit and truth. Worship and service are really one, so that purposeful action will not cease with the unveiling of the sons of God. There will be family activity of the highest order. God's plan for eternity can scarcely be passivity or static existence.

However, what draws us on now is hope. That hope is a fixed assurance in men of faith that they shall one day enjoy the glory of the true family as sons of the living God, and brethren of Christ and one another. It is amazing to contemplate—that family of love—but meanwhile it is not a practically completed fact except in the purposes and sovereignty of God. At this very time we are called upon to participate in the plan of the Father, in the action of the Son, and in the leading of the Spirit.

CHAPTER NINE

***THE PLAN OF GOD;
OPERATIONAL
SONSHIP—I***

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A SON OF GOD

'Adam . . . was the son of God.' To be a son of God is to be created by God in His image, without sin, and to fulfil the graces and powers God has put in His sons by breathing into them the breath of life. It means being that person who carries out the original mandate to be fruitful, to spread across the face of the earth and to have dominion over the powers that exist in creation—to be lord over them, as also a servant to God. It is to bring into operation the great qualities of personal being which God has put into man. It is to be a brother to all men, and a son of God.

We have seen, sadly, that this glorious creature Adam,

with his most beautiful and able wife Eve, abdicated their ministry. Filled with God's glory they came into such a death as to lose their glory, and to fear the God they had once adored. They no longer walked with Him in the cool of the day, but hid in wretched fear. 'I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' The glorious son dwindles down to a craven. The great attributes of sonship dissipate in a slavery to fear. We can scarcely comprehend the vast difference between man-in-innocence, and man-in-sin. One lives; the other exists. One is filled with great gifts; the other covets his power for himself. No wonder God called this thing death.

WHAT IT MEANS NOT TO BE A SON OF GOD

It means not to know God as Father, not to know experientially His love. It means not to understand the kingly providences of God, and His Fatherly concern. It means to be alone in a humanity that is likewise without sonship, and in a universe that seems so awry because it is no longer a home. None can predict what a man may next do, even one's self—so far has man gone in his deviations of sin. It means the misery of glory lost, of being deprived of the Father-Family-home complex, and so being without essential security and inner integrity.

It means the sadness, sorrow, power and burden of sin always dominating one, even if this is not consciously felt or seen to be so. One is not free in the depths of one's being. One is self-seeking, self-justifying. If some kind of a memory persist of that true home, family and Father,

then it can only add to the misery—not alleviate it.

This sort of picture may irritate and even anger some reader. He may well say, 'Why it just doesn't fit with the facts.' Let him, however, ask himself when he has known genuine serenity, true peace and undiluted joy, for these are the true elements of man's norm of living as God created him. Is it not possible to accept misery and the burden of sin, and think this accompanying pain is part of life, and that we ought to bear it without complaint? Indeed if man were suddenly released from his existential burden of guilt, and set free into a realm of total liberty, might not the contrast be such as to make him wonder how he ever bore with life? How many times have I seen people laugh for days, following the release of their guilt, as they are launched into what could be called 'unbelievable sonship'.

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO BECOME A SON OF GOD?

It is not possible to become a son of God apart from Christ and his Spirit, apart from the plan of the Father. First, the Son of God must become man in order that he may identify totally with man *as man*. If man is made in God's image then he the Son can come, i.e. become in the image of man. That is, if man were not made in the image of God, then the Son could not become man. Man's sin is what incurs the wrath of God, and places him under doom. His sin separates him from God—from every angle. His separation is his doom. Jesus is never alone because the Father is with him. Man is not alone in

that God as Creator sustains him. In God he thus lives and moves and has his being, but the anguish is deeper because he has not the relationship for which he was created. He is indeed a prodigal wasting his fine substance in a riotous, egocentric existence.

It is not possible to become a son of God unless Jesus, the Son, identifies totally with man. 'We are convinced,' says Paul seriously, 'that one died for all; therefore all have died.' He means that Jesus accepted and experienced the death of sinful men, not only as a single death *for* all, but as the death *of* all, in his own death. Other ways of saying this are: 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree'; '[He] suffered for sins, the just for the unjust'; 'The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all'; '[God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God'; 'having become a curse for us'. There are many other such verses which tell us that he came, at the end of the age to put away sin, to take away the sin of the world.

In quoting the Scriptures above, as they constitute the work of the Cross, we must see that it is the purpose of the Father that through faith in Christ Jesus men and women should become the sons of God (Gal. 3:26). Man has been created to be a son, so it can be seen that all his actions are unfilial conduct. We may call this unnatural conduct. Having said that, we need to go far more deeply into this whole principle of sin. In Malachi 1:6 we have an indication of how God views sin as unfilial conduct. It is by no accident, then, that Christ's action both of his life and his death are complete filial obedience. They are the opposite of sin. This can be seen in Romans 5:12–21 where Adam's disobedience and

Christ's obedience are contrasted. In order to understand the Cross we must see that in some sense Christ becomes as the unfilial, as the wasteful prodigal, as the son-sinner who wastes his substance in riotous living. We must also see that the cry of anguish from the Cross is that of man, as a son, being forsaken. The misery of being separated as man from the Father is what he experiences in those dark hours. We must be wary of saying the Son is separated from the Father, but we must insist that as man, as the Son of Man, he was surely separated from God the Holy One. His cry was not, 'My Father! My Father! Why hast thou forsaken me?', but, 'My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?' He was suffering, man for man.

A section of Hebrews chapter 2 deals in depth with the matter of the Cross, of man's sonship and Christ's unique Sonship, especially in relation to the Cross. It demands more than a cursory reading. From verse 5 to verse 8 it shows that true man has all things under his authority. However, says the writer, we do not see this as such. He then says:

But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, [God] for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.

The term 'pioneer' suggests a trail-blazer, one who opens up a region hitherto unexplored and untraversed. He blazed the trail in order that others may follow. The

mention of 'death' in both verse 9 and verse 15 shows that this Son went through the suffering of the Cross, the bearing of the sin, and the vale of death, in order to blaze a trail and lead 'many sons to glory'. Doubtless that glory will only be seen in the final day, but the point is that this Pioneer was made perfect, or complete, through suffering. That is, in becoming a Pioneer in fullness, and in completing his act of trail-blazing, suffering was indispensable, and what he suffered attested him to be the true Pioneer. 'Many sons' may now follow him.

That is why it is important, above all things, to understand the Cross. It is not its physical anguish, or the sentiment of a noble man suffering, nor even the horrible shame and ignominy of the Tree that we should ponder, but the fact that he went out into the deepest darkness of all—the total accumulation of man's sin with all its hideous perversity, and became that for man, that in him man might become the righteousness of God.

Man, now, may become a son through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26). That is, through the Son the nature of God has been revealed to him. He sees the love of the Father in providing the Son to be the propitiation for his sins. He hears the cry, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,' and he understands that the Father forgives. The prodigal 'comes to himself' and sees the Cross as the way of the Father. He sees that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them. He sees the way of access to the Father, in Jesus, and knows he has sinned 'against heaven and before [God]'. He repents and believes. He receives the remission of sins. He is justified and is given

the sonship. He becomes a son of God.

What an immense work! The deep perversion of man's spirit from that of being a son, into being a bitter alien. 'Hateful and hating' Paul describes it (Titus 3:3), from all his forms of perversion, whether crude and directly evil, or controlled and subtly deceitful, man was gloriously delivered. 'Such were some of you,' says Paul, 'but you were washed, you were sanctified; you were justified *in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*' This is a deep work, changing a man in the depths. It is called regeneration. God once generated man, that is, created him. Now He regenerates him. Who can say which is the greatest of these two works? It does not matter. Paul calls it elsewhere, 'the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour' (Titus 3:5-6). When a man comes under this deep ministry of Christ and his Spirit he knows what it is to be brought to God. What perhaps he does not understand is the incredible joy in heaven as angels glory in the fact that a sinner has repented.

We must emphasize the work of the Son and the work of the Spirit in all this. All that the Son did he was enabled to do by the Spirit. Now he has poured out his Spirit to take the power of Christ's Cross, and the power of Christ's Resurrection and apply that power to the total being of a man, and so save and renew him in order that that one can be rightly called a son. By the Spirit this man is released, and by the Spirit he is renewed, and by the Spirit he learns to ejaculate, 'Abba! Father!' 'Because you are sons,' says Paul, 'God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"'

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A SON OF GOD, REGENERATED

‘As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.’ This statement of Romans 8:14 should be read in its context. Those who put to death the deeds of the body, by the Spirit, are those who are led by the Spirit of God. They have the mind of the Spirit which is life and peace. They have rejected the mind (or ‘mind-set’) of the flesh because Christ the Son of God and the Spirit of Christ are dwelling in them, each one.

The principle cannot be missed. To be led by the Spirit of God has deep significance. Being led by the Spirit was more than one of the marks of Jesus’ Sonship. It was the whole of his Sonship. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power to do the will of God and fulfil all righteousness. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. This was more than a simple event; it was the event decisive for the way he would henceforth walk—only in the will of the Father. Thus, to walk in the Spirit is to be led by him to do the will of the Father. This can be substantiated in the life of Jesus. What Adam the son had not done, what Israel as the son had not accomplished, all this Jesus did in his obedience of life as he was both led and aided by the Spirit.

To be a son of God, then, is to carry out the will of the Father. That is why Paul says, ‘If we live by the Spirit let us also walk by the Spirit.’ Surely this means the restoration to man of the mandate God has given him. He is to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. He is to subdue it and have lordship over it.

MAN’S SONSHIP IS IN THE SONSHIP OF CHRIST

‘Out of Egypt have I called my son.’ ‘Let my son go that he may serve me.’ We can see the principle. The son does the will of the Father and what Adam and Israel never fulfilled, Jesus did. As we saw, his appointed work is still continuing. This work is seen very clearly in the Letter to the Ephesians. In 1:9–10 we read, ‘For he [God] has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth’.

It is no exaggeration to say that this purpose God has in Christ is an astonishing, breath-taking one. It means that there is nothing which will be outside of Christ. All things will have both their being and meaning in him, and in him alone. Yet, from another point of view, this is very simple and obvious. When we read in Colossians 1:15–17 that all things were created in him, and that these were ‘things in heaven, and things on earth’, then we understand that God planned creation through His Son—‘through whom also he created the world’—and obviously planned that creation would ultimately be summed up in the Son.

We can see that of course this action is a process. It is not that suddenly God is going to complete this by a brilliant, instant transformation. Hence we read in Ephesians 1:23 of him ‘who fills all in all’. In Ephesians 4:10 we read that Jesus is the one who having descended to the lowest parts of the earth then ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things. What he fills of

course is that which is empty. He fills from his own fullness, and so gives true being and purpose to those things which were empty.

If we are not careful this sort of reasoning will be only in the mind. We will not see it in its actual action. In action it means that Jesus gives from his life and powers true being to that which is lifeless and powerless. That is, all things thus regenerated are caught up into the life of Christ. The plan of God is being completed by this process. Even having said that we have not said all. In Ephesians 1:22–23 we read, ‘and he [God] has put all things under his [Jesus’] feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all’. This means that Christ is filling all things full. His fullness as such he has given to the church. In another way of speaking we can say Christ constitutes the fullness of the church, and out of that fullness by the church he is filling all things full.

Anyone who reads this passage and finds it puzzling should go over it again, and even again, until he grasps it. Otherwise he will miss the marvellous fact that Christ’s victorious sonship is being worked out through the church. We will see the verification of this below, but first let us look at its significance. It means, in fact, that a man is only fully, truly and functionally a son of God when he is in Christ and is led by the Holy Spirit.

Of course to have the Son indwelling oneself, as we read in many passages, is a wonderful matter, the climax of which will be glory, but can we imagine the practical impact that indwelling Sonship makes upon us, and the manner in which it impregnates and possesses us? Out of this indwelling we become changed into the Son’s

likeness from one stage of glory to another. Nor is that experience simply mystical, but rather most practical. The Son cannot inhabit us and fail to transform us, as he conforms us to his own image. His image, if we may say so, is a most dynamic and operational one. It defeats evil and causes great triumph. Whilst we know that the ultimate goal we shall reach will be conformity to his image, it is puzzling to know how this can be unless it is a process leading up to this climax. Regeneration, of course, is the vital crisis which launches us into the process, but the process must be at the very least, actional. We must grow by doing. To be a son and not to be doing is to be very unlike the Son himself.

CHAPTER TEN

***THE PLAN OF GOD;
OPERATIONAL
SONSHIP—II***

THE SHARED SONSHIP

Jesus had made it very clear to his disciples that to be the Son of God was to do the Father's will. His reasoning in John 14:10 was to this effect, 'The Son does the Father's will, totally. Don't you see that the one who does that will is actually in the Father, and the Father is in him?' That is their relationship. 'Nothing I say originates in myself; I have no innate authority of my own. I speak what the Father tells me, but in fact it is the Father who lives in me and does His own works. Surely they seem to be mine, but they are through me, so here is your basis for believing that I am in the Father and the Father in me. Anyway you see the works and they should convince you. No works; no true sonship.'

Jesus did not leave the matter there. He was opening

up the astounding truth that *there was to be a continuity of these works*. In verses 12 and 13 he says, 'I speak very solemnly here, whoever really believes in me will do these works [of the Father] which I am doing, yes and even greater works which are designed for the time—in the will of the Father—when I am ascended to Him. Whatever you ask in my name I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. I mean that if you ask in my name, you are in me, and I am in you. My Sonship will then work through you, and so I will be glorifying the Father through you. Being in me you will know what to ask. You will ask, and I will do.'

This surely means that his work is not completed, and insofar as his work as the Son is not completed, insofar, then, is the work of the Father also uncompleted. As the indwelling of the Father in the Son has been with a view to divine action, so will be the indwelling of the Son and the Father within the believers. This is promised in John 14:21–24:

He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him . . . If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

If our eyes were not used to reading such astounding statements without amazement, or if we saw them for the first time in faith, we would be greatly astonished. It is a pity that we have a silent, mental acceptance of such momentous things without actually knowing them to be momentous. What Jesus is saying is, 'As you have seen me do great works, and thus the will of the Father, so

you too will know both Father and Son indwelling you, and doing these works through you. Of course the glory will go to the Father, but you will be in that action.'

Much of chapter 15 of John's Gospel is to teach the disciples to remain in Christ, and so know and do his will. There is also a warning against the hatred which will follow such a course of action. Identification with the work of Christ will also mean identification with his rejection by men. Chapter 16 of the Gospel speaks of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in making the work of Christ effective through his people. It will consist of powerful conviction of the world in regard to sin, righteousness and judgement, and also a revelation of Christ and the things of his Father.

This shared sonship is seen in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. They do as great as, and even greater work than the Son did in his lifetime. However, they make it clear that they are not doing such, of or from themselves. Peter says, concerning the lame man made whole:

Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? . . . his [Jesus'] name, by faith in his name has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through him [Jesus] has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

Nevertheless, though they deny they do it, they certainly are sharing in the work of the Son. They are doing things 'in his name', which was what he had told them they would do.

An interesting prayer is that of Acts 4:29–30, which is addressed to the Father:

And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are done through the name of thy holy servant Jesus.

In this the Father and the Son are both working. The outcome is then described, 'And with great power *the apostles* gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus'.

The shared sonship is seen in numerous places in the Epistles. Romans 8:17 speaks of being fellow heirs with Christ, provided that in this present time we suffer with him. Paul, in Colossians 1:24, Ephesians 3:13 and Philippians 3:10, takes up this theme of suffering with Christ. He refers to sharing in the Son's present action. In Romans 8:35–39 Paul makes it clear that even in these sufferings we can be more than conquerors through Christ.

This, incidentally, brings out the fact that as Christ was a conqueror so should we be. The thought is made clear in Revelation 2:26 and 3:21. He who conquers shares in Christ's victory. Revelation 21:7 says, 'He that overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son'. A true son is a conqueror. He overcomes and subdues that which is required to be restrained. This was precisely what the Son did in his lifetime and is going on doing. Sons of God must share in this overcoming ministry.

When Paul cries, 'that I may know him and the power of his resurrection,' he is truly speaking of the great power by which the Son now works. Indeed Paul later

prays for the Ephesians that the eyes of their understanding may be enlightened that they may know the power of his resurrection that is working towards them. This is surely the same power that is working in them (in 3:20) and by which (in 6:10) they are strengthened. Note that they must be strengthened ‘in the Lord’. In Philippians 2:12–13 it is God who is energizing them with power so that through them His eternal will may be worked out.

We conclude, then, that the principle is valid—the Son is working out his victory of the Cross and Resurrection, through his brethren the sons of God. They too, in the household or family of God, are working out the will of the Father. We shall return to this theme later.

THE FATHER TO BE OBEYED

Sometimes we have a sentimental view of the Fatherhood, and this envelops us. We need not reject sentiment which is healthy or emotional, which after all is part of us. Sentiment and emotion may be present, but not excessively, or they will impede the true Father understanding.

It is interesting to note that we have only one occasion recorded where Jesus is described as being filled with joy. We are told, ‘He rejoiced in Spirit’ (*RSV* ‘in the Holy Spirit’) and said, ‘I thank thee *O Father, Lord of heaven and earth.*’ A similar statement is used in the passage of Acts 4 which we discussed in our previous section. In verse 24 we read, ‘They lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, *who didst*

make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them”’. Again the thought is repeated in Acts 17:24, where Paul speaks to Greek pagans. He says, ‘The God who made the world, and everything in it, *being Lord of heaven and earth . . .*’ It is also the basis of the oath which the mighty angel swears in Revelation 10:5–6—‘And the angel whom I saw standing on sea and land lifted up his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives for ever and ever, *who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it . . .*’

This thought—‘Father, Lord of heaven and earth’—is clearly found in the Lord’s Prayer. ‘When you pray,’ said Jesus, say ‘Our Father who art in heaven . . . thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, *as it is in heaven . . .*’ We speak not only of a family, but of a Kingdom. Doubtless the ideas of family, kingdom and the people of God are brought together from time to time, but the thought of Father, in the Lord’s Prayer, relates to the demands for obedience. Only in the context of obedience, presumably, may we pray, ‘Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts.’

The demand of Fatherhood for obedience is seen in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:9 the peacemakers will be called the sons of God. In 5:16 when men let their light shine that good works may be seen, the Father in heaven is glorified. In 5:43–48 only those are sons of the Father who obey Him in the matter of loving even beyond their own kin to their enemies. In 6:1–6 coveting the praise of men for acts of piety is going against the Father. To be obedient to the Father is to give secretly and to pray secretly. In 6:14–15 forgiving all men is the order or

principle of the Father's love. In 6:25–33 trust in the Father is commanded. Within the Kingdom of the Father His things must first be sought, and this obedience will bring all the benefits of the Father to His children. In 7:21 it is stated strongly that only he who does the will of the Father may enter this Kingdom.

THE FATHER IS GENEROUS IN THE KINGDOM

There are three things which the Father does in relation to the Kingdom. He forgives men's trespasses (Matt. 6:12–15), He gives the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him (Luke 11:13), and He gives the very Kingdom itself! (Luke 12:32; cf. 22:28–30).

What we need to understand at this point is that the Kingdom of God or of heaven, is the reign or rule of God. It is a dynamic rule, rather than simply referring to a literal realm as we understand a kingdom. It is, in fact, dynamic in every realm of the creation. This is the Kingdom in the wider aspect of its being. To call it 'the Kingdom of God' or 'the Kingdom of heaven' is to show that it is not of man, nor of the earth. Its origin is from God Himself.

When it comes to the matter of shared sonship it means that true believers are 'sons of the Kingdom' as they can also be called 'sons of the resurrection' (Luke 20:36). It means they are, with the Son, involved in the Kingdom. This too, explains the principles of obedience. The sons of the Kingdom are necessarily obedient. They work with a view to the full coming of the Kingdom. In fact

believers can be called 'workers for the Kingdom' (Col. 4:11) and are said to 'suffer for it' (II Thess. 1:5).

Therefore forgiveness, the gift of the Holy Spirit and possession of the Kingdom (i.e. truly belonging to it and having its powers), is a proof of the generosity of the Father, who, whilst calling for obedience, richly rewards the children of the Kingdom.

THE OUTWORKING OF THE KINGDOM IN SONSHIP

Without doubt Jesus' Sonship relates to the Kingdom. It was for the purpose of the Kingdom that he was baptized, and in this context the Father said, 'Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' It was relating to the Kingdom that Satan said, 'If thou be the Son of God . . .' as he sought to get Jesus to follow a lesser way than the Cross and the Kingdom. The nature of the Kingdom called for a moral and spiritual suffering in order that evil be defeated and the Kingdom's holy triumph be established everywhere.

Likewise, Nathanael saw Christ's Sonship of God, and Kingship of Israel, as the one thing. He said 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus himself saw his sonship related to the coming Kingdom when the high priest asked him if he were the Messiah, the Son of God. He pointed to the prophecy of Daniel where the Son of man would come in the clouds, with angels, to establish the Kingdom. In this context he makes 'Son of God' and 'Son of man' to be virtually synonymous. Both refer to the Kingdom. His entry into

Jerusalem is understood as relating to the Kingdom, for the crowds cried out ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!’ (John 12:13). Also, at the trial Jesus is asked by Pilate concerning his Kingdom. Jesus affirms that he is a King, but points to the nature of his Kingdom which is not of the quality of this world (John 18:33–38).

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is always related to the Kingdom. Jesus said, ‘if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.’ John the Baptist had related the coming of the Kingdom to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Hence, when following the Resurrection Jesus speaks of the Kingdom, and when the early church preaches the Kingdom, it is always in the light of the work of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, this outworking of Jesus’ Sonship in the light of the Kingdom is the very thing in which his disciples are involved. They too need to be ‘sons of the Kingdom’ in order to work in the service and ministry of the Kingdom. They need to know obedience to, and relationship with, the Father in that context. This is why the Spirit is poured out upon them, and this is why the experience of the Kingdom is ‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom. 14:17). This is why ‘the kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in power’ (I Cor. 4:20).

This is also why the Son is working for that day when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power, and the last enemy, death, shall be destroyed so that he may turn and give the Kingdom to the Father that God may be all in all. It is in this ministry that the sons

and servants of God are involved (I Cor. 15:24–28). They share his Sonship, working out in history, until the victory is complete.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE CHILDREN OF GOD

We cannot proceed to see how the sons work with the Son in the fulfilment of the Father's plan unless we understand that the sons of God are born of His love, and are love-children. Jesus said, 'As the Father has sent me, even so I send you,' and he meant that their relationship to him should be as his to the Father.

THE SON OF HIS LOVE

Colossians 1:13 speaks of 'his beloved Son'. This theme is repeated a number of times. In John 3:35 we read, 'the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand'. In John 5:20, 'For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him . . .' In John 10:17, 'the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again'. In Matthew 3:17 the Father says, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.' In Ephesians 1:6 we are told that we are accepted 'in the Beloved'.

Jesus himself speaks of the 'glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world', and adds, 'I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them' (John 17:24, 26). All of these Scriptures show the relationship of the Father and the Son was one of love, the essential love of the Godhead. That it is mutual is made clear by Jesus' statement, 'that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so do I.'

We see, then, that if 'God so loved that he gave', so also did the Son. It was because of his love that he obeyed the Father and fulfilled his Sonship. Likewise the children, through the Son, come into that sonship which is expressed in love.

THE CHILDREN OF LOVE

'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us,' says John, 'that we should be called the sons of God.' The love that the Father has bestowed is in sending His Son to be the propitiation for sin and the Saviour of the world. 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us'.

Out of this love the children of God are born. To be born of God is to love. 'He who loves is born of God and knows God . . . for God is love'. John also says, 'By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not do

right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother.’ More positively he adds, ‘We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.’

However, the basis of all this is set out in the statement, ‘our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.’ This seems incredible—that a man may fellowship with the Father and also with His Son. Nor is it enough to claim we love God, if in fact we hate our brother. He who is born of God loves the brethren. ‘We know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments’.

This is why Peter says, ‘Love one another earnestly from the heart’ (I Pet. 1:22), and Paul, ‘be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us’ (Eph. 5:1–2). And again, ‘through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”’ (Gal. 5:13, 14).

It is clear, then, that the children of God love. This is not a matter of automatic spontaneity, but the action of the will. It is a command to be obeyed, as much as an experience to be known. The Father Himself has commanded it, as we have seen in Matthew 5:43–48. Here love of one’s own is what taxgatherers do. There is no merit in this. We are to love all men, even our enemies. Only then shall we be perfect like our Father.

None of this love would ever be ours unless we were first loved. ‘We love because he first loved us’ is the powerful principle. ‘If you love me you will keep my commandments,’ was what Jesus said. ‘the love of Christ constraineth us,’ said Paul.

In order to understand this powerful drive we must remember at what cost we are made sons of God, and what depths of love we experience in coming to sonship. The Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts, but he does this by disclosing the immense love of God operating for us in the Cross, as also he brings, experimentally, that love to us. He does the latter by taking away our sin, by bringing forgiveness, by justifying us and setting us apart with the people of God. Most of all he brings God’s love by revealing it to us, and granting to us our sonship in God.

Now the anguish of years is over. Now we are whole in a total relationship with the Father. Truly, whilst the Son of God is unique, and his Sonship beyond ours, yet ours is all a human needs, and is totally what he requires, and is as full as his redeemed humanity can ever have it, at least in this world. So we are flooded with love. We have access to God as His children through the Son and by the agency of the Spirit.

It is this love which urges us to share in the operational Sonship of the Son. Indeed it is instinctive for us to do so. We must express our sonship in action and in the action the Father requires.

THE HOLY CHILDREN

We have been warned against love that is merely sentimental, and action inspired only by such. God’s love, if it is anything, is holy. Because all God’s action is holy, His children must be holy. They must exercise holy love.

That the children must be holy is clear from the prayer

the Lord gave his disciples. He said, 'When you pray, say, "Our father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name . . ." ' This of course goes back to the Ten Commandments—'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain'. Moses and the people of Israel sang gloriously of God and cried, 'Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness?' (Exod. 15:11).

Peter in his first Letter says:

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" '.

He adds:

And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile (I Pet. 1:14–17).

He is quoting from Leviticus 11:44, for the children of God were to be nothing, if not holy.

The thought is again brought out in II Corinthians 6:14 to 7:1. Towards the end of his exhortation Paul quotes both Isaiah 52:11 and Hosea 1:10, 'Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty'. Then Paul adds, 'Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God.'

Similarly in Ephesians 5:1–14 Paul exhorts his readers to walk in love (v. 2) and to walk in light (v. 8). He says:

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these [evil] things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them, for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light . . . Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness . . .

Just how total was the action which cleansed former sinners and brought outsiders into God's family is shown in I Corinthians 6:9–11. Speaking of those who were formerly robbers, adulterers, idolaters, homosexuals and the like, Paul says, 'But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified.' Peter describes the miracle of moral cleansing and renovation when he says, at the council in Jerusalem concerning the Gentiles, 'And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith.' Of these Gentiles God had said to Peter, 'What God has cleansed, you must not call common [unclean]' (Acts 10:15). Thus in his first Letter Peter writes to Gentiles:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

Holiness and love are brought together in John's first Letter under the figure of light. God is light, and in Him

there is no darkness at all. To walk in fellowship with God is to have no sin. To walk in love is to walk in light. Our conclusion, then, is that when God cleanses man and makes him a child of light, that one becomes a child of love. He loves the Father, the Son and the Spirit because of the redemption he has experienced. His new sonship makes him desire to walk in light and holiness (I John 3:1–3).

Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. The pure in heart are blessed for they do see God, and in a more complete way will see God. Without holiness, given by God, love is unholy. Without both, the child of God is a contradiction in terms. Certainly he can know little of the power of God in his life.

THE CHILDREN OF POWER

‘You shall receive power,’ said Jesus, ‘when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.’ ‘The kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power,’ said Paul. Of the disciples it was said time and again, ‘And they spoke the word of God with boldness [power]’. Paul said, ‘I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling . . . but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.’ ‘Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.’ (Acts 1:8; I Cor. 4:20; 2:3–4; I Thess. 1:5).

The Son of God, as man, walked in holiness of life. His holiness showed itself in obedience. His obedience was prompted by love. The power of God was present with him because of his obedience in love. This is the

order of the true children of God. Jesus knew the power of the Holy Spirit as he went about the things of the Kingdom. God anointed him—as he declared him to be the Son—with the Holy Spirit and power (Acts 10:38). So the sons have like power when they are anointed by God.

We saw in chapter 10 under the heading ‘Shared Sonship’ that the believers were to carry on the operations of the Son, and that the sons would be overcomers, not merely holding their stand against evil, but pressing on evil so that it was overcome. John could write to his young men and say, ‘you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one’ (I John 2:14).

This power was to break down the strongholds of Satan, to liberate captives, to fight sin, sickness and the domination of demonic powers. It was to penetrate the darkness of men’s minds and set them free from the power of their sins. It was to bring men and women out into the light and the love and the holiness of God, and to learn the new way of obedience. It was to bring men and women to the Father.

THE CHILDREN OF THE FATHER

When children manifest purity and holiness they are of the Father. Where they love their enemies they are of the Father. Where they manifest the power and operations which the Son did and does, they are of the Father. They have access to the very Father Himself through the Son and the Spirit. Jesus said, ‘I do nothing on my own

authority but speak as the Father thus taught me. And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.’

The sons are never alone when they do the Father’s will. They know the presence and fellowship of the Father. They know themselves to be His children. They experience the greatness of being sons of God. They are now truly what God created men to be. They know the joy of obedience.

Yet, as we saw in John 14:10–14, men are ever only the children of God by abiding in the Son himself. Their sonship is totally dependent upon him. Their love, holiness, obedience and power derive from him. Their knowledge of the will of God is through him. They can do all things in Christ, but only in him. They have sonship only because they share his Sonship.

Now we may proceed to see how this sonship is shared, and what is its outworking.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE SON AND THE SONS

‘It pleased God,’ says Paul, ‘to reveal his Son *in*¹ me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles.’ If Paul had simply said, ‘It pleased God to reveal his Son to me,’ then that in itself would have been much. Paul saw Jesus in the heavens when on the road to Damascus, but an even deeper miracle took place. God’s Son was revealed *in* him. Paul had a revelation which was never to die. Yet the revelation was not an end in itself. It was to be the thrust or ‘booster’ to compel Paul to preach Christ to the Gentiles. We conclude that he who truly has the Son within will be with the Son in his programme, operating as he is until the consummation of the age.

In chapter 10 we saw that Jesus’ Sonship is a shared Sonship. Just as Israel the nation constituted a corporate sonship of God, so Jesus constitutes a corporate Sonship. As Israel was called out of Egypt, so Jesus. He took over the ministry of Israel. He became the Suffering

¹ Some translators have ‘to’ or even ‘to and through’, but the Greek preposition is ‘in’.

Servant. Having suffered he is now triumphant. Since the Church is his embodiment, so the corporate nature of the Son has both continuity with Israel as well as identity.

With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost each believer has received the sonship. Into him has come the Spirit of the Son. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his. That sonship is evidenced by the cry 'Abba! Father!' The cry 'Abba!' is in the context of obedience. We remember that in particular it was used in Gethsemane. As we have said, it is not simply a cry of sentiment but a cry of obedience. He who cries, 'Abba!' is prepared to do the Father's will. He will do that will at any cost. We say, then, that the cry, 'Abba!' is a cry relating to function, or God's purposeful action.

THE SONS AND THE FATHER

Although we have described this relationship previously, let us look at it in its personal elements. Man, created to be a son, lost his relationship with God. How traumatic this was we cannot fully say. Nor can we adequately describe his aloneness, his awryness, his disharmony. All his sin was unfilial action, as also unfamiliar relationships. He ceased to be what it is to be truly human in God's creation. Born to fulfil God's purposes he sought other human purposes, but none could satisfy by nature of the case.

Then God was pleased to give him sonship. It came when the Spirit moved him toward Christ. How much of this experience was below or above the conscious surface we cannot say. However, conviction was genuine. So

was the gift and exercise of repentance and faith. Sin was cleansed. A whole past was obliterated. All the areas of true yearning were now fulfilled. God was at last Father to him, and he a son to the Father. Mutual love was experienced. The fruits of the Spirit's ministry in him were naturally enough love, joy and peace, among others.

The Spirit also taught. He spoke of the Kingdom of the Father and of the Lordship of the Son. The creational urge to work to God's plan returned, and the son wished to do the Father's will, to do works which would glorify his Father in heaven. His alms and prayers were secret. His dependence upon the Father was total for all things. Meanwhile he worked at doing the will of the Father.

That is why the son experienced the peace and joy of God. That is why the Holy Spirit brought gifts to him that he might participate in the ministry of the Son.

That is why, at Pentecost, when the Spirit came, He welded the sons into one corporate being which became the Body of Christ, and which constituted the fullness of the Son, who was to fill all things, and ultimately sum them up, so that nothing of the 'all things' would be outside him.

THE SONS AND THE SON

'Christ liveth in me,' Paul told the Galatians who were departing from this indispensable state. There was nothing of Paul which was not possessed and impregnated by this sonship. It constituted his life. 'I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord,' he said on one occasion. To have

the whole Christ indwelling him was no small thing.

That is why he prayed for the Christians at Ephesus that 'he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith . . . that you may be filled with all the fullness of God' (Eph. 3:16–19). He told the Colossians that Christ in them was the assurance of the glorification (Col. 1:27).

All of this is simply repeating what we said in chapter 10 of us being in Christ, and Christ in us, and also having the Father come and dwell in us. The presence of the Son in the sons is not simply for their personal upbuilding. It does include this, but it is for the greater purpose of their obedience, their co-operation with the Son as he works out in history the plan of the Father. This indeed was what men were created for and what the sons of God desire to do.

The sons know their sonship, when in relating to the Father, they relate to the Son and the plan of God. In this they know their functional satisfaction.

THE SONS AND THE SPIRIT

'The Spirit,' says Paul, 'bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God.' He also says, 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.'

We have already seen that the Spirit brings conviction, and then in revealing the Son, brings redemption. By him we are set free from the law of sin and death. Where he is we experience liberty. He gives life. As he brings us to the Father, so he brings us to the Son. Thus he brings us

into sonship. More than this, it is through him that the very Son indwells, and for that matter, the Father. Being sent by the Father and the Son he is at once the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son.²

Because of these facts our sonship is real to us. By the Spirit we know God to be Father, and Jesus to be Lord. This full relationship with Father, Son and Spirit equips us to be true members of Christ and his Body. We are fully prepared now to participate in the plan of God.

THE SON, THE BODY, AND THE GIFTS

We need to review a little of what we saw in chapter 9 under the heading of 'Man's Sonship is in the Sonship of Christ'. We saw in Ephesians that Christ is ultimately to *sum up* all things, which is much the same as saying *fill up* all things. However, the summation is the climax, and filling up is the process. Whilst Christ can be called 'The Filler' yet he has chosen to give his fullness to the Church, and it is through the church that the plan of God is outworked. This is clear from Ephesians 3:7–12. Paul has been commissioned to reveal the plan of the ages which is God's. It is through the church that this plan is to be outworked as God's wisdom is exhibited to principalities and powers. This is according to His eternal purpose which He realized in Christ Jesus.

Christ, then, is the 'Filler', and his church has the fullness. In Ephesians 4:7–16 this is amplified. The

² Cf. John 16:7–11; Rom.8:2; II Cor. 3:17; II Cor. 3:6; Rom. 8:9–11; Gal. 4:6; Matt. 10:20.

fullness of Christ is expressed and active in and through the gifts he gives to his church. This is part of the 'nourishing and cherishing' of his bride. The gifts he gives are his. He gives these gifts in order that he might 'fill all things'. In this case the gifts are 'apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers'. They will build up the Body in love. The gifts are always oriented to love. Indeed they are the *means* of love operating.

If the gifts are from Christ then they are his. Indeed in one sense they are him. Their operations, normally speaking, are his operations. In I Corinthians 12:4–12 it would seem that the gifts are the gifts of the Spirit. However, a closer look will show that they are given *through* the Spirit. For example, verse 8 says, 'To one is given, *through* the Spirit the utterance of wisdom . . .' The Spirit, then, is the agent of distribution, but the gifts are Christ. Hebrews 2:4 seems to indicate that the Spirit distributes, but the verse means either the Spirit is distributed (variously) or distributions are made through the Spirit.

This is simply seen if we remember from Romans 6:23 that the *gift* of God is eternal life *in* Christ Jesus. Jesus is life. Hence John says, 'He that hath the Son hath life.' In other words, the whole of the Son is eternal life, and his corporate being, his Body the church, contains his precious gifts which are both his and him.

Once we see this the rest is simple. The shared sonship is only resting in the Son who is working in history, and being obedient in the use of the gifts given, as also living in total harmony with the whole Body, as with individual members in particular. We might put it this way: all the actions of the Body are Christ, yet those same actions are

those of the constituent members. No gift is apart from Christ, yet the apportioning of the gifts, and the operation of them are through the Holy Spirit.

THE FATHER AND THE SON

We should pause to see that all the Son is doing is the will of the Father. The plan of the Father is being worked out by the Son, through his Body, the church. This is why his people must abide assiduously in him. He is the Vine; they are the branches. The branches bear the fruit, but the Vine produces the fruit. Nor is the fruit simply that of personal character. It constitutes the entire action of the will of God as it is outworked. This includes both the fruits of ministry as well as of character.

This also gives point to one of Jesus' sayings, 'As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me.' We can see that to be in the Son is to be in the Father. We can also see that the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit is always necessary that our experience of the Father and the Son be kept alive, and our action in line with the divine will.

THE HARMONIOUS ORDER OF THE BODY

One thing we will need to remember is that the Son will not work contrary to the way in which he has worked. Whilst it is true he will not again be crucified, nor again rise from the dead, it is nevertheless true that he has gone

to the Cross and has risen from the dead. He is Christ crucified, Christ risen and Christ ascended. When he works it will be work that is consistent with what he has done and who he is. Pointing to what he has done he said, 'Greater works that these will [you] do.'

He meant that his church would not be limited even to what he had done. It would certainly not do less than he had done. He was obedient to the Father, and would only do the Father's will. He was sensitive to every leading of the Father as the Spirit showed him. Likewise his church must be sensitive to the plan of God. As the Son he was a man of prayer. So the church will be a praying body. He has healed men of their sicknesses, freed them of their burdens, loosed them from their sins. Likewise the church will liberate. He gave new life, new hope, new power. In this manner, too, the church shall operate.

Can we not see the wonder of it all? The Father is the One who at creation brought the whole universe into being with His glorious plan for His sons and His family. With Him was the Son glorying in the ministry of mediating the Creation, and with these two, the Holy Spirit, the great Lord and Giver of life, causing his creative powers to surge through the whole action.

These Three, as One, had also planned redemption long before the Fall. The mystery of the Cross and the might of the Resurrection and the majesty of the Ascension, were their order of action to raise men from death into the life of sonship. And between Pentecost—the birth of the church—and the final restoration of all things, this great God planned the living Body of Christ, the church. Its unity is a unique miracle in the order of living things. One Spirit working its unity, one Lord commanding it,

and one Father operating over, in and through it in His Fatherhood.

Thus when we come to the ministry of the church—or, as we say, the shared Sonship—we find no arbitrary body of people, no conglomerate collection of individuals, no aggregate of saved people, but the very Body of Christ, harmoniously ordered by the Spirit, having gifts and ministries and operations. Each of them and all of them are devised with powerful action in mind.

THE HARMONIOUS, EFFECTIVE WORKING OF THE BODY

The church must be the people of God, equipped and led by the Holy Spirit, working out the ministry of the Son in history until the day of the final renewal when the sons of God will be fully manifested. How, without the gifts, without the ministries, and without the operations, can this Body truly be Christ in the world? Without the Spirit, how can his acts be executed, his love shown and experienced? Where, apart from the Spirit, is the power to bring men into the love of Christ and the embrace of the Father? Where, in man's powers, is there power to convict and convert? What natural gifts does man have to heal and to cleanse and to liberate from the cruel shackles of sin?

Where, how—apart from the Spirit of Christ—can men worship and adore and serve the Father? Who shall teach, prepare and equip us for that day when the entire universe shall break into adoration to the Father and the Son and the Spirit?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

***THE SONS,
THE SUFFERING,
AND THE CLIMAX***

In almost every reference to sonship there is a forward looking to the end-time. This end-time we call the *eschaton*, and so we say the sonship is eschatological. Without doubt this is the plan of God described in Ephesians 1:3–6. In this passage we see that God planned before the foundation of the world that His elect people should be holy and blameless before Him. They are not to be a people apart from Him, but in His presence. Hence in Revelation 21:1–4 it is written, ‘Behold the dwelling of God is with men. *He will dwell with them*, and they shall be his people’. This is in conformity with many Old Testament prophecies, particularly that of Ezekiel 37:24–28. We see, then, that God’s people will be holy as God is holy. This reminds us of Peter’s admonition to be holy as is the Father (I Pet.1:14–17). It also reminds us of John’s statement in I John 3:3, that everyone who

knows he is going to be like the Son purifies himself even as he the Son is pure.

Secondly, the Ephesian passage tells us that God’s elect will all be sons. This refers to the ultimate when all things will have been filled by Christ, and so, summed up in him. That sonship, then, will be one of maturity. This is also taught in Romans 8:14–30. The whole passage should be looked upon as pertaining to sonship. Let us look at it in some detail.

In Romans 8:14 Paul says that obedience in following the leading of the Spirit is a mark of sonship. This life in the Spirit, as against life in the flesh, is marked by freedom as against slavery. It is marked by the knowledge and experience of sonship, sonship being in contrast to slavery. The term ‘adoption’ is used but must not be thought of solely in modern ideas of sonship. It refers, rather, to someone who has come to maturity. This is made clear in Galatians 4:1–6 where Paul contrasts slavery of minors under the law with freedom of mature sons under grace and the Gospel. A mature son is not under bondage, but experiences the freedom of God.

Paul tells us (Rom. 8:15–16) that we involuntarily cry ‘Father!’ At this point he says the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. Being the children carries with it the great privilege of inheritance. This theme of inheritance is a large enough subject on its own. It does mean, however, that the promise given to Abraham that his children should inherit the world (Rom. 4:13; Gen. 12:1–8), now comes to all men of faith. These will inherit the earth, the Kingdom of God, and even God Himself, when this term ‘heirs of God’ is rightly understood.

However, it is at this point that Paul inserts the condition of sonship as being suffering. This we discuss below in order not to break the continuity of his argument. Thus, those who suffer will one day participate in the ‘manifestation of the sons of God’. It is this we will examine now.

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SONS OF GOD

In Romans 8:18 Paul contrasts the suffering the sons now experience with the glory that shall be revealed to them, or as some translations have it, ‘in them’. The glory, of course, makes the suffering, by comparison, almost inconsequential. This glory is not simply a glory which shall be *seen* by the sons, but in fact experienced. In the initial creation men were invested with great glory. The Fall altered that. Psalm 8:5 says, ‘Thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honour’. Romans 3:23 says, ‘All have sinned and come short of the glory of God’. John says, ‘It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him.’ That is, the sons shall have the likeness of the very Son of God himself. At this moment, before that day, we can only conjecture what the Son is like.

This glory will be shown, or ‘unveiled’ as the word has it. The wonder of lost sinners becoming glorious in the likeness of the Eternal Son is something our spirits cannot grasp. They are reduced to a helpless wonder and a tearful adoration and gratitude. Be that as it may, there is much dependent upon the glorification of the sons. Let

us remember, too, that this glorification was planned prior to creation. Paul speaks of a wisdom relating to it. He says, ‘We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification’ (I Cor. 2:6).

What is dependent on the glorification of the sons? Paul answers, in effect, ‘The creation, which God pronounced “very good”, has, because of man’s sin, been subjected to futility.’ That is, although it continues to operate and communicate the glory of God, it cannot do this fully, for it itself is in the throes of corruption. Creation knows the corruption that gives the *impermanency*. It decays, and we humans do not know of what its true glory is constituted. In that day we will. Meanwhile the creation knows its release into non-decay and full expression, is dependent upon man’s release from the decay of death and the conflict with sin. Hence creation waits with eager longing. It has been subjected to its present ‘emptiness’ or ‘futility’ in the true hope that one day it will all end.

Our absorption in this truth may prevent us from seeing what the sons will be. Romans 8:28–30 tells us that all the processes through which the sons of God pass are working together for good. That *good* will be the final conforming of them to the image of the very Son himself, that he may be the first-born among many (such) brethren. This glorious truth thrills us. We shall be like him! It does not mean simply in visible appearance, although that may well be so, but it means primarily in character! The fruit of the Spirit will now be our permanent state of character. Love will constitute our new being. Holiness will be one of the great issues of the new

life, amongst the others of righteousness, goodness and truth.

Thus we see that God's plan from before time has succeeded. Satan has sought to destroy it, and the world system with its fleshly principles has sought to prevent its completion, but God has purposed it and brought it to pass. 'He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ.' This is the main point. This ultimate sonship could not have been realized outside of Christ Jesus, the true Son.

We also see in Romans 8:14–30 that in the present process the Holy Spirit is present, and without him, too, the sonship could not be fulfilled.

THE GLORIOUS LIBERTY OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD

Paul contrasts the 'bondage of corruption' with 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'. It must mean that the non-rational creation will never again decay. By the same token it must mean that the sons of God will not be subject to death and decay. This is the thought behind Paul's reasoning in I Corinthians 15. There he speaks of man's body sown in corruption but raised in incorruption. 'The mortal,' he says, 'shall put on immortality. Then death and the grave will be conquered forever.' He says, 'Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.' We can only cry that this is incredibly beautiful.

In practice it means that the fear of death is banished forever. With the sonship—that is, the redemption of the

body—all temptation will cease. The body will not be subject to fleshly lusts and passions. Whilst we know little of the precise nature of that body, we know it will be substantial, although with properties that our unglorified bodies do not know. It will be unspeakably wonderful not to be set about with temptation. Without this impediment man will be free to fulfil whatever a son's worship and service constitutes. And with man the entire creation will be able to fully serve.

There are pictures, first of the purging of the universe, and then of its new nature. These can be viewed in such Scriptures as Matthew 19:28; II Peter 3:10–13; Revelation 21:1; 22:5; Isaiah 11:1–9; 65:17–25; 66:22–23. Not all students of Scripture agree that everyone of these refer to the ultimate state of the universe, but in them at least the principle of total renewal and man's freedom can be seen.

THE PROCESS OF MATURING AS SONS

We have seen that the children of God are children who live and grow in love. They live and grow in holiness. They are the children of obedience—they operate in the power of the Spirit as he causes the life of the Son and plan of God to be worked out through them. They constitute the fellowship, the basis of which is the unity of the Spirit. In all these things the fruit of the Spirit is evidenced in their lives. As they are led by the Spirit they walk in love. They are aided in prayer and worship by the Spirit. Hence in all things they mature.

There is, however, one thing which is necessary for the maturing of the children of God. In Romans 8:17 Paul

says, 'If [the sons are] children, then [also] heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.' No son reaches glorification without involvement in the suffering of Christ.

This is made fairly clear from a number of Scriptures. Paul says, 'If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.' 'All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.' 'It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.' He speaks about them suffering for the Kingdom of heaven's sake, and he talks about them sharing in the sufferings of Christ. He also talks about 'sufferings for you', i.e. his readers at Colossae, and again his readers at Galatia—'why do I yet suffer persecution?' His sufferings are the crown and glory of the Ephesians, and he speaks of '[completing] what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.'

Peter's first Letter is given over almost completely to the theme of suffering, obviously because men and women Christians of his time were suffering. For some the 'fiery trial' had come upon them, and Peter is teaching them how to act in the midst of suffering. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles outlines their sufferings and their reactions. In Acts 5:41 they count it all joy that they are permitted to suffer for his name. Paul is told personally by Christ that he must suffer many things for his name's sake. Paul and Silas sing hymns at midnight after a cruel lashing whilst in prison. Paul has at least two lists which tell the severity of his suffering. The Book of Revelation is a vivid account of the sufferings of the prophets of

the people of God and of the martyrs.

Someone has said that two-thirds of the New Testament is given over, in one way or another, to the fact of suffering. Teaching concerning it, the action of suffering itself, and the purpose of suffering, all command the attention of its readers. It is interesting to notice that the subject of suffering is rarely taken up in churches or study groups, and is hastily passed over when it is taught. Most seem to recognize that suffering is inherent in Christian faith. To them that is a problem. Observation tells us that where men and women suffer there is a reality about the Gospel which is often lacking in countries of comfort and affluence. More often than not spiritual revival is found in those world areas where suffering is or has been present.

That maturity cannot come apart from suffering is seen in the case of the Son himself. In Hebrews 2:10 we read, 'For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering'. The word 'perfect' does not imply previous imperfection, but simply that lack of fullness which comes only through experience. The writer adds, 'Although he was Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.' Nor was the Son's approach to this grim and rigid, but rather joyous, for the same writer says, 'who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.'

When, then, in II Corinthians 3:18 we read, 'And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of

glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit', we must understand this in the light of suffering. Philippians 3:10 speaks about knowing Christ, amongst other things, 'in the fellowship of his sufferings'. The more we see him, the more we are one with him, and so share in his sufferings. Hence II Corinthians chapter 4 (following on the heels of II Cor. 3:18!) gives an account of the suffering of Paul, including its value, and even, necessity. In verse 17 Paul says, 'This slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.'

These last words are powerful, describing the moral and spiritual glory which man will know, yet not without suffering. All of this is reasonable. Suffering is not the *cost* of glory, but the *way* of glory. We only know his love by suffering. How, then, can we love apart from suffering? Suffering, it seems, is of the very essence of love; at least this is so in a fallen world. Whilst we can nominate suffering as 'with' and 'for' and 'because of' certain things and persons, yet it is inescapable. It is a maxim that he who attempts to escape suffering will remain immature. Indeed it is a curious fact that he will have another kind of misery which will be unproductive of maturity or glory.

We might as well add that suffering is not accidental. Persecution does not arise from a mistake on man's part. The Cross is an offence to him because of his pride, personal, religious or otherwise. The Cross is the most humiliating thing of all history. To take up your cross is simply to identify with its perennial scandal. At the same time its demands cut across things fleshly and evil, and offend the ego-seeking spirit of man. Again, suffering is

not a morbid element in Christian experience. The true believer is neither an ascetic nor a neurotic. To be a son of God requires conformity in every area to the Son himself. This means one must endure hardness, and grow strong and firm. How else could it be if one were indwelt by the Son?

THE SONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

The vertical relationship of sons with the Father demands a horizontal relationship with the brethren. The Son will prove, in the day of ultimate liberation and maturity, to be the first born among many brethren. This presupposes a great family. 'Such as no man can number', said the Book of the Revelation. Whilst we cannot here deal with the subject of the people of God or the covenant whereby they are a family (cf. Mal. 2:10), yet we know that in the new age there will be no weeping or sorrow, pain or death. All of these tensions will have been relieved (Rev. 21:1-5).

By the same token love will be full-orbed. Man will rejoice in complete relationships with God, with himself, with the family and with creation. In all this his sonship will have bloomed into fullness. So we may remark here that full maturity will not just fall upon man in 'that day', but he will have had experience and training previously, in this world, and this age.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE FATHER OF GLORY

In Ephesians 1:17 there is a phrase ‘the Father of glory’. It can mean ‘the glorious Father’, or it can mean ‘the founder or fountain of glory’. In the context of the first chapter of Ephesians it would appear to mean something like this: God is the God of glory. He has planned before the foundation of the world to have His glory revealed. It will be revealed through His sons. They will be to the praise of the glory of His grace. They will be to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:5–6, 12–14). All glory that will be, will be shown to be His. Its revelation will show Him to be the Father of glory.

THE NATURE OF GLORY

God’s glory is His very being. We speak of His attributes such as holiness, righteousness, truth, goodness and love. Yet these attributes—which incidentally form one whole—are operative or actional elements, known by the experience of them. They are not, as such, abstract. Therefore we

can say that God’s glory is His being in its essential action.

Creation is the manifestation of His glory. Psalm 19:1 says that the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork. Romans 1:19 and following verses show the same principle.

The visible created things show the very nature of God, His eternal power and deity. Isaiah 6:3 says, ‘the whole earth is full of his glory’ or as some translators have it, ‘the whole earth is the fullness of his glory’. Creation, then, is the manifestation of His glory. This glory is not just the glory of His handiwork, but somewhat is the living expression of it.

Man, also, is the manifestation of his glory. ‘Man is the image and glory of God’ (see I Cor. 11:7; Gen. 1:26; Psa. 8:3ff.; and Eccles. 7:29). Man is not the glory of God any more than is the creation. Yet both man and the creation reflect the glory of God. The Son alone is the actual glory of God, as we see in Hebrews 1:3. In his incarnation he is ‘the visible expression of the invisible God’ (Col. 1:15f.).

Both creation and man must operate in the power and nature of God, or they will not reflect that image. We have seen that both man and nature groan because they do not, as yet, fully operate in the freedom of God. The day is coming when they will, fully. Meanwhile, to some degree the glory must be obscured.

THE SUPPRESSION OF GLORY

Man was, as we have seen, created to be a son. As such he should have reflected the glory of God. God’s glory is

not simply light and radiance. These are more symbols of it, than the glory itself. Glory has the idea of substance, reality, authority and power. In action it is God's holiness, goodness, truth, righteousness and love working out in God's plan within His universe.

In Romans 1:18–32 Paul says something like the following, 'God showed Himself in and by His creation, from the very inception of the world. Man, however, refused to give the glory to God. He rebelled against it. In order to rebel he could not simply ignore the glory. As glory is God's right and personal acts, so man had to do contrary acts in order to suppress it. God then gave man up to his acts, for man had sinned and come short of his glory. Man's suffering is that God does not let him live according to the glory, but in fact in the opposite way. Man, who has been structured for glory, lives in the misery of an inglorious situation.'

GOD'S PLAN FOR GLORY

God is the Father of glory. There is one way in which His glory as Father can be shown, and in fact, only one way. It is by the family which is His. He has planned that the age will come to its climax in the full gathering, and being, of His family. His glory will be shown quantitatively by the numerical aggregation of His sons. There will be a multitude such as no man can number out of every nation and people and kindred and tribe and tongue. Qualitatively, His glory as Father will be shown by the nature and quality of each son.

Since each son will be exactly in the likeness of His

own Son, then His glory as Father will be both perfect and absolute. His Son is the very expression of Him, and the brightness of His glory. Likewise will the sons be. This is what is meant by (a) '[He has] called us to his own glory and excellence' (II Pet. 1:3), and (b) 'his glorious inheritance in the saints' (Eph. 1:18).

God's Fatherhood, then, will be shown by His family. Yet, at the same time, the total creation which is now hindered in expressing His glory, will also be in absolute perfection. Thus God, as Creator and Father, will be shown in all His glory. It is best to say that as Father-Creator He will be seen in His glory. However, when we have said this we have not said all.

GRACE AND THE GLORY

In Ephesians 1:3–14 we see the following argument: Before the world God planned to have His elect before Him, each holy and blameless. He predestined them to be His sons, to the praise of the glory of His grace. This grace has been shown in Christ. In fact He planned that they should be only His sons in Christ—no other way. They were not to be, in the ultimate, sons by creation, as they were to be sons by redemption. Both Jew and Gentile, in Christ, were to be to the praise of His glory.

To be to the praise of His glory could presumably have been so had man not fallen, and the creation not been subjected to futility. Yet this would not have been the same as being to the praise and glory of His grace. When it is seen that before the foundation of the world God planned this 'grace-thing', then we see that grace is an

essential part of His glory. It is His glory that He redeems man, and then lifts them to sonship. If this is so, then man cannot be fully to the praise of His glory unless first he is to the praise of the glory of His grace.

This is surely borne out in John 1:14, 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father'. The revelation of God's Fatherhood by the Son is his being 'full of grace and truth'. We cannot escape the fact that God's glory includes grace and truth. This is most important for it means that God's glory is not fully shown apart from grace and truth. Hence John can add (1:16), 'from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.' The full glory has, so to speak, its endless supplies of grace.

We are then led to an important truth. Before the foundation of the world God planned that His grace and truth should be revealed in His redemptive and restorative acts, and that they should be revealed by His Son, the incarnate Christ Jesus.

HISTORY OF THE GLORY

We cannot here trace the glory of God. The revelation of His glory includes, as well as demands, the creation, the Fall, the judgement of the Flood and then the revelation of God by covenant. Hence Stephen says, 'The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham' (Acts 7:2). The covenant has no significance apart from man's creational and then fallen state, where he is a necessary applicant for grace, of which covenant is the expression and medium.

Israel knew the glory. To Israel belonged the glory, Paul said in Romans 9:4, and added, 'and the sonship . . .' The glory appeared to Moses in the desert, came in the pillar of cloud and of fire, filled the tabernacle, the temple, and whilst departing temporarily at the Exile, reappeared in the temple of the restoration. Its great appearing, however, was in Jesus Christ. He 'tabernacled' amongst men (John 1:14) and in this tabernacle men saw the glory.

The glory of God, Paul shows us, is 'in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever' (Eph. 3:21). As he showed his glory in his person and ministry (see John 2:11; 11:40; 12:27, 28; 13:31, 32; cf. John 17:1-5), so he also ascended in glory (Acts 1:9; Luke 24:26), and will return in glory (Acts 1:11; Luke 21:27). Note, however, that it is all 'the glory of [the] Father' (Mark 8:38), for such is to be the climax of history—the revelation of the glory of the Father (Phil. 2:11; I Cor. 15:24). As we have said, the full appearance of His total family before Him will authenticate the term 'The Father of glory'.

THE REVELATION OF THE GLORY

We have said that His glory is revealed in creation, and in particular the creation of man. Yet in fact the full revelation of His glory is in His Son, and in particular his incarnation, life and ministry, all of which are with a view to grace—to the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension. Christ shows the Father's glory by what he is and does. In some cases we are told that Christ showed forth his

(own) glory (John 2:11), and in other cases that he was glorified (e.g. the Transfiguration). However, his great desire was to show the glory of the Father, which he did.

This revelation of glory needs to be seen particularly. In John 11:40 Jesus told Martha that the raising of Lazarus would be the revelation of the glory of the Father. In 12:28 he asks the Father to glorify His name. The Father says He has, already through Christ, glorified it. He adds that He will yet further glorify it. Hence, in John 13:31, 32, when the die is cast by Judas's going to betray him, he says, 'Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.'

In John 17:1–5 the Son speaks with his Father. The essence of what he says is this: 'The hour of the cross has come. This is the hour of glory. Father, I cannot glorify you, unless you give to me your (Father's) glory. Then I will glorify you—as Father. Up to this point *I have glorified you by doing all that you have given me to do*. This is the last, the climactic thing to do, but *without your glory I cannot glorify you*.' This is a beautiful and significant revelation—the Son did nothing on the Cross but by the Father's aid, and what he did was of the Father. This means that the Cross was a revelation of the Fatherhood glory. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. He (the Father) made him (Christ) to be sin for us. God has set him forth to be a propitiation. This must not be hastily passed over. It means, in accordance with Ephesians 1:3–7 and other passages, that the Father had planned before the world, to reveal His Fatherly grace and love in and by the Cross. Thus the

cross is His glory, His Fatherly glory. Amazing grace! That is why Christ said, 'the Father loves me, because I lay down my life.' It also explains the passage of Hebrews 2:9–10:

we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, *in bringing many sons into glory* should make the pioneer ['trail-blazer'] of their salvation perfect through suffering.

THE GLORY, THE GRACE, AND THE SONSHIP

God's glory is not seen apart from His grace and truth. This grace and truth cannot be expressed apart from the Son in his incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension. The Father's glory is shown forth in His grace—grace for His sons. Hence we are to the praise of the glory of His grace, and so, to the praise of His (perfect) glory. In our studies, however, we have seen that the Father's Fatherhood is shown by the Son in his obedience. He does nothing but what the Father tells him (John 14:10). Even when he works through his people, it is still for the Father's glory, for 'Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the son' (John 14:13).

Likewise the sons express the glory of the Father, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven'. This is the principle: As the Son had the light of the

Father, so do the sons. When it shines, by their works, the Father's glory is shown. Note, however, that to be to the praise of the glory of His grace not only involves being the object or recipient of grace, but also the one who both expresses and conveys grace.

Having been 'graced' we are now gracious, graceful, and grace giving. These are the 'works' which we do. Grace and truth are our occupation. The liberty of grace should emanate from us, and mostly in an unconscious manner. It emanates from God to us, and through us to others. It re-emanates from us to God, for we are to the praise of the glory of His grace.

We understand now what the phrase 'the Father of glory' means. It means His glory is shown to and through us in Christ. It means, in the ultimate, that we have become like Him. God has now succeeded in His plan. He has by His love captured rebels, those who once opposed His glory, and has made them willing sons and daughters and the practical exponents of His glorious grace, His gracious glory, His total glory!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

MAN A SON OF GOD BY CREATION

On page 35 we have said that God created man to be a son, but that through the Fall he forfeited this sonship. This sonship is regained, or given back to man, through redemption. Man through Christ and the Spirit becomes a son of God much in the same way as the prodigal son, having virtually lost his sonship, regains it through the father's forgiveness and acceptance. In light of Luke 15 the returning son represents a sinner who repents and causes joy in heaven.

This position is by no means accepted by all. For example, the position taken by J. I. Packer in his book *Knowing God* (p. 223) is, 'a Christian is one who has God for his Father. But cannot this be said of every man, Christian or not? Emphatically no! The idea that all men are children of God is not found in the Bible anywhere'.

On what grounds, then, can we claim that man was created as a son?

Luke 3:38 says, 'Adam [was] the son of God'. That is clear enough, although the statement must be seen in its context as part of a genealogy. At the very least it refers to origination. Likewise Paul's quoting of the Greek poet Cleanthes in his 'Hymn of Joy'—'we are indeed his offspring' (Acts 17:28–29). The word 'offspring' refers at least to origination, and all agree that God has created man. However, the term 'offspring' is used in the New Testament for the natural seed (see Rev. 22:16 where Jesus is the 'offspring' of David). The question is, 'Can God create or originate, exclusively of His essential being as Father?' That He is essentially Father is shown by the fact that the Son ever was, and so God ever was Father.

Whilst it is true that anything less than man cannot be said to be an 'offspring', yet because man is made in the image and likeness of God, his origination cannot be mere origination. It must relate to the *kind* of Creator who originates, that is, the Father. This makes the statement, 'Adam [was] the son of God', an intelligible statement.

Again, when Paul's argument in Acts 17:22–31 is examined, it can be seen that Paul is speaking against idolatry for it is making God—the Unknown God—in forms which are not paternal. Man, being filial, will have enough idea of fatherhood to know—should he think about it—that his idolatrous forms are not in conformity with paternity. Of this, says Paul, man must repent.

When we advert to creation and its mode we are reminded that God is Father prior to creation. We see also that before creation He plans the sonship of man (Eph. 1:3f.). If he is not created structurally as a son, then the

sonship of grace which comes to him through salvation is something alien to his original creation. You may modify this by saying the potential for sonship is put into him, but then what does that mean? It also implies that man was not totally man when created, or if he were then the sonship of grace is something added over and above his norm of created humanity.

I believe it can be shown that all men of faith are the children of God. Grace does not begin in the New Testament. Isaac is said to be a child born of the Spirit (Gal. 4:29). By new birth one becomes a child of God, and in the New Testament language this means new birth, as seen in John 3:1–14. Abraham is said to be a justified man on the basis of Genesis 15:6, a point Paul is happy to use in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6. All men of faith are the children of Abraham irrespective of the dispensation or race in which they live (Gal. 3:6–9, 29). Paul, in Galatians 3:26, states a principle, 'for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith.' We note the qualification 'in Christ Jesus'. Yet Abraham himself saw Christ's day and rejoiced in it (John 8:56). He, then, was surely a son of God. Indeed it is not going too far on this principle to say that in Israel they were called such. In Galatians 3:29 Paul says, 'if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.' Circuitous as the argument is, it seems reasonable to say that if being a son of God makes you Abraham's offspring, then the reverse is also true—you are a son of God because a child of Abraham.

On this reckoning, from Abraham onwards there have been sons of God. What then of the time prior to Abraham? Jesus nominates Abel as the first prophet, one

of these who have been ‘since the world began’ or ‘from of old’ (cf. Luke 11:50–51; 1:70; Acts 3:21; cf. Rev. 10:7). Surely the prophets are included amongst the sons of God.

Equally the statement of Romans 8:14 should be considered, ‘as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are sons of God’. It would be possible to show that in the Old Testament many were led by the Spirit of God, e.g. Joseph (Gen. 41:38), Moses (Num. 11:17), Joshua (Num. 27:18), and the prophets (I Pet. 1:10f.). Whilst not New Testament saints and even lacking much, yet they are surely sons of God, albeit New Testament saints had a greater revelation.

When we come to Israel we find (a) that Israel is called ‘the son of God’ (Rom. 9:4; Exod. 4:22; Hosea 11:1; Deut. 32:6, 18), and (b) that the children of Israel can be called the sons or children of God, in a personal sense, although this is often mingled with the corporate sense of all Israel constituting one son. So see Deuteronomy 14:1–2; 8:5; Isaiah 1:2; 45:9–10; 64:8; 63:16; Jeremiah chapter 3; 31:9, 20; cf. Psalm 103:13.

We may adduce a principle then: From Abel (the son of Adam) onwards there existed those who could be called sons of God. Even if we agree—and we do—that this sonship is of grace, how can it be that these are sons when it is not *natural*, that is, by creation, for men and women to be sons? Is it not better to say that by creation it is natural for men and women to be sons, indeed unnatural for them not to be, and that sonship by grace is simply restoring to man that relationship with the Father which he lost through the Fall? We grant, of course, that sonship by grace has a ‘bias’ over the creational sonship, for

man has truly seen the nature of God’s love, among many other special benefits.

When we come to the New Testament it is not to a new revelation that God is the Father of men, especially of Israel. This understanding was already in vogue, and well before Jesus’ birth. Intertestamental documents prove this fact. Jesus brought this fact as a *revelation*, and revealed the *mode* of God as Father, and men as sons of God. This we have discussed already. That Jews understood themselves to be sons of God is patent from the New Testament (cf. John 8:31–44, where, incidentally, being children of Abraham is equated with being children of God).

When Christ speaks to his disciples, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, he speaks of ‘the Father’. Not, we should note, just ‘my Father’ as it is on other occasions, but ‘the Father’ or ‘your Father’. That is, he is saying God is Father—whatever. In the light of this fact, his listeners should come under the discipline of the Father, pray to Him as Father, glorify Him as Father, and so on. Whilst Jesus is prepared to tell them that God is ‘your Father’, yet he also speaks of them as ‘becoming’ sons of the Father (Matt. 5:45). Though God be their Father He will not forgive them unless they forgive others. If it be said in this context that all are sons, then in the same sermon Jesus speaks of those who will not enter heaven, of some who will be cast out. In this he includes scribes and Pharisees. Technically God is also their Father, seeing they are of Israel, but of course He is not, if they are not men of faith. If in the context of Israel He can be Father, and yet not all be His sons, surely this principle can apply generally, elsewhere.

There are other indications of God's essential Fatherhood. Ephesians 3:15 says that all fatherhood (or familyhood) is derived from Him. This surely means that creational Fatherhood derives from Him. It is difficult to understand how this is so, if the only divine Fatherhood man can know is not prior to Christ's coming. We also note at this point that the Son created the worlds, and he created them *as the Son* (Heb. 1:2–3). It is not fanciful to say that creation is at once paternal (by the Father) and filial (by the Son). Also it is by the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of the Son (Gal. 4:6) and the Spirit of your Father (Matt. 10:20). If it is thoroughly Trinitarian, then these relational elements must exist as part of the normal creation.

THE SONSHIP: ISRAEL AND THE GENTILES

In Ephesians chapter 2 commencing at verse 11, Paul makes it clear that the Gentiles had been excluded from the covenants and God. He shows that it is by the Cross that the enmity is removed between them and Israel, and them and God. Now they are entered into the family (the household) of God. Now they have access, with the Jew, by one Spirit unto the Father. Note the term, 'the Father'. He is Father before they are brought into the family.

This matter of the household of God implies the sonship of those who belong to it. This household does not commence in the New Testament. Jesus speaks of it to the Jews. In John 8:33 they virtually claim to belong to this household. Jesus tells them that sin makes them *slaves* and precludes them from living as *sons* in the

household of God. The true Son, however, will make them free, and then they will abide in the household forever, that is because they will be sons and not slaves.

After this we should look at Galatians 4:1–10. Undoubtedly Jews under law represent, in Paul's argument, children who are not yet full grown and mature, who can be said to have not yet entered into the fullness of sons. In their minority they are in the house, but cannot be free within it. It could be argued from this context that Paul is saying that not only Jews, but Gentiles also before coming into full sonship, are somewhat in the nature of children. This is what he infers from verses 9–10. Perhaps verses 1–3 represent a hypothetical argument, seeing the Galatians had been in the main, Gentiles. Even so, the principle could be pressed that all were in some sense children until given sonship.

Ephesians 4:1–6 speaks of the fellowship of the Spirit, the community of God's people. In chapter 2 we see that Jew and Gentile both enter into fellowship with the family and are constituted members of the household or family of God. Hence when Paul says, 'one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all,' he must be speaking of the true family of God. What we need to ask is, 'Is this not what God created men to be? Is He not innately, essentially, Father, and is this something more than the norm of creation, or is it in fact, although achieved by grace, only the fulfilment of true creation?' If so, then it gives point to Paul's statement in I Corinthians 8:6, '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.' This is reminiscent of Colossians

1:15–17 where in the Son all things are created. The theme is repeated of the Lord and Father as creator in James 3:9 where it is said, ‘the Lord and Father . . . [and] men, who are made in the likeness of God’.

FATHERHOOD UNIVERSAL, BUT NOT UNIVERSALISTIC

We may also refer to the story of the prodigal son. Luke 15 and its three stories of lost things was intended to counter the contempt of those Jews who despised sinners and outcasts, and who criticized Jesus for spending his time with them. Jesus was simply showing that the *lost* things are precious to God. God seeks them. The son of the father is virtually no son, because he is *dead* and *lost*. Yet in another way he *is* a son. Yet he is more a son when he is received back. Saying he is not worthy to be called a son, he is re-instated as a son. Of course this parable, like any parable, is not to be pressed too far. Certainly no major doctrine should be built upon it. Yet the principle that God is Father must be the core of the story.

If it be said that it refers only to Israel, then we have the story of the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4. When she asks a question in regard to worship, Jesus says bluntly, ‘salvation is of the Jews.’ He says, ‘You do not know whom you worship. We (the Jews) do.’ That puts Samaritans out of sonship, it would seem. Yet in the next breath He is talking to this woman about ‘the Father’. ‘The Father,’ he says, ‘ever seeks such to worship him.’ By this kind of talk he includes her in the understanding of the Father. Indeed she is the very one

the Father is seeking!

So much is considered concerning the *status* of a son that often the *character* or *mode* of sonship is neglected. A key statement is that of Revelation 21:7, ‘He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son.’ In other words the true son of God is a conqueror. This, of course, can be seen as true in Jesus. Yet if we look at Genesis 1:26 and verses following we will see that Adam, amongst other things, was expected to subdue the earth and have lordship over it. In abdicating from this he abdicated the purpose for which he was created, and surely he thus abdicated his sonship. Of Jesus it is said in I Corinthians 15:28 that he will ultimately have subdued all things—truly a son. If Adam had a mandate to subdue, to overcome, then he must have had the true mode of sonship, albeit he chose to abdicate it. Surely it is reasonable then to conclude with one writer (J. Chapman, *Jesus Christ and the Present Age*, p. 39), ‘While God is the Father of all men, all men are not the children of God.’ A. H. Strong (*Systematic Theology*, p. 474) says, ‘God’s natural fatherhood is mediated by Christ, through whom all things were made, and in whom all things, even humanity, consist. We are naturally children of God, as we were *created* in Christ; we are spiritually sons of God, as we have been *created anew* in Christ Jesus’.

This conclusion immediately gives us insight into the true nature of sin. It is anything which is unfilial.

THE CHILDREN OF GOD AND THE CHILDREN OF THE DEVIL

John in his first Epistle makes a line of demarcation within humanity. He divides it into two. In chapter 3 verses 10 and following he tells us that we can distinguish between the children of God and the children of the Devil. Because he uses the term 'children' we assume that God is Father to His children, and Satan 'father' to his. The marks of the child of God are (a) *he does works of righteousness*, and (b) *he loves his brother*. The marks of the child of Satan are (a) he does not do works of righteousness, and (b) he hates his brother.

John shows simply that Cain is the paradigm for such children of the Devil, 'and [do] not be like Cain who was of the evil one . . .' In 5:19 of the same Letter he says, 'the whole world is in the power of the evil one,' and by the word 'world' (Gk. *kosmos*) he means the world of evil in which man is under Satanic domination.

In 2:15–17 he gives an expanded statement concerning the world:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever.

From John's teaching we conclude the world is not creation itself, but for some a certain view of creation, which sees it as a system whereby humanity may find its (illicit) pleasure in *things* rather than in the Creator God. The world is made a means of fulfilling or developing lusts. It demands that the person following its system or pattern must refuse to do the will of God. Those who are of the world are basically anti-God. We can then add another distinguishing mark of the child of God, i.e. (c) *he does the will of God*. Doubtless this is equal to 'doing works of righteousness'. The third distinguishing mark of the child of the Devil is that he refuses to do the will of God.

THE FAMILY OF THE DEVIL

The idea of Satan being a father of those who are evil is found elsewhere in the New Testament. In John 8:31–47 Jesus is speaking about the freedom of people who come to know the truth, and the bondage of those who do not. We have seen that normally all Jews should be seen to be sons of God. This is so in the Old Testament and is

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assumed in Jesus' statements in the Sermon on the Mount. Yet the point Paul makes is 'he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a real Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal' (Rom. 2:28–29). There were rebellious Israelites, and the term 'sons of Belial' could be applied to them. The term is about equivalent to the New Testament term 'sons of disobedience' and is often translated 'base fellows', i.e. reckless, worthless and lawless men. We need not pursue the matter of these 'men of Belial' (cf. Deut. 13:13; Judg. 19:22; 20:13; I Sam. 2:12; II Cor. 6:15), except to say that technically they are nominally included nationally in Israel who possessed 'the adoption' (Rom. 9:4).

Jesus, then, used the term 'father' for Satan, and said to those who were Jews, 'You are of your father the devil.' They had claimed they were children of Abraham, and when Jesus discounted that, they claimed God was their Father. Jesus also discounted that. His arguments in this passage of John's Gospel ought to be studied closely.

If, then, we return to John's first Epistle, we find Cain as the typical child of Satan. He hates his brother. He loathes Abel because Abel's works are righteous and his own are evil. It may also be drawn from the passage that he could not abide Abel's love of him, for if Abel were a child of God, then he must have loved Cain, his brother (cf. I John 4:20). Doubtless Cain hated Abel because this brother's life and work delineated the evil of his own. In his anger he killed Abel.

In killing Abel and then lying about the act to God,

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Cain proved himself to be a child of his unnatural father. Jesus had told the Jews that the Devil 'was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.' A characteristic of children of the Devil is, then, an inability to know, to live in, and to tell the truth.

SATAN'S FAMILY PLANNING

We have seen from Ephesians 1:3–14 that God planned His family before time. Difficult as it is for some to accept, only those who are elected will be in that family. This family is to delineate the nature of God as Father, and the glory of the same. Satan, for his part, has the overweening ambition to 'be like the Most High God' (cf. Isa. 14:12–14; Ezek. 28:17; II Thess. 2:3–4). In Revelation chapter 12 his rebellion against God is recorded, and in Genesis 3 his ploy to bring man into the same heady ambition, 'Ye shall be as gods [or, as God], knowing good and evil.'

In Ephesians 2:1–3 Paul describes those who are 'the children of disobedience'. He speaks of them being under bondage to Satan, forced to '[follow] the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work [energizes] in the sons of disobedience'. In Hebrews 2:14–15 this bondage is attributed to the fear of death (fear of judgement?) which Satan enlarges in the human spirit. Whatever the explanation may be, each man is caught into the bondage of evil, first by the sin of Adam (cf. Rom. 5:12ff.), and then by the personal sin which he commits.

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Our conclusion, then, is that there are two families, the first being of God in which love and good works are the true order, and the second being the family of Satan in which hatred, evil works, and disobedience to the will of God are the natural order.

GOD'S PLANNING AND SATAN'S

From passages such as Ephesians 1:3–14; I Corinthians 2:6–11; II Timothy 1:9–10; Romans 16:25–26; and Revelation 10:1–7 we have seen that God has not only planned His family, but has also formulated what it shall do and be. In fact this is the prophetic thrust of all Scripture. God is the God who plans, and so gives His promises prophetically, and thus sets the basis for true hope. His children live in hope along with love and faith.

We ought to be aware, then, that John's setting forth of Cain as the paradigm of a Devil's child is not naive. The acts of Cain were dynamic and evil. The acts of Abel were not those of bland obedience, but rather were dynamic in their operation. Jesus informs us that Abel was a prophet (Luke 11:51), and as such he must have prophesied and witnessed to God. Prophetically he would not only proclaim the nature of God, but also His intentions for man and history. It is Satan's implacable hatred of God which drives him to destroy the plan God has for humanity and creation. Hence the hatred. Hence the perverse works. Hence the attempt to demean man who is made in the image of God. Hence, then, the whole mind-set of evil and its stereotype life-style.

Hence, also, the unending conflict between good and

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evil. The destruction and the debasement of the children of God is the aim of Satan. In Cain's case that child of the Devil seeks to destroy the child of God—Abel—physically. In other cases the children of Belial seek to lead the people of God into idolatry (Deut. 13:13), but the basic thrust of Satan's action is to deface, demean and discredit the creation of God.

When the Son becomes incarnate he is out to preach the liberating Gospel of the Kingdom. He seeks to set the prisoners free, give sight to the blind, healing to the sick and wounded: in short he seeks to restore man to his creational glory, and to give him the peace and serenity, as also the joy, which the thief has sought to take from the human race. The thief (Satan) on the one hand comes to steal and to kill and to destroy, whereas the Son on the other hand comes to give life, i.e. not to take it, but to give it richly (John 10:10).

HISTORY, THE BATTLE OF TWO FATHERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

God has His plan for His family, and Satan his plan for his. God is determined that at the end of human history there shall be a new heaven and a new earth in which dwells only righteousness. Through history He has set about fulfilling this. He has promised (Gen. 3:15) the Seed of woman which shall arise and crush the seed of Satan underfoot. He has said that from Judah a king would come (Gen. 49:10) who would rule the nations of the earth. A repetition of this truth is seen in Psalm 2. The Gospel is for all the nations, and will result in a multitude

which is uncountable, but which glorifies the Father (Rom. 1:5; 15:18; Rev. 7:14).

Satan's plan is to oppose the purpose of God for history. His method, we have said, is to discredit, demean and debase the very humanity which God would use to glorify Himself. Hence the *image of God* is attacked by Satan. He seeks to brutalize, dehumanize and unman man. By doing this the Creator-Father will be discredited. Discrediting of God is not the only aim he has, but also the crediting of himself. Hence his compulsive drive to prove he is a father, a world-ruler and so on.

Without going into all the ramifications of Satanic ambitions we can see that they must include the falsifying (manipulation, clever rationalization) of the truth, the deceit of sin to cover evil, the use of lying to make the truth untruth, and untruth the truth, and the dynamic though perverse use of false prophecy. Satan must not only seek to create a counterpart of all that God creates, but also he must counter all things as they really are. Hence the huge system of deceit, falsity and counterfeit operations. The Book of the Revelation is a brilliant unmasking of evil and its operations, and at the same time a fine theodicy.

MAN TRULY A SON OR NOT A SON?

This brings us to the question we have raised repeatedly, namely, 'Is man a son by creation or not?' To this point we have partly answered this question by saying that man is created in the image of God, and so has affinity with

Him beyond that which any other creature has. We have called Luke 3:38 and Acts 17:28 into use for showing that man's origination was as a child of God. However, the New Testament makes it clear that without regeneration and adoption—and the two have a close connection—man is not truly a child of God. This, of course, must be accepted.

What we do know is that Abel was a child of God. This is evident from I John 3:10ff. We also know Cain was a child of Satan. We must assume, then, that all *men of faith* have the status and life of sons of God. Abel was a man of faith, amongst the roll-call of the faithful in Hebrews 11. Such gave signs of life, viz. obedience, works of righteousness, and love to the brethren. Isaac, we saw, was 'born of the free woman [Sarah]' and also 'born of the Spirit'. This can mean no less than the fact that all men of faith have experienced regeneration. This truth is amply shown in Psalm 51 when David prays, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.'

We have also seen that there is an equation worked out in Galatians chapter 3. It goes something like this: Men of faith are the sons of Abraham (v. 7). Abraham's true children are sons of God (vv. 26 and 29). If we add to this that Isaac was born of the Spirit, and those born of the Spirit are sons of God (John 1:11–13; I John 3:9–10), then Isaac is the paradigm for the child of God, the child of faith. Whilst it is true that the New Testament speaks of faith in Christ as essential for true sonship (Gal. 3:26), yet since Abraham saw Christ's day and was glad of it, there must be faith in Christ in the Old Testament at least in unconscious principle if not in informed faith. Nor can

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we say with any dogmatism that there was not informed faith. Revelation 19:10 tells us that all prophecy was 'the testimony of Jesus'.

We take it, then, that *re-generation* is the renewal of *original* generation, i.e. sonship. The *adoption* was known in Israel, for Israel was God's son, and Israelites (where there was faith and obedience) were personally sons of God (Deut. 14:1). This *adoption*, which is always of grace, was widened out to embrace the Samaritans and the Gentiles (Acts 1:8; Eph. 2:14-18). We take it, then, that what Satan was about was to take men and women from actual sonship with God and bring them into actual sonship with him. Whilst undoubtedly in Adam and his sin all mankind forfeited sonship, yet the sonship was there prior to the forfeiting.

This, then, would mean that sonship through Christ (Eph. 1:4-7; Gal. 3:26) was partly a restoration to creational sonship, and then a grace-advance upon it. The ultimate glorification of man in full sonship was what God had intended before creation, and so before the Fall. Man is only fully man (in the sense of being matured and completed) when he is glorified, and Adam certainly was not in such a state of glorification, however much he may have been the image and glory of God.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE FATHER IN THE FAMILY

Now we can see how the Father triumphed in the Son. The god of this world has sought to blind the eyes of men so that they do not see the glory of the Gospel and the

THE CHILDREN OF GOD AND THE CHILDREN OF THE DEVIL

glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Even so, God has sent His Son to show His glory as Father, and the Spirit to reveal both the Son and the Father. Thus men come to the Father through the Son, by virtue of the atoning death and justifying resurrection (II Cor. 4:4-6; John 14:6; Rom. 4:25).

As we have seen in part, the great experience of regenerating grace acts as the motivating force for mankind to join God in the pursuit of His Fatherhood. This is to bring about the obedience of faith of the nations, and to usher the peoples of the world into the Kingdom of God, thus making them part of the true people of God. This in turn involves their participation in the ongoing plan of God, or as we have said, 'operational sonship', until the powers of darkness are subdued and the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Messiah, and He shall reign forever. Whatever inklings Satan had had of such a plan we do not rightly know, but any inkling of this nature would send Satan into paroxysms of frenetic endeavour to neutralize the operation. This he cannot do. One part of him knows his time is short, and another lies in the horrible darkness of illusion, deceit and self-deception. Also his anger is beyond computing. He is driven by it to desperate straits, but the outcome of it all for him will be wholly abortive.

CONCLUSION REGARDING THE TWO FAMILIES

We see, then, that the true Father justifies His creation and His history, whilst the ultimate result of the

millenniums of evil is *absolutely nothing!* Evil at the end of time will have nothing to show for its vast network of intelligence and action. If it can be said to produce anything, then that will be combustible, burning in the great lake of judgement. Nothing of it will remain as reality.

As for the family of God, *everything that has been done in love will remain forever.* Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. It builds up the body in love. Its works will be tried as by fire and will wholly remain. The Father of glory will shine in His glory as Father in the presence and person of His Son, and of the Spirit of Himself and His Son, whilst the children of God, each in the full image and glory of His Son, will shine as stars in the firmament, outbidding all creatures in glory, as in character and obedience.

Then the glory of the Father will be evident in the quality and quantity of His true children, the children of faith from Abel to the end!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THE DOCTRINE OF GOD'S FATHERHOOD

A body of theology which we draw from Scripture may lead us to certain conclusions regarding the person and nature of God as Father, as Son and as Holy Spirit. Fatherhood does not exist without Sonship, and the Holy Spirit, as we have seen, is the Spirit of the Father and also the Spirit of the Son, and this at one and the same time. What, then, are the practical implications which issue from the warm social unity of the Triune God? What does Fatherhood mean for us? What are the ways and manner in which it works out in our human living, and what also does it mean for the whole creation?

MAN AND THE FATHER-LOVE OF GOD

John says, 'Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God!'

He adds, 'and so we are!' (I John 3:1-3). The verse is not saying that it is God's love that He calls us children of God. This of course is true, but paraphrased he is saying, 'Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us *so that* we may be called the children of God.' In other words we could not be called the children of God without the 'manner of love', i.e. the work of the Cross and Resurrection (cf. Rom. 5:5-10; I John 4:9-10). In other words there is no sonship of man apart from the Cross. John 11:51-52 states that Jesus was not to die for the nation (of Israel) only 'but that all the children of God, scattered abroad, would be gathered together into one [family]'. Likewise, Ephesians 2:11-22 describes the alienation of the Gentiles from the family of God, and through the Cross, the inclusion of them in the true family (people) of God.

John's statement about the love of the Cross also related to *calling*—'That we should be called the children of God.' This is the effective calling of God. Unless we are called we may not, and indeed will not, come. Calling secures us in Christ, sealed as we are by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30). Thus Christian assurance comes with the doctrine of calling, and assurance relates to the doctrine of hope which itself is based on the promises of God, i.e. the nature of God. The love, then, in bringing us to sonship is personally assuring for the whole matter of our living in this world and being glorified in the next.

THE FATHER AND CREATORHOOD

Peter says, 'You can trust yourself to a faithful Creator' (I Pet. 4:19). He means God will fulfil what He has set

out to do in His plan and purpose for creation. Even though the appearances may sometimes seem to be to the contrary, God is a faithful Creator. At the same time He is not *barely* (only) Creator. Because He has ever been Father, it is with that Fatherhood He creates. Some have pointed out that the *only* knowledge man can have from God is 'his eternal power and deity' (Rom. 1:20), that is to say, the knowledge that creation brings to man. This statement is not wholly true, for *all* that God is, is revealed in these two elements, 'his eternal power and deity'. His deity is not the cold deity of theism, but the warm and rich personal Being of the God of love. Since His Son was always Son, so He was always Father. Hence He creates as Father.

God creates not only as Father. Isaiah 63:16 has it, 'You O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old [i.e. eternity]'. We must understand, then, that the Creator-Redeemer-Father is unceasingly concerned with what He creates. Of course as Father He has His right over it—'Yet, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou art our potter; we are all the work of thy hand' (Isa. 64:8). However, we can trust Him in all the creation, and this trust is fortified by His good plan and purpose for His people, and His redemptive work in His Son, as also His sanctifying and glorifying work in His Spirit. We must also recognize that creation was a Trinitarian work—paternal because of the Father, filial because of the Son, and living because of the Spirit of life and creation, the Holy Spirit.

For practical purposes we can be at peace in God's creation, even though there is much which is evil, sinful, destructive and divisive. The 'God of peace' (Rom. 15:13, 33; 16:20) is with us!

THE FATHER AND THE KINGSHIP

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus revealed the creatorial Fatherhood of God. God cares for us. Only the Gentiles become frenetic about obtaining security by their human efforts. Jesus also taught about the Kingdom and the King. The Father is King, the King is the Father. God is Fatherly King and Kingly Father. Paul Tillich has put it, 'The Lord who is not the Father is demonic; the Father who is not the Lord is sentimental.' He adds, 'Theology has erred in both directions' (*Systematic Theology*, Chicago University Press, 1971, p. 287).

The King is Father of His people, and His people are 'sons of the kingdom' (Matt. 8:12). The sovereignty of God is of immense personal comfort and strength to the children of God for they do not have to live in fear. Their universe is secure whilst He is King. The heart of the Gospel message is, 'Your God reigns' (Isa. 52:7). That is, the Gospel is the Gospel of the Kingdom. God's children are members of the Kingdom (Col. 1:13-14), and they work in the service of the Kingdom (II Thess. 1:4-5, '... the kingdom of God for which you are suffering'). In fact it is through much tribulation they enter the Kingdom in the eschaton, and yet this is the Kingdom prepared for them as sons by the Father, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom *prepared for you from the foundation of the world*'. Doubtless this links with John 14 where Jesus goes to the Father and His many mansions to prepare places for his brethren.

For the most part it is the current matter of the Kingdom which is important. The Kingdom is now.

That is, God is reigning *now*. Life is lived under His sovereignty. Hence the people of God will be persecuted by those who do not live in the Kingdom, as also by evil powers of darkness. In the Book of the Revelation they will suffer for not having the mark of the Beast, but then those having the mark of the Beast will ultimately be judged. Many of the plagues and vials of wrath come to them in their sinfulness. Whilst the people (children) of God suffer torments, they will ultimately reign with Christ, reign upon the earth and reign for ever. The Kingdom will be such that there will be no night, no darkness, no pain, no crying, no death! I Corinthians 15:24-28 shows the Son defeating every enemy by virtue of his victory of the Cross, and finally putting down death forever. Suffering we have endured for the sake of the Kingdom of the Father will appear minimal in the light of its ultimate glory!

When we know that the promise of the eschaton is what puts heart into us now, through hope, then we live as confident children of the Kingdom, and are glad to participate with the Father and the Son in the plan, as we saw previously in our chapters on operational sonship.

FATHERHOOD AND AUTHORITY

We have suggested that sonship of the Father carries with it the obligation to relate in love and obedience horizontally, i.e. to the brethren, as we relate vertically to the Father. The vexed question of history has always been authority. The fall of man has set a prejudice within him against obeying authority. Formerly we saw that the child

forms a deficient view of its own parents, especially because they represent to it the image of God. Parental authority is the first authority experienced by the child as it enters into life in this world. Hence the problems of association of authority and the image of God.

Doubtless most sociological problems stem from this early child-parent situation. Fatherhood (i.e. dual parenthood) is indispensable emotionally to each person, and any form of deprivation can bring strong negative reaction. It can intensify opposition to authority. True authority (as against authoritarianism which is 'authority for its own sake') is primarily the use of authority for the sake of others. Where reasonable authority is classified as authoritarianism and is opposed by the child, then the matter becomes more complex. Some children, of course, have a reasonable acceptance of parents, authority and fatherhood. Where this is the case they appear to have normal experience and appreciation of life.

Jesus, in his incarnation, is the paradigm for true sonship. His Sonship of the Father is the model for true human sonship. The Son works always with the Father, and does that which is pleasing to Him (John 5:17; 8:29), for the Son does only that which the Father shows him, and all that He shows him (John 5:19; 8:28). This is a rare occurrence in human relationships. In the economy of Israel the son honoured his parents, the outcome of which was that he lived long. Doubtless this means that one's health is the better for acceptance of one's parents! Behind that acceptance must be the acceptance of the Fatherhood and (so) Kingship of God.

Authority, of course, is not confined to parental oversight. The authorities within the world are ordained

of God for their function and purpose (Rom. 13:1ff.). Hence acceptance of human fatherhood parallels acceptance of divine Fatherhood and removes substantially the bias against authorities, however much they may fail in fulfilling the mandates given to them. It is not the *persons* who hold authority who are to be honoured, so much as the office they hold.

We can see, then, that the doctrine of heavenly Fatherhood is essential to true human living, and a society that lives in well-being. Just as we need have no fear of the creation because true Creatorhood insists that there is nothing which is *essentially* evil in it, so Fatherhood insists that there is nothing *essentially* evil in human fatherhood, and nothing innately evil in the principle of authority. It is not that evil is not present and operative both in creation and parenthood, for we know in practice it is often present, but this evil is not a part of the created order. It is an intrusion into the essentially true order, a thing parasitic upon it, and so to be resisted. Authority is *for* man, not against him. The evil that is against him is not of God. God resists the evil, and breaks its power through the death and resurrection of His Son. Ultimately He will judge it and destroy it forever. Then, of course, we will recognize creation in its true character, i.e. 'very good'.

THE FATHER AND ALL THINGS FAMILIAL

Over all we have seen that God is Father, the Word is the Son, the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, so that we may say the internal relationships of the Triune

God are familial in nature. Creation is the home for family. Originally pure, evil has brought defilement, but the work of atonement has purged it principally, and in the eschaton it will have its ultimate purging and be eternally pure. In the new heavens and the new earth man will live as the people of God under the Father-King and the Son-King. Man will reign upon the earth, and his rule under God will be forever.

This means, then, that all things in creation are familial. The implications of this truth are dynamic ones. We have seen, for example, that man does not have, so to speak, an individualistic sonship, separate and autonomous in itself, for 'the way of a man is not in himself' (Jer. 10:23). Rather, man lives in the shared Sonship of the Son. This is the source of the personal sonship of each believer. In Galatians 3:26–29 we read:

for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

This means, then, that in putting on Christ we put on his Sonship and we are 'all one' in that Sonship, i.e. we have essential unity.

Thus the implication for us in current living is that hope of the ultimate is confirmed in present experience. We have already tasted what will be. We are not without rich evidence and proof of the future (Rom. 5:5; 8:22–25). The hope we hold is the power for present, true familial relationships. Within the family of Satan there is

no hope to mend broken relationships, heal hurts and dissolve personal enmities. Hostility is an integral part of that family. In the Family of God we can know healing—if we will. If we may speak of working out a therapy of healing, then it may be worked out on the basis of the true Family. Man today may know healing within the Family. The gifts of forgiveness and justification ensure this. Whilst all healing, and all reconciliation is in the realm of faith and not in the realm of sight, nevertheless it is a present possibility. The healing may be contested, but it is obligatory upon us, and possible for us.

THE FATHER AND THINGS WHICH ARE VOCATIONAL

The mandate God gave to man at creation is as much intended for today as it was for that yesterday. The Fall in no way cancelled the creational command as we see from Genesis 9:1–9. Man is still bidden to be fruitful, multiply, fill up the earth and subdue it. In other words the vocation of each person is present within this mandate. Each has only to discover it. For the Christian new elements are added. These are found in the second mandate which is the command to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom and of redemption.

Vocation is therefore functionally indispensable for man, for his personal sense of usefulness and accomplishment. Without vocation he is pointless as a human being. There is no place, functionally, for a lay-about. Whilst the economic conditions may deny him paid employment, the mandate assures him that the very

business of life cannot be truly known and experienced within the mentality of a lay-about. There is always much for him to do. God is the Paradigm of the true worker, and man may find much for his hands, brain and heart to do. His very life is a witness. He can show the glory of God in all his acts. Denied employment as society calls it employment, he may discover ways and means of loving, caring, sharing, and building. Having normal employment he may equally be the image of God in his given vocation, knowing that all in the family of God are likewise pursuing vocation. Where the Father is the Worker His children find their joy in similar vocation.

Again vocation is therapeutic, especially where unbelief and disobedience have set the heart and mind of a person against vocation. Work was in existence before the Fall, and work is not the curse following the Fall. That man could sweat—as a guilty person—was a blessing, a physical and psychological blessing, and not a curse. Redeemed man sees the functional nature of work and vocation. Most of all he is not caught in the anguish of Marxist alienation. Nothing of the works of his hands is denied him. His works will follow him into eternity (Rev. 14:13). He will 'receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body' (II Cor. 5:10).

Work, as we have seen, is not individualistic, but personal; not autonomous, but societal; not for self-attainment, but for the good of all. This being so, the relationships within the Family must be enhanced. The fruits of love will be seen in the contribution of all the constituent members of the Family. This makes sense, then, of the Father's ultimate commendation, 'Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of your master!'

CONCLUSION

There is no lack of material in Scripture to show us the paternal, filial-familial nature of Creation as God made it. We have seen that His intention even before time was to show His glory in the creation of man, and in the glorification of man in the end-time. The fall of man was incorporated and involved in the purposes of His will. God had intended, prior to creation, to display His nature of grace to the entire universe.

The tireless patience of God in bringing His plan to fruition is incomprehensible to man whose time-and-space concepts make it impossible for him to understand it. God's long-suffering is motivated by His love. As Father He will have His family—and He does! Nevertheless this matter of family is not something only for the eschaton, but man may now in the present time share in that family life. He may know it in the sheer domesticity of his natural family and the wider family of all humanity. In the ordinary round of life he may know the greatness of filial and familial living.

All of this is contingent upon the nature of God as Father, as the Son and as the Spirit of the Father and Son. Redemption not only releases man from the bondage of enslaving autonomy and the dark satanic father and his family, but it gives a revelation of the Being of God as Father. The Son declares His Name to humanity. It is in this Name—Father—that humanity finds itself afresh. At the same time it is not redemption to a liberated life which is merely 'freedom from', but which also is 'freedom to', i.e. freedom to obey, to accept the functional order of the universe, and to live purposefully within it, knowing that

at the end of time man will have matured to that point where he will be able to exercise his vocation in full. He will be equipped as a true son, a true priest to God and His universe, and as a king to reign over it.

In other words, the true nature of God as Father will be revealed in the maturity of human sonship, and the unity and love of the entire Family. This will delineate the glory of God and cause the whole creation to give vent to its thunderous and heartfelt praise and adoration. God will have declared Himself both in time and eternity, and the creation will henceforth express itself in the worship which is service, and the vocation which is eternal, that is, its being the Family and the Home to the perpetual glory of the Eternal and Most High God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ the Lamb of God.

It is then we shall see His face, and know, even as we are known!

How better to express our own present wonder and adoration than in the ascription of Paul in Romans 11:33–36:

*O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!*

*'For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counsellor?'*

*'Or who has given a gift to him that
he might be repaid?'*

*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To
him be glory for ever. Amen.*

CONCLUSION

We are now in a position to review the total thesis of this book. It is this: God, in His Trinitarian being, in the Fatherhood, Sonship and being of the Holy Spirit, planned that out of Himself should issue the entire creation, and that man should not only have a special place, but especially be a son of God. The elect should constitute the sons of God, and so, the family of God.

The Fall was no surprise to God. Whilst man lost his sonship, God did not lose His Fatherhood. In His grace and mercy He had planned the redemption of His elect people. What He would do He announced through His servants the prophets, and what He had planned He fulfilled in Christ. This one, being eternally Son, demonstrated his Sonship in his manhood, and as man, redeems his brethren.

The Son, with the Father, sends the Holy Spirit to bring the effects of redemption to man and cause him to truly be a son of God. Regenerated and adopted and possessing the Spirit of the Father and the Son, Christ's Sonship indwells his people personally and corporately, and the Son continues to complete the work and plan of the Father, ultimately defeating all evil forces and set-ting the entire universe free, regenerating it into eternal newness.

So the sons are set free, and with them, the creation. This new creation is what the Father has planned from all eternity. What the new creation is in entirety, and what plans the Father has for it, are not fully known. However, this present age in which redemption is being worked out is an age of God's mighty acts being fulfilled, and the Son and the Spirit with the Father, endue redeemed man with gifts and special power to share in the task.

Ultimately this Body which is Christ's fullness shall be revealed as the Bride of Christ, the Bride of the Lamb, and history shall climax in that mighty love feast, and God shall be known. 'There shall be no more anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship Him; *they shall see his face . . .*'

This will be the great hour, when the sons shall know the glory of their liberty, their glorious liberty, and they, a vast army in the very likeness of the Son—true overcomers—shall be to the praise of the glory of His grace!

BACK COVER

ABOUT THIS BOOK . . .

- *Who loves a father—a human father?*
- *What is patriarchy? Is it good, bad, irrelevant, or the very best of all?*
- *Who loves the Father—God? What is His Patriarchy?*
- *Is God really Father? If so, what does His Fatherhood mean?*

The answer to the last question is that God's Fatherhood means everything. In the face of rebellion against authority, the drive for egalitarian structures, the rejection of masculism and the assertion of feminism, there is the mystery of God as Father. Refuse this and we may find true sociality will eventually evaporate, leaving in its place a society more confused and less integrated than ever.

In this book Geoffrey Bingham has taken up the heart of the Trinitarian Godhead, and shown its biblical reality in that man must have God as Father, and have Him at the centre of his being. Anything less leaves man as dehumanized. The book has a strong prophetic ring, and it sounds a tocsin of urgency. A return to God's Fatherhood—the central mystery and meaning of all life and sociality—is urgently demanded.