

Oh, Father! Our Father!

What could 'the man in the street' possibly want—or need—to read in a book on Fatherhood? Probably he would not know, but if he picked up this book of Geoffrey Bingham's writing he could quickly become intrigued. The author's previous two titles on this fascinating subject were *I Love the Father* and *Father! My Father!* Both volumes sold quickly and are out of print. Rather than publish new editions, Bingham decided that a more simple and racy book was needed. Also such a volume would need to relate to man where he is in life, and show that God's Fatherhood, far from being up in some aery-faery (theological) strata, is in fact intimately and powerfully related to where we are—now!

His thoughtful and skilful weaving of the themes of fatherhood, familyhood, love relationships (and the like) present us with a pattern for true living. The book not only opens up new vistas of thinking, but is, in itself, the way to personal healing of heart, mind and spirit, as we see what it is to become—and be—children of God and brethren in the family of man. Bingham, who has been a farmer, journalist, soldier, prisoner of war, clergyman, missionary, college principal and executive director of a teaching ministry, has the elements of experience in his favour—to say nothing of his theological acumen. Perhaps that is why he makes the subject almost as fascinating as—by nature—it is.

new creation publications



Oh, Father!

Our Father!

Geoffrey C. Bingham

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Sons of God are Servants of All

Christ's People in Today's World

Where I Love, I Live

Angry Heart or Tranquil Mind?

Christ's Cross over Man's Abyss

Twice-conquering love

Ah, Strong, Strong Love!

The Everlasting Presence

The Profound Mystery: Marriage Love, Divine and Human

God's Glory, Man's Sexuality

Oh,
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Our
Father!

by Geoffrey Bingham

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FOREWORD

THE FULLNESS OF FATHERHOOD

Having written three books previously on the Fatherhood of God, I still feel the urge to treat this subject as being of the utmost importance. In fact I intend to write more on the subject, and for many years have been preparing myself to write a magnum *opus*, what one would hope would be a grand, bell-ringing book. Whether or not that will eventuate is of no great point now. What matters is that human beings come to the refuge and serenity of the Father.

One old saint speaks of 'the intolerable sigh' which is in the unsatisfied and yearning human heart. One finds this unfulfilled longing from time to time in some Christians. It seems to me that these persons have—for some reason or other—stopped short of the great and beautiful truth of God's Fatherhood. I do not mean, necessarily, that they have not heard—and even sincerely believed—that God is Father, but the reality of it does not seem to have gripped them. As we say, 'The penny has not yet dropped.'

I hope earnestly that those who pick up this book will read it. I realise that human fatherhood is not always acceptable and can turn human beings against seeking the Fatherhood of God. At the same time I believe there is a drive for paternal comfort and fellowship which we must seek to satisfy either by substituting idolatry for reality, or really coming to the truth, to the Father. Some time ago I counselled a man, and as we talked I realised that he believed Jesus had saved him from God! I

was stunned. When I asked him about the Father he seemed mystified. ‘The Father,’ he said, ‘who is He?’ It was his turn to be stunned when he found the answer to his question. It completely altered his view of God.

Lately I have been reading a posthumously published essay of the theologian, Karl Barth. It is entitled, *The Children and their Father*. The gentle, simple words of this famous theologian brought tears to my eyes. Having read much of his *Church Dogmatics* I thought, ‘He has kept the good wine until last!’ In this sixty-page treatment he shares what the Father means to him, and it is deeply moving. From the simple peasant then, to the erudite theologian, the human heart witnesses to restlessness until it finds the Father. Of course there is no finding the Father apart from the Son, Jesus Christ, and the Spirit of truth who convicts us of the great need we have, and reveals that it can only be satisfied in the Father.

In conclusion I gladly confess that God’s Fatherhood has richly transformed my own life. No one is truly Trinitarian who makes much of one or two Persons of the Trinity but not equally much of the third, whichever Person that may be. We gladly acknowledge that most of the church gives due worth to Jesus Christ its Saviour. In these days new movements lay heavy emphasis upon the person and work of the Holy Spirit. It is my hope that through the Son and the Spirit we will personally find the Father in all His fullness.

Only then will we truly come to ourselves, and to all mankind. Only then will we really come to know the Son and the Spirit in all their fullness.

Geoffrey Bingham
Coromandel East, 1983

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ONLY ONE FATHER

Only one Father, in all the universe,
In all time and in the whole creation.
He is above all, through all,
And in it all, not only as Creation's force and power,
But as its Initiator in love, the Father of love
Whose Fatherhood must never be denied,
For pain of denial is the deepest pain
Man's spirit knows, can ever know.

As fish for water, and as bird for air
So then is man for Fatherhood. Let him but
Deny this essential reality and he denies
Not only God but self, his very self,
And self's fulfilment; Father-love
Is breath of being for created man,
The life of spirit for childing heart
And love-for-Love that keeps that heart
In worship's deep integrity.

Let thus the warm heart flag in love—
Ceasing to live as fish in sea and bird in air—
Then comes the intolerable ache,
The indefinable chaos and the anarchy
Of mind and soul, until the will is lost
In the maze of mindless questioning.
Out of necessity the gods are born—
Or made—are fashioned from the thoughts,
Ideas that emanate from gloom

But break with seeming brilliance
 Into the diseased fancies
 Of the restless longing devotee
 Of these false fathers.

God is the Father or there's none.
 God is Creator-Father, claiming love,
 And giving His gifts to make our work
 Purposeful in labour and in calling
 As though vocation were eternal.
 There is the Father's love that planned—
 Before creation's time—salvific grace
 That now redeems us. Prodigals abound
 On the shores of lost continents and lands
 Which know no path to God, no way of going back
 To where man lost his way.

It was essential that the true Son come
 And clothed in flesh of us, true man
 To show the Father in these human terms
 In which we live and move and die
 That we might understand deceit—
 The falsity of foolish gods,
 Of idols dumb and fathers surrogate—
 Until a passion new be born
 Out of the cross of suff'ring deep,
 Out of the crucible of love
 And its intensest fires.

It was essential that we see
 The Son as way and truth and *life*
 And *only* life and way and truth
 To find ourselves unto the home
 Of the eternal Father; to find those arms
 Embracing us in all our sin,

Destroying in a flush of love
 The idols of our pain and shame,
 So filling us with love and gifts
 Until our hearts wax filial
 And all the numbed yet painful blank
 Is flooded with His Fatherhood.

Not only to His Fatherhood we come
 But Brother-Son our truest Lord,
 And to the family of all true men,
 Brother and sister all made one:
 By Fatherhood and Father's Son,
 And Spirit's unity complete
 Making the people of God—
 The true community of man—
 For ever and for ever.

Here in the now-time thus we live,
 Fulfilled in heart, complete in mind,
 Emotion's yearning finding rest
 In daily love, paternal care,
 Familial life, in service full,
 And labour for the needy race
 Who need their Father and their
 God. 'Complete,' we say, yet incomplete.

'The best is yet to be,' we say—
 An affirmation of our faith and hope—
 'But what is so surpasses thought
 In daily life with Father-God.
 We know The empty idols helpless lie
 Whilst we from every living fibre cry,
 "Oh, Father! Our Father!" '

A WARM NEED: A HUMAN NEED

THE FATHER-SHAPED BLANK

A wise man once said, 'In every man there is a God-shaped blank.' When the blank is a blank we feel empty. When it is filled we feel good. In fact when it is filled we feel fulfilled. What every human being is looking for—whether he is conscious of the fact or not—is emotional fulfilment. We love it and we get it in many different ways. A good meal, a pleasant drink, good creaturely comforts, intellectual success, achieved ambition can all give us some kind of emotional satisfaction. Of course it is only temporary, but it is good while it lasts.

Suppose this God-shaped blank were to be filled with God! The effects would be startling. In fact they would constitute emotional fulfilment at its highest peak. Yet the very thought of being filled with God is frightening to some, for they do not have pleasant views of God. Some fear Him. Some hate Him. Most of us would be terrified to be filled with Him.

If we could be permitted to change the statement of our wise friend to, 'Inside every man there is a Father-shaped blank,' then the fact of being filled with God as Father might not be too terrifying. On the one hand you would find people who would be delighted with the idea; others—those

whose fathers were unsatisfactory—would be repelled by the thought.

FATHERHOOD ESSENTIAL TO ALL

On the human plane we would always have a picture of God as Father which would be tied up with our own father-image. Whatever we see in regard to our father we would see in regard to God. Because of this difficulty Jesus always talked about ‘your heavenly Father,’ or ‘your Father who is in heaven’. He wanted us to get the idea that God is not like an earthly father—no matter how good that earthly father may be. By ‘heavenly’ he did not mean something (or someone) far beyond our reach, and very spiritual. No, he meant ‘someone of an order and quality which is better than, and beyond what an earthly father is.’

This then relieves our mind. Although bad fatherhood is a sorry thing, good fatherhood is something we all recognise as worthwhile. Every human being needs fatherhood, and, if possible, the best. If in fact we have a ‘Father-shaped blank’ within us, then it would be wonderful for us to have that blank filled up by first-class fatherhood. We would be emotionally satisfied. We would be personally fulfilled.

THE OVER-MASCULINE GOD

Some theologians these days are saying that Western theology has over-masculinised God. That is, there is little in Him that is tender, gentle, and of feminine warmth. Whether this is confined to the West or not is difficult to say. What we do know is that many of us tend to see Jesus (the Son) as gentle, tender, and compassionate, whereas we tend to think of God as somewhat remote, and even grim and severe. Certainly He is distant, whilst the Son seems to be nearer. After all, he was a man!

Some churches do not have this problem. For them, God is certainly masculine. But then there is Mary, Mother of God. She has all the femininity we need related to the Godhead. So the balance of masculine-feminine is secured. Even the Son is now allowed to be wholly masculine.

Both theologies here nominated are incomplete.

GOD IS MALE-FEMALE

In the Genesis creation story of man we are told that God said, ‘Let us make man in our own image.’ The account then runs on, ‘In His image made He him, *male and female* made He them, and...’ A later account repeats this formula and adds, ‘And He called *them* man.’ Two things emerge from this. The first is that God is male-female, otherwise man could not be male and female. Of course God’s masculinity-femininity is not *sexual* as such, because He is Creator. We have sexual masculinity and femininity because we are procreators, and not creators.

The second thing is that humanity is not of two races, one male and the other female. It is of one race, namely male-female. To split these into two separate elements is to split God down the centre, Man (humanity), then, is a male-female unity. It is interesting that a human person cannot be sexual within the orbit of himself. Each needs the complement of another person. Both are needed to constitute full sexuality. So then God is One, as we are often told in the Bible. How exciting to know that all masculinity belongs to all femininity, and vice-versa!

GOD IS NOT DIVIDED

When God said, ‘Let us make man in our own image,’ He then produced man as male-female to be the one entity. ‘Male’ is never lost in ‘female’, nor ‘female’ in ‘male’. Each

has its own identity, but each needs the other for total identity. It is the relationship—the relationship between the male and female—which shows the true image of God, namely love and unity. That is God—love and unity!

When a child is born it sees its parents as the one entity. In Genesis it is said that the man and woman in marriage become ‘one flesh’ or ‘one being’. They are of course two persons—each with his or her own identity. But in marriage they are wholly united. That is the true order of creation. Therefore the male and female units are as much one (together) as male and female elements of God are one in His unity. That is why we see God as love. If the husband and wife are not united then the child will never see the true image of God, i.e. love.

THE NEEDS OF A TINY CHILD

The God- (or Father-) shaped blank within a child is no larger or smaller than in an adult. The child wholly needs emotional fulfilment, as does the adult. It is most important that the child see God imaged in the parents by the mutual love they have. Where that love is missing then the true image of God is missing. In such cases the male and the female elements become a puzzle and even a threat to the child. In these early days, the child will begin to make up its mind about what is male and what is female. It will like or dislike. It will feel confused and puzzled where the male-female unity is missing. So it will have a deficient view of God. Certain lifelong images will be being formed.

TINY CHILDREN ARE NOT PERFECT

A tiny child both wants and needs love and care. It is a functional necessity. There are reasons for this, biblical reasons. Because God is love then the child has a right to

expect that it will be born into a love situation. The creation, rightly understood, is a love-creation. God could not have elements which are not love, otherwise He would not reflect and express Himself in creation. Man in His image must be a love-creature. Hence the child expects love. It rarely, if ever, meets this perfect love. In addition, the child itself is born with a bias against authority, and so against God.

What I have just said may be galling to some readers. It is a hard thing to swallow, that universally, children born into this world do not wholly accept authority. Yet it is a practical fact. The theologian speaks of it under the heading, ‘original sin’. He means that in Adam the whole race sinned. This is hard to understand. The difficulty lies in much of our Western thinking. We do not generally see the whole race as a solidary unity. It is up to people like John Donne to tell us we ought not to think of ourselves as separate islands, but as parts of a whole continent.¹ In truth, we are interrelated and interdependent.

Whatever may be the reasonings of theologians, we know as hard practical fact that children find difficulty with parents and authority. Some handle it by being passive. Others protest loudly and angrily. Some merely accommodate, i.e. ‘toe the line’. Even if we do not know it, all of us have problems with parental authority.

CHILDREN MAKE CERTAIN ASSESSMENTS OF PARENTS

It is a fact of history that there have never been perfect parents. Equally true is that there have never been perfect children. It is a technique of human life that when we do not wish

¹ This quotation is taken from John Donne’s poem, ‘Devotions’, in which he says: ‘No man is an Island, entire of itself...Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls, It tolls for thee.’

to obey an authority we look for the faults and warts in that authority, and rationalise the demand for obedience by saying the authority is not worthy of it. This not only happens in the child-parent situation, but also in the pupil-teacher, employee-boss, and similar relationships. There are some human beings who have never obeyed any authority in their lives. Cunningly they 'toe the line', but there is none of what the Bible calls 'obedience from the heart'.

Children, then, will make a deficient assessment of parents in order to lessen their own guilt of disobedience, so rationalising their own behaviour as being reasonable.

2

**DRIFTING FROM THE FULFILMENT
OF WARM HUMAN NEEDS**

**THE BLANK THAT IS NOT A BLANK:
FATHER-MOTHER MAKE THE TRUE IMAGE**

For man to be made in the image of God means he reflects God. Everything that God is, man is like that, although he is none of God Himself. Man is man, not God. But he is the reflection of God. God is love: man loves. God is holiness itself: man practises holiness. God is truth: man is truthful. And so on.

Imagine two parents knit together into one, and reflecting in every action the nature of God! Imagine a child without any anti-parent or anti-authority bias! What a world it would be!

Whilst we know little about God in truth, yet we know enough to know that He is One; He is an unshatterable unity. He never changes; He is an inseparable unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Man is made in the image of the Triune Godhead. So he too is a natural unity. Yet he is only the fullest unity when male and female are the one. Of course this seems to be easiest in marriage, although we know this is not always the case. It is across the whole human race that male-female unity is needed. We do not mean all males and females must find partners. Not a bit: all

masculinity and feminity must flow together to accomplish the whole task given to man within God's creation. What that is we will discuss later.

THE ONENESS OF THE FATHER-MOTHER IS FUNCTIONAL

Even though we may not care to see it this way, males have certain roles and females have certain other roles. Within marriage there is no question of the male being superior and the female being inferior. Nor is there any question of the two being equal or unequal. Each is unique, having his or her own identity. But there are still functional roles. When their two sets of roles are wedded, then the man and the woman are really one. The child sees this oneness, is delighted, and can feel secure in it, provided it is not of a kind which excludes him or her.

SOME PRACTICAL PROBLEMS ARISING FROM DIFFERENCES

The child who is born under united parents is fortunate. If the masculine role of leadership and kindly authority (truly loving authority) is fulfilled, and the feminine role of helpmeetship (being one in the task with the husband) is likewise fulfilled, then the true image of God is seen.

If the husband is weak, fearful, without leadership, then the balance of the unity is missing. If the wife compensates by being dominant, unfeminine and the like, then the child is bewildered. The true image of God is not showing. All sorts of consequences may follow. The child may see an un-masculine God, or an over-feminised God. The child may be afraid of the creation because the father is fearful. The variations are many on this particular theme. Just seeing the problems may help us to understand ourselves and others.

What we are saying is that if the parents presented an image of love we would not want to blank out God. We would want to 'fill Him in,' that is, into ourselves. The blank then would not be a blank.

MAN AND HIS LOVING CREATOR

In the beginning man was a gloriously happy, peaceful and tranquil creature. He was rich in purposiveness. Loved by God, he loved God and his fellow creature. This was life! Living within the bounds of his humanity he was contented.

Then he was tempted to go outside those boundaries and strike out into areas of Godhead which are not part of being human. The results were disastrous. The serpent said, 'You shall be *as God*'. In the name of all that is sane, how can a human being be more than a human being? The fascination of trying this out, however, was too much for man. Besides, by this time he suspected that God was holding him back from some rightful fulfilment which was his. Alas! He did not see that the prohibition God had placed on him was for his own good.

No man has ever explored what it is to be a man. One ancient writer has written, 'O God, you have made everything beautiful [functional] in its own time, and you have put the universe into man's heart so that by searching he cannot find out the end from the beginning.' What a statement!

The result of this rebellion against human limitations—in reality, rebellion against the God who had placed the limitations—was that man came into guilt. Guilt makes us feel inferior in the presence of the one against whom we have sinned. Man felt guilty before God. Guilt leads to anger and separation. Man was now out of his true human situation. Guilt, fear, insecurity, disorientation with his environment (creation) and his fellow creature had suddenly happened.

He was a disjointed, dislocated person. He excused his failure by blaming others. The man blamed the woman and God (for giving her to him!). The woman blamed the serpent. The image of God was becoming unshapely!

Such an image children see. Of such an image are they born. With such an image they grow to be adults. No wonder man's view of God is not the best. No wonder the human race keeps rejecting God. Paul the apostle once said, 'There is no one who seeks after God. There is no one who understands Him.'

Of course all human beings do seek after *something*, trying to fill the inner blank. However we do not want to fill it with God! That would be too confronting, and too demanding. We all want to fill the blank, but not with God. No way will we have God!

WE MUST FILL THE BLANK

If my thesis is true, then man must fill the blank. If it is filled with (or by) God, then man will be complete. Masculinity and femininity can then come together in good and fulfilling ways. If man does not fill the blank with (or by) God then he must—by necessity—fill it with something. The 'something' is nearly always—if not always—idols.

At first sight, this may seem to be a strange claim. But it will no longer appear so if we think for a moment about idols. They are simply those things which replace God. Man, by creation, is a creature of love and worship. Because he is a creature he has a strong element of dependency. Because he is a love-creation he must love. The biblical pattern of love is as follows: (1) love to God, (2) love to others, (3) love to one's self.

These three elements operate simultaneously. Love comes from God to man and as a response man loves God, his neighbour and himself. This is just what happens when the

inner blank is filled with God. As long as a blank remains, man lives to himself and is not alive to God. He may love others, in a kind of a way, but primarily for his own benefit and pleasure. I hope we are not getting complicated. All I set out to say is that—come wind, come weather—man will love something, even if it is only himself or some object, talent or person. These things then become idols.

THE FUNCTION OF IDOLS

Our intention for idols, then, is that they fill up the inner blank, substitute for that which truly fulfils man, namely God.

And idols are most fascinating. Probably they represent our inner desires. Probably we project these desires on to them, insisting that they can fulfil our needs. They are, of course, illicit, and we have an unhealthy (though enjoyable) excitement from the illicit. The inner truth of idols is that they constitute that image which is (a) the substitute for the image of our parents, and (b) the substitute for the image of God given through our parents. We feel free with our own gods. We call the tune. They do not.

But we fool ourselves if we believe so. Idols have a way of possessing their worshippers. They have a way of bringing emptiness and not fulfilment: slavery and not freedom. Idols bring bitterness and anger and frustrating disappointment. The blank is not filled with reality, but barren fantasy.

THE ANGRY AND FRUSTRATED PEOPLE

ANGER AT AN IMAGE: ANGER AT IMAGES

A wise man once said, 'A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh, but passion rots the bones!' The word *passion* can also mean, 'envy', 'jealousy', 'zeal', and 'intensity'. It means that a person who is compulsive in these elements of passion is a restless being. He cannot dismount from the moving tiger.

Why do people get angry? Primarily because things do not go as they wish them to. We have all experienced this. The most certain trigger for anger is injustice. Injustice angers the whole human race. We will get justice even if we have to die for it! Even if we have to kill for it! We will have it, whatever. The sense of injustice brings hurt, anger, resentment and bitterness. The one against whom man is primarily angry appears to be God! Most people would not agree with this proposition. Yet it can be seen to be true when we pursue it. For example, when we are angry against people (the image of God), we are generally angry with God. Many of us (if not all) keep dossiers on God. We enter the things we have against Him; the ways in which He has failed. Our (seeming) higher intelligence would work out the world in better ways than He has done it. Take, for example, wars, crimes, rapes, murders,

genocides, deformed children and sicknesses which afflict man. We would have prevented these, or, somehow, swept them away.

No wonder we don't want a God-shaped blank within us! No wonder we would not seek to fill it with God!

The trouble all stems from the image we have of God. Obviously God is not wrong, that is, being God. That our image is wrong must be obvious to rational people, but then who—in this matter—is ever rational?

THE ANGER OF FRUSTRATION

How we would love to be filled! How we would love to be fulfilled! What bliss to have peace and tranquillity, authentic stimulation and joy! No wonder our anger grows as life speeds by and these things do not happen. We see ourselves slipping away from the dream's fulfilment, the completeness of being a whole person, an enriched human being, a unique identity.

No wonder, too, that we get angrier with parents, family members, people in authority, and those who do not love us and who do not accept us. We resent those who will not give us freedom to be our true selves. Those who ignore our attempts to prove ourselves increase our frustration. Then, of course, there is God! What has He ever done? How has He ever helped? What great powers He has, but we scarcely—if ever—get the benefit of them! What benefits does He give us? So we reason, and, of course, very foolishly. We still have the image from earlier days of our parents and so our poor image of God. Such images, besides being wrong, are most unhelpful.

THE ELEMENTS WHICH DETERMINE US

If it is true that we need to have inner fulfilment through

completeness, then we can always point to those elements which we believe have prevented us reaching our goal. These elements are many, but they can be classified under the following headings: (1) parental upbringing; (2) heredity; (3) environment; and (4) circumstances.

I have counselled many hundreds of people who have fallen for the age-old excuse that some or all of these factors have shaped them and will continue to do so. Some feel fated to become like their father or mother or both. They groan as they think they have to repeat these parental patterns of temperament, disposition or character. If parents were neurotic, then so will they be: and so on. Others groan because they were born in a slum, or in a middle-class (mediocre) family. Others are angry at being born into riches or poverty. Nearly all of us are indignant at the circumstances which come upon us. We feel they are unfair. If only we had the time, intelligence and ability to order the circumstances!

If we didn't take ourselves so seriously we could quietly smile at these foolish ideas.

THE ELEMENT WHICH DETERMINES THE ELEMENTS

A wise theologian once said that heredity determines not our fate but our trial.² He meant that we can be born and live in adverse environments and circumstances, having the worst of parents and seemingly unhelpful elements of heredity, and yet not be shaped by them. The determinant element is our wills. We can either be negative about what comes our way, or we can be positive. Adverse elements can

² James Denney, *Studies in Theology*, p.91 (Baker Book house, Grand Rapids, 1976). The full quote is: 'What we inherit, strictly speaking, may be said to fix our trial, but not our fate. Every man is to be put to the proof somehow, and to a certain extent his natural ancestry determines the mode of it: it depends on them, so to speak, whether his temptation is to be anger, intemperance, lust, greed, duplicity, or whatever else. But it does not depend on them what the issue of this trial is to be. It depends on the man himself, and above all on his faith in God.'

be either stumbling blocks in our way or stepping stones to richer character and life. For the moment we will not pursue this line. Here, we only need to note that the things which anger us need not do so. In fact we have no authentic basis for being angry with God.

If we really understood the whole matter we would see that anger is primarily against ourselves—as persons. No one easily admits that the one who disappoints him is the person he seems to be. I say 'seems to be' because I doubt whether any one of us is really what he seems to be.

I AM ANGRY CONSIDERING THE IMAGE I CARRY WITH ME

Our whole point is that we do not see God as He is. We see Him as we think He is. We form the image out of our infant experiences, including our own reactions and responses.

In my case, I was born into a large family. My father was a dentist, and we were told not to eat sweets. I felt God had arranged a curious world in which there were sweets but we should not eat them! My mother—as her custom was—gave us children a tablespoon of castor oil each Saturday morning. I dreaded Saturday mornings and thought that God must be very strange, causing castor oil trees to be part of His creation. On Sunday I would go to church, there to be confronted by the ten commandments written on the reredos, embellished, doubtless, in rich gold, sky-blue and silver, but nonetheless exacting for all that. God was undoubtedly a grim sort, with His 'Thou shalt!' and 'Thou shalt not!' Rebellion surged in that hidden childish heart of mine!

It is according to this kind of pattern that the human race expresses its indignation at God. Justice is all it cries for and the heavens are unhearing, hard as brass, and unfeeling.

What a world! What a God!

The sad and hurtful thing is that we really see the creation also in the light of this false mental image. Guilt, anger, frustration, rebellion and sins of all kind compound themselves in this sad mix. Some of us brood over the so-called determinant elements. We feel we are the victims of an uncaring and even malignant fate. Why could God not have done better? Why, eh?

4

HUMANITY AND THE FATHER

OUR FATHER VIEW

Without bringing too much theology into our discussion, let us say it could be shown biblically that God created Adam as a son of His (Luke 3:38). In fact, it appears that we were all intended to be sons (Acts 17:28). At the same time we were creatures, the product of the Creator. We were also subjects of the King of the ages. In saying we would be *as* God we destroyed the relationship of dependency (on God) and sought to live independently. For this reason we rejected Him as being the Father, the Creator, and the King. Whilst a son is *like* his father he can remain dependent, but if he wants to be *as* his father, then he is no longer a son. This was pretty much the case of the prodigal son in the New Testament. In asking for his inheritance he was really saying to his father, 'Drop dead, Dad!' That is, in effect, what humanity said to God at the time of the Fall.

THE FAMILY FATHER VIEW

We saw that when we speak of God we must include the inseparable masculine-feminine elements of Him, which constitute a unity. When we get our view of God from our parents it is a father-mother (Father-Mother) view which we

obtain. Hence the God-shaped blank within us is really a Father-Mother-shaped blank, and our yearning is for that which we badly need. We need to fill the blank with God Himself, but in fact we do not wish to do so.

Sadly enough some people—such as homosexuals, rabid feminists and masculinists—get an angry view of one or other of the sexes. We need not go into all this. The point is that they naturally become angry with God. Nor is there any way out of their dilemma, except the radical one of forgiving their parents for their weaknesses and deficiencies and waving farewell to their own hurts, angers, resentments and bitternesses—to say nothing of their infantile prejudices!

Let us not say that an angry view of God and the sexes is limited to special persons such as those mentioned above. By no means. Everyone is in this push! How then do we get a true and sane view of God? That is the basic question for which we will seek an answer. It is not a difficult one to find.

‘HOW ODD OF GOD TO CHOOSE THE JEWS’³

This saying is part of an old couplet. It was not odd in fact. God has His own reasons for talking first to the patriarch Abraham, then his son Isaac, and finally his grandson Jacob. There was not a lot of promising material in the last two, and even Abraham had his weaknesses—just as we all have. Even so, God was able to get a good message through to these men and their clan, and later—through them—to the world. This message is that He was (is) the God of love and grace. If you have a bad image of God and an angry mind, then the chances are ten to one that you will only be confirmed in your bad view of God if you read the Old Testament. If you have what I call ‘a grace-mind’, then you

will see how gracious God really is.

The point of this discussion is that Israel (the Jewish people) had a reasonable view of God as Father. It was by no means complete. For example, the Temple (or Worship Tent) was so built as to give the idea that God was remote. A worshipper could offer his sacrifice at the altar but could not go beyond that. The priests—having washed themselves in a kind of bath known as the laver—could go into what was called ‘the Holy Place’. There they offered prayers with incense, and all of this in the light of a seven-branched candelabra. However, the special place called the ‘Holy of Holies’ was forbidden to all but the High Priest; he could go there only once a year, and then only with the blood of the Atonement sacrifice. This tended to make God appear removed from His people.

At the same time we must not forget that the Worship Tent was always in the centre of the camp on their journeys, and at the heart of Israel when they had Jerusalem as their capital city.

All this ritual taught them the holiness of God. Even so, when we read those warm human writings called the Psalms we see that many persons wrote and sang about a God who had filled their ‘God-shaped blank’, and they loved Him. Take, for example, Psalm 116:1, which says simply, ‘I love the Lord!’ Another Psalm has it, ‘Thy loving kindness is better than life.’ The responding love of loyal Israelites was not necessarily constricted by the thought of God dwelling in the Holy of Holies. He could not be confined within a tent or building!

It was not odd, then, of God, to choose the Jews. They proved to be a most resilient people under the great troubles they experienced. They still do. He never made them favorites. They were simply His chosen people, chosen to fulfil a purpose. In the coming of Christ much of that purpose was accomplished.

³ ‘How Odd’, by William Norman Ewer.

THE NEW TRUE VIEW OF THE FATHER

We come now to the heart of the matter, namely God's revelation of Himself, through Christ His Son, as the true Father. He showed He was not only the Father of His Son, but the Father of all who would see it that way, want it that way, and have it that way. The way in which He did it was very simple, and this way we shall try to understand.

In many of the Old Testament writings God had been called 'Father'. Yet the idea was more that He was Creator-Father or Covenant-Father; this latter because He had made a covenant with Israel. Even further than this, the prophets spoke of one to come who would be uniquely the Son of God. They did not understand that Sonship in the way which we have worked it out over two thousand years, but they did have some idea. When Christ came, Peter could say Jesus was the Son of God, and the high priest could ask whether this was so; the idea of 'Son of God' was intelligible to both of them.

The simple way of showing His Fatherhood was for God to bring His Son to the world. The simple way for us to see that Sonship was for the Son (Jesus) just to walk, talk and live Sonship in the ordinary ways of life. No one—repeat, no one—ever thought him to be God or to have Deity. They all thought he was a man. Only in later days did people called Gnostics and Docetists think he was 'God-in-a-skin'. They thought he could not become a man living thus in gross flesh! At the time of his life on earth ail who saw him believed they saw a man. Not one of them thought he was God as such. As a man he lived Sonship in a man-way, and by man-actions.

If we read the accounts of his life (the Gospels) we see that he never embarked on 'high-falutin' philosophy or heavy metaphysical arguments such as brilliant religionists in history have done. Beside Budda, Christ seems intellectually

very simple. The same is true of the comparison between him and other leaders. Whilst it is true that many did not understand what Jesus said, the problem did not lie in the intellect but in the will. For this reason Jesus often cried, 'He who has an ear to hear, let *him* hear!' He knew that the willing ones would hear and others would not. His words were so clear to many that they became angry. They knew only too well what he was saying, and yet it seemed to them to be blasphemous. That, or it was just directly confronting.

The thing that stands out clearly is that Jesus believed himself to be the Son of God. He believed he really knew God as Father, and uniquely as his own Father. This we can trace very easily by reading the Gospels, and in particular the Gospel of John.

THE SON AND THE FATHER

JESUS IS THE SON OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER

Suddenly, at a particular moment of history, Israel was confronted with a powerful prophet. His name was John the Baptist, the son of a Jewish priest of Jerusalem. Unusual events had happened at his birth and these certified him as a true prophet. He explained to his listeners that he was not the light of God as such, but sent to bear witness to that light, namely Jesus, who was, himself, the true witness to the truth. John further pointed out that this Jesus was the one on whom God had permanently placed His Spirit.

To place the Spirit on a person was to anoint, and such permanent anointing was unique. To be anointed thus was to be proclaimed Messiah. The term 'Messiah' was equivalent to 'Son of God'. At the time of the anointing God spoke from heaven. To Jesus He said, '*Thou* art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' To the assembled crowd at the baptism being given by John, He said, '*This is* my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' Much the same words were said to Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). Peter once cried, 'You are the Christ, the Son of God!' Jesus replied calmly, 'No human being revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'

On one occasion Jesus said, 'All who are taught by my Father come to me.' To others he said, 'If you knew me you would know my Father also.' To Philip he said, 'He that has seen me has seen the Father.'

Out of these sayings and many more in similar vein we see, (a) Jesus was the Son of the Father, and (b) God was the Father of Jesus Christ.

On one occasion, Jesus claimed this with the words, 'All things are 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 he to whom the Son is pleased to reveal Him.' What he was saying was most significant. To know the Son is something we cannot do, except by the Father, and we cannot know the Father except by the Son. We can, on the other hand, know the Son where the Father reveals him, and the Father where the Son reveals Him. It is to do with this revelation that we continue our exciting investigation.

THE SON SHOWS THE FATHER

'No man has seen God at any time,' reports John the apostle, adding, 'The Son who is in the bosom of the Father has declared Him.'

This is a startling claim. Yet it rings throughout the Gospels. This Son who has always been, and who elsewhere is called 'the Word', has become human, truly human, and spells out his Sonship in human terms. He also reveals the Father's Fatherhood by these ways. John records, 'The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only Son of the Father, *full of grace and truth.*'

An Old Testament Israelite would be forgiven for thinking God was 'full of law', yet John here is saying, 'full of grace and truth'. Jesus, as he ministers in Palestine, is full of

truth which is the truth of God, and without possession of which no man can truly worship God. He himself said, 'God is spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and *in truth*. 'He added, 'And such *the Father* seeks to worship Him.' He means that they who have the truth, have the truth of God's Fatherhood; they come to Him in the spirit of the same and thus come as His children.

HOW JESUS REVEALED THE FATHER

Perhaps we grow a trifle complicated. Let us see how Jesus revealed the Father.

Firstly he revealed the Father *by just being the Son*. He taught what is not common knowledge to all men. 'The Father has always worked,' he said, 'and I have always worked with Him.' That is the first thing about a true son. He works always with his father. They are in the same business, so to speak.

Secondly he said, 'The Son *does nothing but what the Father shows him*. 'This is rare, if not unique in the affairs of men.

Thirdly he said, 'The Father loves the Son and *shows him all things*. 'This also is rare in human relationships.

Together the three things constitute true sonship. They also make for total relationships.

As Jesus ministered to mankind, and fought the powers of evil, he showed his Sonship. He initiated nothing. 'I say nothing from myself,' he said. 'The Father who dwells in me, *He* does the works.' If then we were to take the Gospels and cross out 'Jesus' and 'the Lord', and substitute 'the Father' in every case, then we would see who the Father really is. He is the loving Father of the loving obedient Son. That is why Jesus said, 'The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands.' This is what is meant by another saying of his: 'I and the Father are one.'

In these ways then Jesus showed by his true Sonship who the True Father really is. Notice that there is no anger in Jesus, no frustration, no rebellion. He is not suspicious of his Father, nor is he against Him. He loves Him. He wishes to do His will. This is unique in all human history. It is the Truth of (heavenly) Sonship and Fatherhood and hence is the truth of (earthly) fatherhood and sonship.

HOW JESUS SUPREMEY REVEALED THE FATHER

The supreme revelation of Fatherhood was at the Cross. In order to see how he revealed the Father we first of all need to read, carefully and thoughtfully, the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel, verses one to five, as follows:

'When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son that the Son may glorify Thee, since Thou hast given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom Thou hast given him. And this is eternal life, that they know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. I glorified Thee on earth, having accomplished the work which Thou gavest me to do; and now, Father, glorify Thou me in Thy own presence with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made.'

We now enlarge on this passage in a sort of paraphrase.

'Jesus was at the last hour of life, the appointed time of his death and therefore at the appointed time for revealing the Father wholly. He said, "Father, the glory that I have as a Son is dependent upon my total relationship with You. At the same time it is dependent upon Your total relationship with me. A husband cannot be a husband without a wife. Likewise I cannot be a Son without the Father. *Father, You must be wholly with me in all I do*, so much that when they see me, they will really see You. They will see I am Your Son because You affirm me that way. You have given me the elect number of mankind to bring to eternal life. *Eternal life is knowing You and me*. If I cannot show You to them and show myself, then they will not know You and so they will not have that life. That life is life which is sharing relationships with us—with You and with me. Father, in every way I have showed our relationship by obedience, by giving You glory. This now

is the supreme manifestation of that. So now, Father, let us have the glory which we always had, even before time began. Let it express itself wholly on the Cross, in the way that is necessary Then they will see You as Father and me as Son.” ‘

What, then, happened on that Cross which showed the Father as Father and the Son as true Son? This we shall see in our next chapter.

6

THE SON, THE FATHER, AND THE CROSS

HOW GREAT THE FATHER’S LOVE!

On the night of his betrayal Jesus prayed, ‘Father, that they may know that You have loved them...’ He went on, ‘even as You have loved me.’ This is an amazing statement, but no less amazing than one he had made some time previously: ‘The Father loves me because I lay down my life [for the sheep]’ .

Let us work that out in the human sphere. As a parent having a son, would you want that son to lay down his life for another person? The answer must be, ‘No!’ You might feel this would be a noble thing to do, and wish your son to have such nobility, but when it came to the pinch you would still say, ‘No!’ Now the Father not only wants His Son to do this (for us) but actually loves him for doing it! In one sense that means He overleaps His love for His Son in His love for us! This is incomprehensible.

HOW GREAT, THEN, THE CROSS!

We do not understand the Cross if we fail to realise that in the work of the Cross the Father was the Initiator. Many scriptures tell us this, such as: ‘God set him forth to be a propitiation...’ ‘In this is love...that He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.’ ‘It was the will of the Lord [the Father] to bruise him.’ ‘The Lord [the Father] laid on

him the iniquity of us all.’ ‘God made him to be sin for us.’

THE FATHER’S LOVE IN AND THROUGH THE SON

The Father, then, is in the Cross. So is the Son, ‘the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up [to death] for me.’ Hence Paul’s statement, ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.’ It goes closest of all to expressing the truth we are endeavouring to state.

Most powerful of all are verses nine and ten from the Letter to the Hebrews, chapter two: ‘But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour for 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, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.’

Let us note the important points:

- (1) As in John 17:1-5 Jesus is given glory and honour *for* the suffering of death. In other words, he cannot suffer without that glory. It is God’s glory to give His Son, and the Son’s glory to suffer for us. The death itself is the glory of the Father.
- (2) The intention of the Cross is ‘to bring many sons into glory’. This means (a) to bring sinners into sonship, and (b) to bring them into ultimate glorification.
- (3) The Father makes the Son to suffer fully so that the totality of sin, pollution and evil are dealt with wholly on the Cross. In this way Jesus is ‘the trail-blazer of their [our] salvation’. Nothing that God’s holiness and the true moral law requires is left unfulfilled: the Son’s suffering wholly bears what these demand. In so doing he sets sinners (law-breakers) free. This was the loving intention of the Father.

Looked at in terms of the act of the Cross, Jesus suffers, even to the point of being alienated by God. Notice that when he cries out, ‘My God! My God! Why did You forsake me?’ that he is crying out as man-for-men. He is at this point both representative and substitute for all mankind. Having identified with all men, having been ‘numbered with the transgressors’, i.e. having become *as* the transgressors, he is alienated, not as Son by the Father, but as sinful man by God.

What does it mean, then, to call him ‘the Trail-blazer’? It means that he alone, out of all men, has blazed the only trail that can (and does) lead to God! We recall that he said, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father *but by me*.’ No one in all history could lead us to God *as Father* because no one else has been the Son. This is apart from the significant fact that no one ever dare, of himself, even to approach God. All men have been too sinful for that!

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SUFFERING

We must realise that in the statements—‘He bore our sins in his body on the tree’, ‘He suffered the just for the unjust’, ‘He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows’, ‘...by his wounds our wounds are healed’, ‘God made him to be sin for us’—is contained the liberty of man. Man has been in bondage to sin, to evil, to law, conscience, and to death. Now he is emancipated. He is in a freedom that is beyond any dream he may have had. His liberty as a person lies in the Cross and the Resurrection. Dread of judgement, fear of eternal corruption, horror of alienation from God, life and others have all passed. Now, through the love of the Father, he is free to be a true human being. His identity is not marred or defaced. He can enter into himself or ‘come to himself’—his true self. He can possess life.

The significance of the Father's act of love in the Son is breathtaking, and its consequences are a total redemption of a fallen human being, but there is yet more to be seen and grasped. Paul announces the new range of living in a marvelous passage. In Galatians chapter four, and verses 4 to 6, he says, 'But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ' This accords with what we have just seen above: God's plan—through the Cross—to bring many sons into glory' !

HOW BEAUTIFUL IS SONSHIP WITH REDEMPTION!

This beautiful passage of Galatians 4:4-6 gives a startling revelation. Analysed, it falls into natural sections such as follow:

- (1) At the right (and ripe) point in history God sends His Son to be the Saviour of the world. This is done by Christ becoming man, and coming under the law.
- (2) The purpose of this incarnation is that he should redeem (liberate by paying a ransom, so freeing us) from the law: thus giving us salvation. Now salvation has been the marvellous truth which the church has always emphasised as the glorious act of God. As we have said above, this is wonderful evidence, perhaps the most wonderful of all, of the love of God.
- (3) A quirk of history is that for certain theological reasons—reasons which are embedded in the controversies which happened regarding Christ in the first few centuries—the next (and even more marvellous) part of these verses we are considering has almost been

lost. To be redeemed is magnificent, but to be made *sons of God* is unspeakably wonderful. Read then and see what the text is saying: '...to redeem us so that we might receive the sonship.' So then, through the Cross—initiated by the Father—we have become the sons of God,

- (4) Nor does it end there. When we read on we see the fourth statement, namely, '...because you are sons, He has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba!" that is "Father!" ' This means we are not only made sons of God but we are also given the Spirit of the Son who comes into us constantly crying out, 'Father! Father! ' The point of this is that Jesus as man knew his Father as Father through the presence and power of the Spirit. The Spirit also led him in everything that he did, thereby helping him to live out true Sonship in this created world. It is remarkable then that the same Spirit of the Son comes into us and gives us our sense of sonship (of the Father), and both causes us to live as sons and aids us to do so. Left to ourselves—devoid of the Spirit of the Son—we would lapse from sonship. It is as though we have the Son himself within us by the presence of the Spirit within us. In many places in the New Testament we are told that the Spirit dwells in us. Also we are told that we live in the Spirit. Hence the wonderfully warm experience and knowledge of our sonship. To strengthen our sonship we are told that the Spirit is also 'the Spirit of your Father' (Matthew 10:20).

WHY THE HISTORICAL QUIRK?

As a matter of interest we may pause at this point and ask why Christian history should have experienced the quirk to which we referred above. The answer is that when the

church was debating the equality of Christ with the Father it was anxious to preserve the truth of his deity against the Arians, who insisted that Jesus was a man who was given sonship by God. They—the Arians—said that he did not possess Sonship as God from all eternity, and so having received such sonship only at his baptism he could not be said to possess deity. They believed him to be not only true man, but more than man. They believed he was created before any other creature or thing, and indeed that he was given powers of creation so that he could create all things, as stated in John 1:1-4, Colossians 1:15-17, and Hebrews 1:2-3. However, they claimed, he was not God. By the same token he could not really be man. Today we would call such a person ‘superman’.

The orthodox theologians of the ilk of Athanasius argued for the equality of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. They maintained that the subordination of the Son was one *of function* and not *of nature*. We need not here concern ourselves with all the details of this debate. It is enough to say that because of the emphasis on equality of the Persons, the rich elements of Sonship which are set out in John’s Gospel were not thoroughly emphasised. Whilst the theologians were correct in attributing deity to the Son, they unconsciously passed over much which relates to Christ’s Sonship of the Father which we see in the New Testament. In this way the Fatherhood of God was somewhat limited, especially as a primary doctrine of the Scriptures. Of course it is present in some measure in the ecumenical creeds.

MAN’S OWN QUIRK

Whether our suggestion in regard to the Christological controversies is greatly significant or not, it is a fact of history—and even of the history of the Reformation—that salvation has been the major emphasis in the teaching of the

Western Church. The Reformers were magnificent in their emphasis upon forgiveness and justification. The Pietists were strong in their insistence upon holiness of life and obedience to the truth. The Puritans were specialists in the understanding of the cure of souls. They knew the dynamics of guilt and grace. In this, they are head and shoulders above even the Reformers, whose primary emphasis was justification. Of course, as regards justification, they were at one with the Reformers. Later streams of Holiness teaching emphasised—with the Pietists—the reality of practical godly obedience. Few, however, were there in all these streams of theology, who emphasised adoption, that is the gift to men, by the Father, of sonship.

Why then was this so? The answer may well be (and I personally think this explanation is the true one) that man has an inbuilt bias against fatherhood, whether human or divine. A statement such as this one is quite likely to cause involuntary objection in many people, but it should at least be given a good hearing. Universally the primary objection against fatherhood (i.e. parenthood) is that it represents authority. In fact it is that authority which is primal and which is closest to every child.

This matter of authority and its non-acceptance has been the subject of earlier chapters in this book, and we do not need to go over the same ground again. What we can say is that if it had not been for the suffering of both the Father and the Son we would never really know God as love. We would miss both Father-love and Son-love, and for that matter the love of the Spirit which is also a vital subject within the New Testament. We need, then, for the moment, to ignore the historical quirk, and to concentrate upon the wonderful fact that God’s love has brought us into sonship.

PERSONALLY DISCOVERING THE LOVE OF THE FATHER

THE FATHER LOVES

As human creatures we are easily distracted. Perhaps it is because we want to be distracted. Life is so busy. It moves so quickly. If there were times in man's past when he could be quiet and contemplate a matter steadily, then such times seem lost to us in our nervous restlessness. Mary of Bethany sat at Jesus' feet. She did more than that; she really listened. Of all the women to whom Jesus ministered, she seemed to understand most. That was because she listened. How many of us would even be prepared to read a few paragraphs of explanation which might—when understood—bring us out to the other side of life, wholly liberated? Many of us seem too restless to stop and contemplate truth. In this restlessness of ours we miss out on coming to know matters of eternal value.

What I want us to do now is to contemplate, and patiently make our way through the substance of the next few paragraphs, for they are deeply significant. Having been through the process myself—the process of discovering God's Father-love and so my own father's love—I ache for others to do the same. That is why I plead for close and undivided attention to the principle I now seek to outline. It is this:

When we saw the Son offer himself on the Cross for us, it was the Father who was the Initiator of that event. More than initiating it, He was with His Son in every element of his suffering. Paul puts it, 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, [thus] not counting their sins against them.' John says—and I paraphrase—'Look at the measure of God's love, that He did that by which we may now be called the children of (God' (I John 3:1). That which He did was the Cross. No Cross: no love. 'In this the love of God [the Father] was manifested, that he [the Son] laid down his life for us.' Doubtless the love of the Father is shown in the fact that He created us, and in the fact that He continually provides for us, but primarily we see that Father-love at the Cross. When then we see the Father's love at the Cross we know He loves us. Other Scriptures then crowd in on us, such as, 'God so loved...that He gave His only Son...'; 'Herein is love...that He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins'; 'God [the Father] out of *His great love* wherewith He loved us'. And so on.

If we look at these verses simply as texts to prove the point we are making, then they will merely slip over the surface of our thinking. They will not startle us, awaken us, thrill us, transform us. Only by exposing ourselves to the full impact of their meaning will we see it: the Father is love!

LOVE IS IN THE IMPACT

What do we mean by saying that love is in the impact? We mean that until we—by faith—actually receive the benefits of the work of Christ in his death and resurrection, we will not know the love of the Father.

Theological books written on the work of the Cross and the Resurrection—known as 'the Atonement'—often go into enormous detail about the death and the resurrection. They have a right to do this, for the action, purpose and

results of the Atonement are the most significant happenings of all human history. We cannot go into such details here. What we can do, though, is to look at the results. They are (a) the total forgiveness of sins; (b) the total cleansing from sins; (c) the gift of justification, that is acquitting a person from all condemnation, thus setting him free from the guilt of his sin; (d) the admission of the person into the people of God, the Kingdom of God, and eternal life; (e) the gift of love and of the Holy Spirit; and (f) the gift of becoming a son of God.

These results, which flow to each person who believes, are astonishing, even incredible. For a human being to experience the total forgiveness of his sin—virtually all sins: past, present and future—is a liberating and mind-expanding encounter with truth. To have washed away all the elements which have polluted the mind and shamed the heart is a transforming effect of love. To know one can walk out into life and live it without ever-present guilt is richly liberating. To know the love of God pervading one's being, and to know the Spirit of God present—by faith—perpetually, is a truth which boggles the mind. Then—to cap all this—to hear oneself saying simply and earnestly, 'Dear Father!' to God is almost beyond comprehension.

THE EFFECTS OF THE IMPACT

Look, now, at the effects of the impact. The first result is to love God as Father, and also His Son as Saviour and Lord. After all, he 'loved me, and gave himself up for me.' He—like the Father—did this in great love. He bore all my evil, personally, in his body, his mind, and his spirit, and he successfully overcame it. The suffering of that accomplishment must have been enormous. So then, seeing this, I love the Father and the Son.

In loving the Father I suddenly discover a most liberating

truth. The God-shaped blank which is really a Father-shaped blank is gloriously and completely filled! For the first time in my life I know total emotional fulfilment, that is, complete human satisfaction. I love the Father, but the implications take me further. As John put it, 'We love because He first loved us.' He not only means we love the Father because He loved us, but that we love all mankind, including our own persons. It is to be doubted that a more important practical truth has ever been revealed. Let us look at it again: 'We love because the Father first loved us.'

Let us see the implications of this truth. Being reconciled to God, I am likewise reconciled to all human beings. It may well be that they are not reconciled to me, and even that they do not want my love. However, from my side I do not hate anyone, and I love everyone. When I understand this I suddenly realise that this means I can no longer hold grievances against another person. I cannot now feel justified in my anger against my neighbour. I must love him and not be angry with him. I have no grounds to avenge myself because the grounds have been dissolved in the love of the Cross. Certainly I may now never be justified in being critical or judgmental in regard to anyone. What is of most importance is that the image I had of God—formed from my early father-mother impressions—has now become outmoded. A right, fresh image of God *as love* has come to me. I see then that my former image of God—as Father-Mother—was inaccurate. Thus I am also forced to see that the parental image—the father-mother one—was also wrong. That being the case, I can no longer retain it. For me this has quite powerful consequences. Let us look at these powerful consequences.

THE EFFECT OF FORGIVENESS

When I am forgiven, I forgive. This is the teaching of the

New Testament, if not the Old Testament also. In Matthew 18, from verse 21, Jesus speaks of unceasing forgiveness to others because of the total forgiveness of the Father. When we see the cost of forgiveness—through the Cross—to both Father and Son, we see how pitifully small is another person's debt with us. Sadly enough we generally see our sin debt to God as little more than trifling, but others' trifling sin-debts to us as quite large.

Since the Father has forgiven me, then I must forgive those things which I have held against my father and mother. As I do so, liberty comes both to them and to me. In one sense, I have held myself in bondage by my own unforgiveness. In another sense, I have held my parents in bondage through that same unforgiveness.

The somewhat disturbing—and yet humorous—fact is that when I begin to examine what it is I have against my parents (or others), I discover there is little to forgive. Most of my anger has not been well-based. It is not authentic because, in fact, most of what I have held against my parents—and others—has come from my own negative reactions, my wrong views of them. For the most part it is I who need the forgiveness. It is good then to see that even these negative reactions—being as they are, sin—are also forgiven through the Cross. So then I emerge as a forgiven person. My attitude to my parents—and others—is wholly changed. I am free from the past.

It is a curious and pleasant fact that when we are no longer prejudiced about a person we can see that one clearly. A son can suddenly see the truth of his parents. He can understand even their various problems linked with parenting. He can accept them as they are, and finds he loves them. Loving, as we know, has nothing whatever to do with the 'lovableness' of a person. Love just loves! Of course that kind of love is God's love in us, not our rather feeble human love. Human love peters out so quickly. The

wonderful truth of a forgiven person is that he can love with God's love. 'He that has been forgiven much, loves much.'

THE NEW TRUE IMAGES

LOVING WHERE WE DID NOT LOVE

We have said that, because of human sinfulness, we may have wrong or inadequate views of our parents, and of other people. We may even have wrong views of the male and female sexes, especially if we have seen them as deficient in our parents. We have also seen that our view of our parents is really our view of the image of God, and so, God Himself. This would mean that all our lives we have seen the creation as lacking, too. We would view it as being threatening, deficient, weak, overly strong, and so on. We would also see ourselves as deficient in some way or another. God, man, and creation are strongly linked. They are functionally one, so that a false view of one leads to a wrong view of the others .

This mixed-up view of God, man, self and creation is what makes life distressing to us in one way or another. It also seems to put us further and further away from the goal which we wished to achieve, namely emotional or personal fulfilment. This deprivation of what we long for causes anger, resentment, depression and even violence to form within us. In reactionary anger, human beings may even vandalise their creation, doing this with words, implements, or weapons. This vandalising helps to compound itself through consequent guilt and leads to cynicism of spirit.

Imagine then that suddenly—because of the Cross, and God’s love and forgiveness—we really see God as He is, as Father! Then our view of earthly fatherhood and parenthood will also suddenly change. Having been forgiven we will now forgive. We now genuinely love. Life changes for us. This life-change is radical, in that we no longer seek to fix blame on anyone for what has happened; no blame on God, or others, or even ourselves. We come to a sense of responsibility concerning all things to do with us.

ACCEPTING THE CONDITIONING INFLUENCES

In Chapter Three we discussed briefly the four factors which tend to condition human beings, namely parental upbringing, heredity, environment and circumstances. At this point we need to consider these elements in more detail. Only one of them is personal, and that is *parental upbringing*. Whilst parents are never perfect, even a long way from perfect, few of them actually wish ill for their children, or consciously seek to do them harm. Some of them— especially the insecure ones—do inflict certain bodily or emotional damage, and even sexually interfere with their children. Even so, many who behave in such ways do not really know what they are doing, and—whilst not excusing them—we must try to understand their inability to act as good parents.

The other three elements are not personal. *Heredity* is not an individual directing its affairs and effects. Neither is *environment*, which may affect us personally but is, itself, impersonal. The same is true of *circumstances*. We may be able, from time to time, to arrange circumstances for ourselves and even for others, to a limited degree, but on the whole they just happen.

If we get angry with one, some, or all of these factors then we are personalising their operations. We are saying that

people or God have caused them to happen. Generally— often without being conscious of our action—we blame God. We believe that He controls the movement of all things, including our four elements. When they do not work out as we wish them to, then we blame Him. We say that He was in the position to prevent or change their effects. In fact God is not in such a position. Without taking back the free will which He has given man, God cannot—indeed will not —artificially force man and creation into certain ways of behaving. Hence man brings much misery upon himself, his neighbours and creation by taking wrong lines of action.

Because of pride and anger we place responsibility for our difficulties and hurts upon God, and even on others. When we front up to the Atonement, receive total forgiveness and so come to know God's love, then a change takes place in us, in our mind and attitude. We now accept responsibility for who we are and what we have done. We do not charge God foolishly. In a wonderful way we cease accusing—or excusing—others, and even ourselves. We desire to share God's love with them.

If, however, we wish to receive God's forgiving love without taking responsibility for what we have done, then we do not consciously receive full forgiveness, even though that forgiveness is available for us. If we blame others for certain things done in the past then our relationships with them cannot be full. They cannot be relationships of true love.

AN EXAMPLE OF LOVE.-LIBERATION

I once knew a man who, though a person in God, blamed his father for about ninety-percent of the things that he (the son) had himself done. I said to him, 'Then you only need a ten-percent Cross, a ten-percent repentance, and a ten-percent forgiveness.' At first his look was quite blank. I continued, 'We are all responsible for every choice of will which

we have made from the womb, and perhaps even in it, for Jacob and Esau fought there with each other. From the cradle to the grave we are responsible for our choices. If we choose to be negative with parents and others then that is our decision. So with all choices, whether we can put them into effect or not.'

The light dawned on this man. Instead of being angry or depressed he suddenly came alive. 'Of course!' he exclaimed. 'How wonderful! That means that as I take responsibility for them all, I can have forgiveness for them all.' When I nodded he was even further delighted. 'Why then,' he said, 'I can really say I am wholly born again because all that past has gone. I am a new person. I have been forgiven all!'

So he was. If we lay blame on others for those choices we have made, then we lock them into ourselves indefinitely. No wonder we go through chronic stages of remorse, never knowing pardon for what we claim needs no pardon! That is why we often live in the uneasiness which comes from unresolved guilt.

What we need to do is to say that whatever God does He does rightly, though appearances may seem to be to the contrary. Only by faith do we see the reality of God's actions and man's actions. We do not judge by fallen human standards. When we refuse to acknowledge our sins and failures then we miss out on the free forgiveness that covers them. By thus locking them into ourselves, we force ourselves to bear them. As long as we keep on blaming others, and especially God, then we keep ourselves locked into anger. No wonder we live in confusion and frustration when in fact we could be free, joyful, and serene!

THE LIBERATING LOVE OF THE FATHER

We need, now, to return to our theme of the love of the

Father. Seeing God as He is we first recognise that He is the Father of His Son, Jesus Christ. We see that He is *essentially* Father because Christ is *essentially* His Son. By creation that essential Fatherhood now Fathers us. We become true sons of God as humans; as humans and not divine beings. We are spared such demanding levels of living. We can relax and enjoy being humans whose Father is the loving God.

Thus we establish loving relationships upwards to God, outwards to others, and inwards to ourselves. How freely, then, we can move in life. How rich and beautiful to be the children of God and so His family. In this way we have good and loving relationships with the other children of God. Our love also reaches out to the children of Adam, for by creation they too are our brethren.

'I'VE LOST MY CAN OF WORMS!'

I SEE JUST AS I WANT TO SEE

I see as little as I wish, or as much as I wish.

We have just reasoned that God's love is total, and so our response should be total. When it is total then we are richly liberated. When we deliberately graduate our response, then we are not free at all. To speak of being 'partly free' is a misnomer. We need to be totally free. For this reason we should not condition or qualify our response to His total love.

'EVERY MAN HAS A CAN OF WORMS'

So the saying goes, and it is certainly true of fallen man. Instead of the God-shaped blank being filled with God, it is often—sad to say—filled with worms.

What do we mean by worms? The man going fishing is glad he has a can of worms, but then they are not inside him. The inside can of worms contains our sins, our failures, our defilements, our angers, resentments, hurts, bitternesses and the like. These worms are not dead. Nor are they passive. They squirm and writhe incessantly.

Having counselled numberless people I have come to see how controlled they are by their worms. Having had some

myself I know only too well the discomfort they bring, and their ability to breed rapidly. A person can be gradually eaten away by them. They are very real. The pious hope of every psychologist and psychiatrist is that he can release some of these worms from their human can, and so relieve the sufferers. It is a tricky business.

The trouble is that we get angry about the worms and thus provide the ideal breeding conditions for them. In this atmosphere and climate they flourish. We then wonder why we should have them. That we have them is the sad fact. How to be rid of them is a matter we can tackle.

GETTING RID OF THE WORMS

The first great step in being rid of these, our squatter-tenants, is to acknowledge we are responsible for them. They would not be there but for us and our actions. They are the result of our decisions. We must not blame them on to others. Most especially we must not blame them on to the four elements of which we have spoken, namely parental upbringing, heredity, circumstances and environment.

In recent research into industrial problems arising from alcoholism, it was discovered that alcoholics would not accept responsibility for their failures. If they failed to handle a machine properly then the machine was at fault—not them! If they were depressed then it was because of circumstances: no one could be expected to work under such conditions! In other words they refused responsibility for failure. It was also seen that the moment they accepted failure as stemming from themselves, and agreed to the needed treatment, then, in fact, fifty percent of their healing was already accomplished.

As for alcoholics, so for all. We all have aberrations. The alcoholic is simply one amongst many. From the biblical point of view, accepting responsibility for choices is equal to

repentance. It is the first step in being wholly healed.

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

We have already seen that Adam blamed both God and Eve for his failure. Eve blamed the serpent. Cain blamed both Abel and God. So the story continues: heredity, environment, parental upbringing and circumstances force us to the choices we make. Wrong! We make the choices as we wish to do so.

Because Israelites blamed the sins of their fathers for their own problems and acts, God spoke through the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah (Ezekiel 18, Jeremiah 31:29-30), and said:

*'In those days they shall no longer say:
"The fathers have eaten sour grapes,
and the children's teeth are set on edge."
But every one shall die for his own sin;
each man who eats sour grapes,
his teeth shall be set on edge.'*

If we look into these two prophetic passages the principle emerges that every man is responsible for his own choices, no matter how small he may be—as a baby—or how large—as a grown person. Somehow, human choice begins at a very early age. We can see this from the stories of Jacob and Esau wrestling in their mother's womb, John the Baptist being filled with the Spirit in the womb, and the choice of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Paul, each from his mother's womb.

Choices are, of course, to some degree conditioned by outward influences. We dare not deny that. That is why Jesus warned against causing little ones to stumble. Every person has a responsibility towards little ones in this way. Yet, at the same time, the little ones make their own choices. Such choices can be very strong ones; those who bring up children know this.

In any case, children must take responsibility for their choices. If the fathers (and others) have eaten sour grapes then only the adult teeth will be set on edge. Children eat their own sour grapes. My friend who blamed his father for ninety percent of his own failures in life was really only a ten percent person. That is to say, if we do not have the liberty of making our own choices, and full choices at that, then we are not persons with dignity. We are only chips tossing on the strong waters of external influences.

We renew (and retain) our dignity only when we take responsibility for our choices.

**‘WILL SOMEONE PLEASE DESTROY
MY CAN OF WORMS?’**

Of course. As we have seen, that is what the Cross is all about. That is what the Father does in the Cross. His Son receives into himself the worms of every one. He bears them, plays them out—so to speak—to exhaustion and extinction. He takes their dynamic action as they seek to destroy him, and emerges from that dreadful conflict only because his pure and holy love is stronger than their vileness. No matter what the worms may be—sins or sorrows, hatred or hurt, badness or bitterness—he counters them all with his lethal love. They die, and are no more!

If we do not see this, and if we choose not to believe this, then our love will always be deficient. We will still be living with the worms! Our dull minds will say, ‘He bore our sins,’ but our hearts will feel no true liberty. No wonder we have small self-esteem, and no wonder we have dreary images of what we are. Some who love to be infamous claim their worms are too large and horrific for him to deal with! How childish is their claim. What mighty worm is there which can be proof against the fire of his love, and the dynamic of his purity?

No, without doubt, the can of worms is destroyed.

‘I STILL HAVE SOME WORMS!’

I have heard that statement many times. The answer is, ‘You have as many worms as you wish to have. If you want to retain worms, then that is what you will do. You will do so either out of ignorance of their demise, or out of obstinacy because your pride cannot accept the total work of love and grace.’

This is true. He has destroyed our worms. We only have worms when we give substance to old worm ghosts! Our faith must rise to the height of Christ’s finished work. Sadly enough, some of our churches are turning into counselling clinics, rather than places to proclaim the definitive liberating word: ‘Whosoever’s sins you forgive, *they have already been forgiven*’; or, ‘Son, take heart, your sins have been forgiven you’; or ‘I will forgive their iniquities and their sins I will remember no more.’

Why then should we remember our sins? Why should we take part in a recycling of our worms? Why should we give powerful embodiment to them?

THE LOVE OF THE FATHER AND THE SON

Faith sees the can of worms finished. Fear sees some or all of them still alive. Only he whose can of worms is finished hears the definitive word, ‘Go in peace; your faith has saved you.’ Let us make no mistake; ignorance is no excuse when the Word has told us we are free. Pride alone stops us from receiving grace and love. Grace is so humiliating to the proud human spirit. Pride is cunning, too, cunning enough to argue that grace is dangerous when it comes to morality and ethical living. This is the most subtle and damning lie of all!

When we see the complete work of the Father and the Son in the Cross, and come to total freedom, then it is that we realise the total love of the Father, and the Son. Then it is that our eyes are opened to see others in this world—our parents, our friends, our enemies and ourselves—in a wholly new light.

This is the subject of our next chapter, but will only be understood by those who have taken the worm treatment! They are the ones who love the Father and the Son for loving them.

THE COMMUNITY OF THE RECONCILED

‘YOU ARE ALL BRETHREN’

We now need to look at the practics of living as sons of God. We have seen that to be reconciled to Father-God is to be reconciled with all men. Whilst not all will accept reconciliation with us we are to come to terms with their hostility. We must not be idealistic or we will be disappointed. We must not be shocked into cynicism or we will again become bitter. We must simply be realistic.

What then is being realistic in relationships? It is recognising what fallen man is and coming to terms with that. It is accepting people just as they are. This does not mean we agree with wrong elements in the thinking and living of others, but it does mean that the persons themselves we accept. In fact we let them all be. We do not seek to reform them, or to manipulate them—as we say—for their own good! We do not look upon ourselves as Mr or Mrs (or Miss) ‘Fixit’. We trust that God is working in the world, and in their lives, and we are ready for the leadings He gives us in loving and helping them. Meanwhile we just accept them, not ignoring their warts, but yet not seeing only warts. The image of God is in all human beings, however much our sinfulness may have obscured that image.

Jesus said on one occasion, ‘You are not to be called

rabbi [teacher], for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, even your Father who is in heaven.' By this Jesus meant we are not to covet being called teacher so that men will look up to us as though we are a grade above them. God (Father, Son and Spirit) is the True Teacher. No one must usurp that position. Likewise no human being should demand that worship and place which only God as the True Father can fill. Jesus also said that we should call no one master (leader, guide) except Messiah. Only *One is* constituted as Messiah, that is to say, Jesus the Son.

By all of this we see we are all brethren, and all sons. That is where our life is lived. It is family. To emphasise this Paul once said, 'Concerning brotherly love; you have no need that I teach you, because you yourselves are taught by God.' Peter put this brotherly love as the very reason for conversion or new birth. He said, 'Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for [i.e. with a view to] a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart.' John said, 'By this we know love, that he [Jesus] laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.' John had heard Jesus say, 'Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.'

THE FATHER AND THE SONS

When Paul said that God teaches us brotherly love, he simply meant that when the Father is present, then the children of God are all brethren, and are motivated to love as brethren by the very fact of His presence. Paul also means something like this when he says, 'The God and Father of us all, who is *above* all, and *through* all, and *in* you all.' When God is above all He controls all things for our benefit. He has authority over us for our good. He is not locked into His family so that He is controlled by them.

On the other hand, He is through all, co-ordinating it, giving it reality as family, and so is not locked out of His people. Finally He is present intimately and personally to all His family, that is, to each and every member, so that none is lonely, none unassisted, none without emotional and personal fulfilment. For our part, being sons of the Father brings responsibility. This differs from person to person, but each has it. Before we discuss some of these things let us understand clearly how it is that the family lives in love, for without doubt love is the motivating and co-ordinating element in true family.

SIMULTANEOUS LOVE

We saw that love is in laying down life for others. That was the Son's love. The ancient principle of loving was summed up by Jesus, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. Then, too, you shall love your neighbour as yourself.' Now the principle of loving is this: the child of God loves because God (the Father) first loved him. Not only does he return God's love; he also loves his neighbour and he loves himself.

Let us look at this principle a little more closely. God's love comes to the child of God, and causes him in response to love upwards to God, whose love is always coming down to him. Simultaneously, the child of God is loving outwards to others, and loving inwards to himself. If he seeks to love others from his own resources he will fail. If he believes God will love him for loving others he will also fail. If he seeks to love himself so that he can love his neighbour *as himself*, then he will still fail. Love downwards from God, upwards from man, outwards to others, and inwards to himself will prove to be the

true love action. This will be the way both of stimulating and continuing liberty.

Incidentally, a person who lives in this action of love has achieved his true identity as a person. When all live like this together then they have achieved community identity.

BROTHERLY LOVE IN ACTION

John said, 'If any man says he loves God and hates his brother then he is a liar; for if he cannot love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?' Any man's brother is his Father's son, as he, too, is a son. To say one loves the Father and hates the son is a contradiction. To love God is to love the brother: to love the brother is thus to love God.

John even gave us the test of brotherly love. He said, 'If any man has this world's goods and sees his brother is in need, but shuts up his heart of compassion, how then does the love of God dwell in him?' The answer is, 'It does not dwell.' John added, 'When I help my brother then I know I am living in the truth. In this case it is the truth of love. If I do not help my brother then I do not love him.' Elsewhere John said that he who does not love his brother abides in death. He also wrote that he who hates his brother is a murderer. For the New Testament writers, to love is to give. It is to give what one has in order to meet the needs of another. It is to give oneself to another, and it is to give one self for another—even to the point of death. Love is to use one's gifts not only to supply material needs of others, but also to supply their emotional needs. Thus true love is union between the loved and the one loving. One does not withhold oneself where giving is needed by the other. As John said, the difference between the children of God and the children of the Devil is that the first do righteous deeds and love the brethren; the latter do evil deeds and hate the brethren.

11

THE ELDER BROTHER AND HIS BRETHREN

THE OLDER BROTHER

Just as the Fatherhood is often neglected in Christian teaching, so also is the truth that Jesus is the older Brother in the family of God. Hebrews 2:9-18 is a very moving passage. It speaks first of Jesus becoming the Trail-blazer for the Father so that the Father can bring many sons into glory. It then adds, (verses I 1-14):

'For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I will proclaim Thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will praise Thee." And again, "I will put my trust in Him." And again, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil...'

We can see then that the Son and the sons are of the same stock. Christ is not ashamed to call sinners his brethren. The statement, 'I will proclaim Thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will praise Thee,' is from Psalm 22.

This psalm is a Messianic psalm and depicts the suffering of Christ on the Cross. When the redemptive suffering is complete, the sufferer makes this cry (verse 22). We

see then that this brotherly love was expressed in the Cross. He truly laid down his life for his brethren.

In Romans 8:28-30 we are again shown that we are the brethren of Christ. God is conforming us to the image of His Son so that he (the Son) shall be the first-born among many brethren. For the purposes of our study we want to see Jesus as the paradigm of the true brother, especially the true elder brother.

OLDER BROTHERS WHO DID NOT LOVE

We have noted John's statement, 'If any man say, "I love God," and hates his brother, then he is a liar, for if he cannot love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he cannot see?' Any man's brother is his father's son, the same flesh and blood as his. In I John 3:10-11 we saw this principle. Those of Satan's family hate the brethren, whilst those of the Father's family love them.

Cain is specified as being of the Evil One. He slew his brother. Why did he slay him? Because Abel's deeds were righteous and his own evil. There were conflicting forces at work in Cain. He desired God's approval, and the passage shows he became very angry when this approval was not given. So on the one hand, Cain wanted the Father's acceptance. On the other, he hated the same Father, as he showed by slaying His son, Abel. We can see then the battle of two strong forces—the wanting of the love of God, and yet resentment that God makes demands Cain is not prepared to fulfil.

In the Old Testament the older brother was expected to care for the younger children of the family. Cain is the antithesis of Jesus, who is the true Son and Brother. Likewise Ishmael—an older brother—hates Isaac, the son of promise. For a clear understanding of their relationship, we need to read Genesis chapter 16, 17:15-21, 21:8-21, with Galatians 4:21-31.

The substance of these passages is that the younger brother, Isaac, is the child of promise and is hated by his older brother Ishmael.

There is little difference in the case of Esau and Jacob. Genesis 25:19-34 shows the battle of the two children in the womb, the conflict as Jacob seeks the birthright and the blessing of God. Esau is a secular type, not caring for the things of God. There is partiality in the parents, Isaac loving Esau and Rebecca loving Jacob. The outcome of the conflict is that Esau hates Jacob. Thus in Cain, Ishmael and Esau there must have been hatred for the Father-God, as also for the human fathers Adam, Abraham, and Isaac. In accordance with what we have seen about the child's view of its parents, these men must have had a wrong view of God Himself. Hence they were out of kilter with His true creation.

Some words of John sum up their case: 'If any man hates his brother then he is a murderer.'

THE YOUNGER AND OLDER BROTHER OF THE PARABLE

The two men, brothers in the parable which we call 'the prodigal son' story, are interesting to study. We have observed that the younger son was a wild and self-willed creature. He was quite wrong in demanding his portion of the legacy. It would be rare, in the West, to find a son making that demand. In the East, I am told, it is impossible to trace a single case of such a request. We can find no defence, then, for the younger son.

We can understand the older brother's reaction when he heard his brother had wasted his part of the legacy in wild living. What we cannot agree with was his anger at his brother's return. In that anger the older brother revealed what he really was. He made it clear he had no love for his

brother. In that, he made it clear he did not love his father. He breached the principle of I John 4:20. It was his anger at his father which is revealing. He carped and croaked and complained: 'All my life I served you...I never disobeyed any of your commands, yet you never gave me a kid, let alone a fatted calf! But what do you for this son of yours who has wasted his inheritance evilly? You give him a fatted calf! '

We will not fully understand the story unless we read the introductory words of the chapter in which it is written (Luke 15:1-2). Jesus was really speaking against the Pharisees and scribes who objected to Jesus eating with sinners and receiving them. He told the stories of the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son, thus showing that the Father greatly rejoiced when that which was lost was found. Not so the older brother. He had neither love for the Father, nor for the Son.

THERE IS FREEDOM IN LOVING AND FORGIVING

The point of examining these stories of older and younger brothers is to show that if we claim to know God as Father, the validity of that claim is seen in the way we love the brethren. Loving the brethren is the test point for our loving of God. This simply means we take the same view of the brother as God does of him.

In Matthew 18:21 to 35 Jesus tells the story of the man who is so heavily in debt that he cannot possibly repay what he owes. His boss forgives him the entire debt. This servant then discovers a fellow-servant who owes him a mere trifle by comparison. By contrast, he is unforgiving, and throws his debtor into prison. His master discovers this and is angry, so much so that he withdraws the forgiveness. Jesus concludes by saying, 'So also my heavenly Father will do to everyone of you if you do not forgive your brother from

your heart...' Notice that it has to be a heart-forgiveness.

The truth is that when we are forgiven we forgive. When we forgive we liberate both the other person and ourselves. It is interesting to note that in the Old Testament an explicit command is never given to Israel to forgive the brethren. Doubtless it is implicit in the covenant, and the fact is that each day there was a sacrifice made for the people. On the Day of Atonement a special yearly sacrifice was made for all. Because God had forgiven none was to dare not to forgive! In the New Testament the Father has made a universal sacrifice for sins.

The Father has forgiven: who are we not to forgive? Because those who refuse to believe the gospel do not receive this forgiveness personally from God does not excuse us for not forgiving. The Epistles do insist upon mutual forgiveness between Christians, but the joy and liberation which such forgiving brings to us carries its own motivation for continued forgiving. Constant and instant forgiveness is part of the life of the loving family, whether we be older or younger brothers.

THE NEW TRUE FAMILY—1

THE PRACTICAL VALUE OF FAMILY

We have seen that to be loved by the Father is to know ourselves to be His children. He has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, and that Spirit is Himself crying, 'Father!' so that we too utter the same cry. We say it naturally, involuntarily. He has not given us the spirit of slavery again, to fear, but the Spirit of sonship whereby we cry, 'Father!'

Now this must be about the healthiest thing we ever do. It is a rich, relational cry. We love the Father and say so. It is health-giving and health-sustaining. To be solitary is not good for our humanity. Withdrawals into solitary states for the purposes of meditation, contemplation and creative thinking can be very valuable, but basically man is a social creature, made for family living. To be in family is relationally satisfying and fulfilling. Of course to have 'bad family' is not helpful. Even so one State welfare department has the principle, 'Better a bad home than a good institution.' Family and home are enriching to the human personality. They are most enriching when they bring love, security and concern for others.

The healthiest person is one who lives in family. The Family of God is a wholesome and functional entity. It is

where we relate to God as Father, the Son as Lord and Brother, the Spirit as the Spirit of truth, and the brethren as God's children.

THE FACT OF THE FAMILY

In the Old Testament we are struck by the fact that in its early chapters it gives itself over to the families of the beginning times. In the last page of the New Testament we see that the families of the earth figure quite significantly with God. In one way of speaking He seems more concerned for families than individuals. Of course families are composed of persons and He is interested in persons, but He thinks largely in terms of families. So should we. It is a healthy way of thinking. To think in terms only of one's own immediate family is relationally restrictive, and it limits the action and bounds of our humanity.

THE CREATED AND REDEEMED FAMILY

Romans 5:12-21 makes it clear that all men are in Adam. He is our great human father. Genesis 11 onwards tells us that Abraham is the father of all the nations that come under God's great covenant of grace. This is confirmed by Paul in Galatians 3:6-9:

"Thus Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.'

We are then a family people, and God has His true family. Man rebelled against God and as a rebel denied his created sonship. This is the sonship set forth by Luke 3:38,

‘Adam was the son of God,’ and by Acts 17:28, ‘We are His offspring’. It is the sonship indicated by the parable of the prodigal son, where the true son is the one who repents before the Heavenly Father, whilst the untrue son is the older brother who carps and croaks before God as a Taskmaster. Man in denying his created sonship caused a fracture in all his human relationships. We have seen that as a result of this difference between man and God there came a rift between man and woman, so that children do not see God, especially if they do not wish to do so!

I John 3:10-12 tells us the whole story:

‘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. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous.’

Man split into two groups. Although all the human race—in Adam—abdicated from God as Father, yet one part of mankind, under the elective grace of God, was drawn to know God as Father. The sign of this is that like Abel they were the true children of God. Those like Cain were ‘of their father the devil’. Jesus brings this point out powerfully in John 8:42-44:

‘Jesus said to them, “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. 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 the human race from the beginning constituted two families, the one of God the Father and the other of Satan as a father. The distinguishing marks of the

two families is that those of the true family do righteousness and love their brethren, and those of the evil family do not do righteousness but wickedness, and hate the brethren.

When we ask why did Abel obey God and love Cain his brother, the answer must be, ‘He was one of God’s family.’ To the question, ‘How did he come to be a member of God’s family?’ the reply must be, ‘By the elective grace of God.’ We must see that from the beginning only men of faith were members of God’s family. Their faith was in God. It was by faith that Abel offered up a true sacrifice. It was by guilt that Cain offered up a faulty sacrifice. Somewhere and somehow all persons of faith saw God as the propitiating God and Father. Hence they believed. Of Abraham it was said, ‘Abraham believed and it was counted unto him for justification’ (Gen. 15:6). Likewise the penitent tax-gatherer had faith that somehow God would make propitiation for him for this is innate in his plea, which was ‘O God, be propitious to me a sinner!’

Man who—in Adam—has abdicated from God as Father, has no known way back to God. He neither desires to return, nor has the ability to do so. That is why the Son came to show the Father and stir the spirit of man so that he would set aside his deliberate amnesia—his self-induced forgetfulness—and long for the Father. His intolerable sigh would now be evoked. Through the Son he would long for the God-shaped blank to be filled with Fatherhood through Sonship.

That is how the redeemed family comes into being.

BEING BROUGHT TO THE FAMILY

The New Testament has two wonderful passages which speak of the family being drawn together. The first is in John 11. Following the death and raising of Lazarus, the leading Jews become alarmed. What Jesus is doing will soon

come to the notice of the Roman authorities, who will surely step in and destroy the whole (now dangerous) nation. Caiaphas the high priest says it is high time for Jesus to be destroyed. John comments (verses 51-52): 'He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.' We see then that God's purpose in the Cross was to bring all His (elected) children together, together in one family.

The second great passage is Ephesians 2: 11-21. It is so important that we quote it in full:

'Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.'

What we derive from this passage is that there are two groups of humanity, namely the Gentiles and the Jews. The Jews are God's chosen covenant people. In the eyes of the Gentiles they seem to be an elite group, and this fact may give rise to some questioning. Why should God choose

them? Why are they so privileged? Why should they have facilities for ridding themselves of guilt and the rest of the world be neglected? Whatever the answers may be, Paul shows clearly that in the Cross God has dissolved the enmity between the two sections of the human race by the following acts:

- (i) He has finished the distinctive cultural, ritual and sacrificial laws by fulfilling them in Christ. Therefore there is no real reason for separation between people.
- (ii) In Christ His Son the sins of the world have been borne and so there is no need for division. Where guilt is remitted enmity is dissolved.

By these means a new people has been created, the new humanity. Man now does not have to participate in Adam. He may participate in the true man, Christ the Son. Each person's new humanity derives from Christ. Thus men are no longer strangers and pilgrims in this world but through Christ and the Spirit they are brought to the Father. They are part of the new family, sometimes called 'the third race'; they are neither Jews nor Gentiles but true children of God. The innate yearning of man to become his true self is now fulfilled as he comes through the Son to the Father.

The true family has been born; the children of God scattered abroad are now brought into one family. What was lost by rebellion has been regained by redemption.

THE NEW TRUE FAMILY II

THE FACT OF THE FAMILY

We have said that true family living is essential to the true life and well-being of every human creature—whether he will agree with this idea or not, and whether he will accept it or not. The practical question arises: ‘Is there actually such a family?’ It could be that only the concept may exist in some minds, whilst the reality has not yet been produced.

The fact is that there is such a family. On the Day of Pentecost the new, true people of God was born. The family formed out of the word uttered by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth, and who was to show the things both of the Father and the Son (John 16:12-16), led those hearers who were willing ‘into all the truth’. They came to see the love of God in the Son. They repented, they received forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ as they were baptised, and they also received the gift of the Spirit. Because of this they were now able to cry, ‘Abba!’ that is, ‘Father!’ That made them to be family.

THE ACTION OF THE NEW FAMILY

All we saw in Chapter Ten, about God being Father, about believers being brethren, and about the mutual love

they share, was made evident in the life of the new people of God. They not only came together to hear the word of the apostles, and to pray and worship, but they simply gathered in each other’s homes. They had great joy. They cared for one another and shared their possessions in loving concern. They were of one heart and one soul and one mind.

Each day they had a distribution in which the poor, the orphans, and the widows shared. The family cared for the material and emotional needs of its community. The letters which the apostolic leaders wrote to the churches are filled with constant urgings to keep up the spirit of Pentecost and family by love, and care and concern.

There is no doubt about the relational reality of the family. Its action was that of true love.

THE BASIC REALITY OF THE FAMILY

The New Testament church was most certainly the family of God. Further, the writer of Hebrews also refers to God’s people of the Old Testament as the household of God (Hebrews 3:1-3). This word ‘household’ is not used much in the West, these days. Households, for the most part, have disintegrated under the extreme individualism of our modern industrial and technological age.

Whilst that may be true enough, yet current literature—especially in novels and soap opera scripts—is again laying emphasis upon family saga. The idea of household in the Scriptures is just this. Hence the teaching about Abraham as the father of a great people. In this sense the household of God must be called the family of God. We saw in Ephesians 2:19 that we are no longer strangers and sojourners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household (family) of God.

In Hebrews 3:1-6 Moses is shown as a servant in the household, but Christ as the Son is over the family. In

I Timothy 3:15 Paul talks about knowing how to behave ‘in the household of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.’ When John says in his first letter, ‘See what love the Father has given us [in the death of Christ] so that we should be called the children of God,’ he adds, ‘And so we are’, that is, the family of God. He then goes on to say in the same chapter (chapter three) that we can distinguish the family of God from the family of Satan.

The same fact is evident from the Book of the Revelation. Within it are two sets of people, one which is marked with the number of the Beast, and one which is marked with the name of the Father and the Lamb (compare Revelation 13:16-17 with 14:1). This two-family concept is quite dynamic. Men are in one or other.

How, then, does one pass from the family of evil into the family of the true Father?

ENTRANCE INTO THE FAMILY

The New Testament shows the modes of entrance into the family of the Father. It speaks of ‘adoption’ and ‘regeneration’. ‘Adoption’ may seem a fairly cold and impersonal word. But the parents adopting a child do not think of it that way; they see it as a warm affair, and they are right. To a baby, who, as far as we can judge, does not know it is being adopted, it would not be a cold word, either. There may be some strangeness for an older child in the process, but only until the new parents have warmed him with their love —assuming that love will be accepted.

God’s adoption is in no way a cold or impersonal affair. The joy of being redeemed produces a high level of emotion for the one who, at the same time, is being adopted, and given the status of a son. In both Galatians 4:4-6 and Romans 8:14-17 this is evident. In the first case the Spirit of

(Christ’s) Sonship is sent into the heart, crying, as he comes and stays, ‘Dear Father!’ In the second case the sons themselves cry, ‘Father! Dear Father!’ along with the Spirit. Sonship is thus a warm and natural matter. The recipient of sonship is delighted, indeed enraptured. This is the highest human experience he will ever know.

Regeneration is in one sense a mystery. Adoption may be called the objective side of new sonship and regeneration the subjective side. Jesus calls regeneration ‘the new birth’. He says it comes from above, and man cannot cause or manipulate this work. The Spirit ‘blows where he wills’. Out of the work of the Spirit comes a new person. It is the old person reborn. If he had not been born once then he could not be reborn. Created by God he was yet dead because of his sins. Recreated by God he is alive as a child of the Father.

We need not go into the mystery. Paul simply says that if any man is in Christ then he is a new creation. In another place the same apostle speaks about ‘the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.’ Undoubtedly it is a dynamic and comprehensive miracle. We mention it here because the whole purpose of this book is to show us how different we are when we come to God as Father.

It takes a miracle of God, through the Cross, Resurrection and the Holy Spirit, to make us such children of God. All the elements of repentance, faith, forgiveness, and justification are necessary for the new birth to be effected. Then we know the love of God and are assured of our sonship. By these means we enter the family.

The whole process is a simple one. James says wonderfully, ‘By His own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures’. He sees us as so different from what we once were.

Peter for his part speaks of us as having been ‘born anew to a living hope’. His words are, ‘You have been born anew,

not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.’

John has a whole host of sayings about the regeneration-miracle. He speaks of its effects rather than its modes; those who are born of God do not practise sin, or do unrighteousness. He says that the regenerated person knows God and loves Him and loves his brethren. He can overcome the hostile world in which the family of Satan is powerfully active. In fact this new-born person is kept by the Son whose Lordship protects him.

It is profitable and helpful, then, to see how one enters into the family of God. That is why we need to keep remembering these matters. In so doing our astonishment and wonder is kept alive. We keep remembering what the Father, the Son and the Spirit have done to make us members. In this way we remain grateful and continue to value very highly our position and experience as the children of God, and as brethren within the family.

THE NEW TRUE FAMILY III

A HELPFUL SURVEY OF FATHERLY GRACE

We come now to the conclusion of our theme of God as Father, and of ourselves as His children, members of His family. We need to share an evaluation before we discuss the daily life of the new family.

Each of us ought to see that from being those who abdicated their created sonship we are now the sons of the Father, and participators in His family. This means that we are no longer chronic visitors to counselling clinics. We are forgiven, cleansed, justified and adopted. We have no can of worms, no past events or memories to recycle in unhealthy ways. We should never look back; God has forgiven all the past, and for that matter the present and the future! He will remember our sins no more. Nor, then, should we. Should memories return unbidden then we can simply say, ‘Oh, that does not remind me of my failures. It reminds me of the grace and love that has covered those failures.’

Again we have no griefs or sorrows, hurts or sufferings. These have been carried by Christ in his Cross, and they have been healed. ‘By his wounds our wounds have been healed.’ So then we are free to live. We refuse to revive the dead past. All this is so simple that if we are not careful we will not realise its truth. We will give way to old patterns of

depression, and will again seek out old worms! What a dreary and harmful pastime that is!

WHERE WE ARE AT PRESENT

We are in the Father. In two of his epistles Paul speaks of 'the church which is in the Father'. That is beautiful. The Family is always in the Father. There is 'one God and Father of us all, who is above all, and through all, and in all. ' From Him 'all familyhood in heaven and earth is derived'. So then the reality of our sonship and childhood does not change. Likewise the reality of being brethren together in the Father does not alter. We have full relational living. We mature in the true community of God. It is true that we have difficulties, and that we are opposed by evil forces, but the security of the family does not lessen. Our growth in character and personhood is assured within the family.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

The answer to this question is vital. If we are only luxuriating in our new status as sons, and in our new relationships with the Father and the Son, through the Holy Spirit, then we can become those who seek to live merely for relationships and the emotional satisfaction which they bring. When we look at the way the Son lived we can clearly see what being sons is all about. He said, 'I do nothing but what the Father tells me.' That is, genuine obedience is the essence of living as sons of God. 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.' As with Christ the Son—who was always led by the Spirit—so with us. Our sonship is fulfilled in doing the will of God.

In Revelation 21:7 the Father says, 'He who conquers shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.' We remember that God gave a command to His

first son, Adam, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill up the earth'. That is not all; he is also told to 'subdue' the earth: subdue it, and have dominion over everything upon it.' Man refused to fulfil this mandate. In refusing the command he was refusing his true sonship. Now we can fulfil that command, as also the command to proclaim the gospel of truth to all the world. For an example and pattern we have the Son. In I Corinthians 15:24-28 we see that he sets out to do what we did not do, that is to subdue all things.

When he does this he will give the Kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all. In Philippians 2:9-11 we read that 'every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father.'

It is important to note the last phrase of this passage, 'to the glory of the Father'. It makes very clear that our present life as the family of God is to be in action, serving the Father in His business.

WHAT ARE OUR BOUNDARIES?

The business of the Father, Son and Spirit knows no boundaries. Hence we are told to 'do good unto all men, especially the household [family] of God.' The Son sends us out into the world, for the gospel is for all the world. We are in the world, but not of it. Yet the Father loves this world and calls us to love its people and serve them. Paul prays that 'you may increase and abound in love to one another, and to all men, as we do to you.' His call is for love and prayer 'for all men'. In the same breath he speaks of 'our God and Saviour who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth'. At the same time the business of the Father is to destroy all evil. The sons then are those who overcome the forces of evil. Revelation 15:2 speaks of those who had overcome 'the beast and its image and the number of its name.' In 17:14

John sees the evil forces making war on the Lamb, but the Lamb conquers them, for with him, fighting in the same battle, are 'those...who are called and chosen and faithful.'

In this conflict and action of obedience there are no limits. The whole creation is the battlefield, and the people of God do not fight 'flesh and blood', i.e. other people, but they wrestle against princes who are angelic and powers who are celestial, those who lead evil actions even in the heavenly sphere. The sons of God are strong, and they are equipped with spiritual weapons of great power.

The action of obedience, and the operation of fighting evil, all work to bring the children of God to maturity. They are faced with many adverse circumstances. As a matter of fact they are 'being killed all the day long...accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' This must not daunt them, since in all things they are more than conquerors through Him that loved them. This action of obedience in sonship is fitting them for the Great Day. Meanwhile they know that in all things—whether good or calamitous—God is working for the good of those who love Him.

WHAT WILL BE THE OUTCOME?

It is here we can wax lyrical. If what God has done for us is marvellous, then what He is doing in us is no less remarkable. His Spirit and His Son live in us, so that our sonship is wonderfully filled out. That is why, and that is how, we grow in maturity. We put aside the weak things of the past—the things of self-consideration—and we grow healthy in the relationships within the family, and the exercise of obedience. Far from being stunted we are growing up into Christ the head. We are sharing in his stature and his maturity.

Even so we do not know how wonderful are the things

ahead of us. We saw in Hebrews 2:10 that the purpose and action of the Cross was to 'bring many sons into glory'. Note that it is not only to bring sons to the Father, but to bring them to glory. It is similar to what Paul says in Ephesians 1:5—'He predestined us in love to be His sons through Christ Jesus, according to the purpose of His will'.

In I Corinthians 2:9 Paul says, 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the hearts [imagination] of men, the things that God has prepared for them that love Him'. He means that the Father has prepared a wonderful inheritance for His children. These sons of His will be resurrected from corruption, given a body of glory, made kings and priests to God and the creation, having been appointed to judge angels, and to reign for ever. This breathtaking truth needs to be pondered. John simply says, 'It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when we shall see Him then we shall be like Him.' Paul says, similarly, 'He is conforming us to the image of His Son that he [the Son] should be the first-born among many [such] brethren.'

THE NOW-TIME AND THE THEN-TIME

The New Testament tells us that we have been through the *crisis* of redemption and so have come to sonship. Now we are living in the *process* of sonship and familyhood. This process will issue in a *climax*, the climax of resurrection, glorification, and eternal sonship. Meanwhile we are being changed from 'one stage of glory to another'. We are also suffering in this process, as is right and necessary. Yet 'our light affliction is but for a moment'. Thus suffering 'is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison'. The richness, splendour, grandeur and useful nature of eternal sonship is quite beyond our powers of imagination. Only then will we know what God has done in 'bringing many sons into glory'. Then we will know what it is to be

'to the praise of His glory'.

What is to come certainly affects us deeply in the now-time. What God promises we will be motivates us to live now, in accordance with the promises for the future.

'FATHER! INTO THY HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT'

When he had fulfilled the Father's will, Jesus quietly, but deliberately, committed himself into his Father's hands. He had no fears. The alienation he had known on that Cross as he took the sins of man did not blind him to the nature of God as his Father.

As we close off our very brief study of God as Father, of His Son as the way to the Father, and of the Spirit as the Spirit of both Father and Son, we realise that the richest things we will ever discuss we have shared within the pages of this small volume. Whether they will be significant and life-changing for us depends upon whether we have listened to them and caught their truth. If not then what we have said is just so many words. If we have listened, then the sure outcome will be to have the same spirit as the Son—'Father into Thy hands I commit myself.'

This is what we should do, not only in death, but now, in life. We should willingly surrender to the loving Father, taking up our sonship now and for ever. There is nothing in all creation which is so fulfilling, so satisfying and so able to complete us as human beings.

Otherwise we have only the alternative of loneliness, for 'The way of man is not in himself. It is not in a man to direct his own footsteps.'

**THE ALTERNATIVE TO
GOD'S FATHERHOOD**

THE END OF THE FATHERLESS

A gentle and warm insight into the Featheriness of God is seen in Psalm 68:5-6:

*'Father of the fatherless and protector of widows
is God in His holy habitation.
God gives the desolate a home to dwell in;
He leads out the prisoners to prosperity;
but the rebellious dwell in a parched land.'*

The term 'desolate' is elsewhere translated as 'the solitary'. The Bible contains a great amount of teaching about the care of such people. It is pure religion and undefiled to visit the fatherless and the widows. Provisions were made for the fatherless in the covenant of Moses.

However, what is the alternative to coming to know the Father? The alternative is to refuse to know Him, and to be Fatherless. It may sound cruel to insist that we must have a father, whatever. I John 3:10ff. (cf. Ephesians 2:1-3, John 8:44) shows us that we have either God as Father or we have Satan. Some would violently object to this idea, preferring to believe they can opt for *no father* at all! Even so it is true that we make surrogate or substitute fathers such as the idols. We must express our innate love and worship to something.

We may not be aware that Satan is our father (see John

8:39-44); but he inevitably is, if we refuse God's Fatherhood. Satan exercises his unseen fatherhood through the substitutes. Thus the alternative to true Fatherhood is Satanic anti-fatherhood, which is negative and abortive, and so really non-fatherhood. This means the God-shaped (or Father-shaped) blank will never be properly filled. If we know the truth of Fatherhood then that thought will be terrifying. If we do not, then we will accept it without much worry. Even so it is unpleasant.

SHEEP AND GOATS AT THE END-TIME

In this parable Jesus says the goats are those who did not care for his brethren. I doubt that Jesus means by 'my brethren' all human beings that inhabit the earth. From the context it appears his brethren were those proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom. This is, at the same time, the Gospel of the Father. Only those who cared for the brethren are the 'blessed of my Father'. Only they enter the Kingdom. The others are the 'goats'. They have to enter into eternal punishment. Surely the essence of this punishment is existence without the loving Father!

THE SONS AND THE NON-SONS

In Revelation 21:7-8 we read of the sons and the non-sons: 'He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.' The ones who conquer in the Book of the Revelation are those who refuse the mark of the Beast. They refuse to be beastly! Chapter thirteen, verses 11-18 shows a group of people who bow to evil and are conscripted to the beastly

way. The good counterpart of these is those who do not have the beastly mark but the mark of the Father and the Son, as in 14:1 (cf. 7:1ff., 22:4).

The dreadful end, or eternal anguish of the non-sons is powerfully depicted throughout the book. These non-sons are in the category of the goats.

THE KNOWERS AND THE NON-KNOWERS

In I John 2:12-17 John pursues a serious theme, contrasting those who know and love the Father with those who do not. He says, 'I write to you, little children, because you know the Father.' He adds, 'If anyone loves the world, the love of [or, 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.' He adds, 'The world is passing away, but he who does the will of God [the Father] abides for ever.'

In this same letter John says some beautiful words (chapter five, verse 20): '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.' Notice, however, that he concludes with a warning: 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols.' John knows all about surrogate fathers. To be riveted to the world, and to pass away with it, is terrifying. To be the plaything of idols is both demeaning and sterile. Jesus gives the rich alternative: 'This is life eternal, to know Thee [the Father], the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' John adds, 'And our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son...'

THE BROTHERS AND THE NON-BROTHERS

If we go back a few chapters we see the stories of Cain

and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, as also Esau and Jacob. There we see that to hate one's brother is really to hate the Father. The non-brothers, then, are the non-sons. If one sees the brother in need and does not help him, then the love of God does not dwell within that person. He may have high-flown ideas and ideals, but the truth of them works only in acts. These are those who 'lie and do not the truth'.

Their end then is along with the goats—eternal punishment, alienation from God. This seems a drastic judgement and execution of the penalty. It is not a point we ought to debate. The elder brother of the prodigal son had no mercy on either his brother or father. There was repentance in the younger son, but not the older. Jesus told the parable because the 'older brothers', the self-righteous Pharisees, would not welcome sinners into their fellowship. Jesus said that there was joy in heaven, i.e. amongst the Father and the angels, over one sinner who repented.

In Matthew 21:28-32 Jesus talks of two sons and their father. The father requests the first son (we do not know whether younger or older) to work in the vineyard, which is the family business. He refuses, but later repents (i.e. changes his mind) and goes and works in the vineyard. The second son, when requested, answers sweetly, 'Sir! I go!' but he does not go. Jesus likens the first son to harlots and tax-gatherers, for they—rather than the Jewish leaders—had believed in him. The second son Jesus likens to the chief priests and elders who had come at that time to question him. It was Jesus amongst the goats!

MAN AND THE SAD ALTERNATIVE

Many moderns look upon the thought of penal punishment by God as crude and awkward. In this they have been greatly assisted by theologians who, over the past hundred years—if not longer—have mollified the strong words of

Scripture. The common argument is that since God is Father He cannot cause His children to suffer. Even a human father has leniency and love, and would terminate suffering after it had done its chastising work. Some theologians insist that God, being pure love, could not cause such suffering.

There are many weaknesses in these statements. The main one is that God is not only Father. He is also Creator and King. In giving man choice of will He must allow him to choose his own destiny. If man chooses against the functional truth of creation, then that is his choice and he must abide by it. There can be no talk of God changing his mind by some cerebral magic, or talk of free will is rubbish. The Father has provided redemption from a sinful and fatherless life. If man refuses that salvation then he has further made his choice to live without God. He has refused love. Even more, God is King. When man violates the life of the Kingdom, dishonours the Father-King and seeks to be man without rule and without the Creator-Father-King, then God cannot be indicted for the end of that man.

We will refuse the debate. We will refrain from trying to prove that man has set up his own suffering by going clean contrary to the true functional order of things, for without doubt God is personal in His judgements, and no less personal in the execution of them. We need not try to develop an apologetic for God's judgement. Debate will neither remove such judgement, nor vindicate it.

THE FINAL ALTERNATIVE TO FATHERHOOD

The talk of this chapter has not been in the nature of threat which seeks to force the wills of readers, nor is it a subtle form of gloating. To the contrary: it is simply the warning the Scriptures give. They insist that the matter of God and His Fatherhood is a serious one. It takes little to imagine eternity without Fatherhood and participation in

the love of God. Studies in divine Fatherhood ought not merely to be academic. They must be personal, directly affecting us, confirming us in our desire to be His children.

We must make a choice, either of rich relational life in the family of God, or the stark and horrific existence outside of that family. The loneliness and suffering that man must know without God will contain nothing of greatness and nobility in it. It is pointless, useless suffering, filled as it is with anger, bitterness, self-justification, Father-vilification, and unchanging impenitence. Remorse is not repentance. The first is harsh and destructive, the second sweet and liberating. Pride falls before repentance, but remorse seeks to justify it.

Jude has a powerful—though sad—passage in which he describes the intransigent non-son, non-brother, anti-truth and anti-God individual. He says (in verses 10-13):

‘But these men revile whatever they do not understand, and by those things that they know by instinct as irrational animals do, they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they walk in the way of Cain, and abandon themselves for the sake of gain to Baalim’s error, and perish in Korah’s rebellion. These are blemishes on your love feasts, as they boldly carouse together, looking after themselves; waterless clouds, carried along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever.’

Few—if any—of us would see ourselves reflected in this description. It may well be that we are not. What we need to do is to make sure we are not among the finally impenitent. They—and only they—are those who will endlessly know the puerile poverty that comes when we reject the Father.

To accept the Father, to be His son, and to live in His family, well, that is the very essence of true life. That is eternal life itself.

APPENDIX

‘MY FATHER IS ALWAYS WORKING...’

In the main text of our book we have set out to show God’s plan for history as well as the way He, as Father, relates to man and his situation. What we may miss, in all this, is the objective truth of history, namely the history of God’s Fatherhood. Jesus said, ‘My Father is always working...’, meaning ‘from before time, through time, to the end of time, and in eternity’.

The need for, and usefulness of, our Appendix is that it shows us in one sweep the scope of the Father’s work. Without such an insight, some may think the Father only comes into view with Jesus, or they may think that the Father is not prominent after his ascension, that somehow He has handed over history and its action to Jesus and/or the Spirit. This survey shows us that, in fact, this is not the case.

The reason why we now look at the continuous work of the Father is in order for us to catch something of His glorious and profound nature. Sadly enough, our theology often dwindles down to a man-centred discussion of Him and His creation. Even in the grand matters of creation, salvation and sonship (adoption), we are looking to see what advantages we obtain from these, and what benefits we derive from God. We are rarely free enough simply to praise God for His own greatness and marvel at Him and His works.

For this God-centred kind of worship we can learn much from the Psalmists. So much of our singing and music, unlike theirs, is thin, flimsy, shallow, superficial. It does not fit the greatness of God. Thank God, however, that each generation has some men and women in it whose music and worship is rich and profound.

Now we will look at the work of the Father in terms of what we call history. In fact we have to look at what happened prior to history, at what happened in Biblical prehistory (Genesis, chapters 1-11), history, and in the historical end-time, as also the prophesied post-history aeons. A vast task, which we can only begin to tackle here.

THE TIME BEFORE TIME

Consider the eternal nature of the Father with the eternal nature of the Son. Hebrews 1: 1-3 shows that the Father created the ages through His Son. This is fortified by John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15-17, and I Corinthians 8:6. Philippians 2:5-6. and II Corinthians 8:9 can be placed later in time. They speak of the incarnation.

Time and again God is spoken of as the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the Beginning and the End. He is also, 'Who was, and is, and is to come.' These statements really add up to, 'There never was when God was not, in or out of time, nor ever action which was not His. He is never merely past but is, and is being and doing, and is not looking to any future for He is that future. He is sovereign.'

TIME, PREDESTINATION, ELECTION AND GOAL

Passages such as Isaiah 46:8-11, 48:3-8, and Ephesians 1:3-7, 9-12, 3:9-11, amongst many others, show that God planned all things according to the purpose of His will— before He began creating. Scriptures such as I Corinthians

2:6-10, Ephesians 1:3-14, and 11 Timothy 1:9 indicate that He foreplanned the glorification of man. Isaiah 43:6-7 shows the reason for this—His own glorification. John 17:5, and 24 indicate the Son's participation in the Father long before time began. Ephesians 1:3-5 indicates that the Son was made part of these purposes, whilst Ephesians 1:19-22 shows that He purposed the Son would reign not only in the present ages of time, but also in the 'age to come' .

CREATION

Here we need spend little time except to say that Father, Son and Spirit participated in Triune manner in this great event. The Father was Initiator, the Son Mediator, and the Spirit was the Agent. Through the word and will of God all things were created.

THE FATHER AND PRE-HISTORY

The events contained in the first eleven chapters of Genesis were given to Israel to know its origins, and the purposes of God for them. These chapters contain the events leading up to the Abrahamic Covenant, which in itself is really the outworking of God's relationships with man, and man's true relationships with God. From Abraham to the end the Father works in accordance with His promises of prophecy.

THE FATHER AND HISTORY: ISRAEL THE SON AND SONS

Israel knew God as Father. It is also true that in many religions the idea of God as Father is present. Nothing will be served by examining these elements, but they may have

been basic ideas which have been partly lost and distorted with the passage of time. Scriptures such as Exodus 4:22, Deuteronomy 14:1-2, 32:4-9, 17-18, Isaiah 1:2, 63:16, 64:8, Hosea 1:8-10, and Malachi 1:6, 10, all show that Israel in some sense understood God as Father. This may have been as Covenant Father, but they clearly confess that they owe the origin of themselves as a nation to Him.

**THE FATHER AND HISTORY:
PROPHECY CONCERNING THE SON-KING**

The Father prophesied through His prophets of a Son who was to come. Psalm 2 is the locus classicus. See also Isaiah 7:14, and compare with Matthew 1:21, Isaiah 9:6-7, Psalm 89, especially verses 26-27 (cf. 11 Samuel 7: 14). There are many other references regarding this coming one, prophecies which deal with him as son of David, son of man, king of Israel, the stem of Jesse, the righteous branch, and so on. John 6:44-46 (cf. Matthew 11 :27) indicates that the Father had taught Israel with a view to their recognising the Son when he would come. Hence when He said, 'This is My Son in whom I am well pleased' (cf. Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 42:1), then Israel should have understood him to be the Son. Peter did, involuntarily, as a result of the Father's revelation (Matthew 16:16-17). Nathaniel also saw this (John 1:49).

**THE FATHER AND HISTORY: THE SON SHOWS THE
FATHER**

Theological research tells us that Israelites never addressed God personally as Father, although the idea of Him being Father had developed by the time of Christ. Jesus did address Him personally as Father. Many times the Father witnessed to Jesus as being His Son, eg. at his baptism, his transfiguration, and prior to his trial (John 12:27-28). Jesus

claimed that his Father bore witness to him (John 5:36-37). The Son showed the Father in many ways, but primarily by living in the unique relationship he had with the Father, saying, 'I and the Father are one'; 'I say nothing of myself. The Father who dwells in me, He does the works'; 'He that has seen me has seen the Father'; 'No one comes to the Father but by me.' All is summed up in John 1:18—'The Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has revealed Him.' Supremely in the Cross Jesus revealed the Father. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. There was nothing Jesus did which was other than what the Father initiated, including incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection and the ascension.

The New Testament speaks of the Father initiating the incarnation, of setting forth the Messiah as a propitiation on the Cross. He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. The same power (the glory of the Father) raised him and seated him at His right hand.

**THE FATHER AND HISTORY:
THE ASCENSION AND SENDING OF THE SPIRIT**

Ephesians 1:19-21 indicates that the glory of the Father brought Jesus to the Ascension. Acts 2:32-33(cf. 3:15, 4:10, 5:31) shows that the Father raised him up and seated him at His right hand. It was at the ascension that Christ 'received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit'. At this time, he received the Spirit—not for himself as at his baptism when he was anointed by the Father—but for others. Now, it was the gift of the Father to be given, by the Son, to the people of God. The term, 'the promise of the Father', is found in Luke 24:49, and is implicit in Galatians 3: 14, and Ephesians 1:13-14. It is the Father who initiates the coming of the Spirit to His people (see John 14:15-16, 26, 15:26-27, 16:7-16: here both the Father and the Son send the Spirit as

is consistent with Acts 2:32-33).

**THE FATHER AND HISTORY:
THE SPIRIT WORKS FOR FATHER AND SON**

In Matthew 10:20 the telling statement is that when God's messengers are hauled up before kings and governors they need not premeditate what to say, 'for the Spirit of your Father will speak from within you.' All the leading of the Spirit is done as the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son (see John 16: 12-15, Romans 8:9-11, Galatians 4:6, Romans 8:14-15). The church does nothing apart from the Spirit; this is the clear truth of the Acts.

**THE FATHER AND HISTORY:
HE IS THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP**

The Father seeks His prodigal sons, as we read in Luke 15. His prodigal daughter is seen in John 4. She is told that God is Spirit and she must worship Him in Spirit and in truth, for 'such the Father ever seeks to worship Him.' In the Acts and the Epistles it is the Father who is worshipped by the Spirit (see Philippians 3:3, Ephesians 5:18-20). Worship of the Father is fulfilling to His children.

**THE FATHER AND HISTORY:
THE FATHER IN THE NOW-TIME**

In our notes we have seen God as Father of the family. Ephesians 3:14-15, and 4:6 are key verses. All familyhood on earth and in heaven derives from Him. He is the one God and Father of us all, who is above us all, and is through us all, and in us all. In I Thessalonians 4:9 His being Father teaches us to be brethren. And so on. The point is He is never an absentee Father! In the now-time the Son, with his

brethren, seeks to delineate this Fatherhood to creation and so to glorify it, especially by the defeat of all evil (I Corinthians 15:24-28, Philippians 2:9-11, Revelation 15:3, 17:14, etc.). The church is in the Father (I Thessalonians 1:1, II Thessalonians 1:1), and daily His people receive grace and peace from Him and the Son (the salutation in almost every New Testament epistle). It is the Father who works in us to bring us to sanctification of life and glorification in eternal life (Philippians 1:6, 2:12-13, I Peter 1:14-17, I Thessalonians 5:23, Jude 1). Thanksgiving should be made to the Father by His people for He is working in all things for them (Ephesians 5:20, Colossians 3:17), for all good gifts come from Him (James 1:17).

**THE FATHER AND HISTORY:
THE FATHER AND HIS KINGDOM**

The idea of the Kingdom of God (the Father) is not confined to the New Testament. It is there in the Old Testament, though never just under that title. The Kingdom of God is the reign and rule of God. It is also called the Kingdom of Heaven, meaning the reign and rule that is from heaven as well as in it. The two terms are synonymous, meaning the true Kingdom is of God and not man, and of heaven and not of earth, although it is on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus saw the reign and rule as being of his Father. Hence the Lord's prayer which opens with 'Our Father' and speaks of the Kingdom, and the Kingdom coming on earth. We need to read all the sermon on the mount to see (a) it is all a matter of the Kingdom, and (b) it is also all a matter of God's Fatherhood. The word 'kingdom' is only numerically exceeded by the word 'Father'. In the Kingdom we see that we can pray to the Father, do our giving only in His eyes, cease caring about tomorrow's needs for food and clothing

since the Father knows we have need of them. We can be sons of the Father by acting as peacemakers (those who bring reconciliation) and by loving all men, even those who hate us. These principles of the Kingdom are dynamic. They also open our eyes to the nature of the Father and His present actions. Yet Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom was not confined to that one sermon. He lived the Kingdom by liberating people from oppressing evil (Matthew 12:28, Acts 10:38, cf. Luke 10:1-11, 9:1-6). He also taught many parables concerning the Kingdom. His teaching is supplemented in both the Acts and the Epistles.

The main point that we need to grasp here is that currently the Father is working as King. If the King is not Father then He may be thought of as rectoral, and even severe, grim and judgemental. If the Father is not King then He may be thought of as weak, subject to stronger powers, and unable to be the Father who is above all, as well as through and in all.

It is the outcome of the Kingdom which interests us, for it is the basis of the family hope. The bringing in of the Kingdom is known only to the Father (Mark 13:32), for 'it is in the Father's authority' (Acts 1:7-8). Already Jesus has said to his disciples, '...I assign to you a Kingdom, as my Father assigned to me a Kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in the Kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Luke 22:29-30). This is not only the Kingdom of the present but of the future, too. It is of this future Kingdom that Jesus speaks in the parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46). In this he addresses his people who are accepted: 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

So we come again to the eternal nature of the Father and His long-standing purpose for His Kingdom. He has

planned that His children will inherit, and be part of, His Kingdom. He is presently working on this whole matter.

**THE FATHER AND HISTORY:
THE FATHER AT THE END-TIME**

The Son is to come 'in the glory of the Father' as is seen in Matthew 16:27, 26:64, (cf. Daniel 7:13ff.), Luke 9:26, Acts 1:11, Philippians 3:21, I Thessalonians 4:16-17. This end-time is known especially to the Father: indeed its time is only known by Him (Mark 13:32, Acts 1:7). From our brief notes on the Kingdom (above) we see that the Father is in control of all that happens in the end-time, including the final battles and judgements as contained in the Book of the Revelation. In this tumultuous end-time the people of God are sealed with His mark (name), as also that of His Son (Revelation 7:2-8, 14:1, cf. 22:3-5). Ultimately these 'blessed of my Father' will see Him 'face to face' (Revelation 22:4, 1 John 3:2), and so be like Him, the Father, because each will be in the full likeness of His Son (Romans 8:30, cf. Ephesians 1:5, Hebrews 2:11f.). This means that it is the Father who will raise us up (Romans 8:11, I Corinthians 15:38f) and glorify us (I Corinthians 2:6-10, 15:43ff., II Corinthians 4:26-36, Romans 8:30, Colossians 3:3-4).

**THE FATHER AND POST-HISTORY: THE FAMILY IN
THE NEW AEONS**

In our notes on the Kingdom we saw that the sons will be welcomed into the triumphant Kingdom. They are 'blessed of the Father'. This is because they are 'sons of the Kingdom'. Eternity is really 'the aeons upon the aeons', ie. ages succeeding ages, a Greek way of trying to visualise an endless succession of ages which will never cease. For us the significance is that eternity is not static. The sons of God

will always be worshipping their Father (Revelation 7:15), and to worship is to serve. They will be made 'a kingdom of priests unto their God' (Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 19:4, 22:5). What all this will mean we do not fully know. The parables of the Kingdom showed that those who were faithful in this life would be given authority in the next.

In any case all will be glorified. Leaving aside the wide subject of losses and rewards, every child of God will relate to the Father, and serve Him. The new kingdom of priests (priestly kings, kingly priests) will reign on the earth, and will reign in eternity, and will reign for ever! This is the purpose of the Father whose Fatherhood is vindicated by the triumphant end when evil is defeated and God is 'all in all', or 'everything to every one.' The new true family, each and all in the image of the Son, is the true testimony to the triumphant Fatherhood of God.

CONCLUSION: THE FATHER IN EVERYTHING

How easily the simple fact could have been missed or obscured, that the Father works as the Father from before time to after time. He is not only Father, of course. He is also Creator and King. Father-Creator-King is His full true Being. Having said that, we must still acknowledge that there is much of His fullness we have yet to know.

It is immensely helpful to scan all history through the Scriptures and obtain a panoramic view of the action of the Father. At the same time we will be seeing the work of the Son and the Spirit in that panorama. The immense patience and persistence of the Godhead will appear marvellous to us. Even though we comprehend such things from a human vantage point, our understanding of the Father is gloriously enriched by such a Biblical scan. It also helps us to see that history is not chopped up into dispensational sections so much as it is one continuous, flowing, and purposeful whole.

Knowing such things, we can say with deep love, 'Abba! Dear, dear Father,' and with His Son, 'I love the Father!'

TO THE GLORY OF THE FATHER!

THE TRUE PATER

He is the Father, the eternal One.
Long before we were, He was.
Yet in Him we ever were; uncreated
And yet to be. The Father!
No human lips can frame that Name
And be as were before. The Name
Fires the being with fervence: fires
The true nature of man as man,
As total being. Man is a man
When he is one with the Father.

No atom came; no sphere swung into space
But man as son was in the Father's eyes.
Sphere upon sphere rolled into view,
And verdure of the earth and swinging interspace
And life that burst from the Word
Uttered into being. Father at work
Plans for the home of man: domesticity
Is the heart of the plan, the Family.

Out of the Triune God: out of His depths,
Made in His likeness, full as His love,
The creature created; the son becoming and become
The true world of being—Father created.
Into this realm of time; erect, alert,
The regal son, like the Son himself,
Son of the Father. The Father love
Creating from itself.

Down into the mire of unrelated being,
Twisting upon itself, forcing non-being
By rebellion. Forcing its filaments and fibres,
Muscles and corpuscles into dislocation;
Setting awry the godliness
Into the sensual patterns, new and distorted;
Creating the idols in tortuous semblances
Of the original God. Making the Father
As no Father. Hating the loved;
Loving the hated.

If then the Word comes not forth,
If the Son, come in the flesh, does not come,
Then the agony must continue.
The hell Of the twisted inner perversion
Reign as the wrath of the Father, the
Refused true being and nature of love; then
Must untrue sonship become the order,
And man, for eternity, be the lost,
The dead, the wandering son, never knowing,
Never seeing the Father.

But the Word is flesh; the Son is man,
Powers of Sonship clothed in flesh,
Wrought by the Spirit into fullest man,
No more than man, but most-ever man,
Trailing the lost sons, finding their lairs,
Parading the unveiled truth of the Father,
Telling the Godhead in its Father powers
Holding the universe in its unchanged Deity,
But grasping it also as man; making
The hour of revelation break on earth:
Father unveiled in the bloody Tree.

Oh, Father! Our Father!

One of the Triune God crucified, but all
In the man, suffering; Father in Christ
Rejecting the Man—for men, and yet
Brooding, moving across the deep of evil:
Brooding within the depths of man.
Out of him Man's 'de *profundis!*'—man's cry
To the Eternal Father, the wail
Of the eternally lost, horrified
At the dark baptism of death, the painful fire,
The loneliness of the man-hell—
No son to the Father! No son! No son!

Here in the depths the Father moves.
Moves in His Father glory, giving to man:
Giving the suffering one to suffer, and he
Setting the suffering that His suff'ring man
Come as son to Him. The Son, suffering,
Nails to the craggy cross the failure,
The hatred unfilial, the full pollution,
The moral sludge of the impure prodigal.
See in the sweep of the scandalised, the crucified
Man's sonship reborn, man coming to Him:
Man the son, returning to the Father.

This by the Way, the Truth, by the Life,
The Son as the Man-for-men, bringing
Sons to the Father: he again with his God,
And man at his side, and man on his belt,
And man in his heart: man everywhere
In the glory of the Father. Man spread
Prodigally in renewed glory; man across time,
Man flowing into the Family. God above all
As Father, and in all, and through all.

TRUE PATER

That which was planned before time—for time,
That is fulfilled in time. This the great suffering
Which makes the will of God to be
The fullness of love; the fullness of His being.