

The Father Heart of God and Redemption in Christ

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The creation of our first parents is marked by God blessing Adam and Eve (Gen 1:28). To bless is to bestow favor, to assign value, dignity, uniqueness, and purpose—to single out for honor, to hold in a place of endearment in one’s heart, to set apart from what is common, mundane, and run of the mill. To bless is to grant a forecast of success. It is the greater blessing the lesser: “*But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater*” (Heb 7:7).

To be blessed by the greater is to find favor in that individual’s sight—it is to find one’s ‘stair’ or place on the staircase of honor, glory, authority, influence which ultimately flows down from our sovereign God. But, original sin ‘broke’ the student-pupil relationship with our God—the Father-blessed-son connection with our Creator. And, it wasn’t long before man’s depravity sought a substitute for divine blessing. The first formalization of this counterfeit blessing was the tower of Babel—built for the express purpose of “making a name for ourselves” (Gen 11:4).

Thus, early in the biblical record we see the pride of life (1 Jn 2:16) filling man’s wicked imagination with the false hope that he can ‘bless himself’ instead of finding his needed blessing in God. Babylon becomes the ‘mother of harlots’—and as such is the origin of the mother-son cult which drives so much false religion in the world today. The evil of the mother-son cult is found in its ‘normalization’ of the alienation of father and son. Thus, in the cult, the mother rushes into the emotional and spiritual vacuum left by the father as if she possesses the power to give the blessing of the father. But this is a radical overturning of the order of authority, honor, glory, and blessing. Earthly fathers commonly abdicate their roles, and mothers usurp the role of blessing which God reserved for fathers. The crisis becomes generational. Unsaved fathers order their lives as if they do not need the Heavenly Father’s blessing. The result is the evil counterfeit for genuine blessing rushes into the void: the love of the world which is condemned in 1 John chapter two (1 Jn 2:15-18). The ‘pride of life’ forbidden in Scripture is an attempt to bless oneself, instead of living for God’s glory and favor.

This wicked substitute for the blessing of God’s love and knowledge has a number of expressions. One of them is the ancient mother-son cult which has come down to us today. The Roman Catholic Church and feminism are but two expressions of it. Paganism ‘normalizes’ the absent father and his absent blessing. The mother-son cult is played out in cultural expressions which are not immediately religious. For example, ghetto, hip hop ‘culture’ is created by the absence of the father. Angry sons form gangs and tribes, women become sex objects to be manipulated, bought, and sold. The security, belonging, and significance which ought to come from the father’s blessing are instead replaced with the counterfeits of illicit sex and senseless violence. Hip hop culture is characterized by pornography, prostitution, and pimps. Blasphemous rap, senseless violence, and drug abuse are ever present themes. Why you ask? Part of the answer is that fathers are designed by God to be the means of bestowing ethics. Fathers are to teach their sons and daughters the knowledge of God the Father, as well as virtues such as honor, self-control, virtue, fidelity to principle (Ps 78:5-8). Out of this kind of fathering comes solid servant leaders and citizens who seek the welfare of their communities.

In contrast to the moral authority which is meant to accompany healthy fathering is the lie that freedom is to be found in the lack of restraint. In the pagan expressions of the mother-son cult,

the female controls by means of sensuality, pleasure, indulgence, specialness, guilt, unearned privilege, and possession of others. That is the exact opposite of the paternal ‘school of ethics’. The most dominant Canaanite fertility cult in Palestine was Baal worship. In this cult the female deities are near, and the father figure is stern, distant, and terrifying. What is remarkable about all forms of the mother-son cult is that the distant father who is emotionally and spiritually absent (not unlike a dysfunctional family) is normalized into a religion (like Roman Catholicism), or into a cultural form like feminism. And in cultures in which this aberration is normalized, sons may not even perceive that something is seriously wrong. The Western world has deviated from God’s plan for fathers for such a long time that the absence of his blessing is treated as the standard (themes in countless Hollywood movies have contributed to this blight of normalizing the absent father).

It is remarkable just how much this theme of the Father-heart-of-God permeates the Scriptures. So important is the father’s role, that our relationship with our earthly father explains so much about us, and so much of our lives. In the Torah the Lord warns that earthly fathers deeply affect the spiritual and moral state of their children. Fathers must be free from idols. “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord our God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Deut 5:9-10). Nonetheless, the moral and spiritual failure of fathers is not an excuse for the condition in which sons find themselves. For God rebukes Israel for using a proverb which blames fathers: “What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, ‘The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge’? “As I live,” declares the Lord God, “you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore” (Ez 18:2-3).

Paternal culture is meant to be a reflection of God’s authority, love, care, sovereignty and character. For in the *relational space* of father to son, the child is to learn honor, trust in God, fidelity to principle, virtue, self-control, and servant leadership (Ps 78:5-8). By contrast, the values in the mother-son cult are more about possession, impulse, and manipulative control. The carnal female controls through pleasure, nurture, permission of passions and sensuality, unearned privilege, and possession (note Jezebel, 1 Kings 21ff., Athaliah, 2 Kings 11, etc.). In the mother-son cult, the female supplants the father as giver and source person—as if the woman can give the blessing just as well as the man. The feminist ideal buys into the notion that the blessing need not be gender specific—need not be paternal. This is a hostile rejection of God’s sacred order and plan—namely that authority, glory, honor, and blessing are to flow down the hierarchal staircase of God to Christ to the man (1 Cor 11:3).

Female narcissism subscribes to the idea that the woman can successfully make up for whatever fathering is absent from the man. Thus, she attempts to impart the blessing to the sons. If the father is absent, or detached and passive and neglectful, she may try to fill the vacuum herself. But the fallout is usually predictable. Since a woman cannot help a man with problems of manhood, her efforts to be both mom and dad will fail. This author knows of one sad case in which a single mother is called, ‘mommy-pa’ by her young sons. James and John were the angry sons of thunder. Mom made great efforts to bless them, she even approached the Son of God and asked Him for the greatest promotion imaginable on behalf of her sons:

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. And He said to her, “What do you wish?” She said to Him, “Command that in

Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.” But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” They said to Him, “We are able.” He said to them, “My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father” (Mt 20:20-23).

Moms who attempt to be ‘dads’ to their sons often raise boys who are angry, passive, risk-averse, paralyzed by expectations, hostile, tribal, and filled with self-doubt. Mom promises them that they are special and adequate, and bound for success. But that message is coming from a woman, not a man, therefore it is bound to be mixed with a degree of flattery. Sons are rightfully suspicious. At the core of the problem is the issue of ‘unblessed sons’—because fathers have been delinquent, unavailable physically, emotionally, and spiritually, their sons have never been ‘initiated’ into the world of men by a father figure who perpetually holds them in his heart. And, who have ‘theologized’ their sons by explaining to them: *this is who God is; this is how life works; this is why anything worth achieving will be difficult*. Sons leave these households exasperated, looking to women instead for favor and acceptance—having given up on the prospect of paternal blessing. These young men have grown up with mother as ‘source person’ by default. Our sexualized, sensual, ‘pornified’ culture becomes too easy of an escape from the emotional pain of being unblessed sons.

What masculine self-control these young men have remaining is easily bartered away by porn addiction and escape into video games. Porn is coveteousness and pride of life—for the user says to himself, “I guess I will bless myself—I am entitled to take what isn’t mine.” The Scriptures warn: “Do not give your strength to women, or your ways to that which destroys kings” (Prov 31:3). How opposite indulgence is from true masculinity which sacrificially assumes responsibility on behalf of others and consequently enjoys influence and God-given authority. The Old Testament closes with a prophecy of the coming of John the Baptist. He will prepare the way for Messiah, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. “He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse” (Mal 4:5-6). So critical is the relationship between fathers and sons that God warns in Malachi chapter four that if the hearts of fathers and sons are not restored, God will smite the land with a curse. And how will that curse be realized if men do not repent? Sons not held in the hearts of fathers—sons not reconciled to fathers are angry and selfish. They will use their masculine strength for activities which tear down social order.

In the New Testament fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy, it is clear that it is John the Baptist who will come in the spirit and power of Elijah (Mt 17:12-13). Just as Elijah did in the Old Testament, the forerunner of Jesus will address the double-mindedness and passivity of the fathers which allowed Israel of old to remain enmeshed in Baal worship. “It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” The point is that repentant fathers stir themselves to leave their apathy about God the Father. And their penitent hearts make room to passionately seek God the Father’s blessing. So the redemptive cycle desired by God is as follows: earthly fathers are reconciled to God the Father, and the resulting action is to assume responsibility in spiritually fathering their children. Their hearts are *restored* to their sons’ hearts. Then and only then will

the fathers manifest a lifestyle of living in the blessing of God and living as those who bless their sons with the knowledge of the God, the Blessed Father. This lifestyle of walking in the blessing of God is described in Deuteronomy:

Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the Lord your God has commanded *me* to teach you, that you might do *them* in the land where you are going over to possess it, so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. “O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do *it*, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, *in* a land flowing with milk and honey. “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. “You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up” (Deut 6:1-7).

But, isn't it interesting to our thesis that the call to repentance so passionately issued by the prophet, when obeyed, will not only bring spiritual renewal to fathers, but will bring the hearts of fathers and sons together. Otherwise, apart from this restoration of hearts, the generational alienation gets passed on: detached, hostile, passive, exasperating fathers have no abundant grace relationship with God the Father upon which to draw that they might pass on abundant grace to their sons. Alienated hearts becomes the societal norm. Only repentance toward God can change that. Believing fathers will find that investing in their sons and daughters is *the overflow* of their own walk with God the Father. Faithful fathers seek God and obey Him, and the result within the family unit is heart affection between the fathers and the sons—but we ought not miss the fact that this takes place because fathers are enjoying God the Father and His love and favor.

The ancient problem of idolatrous fathers alienated from sons is still pandemic today. The answer is found in the gospel. The redemption which is in Christ Jesus restores the flow of patriarchal blessing from God, to fathers, to sons. Christ is the answer—He is the perfect Son who gives the believing sinner a blessed status of sonship before God the Father. “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (1 Jn 3:1). The new covenant name of our God is Father! Christ came to bring us to the Father. The pride of life, with its love of the world and myriad of personal *score cards*, cannot win the blessing. So much of the conflict in the world today is about seeking blessing in the wrong way. “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; *so* you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (Jas 4:1-4).

In the plan of redemption, God inserts himself into this terrible dilemma of the natural man being ‘orphaned’ from God by reason of sin. God's fatherly heart is vividly seen in the free donation

of Christ given for miserable sinners (Rom 8:31-32). Christ is given for our full acceptance and adoption by the Father. Christ the perfect Son, eternally begotten of the Father comes to earth to reveal the Father (Jn 1:18), and to *qualify* believing sinners as sons of the Father. This is truly amazing: the Son gives believing sinners His own right-relatedness to the Holy Trinity. All of our efforts to make ourselves worthy of the blessing are as filthy rags (Is 64:6). The breach which separates mankind from our Holy Creator has been bridged by Christ. In the great ‘guilt exchange’ at Calvary, Christ alone assumes our wretchedness in order to replace our liabilities with His righteousness. Wonder of wonders, in Christ repentant sinners are graciously given a status of full eligibility for the Father’s eternal blessing. “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete” (1 Jn 1:1-4).

As humanism, paganism, and Darwinism continue to wage war on biblical theism, the gospel will increasingly be cast as illogical. Students in public universities are being placed in a philosophical position in which faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ is considered a decision for irrationality and oppression. But consider the social ramifications of Darwinism. Shall we model societal order after the ethos of evolution? For, natural selection culls out the unfit, and rewards the viable with the ‘right’ to live and propagate. How opposite is the gospel: Christ, the ultimately ‘fit One’ lays His life down for the unfit that they might have life and life eternal. During His earthly ministry Christ ate with tax gatherers and sinners from among the people (Mk 2:15). He dined with the downcast, with those who knew they were lowly, and unqualified for blessing. The wonder of the gospel is that God is glorifying His grace in the rescue of sinners. Paul tells us in First Corinthians that God has intentionally chosen what our culture deems ‘unqualified’ people in order that God may receive all the glory and no man would boast.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 Cor 1:26-31).

The cross destroys the cleverness of the clever and the wisdom of the wise (1 Cor 1:18-24). **For in the cross Christ is bearing our unfitness, our disqualification, our dis-relatedness.** What the world falsely calls ‘wisdom’—our effort to bless ourselves and credit ourselves with qualifying ourselves, the cross exposes as ignorant and worthless. Man presses for his standard of eligibility for blessing, ‘burning incense’ to his accomplishments and leaning upon an arm of flesh (Jer 17:5). Playoff teams in sports will continue to kiss trophies instead of kissing the Son (Ps 2:12). But, Christ is true treasure, He is our eligibility for endless installments of grace (Eph 2:). He is the glory of the gospel—the gospel that humbles the proud sinner who cannot make himself eligible for the Father’s blessing. This is fantastic news: God is majoring in giving grace to the unfit and disqualified. He justifies the ungodly who believe

in Christ Jesus (Rom 4:5). My qualification for the Father's blessing is carried by Another, by Christ. The shed blood of Christ *ratifies* my covenant with God (Mt 26:28). Christ Himself is our covenant with God (Is 49:8). God is calling sinners to believe His record concerning His Son; for God has given the Son to make us sons; and God has given countless sheep to Christ (Jn 5:24-25; 10:29). Those sheep will most assuredly 'hear' the voice of Christ their Shepherd (Jn 10:3-5, 16). Our blood-bought sonship comes with many obligations to our Lord—for we are to live as sons of the Most High.

We are to demonstrate before the watching world that we are sons of the Most High (Mt 5:43-48). 'Sons of God' is the identity we are to live out before the eyes of men. We are to manifest the reality of our sonship by demonstrating the attitudes of righteousness and meekness found in Christ, the perfect Son (Phil 2:1-8). We are to guard our fellowship with the Father by eschewing evil associations (2 Cor 6:14-7:1). We are to protect our freedom in Christ as beloved sons (Gal 5:1, 13; Rom 8:21). We are to walk as 'sons of light' in obedience by imitating our Heavenly Father (Eph 5:1-14).

The law can sow to a legal spirit; calling out to our flesh to 'qualify ourselves'—for Paul states that the law is not of faith (Gal 3:12). In the allegory of the two 'mountains' in Galatians, there is the free woman and the bond woman. One depicts the freedom of sons in the gospel, and the other the bondage of slaves under the law (Gal 4:21-31). This passage is written to show us that we still carry a strong desire to qualify ourselves instead of resting in Christ who qualifies us. Paul reminds believers of their freedom in Christ and their identity as sons of God: "And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say? 'Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.' So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman" (Gal 4:28-31).

Christ frequently speaks of the Father to His disciples. He stirs up their 'father hunger' as He discloses to them the heart of the Father. Some of the most touching passages regarding our sonship are found in the Gospel of John (especially in the Upper Room discourse, chapters 12-17). Christ speaks of the Holy Spirit who will give the disciples the consciousness of their sonship. "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. "After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you *will* see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (Jn 14:18-20). Philip expresses his excited response to his father hunger in this manner: "Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and *yet* you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father'? "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?" (Jn 14:8-10b). In Christ's high priestly prayer, He opens up the glorious subject of believers experiencing the joyful communal life of the Trinity in future glory:

And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn 17:22-26).

Christ guided His disciples in the process of transferring their father hunger to God the Father. Sons ‘unblessed’ by their earthly fathers, yet, who belong to Christ desperately need to know that their Heavenly Father is ‘for them’—that He loves them, and holds them in His heart. This is a life-long battle of faith. As we keep looking to Christ and the gospel, we see that our Lord explains the Father, reveals the Father, brings us to the Father, and most of all: is our immutable qualification for the Father’s eternal blessing. In Christ our ‘source person’ we have favor, status, sonship, and belonging.

The book of Ephesians begins with a recitation of every spiritual blessing in Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the source, and the realm, and the sphere of these spiritual blessings, for they are all found in Him (Eph 1:3ff.). So what shall we do with these magnificent promises? How are they to transform our relationships? To begin with, the more you cherish Christ and your sonship, the more you will repudiate the false sources of ‘blessing’ championed by this world. You were called to receive a blessing (1 Pet 3:9), now in the body of Christ you are appointed to be blessing to others. Your sonship is the very meaning and motive of ongoing gospel holiness. For, in Christ, you have the infinite enduring love and blessing of God the Father in heaven. And, to have this blessing is to have the hope and assurance that you are part of God’s immutable ‘forever family’. “The Lord protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, but He thwarts the way of the wicked” (Ps 146:9).

Adam, the first man was appointed by God to subdue the earth, to rule over it and its creatures (Gen 1:26-28), and Adam was called to raise up God-fearing communities by teaching the ordinances of God (Gen 2:16-17). Though at creation Adam was only hours old, he was given the knowledge and ability by God to name all of the animals in the Garden (Gen 2:19-20). No doubt Adam’s assignment of naming the animals involved selecting names which said something about the animal’s body type, behavior, and means of locomotion. In a sense, Adam was practicing taxonomy, or classification of all the creatures which God brought to him. But, when original sin entered, it greatly damaged man’s ability and desire to raise up God-fearing communities. Adam’s passivity in the face of Eve’s temptation has been replicated through the ages in the spiritual and moral passivity of fathers. It is stunning that men can build skyscrapers, and can put a rover on the planet Mars, and yet are so willing to abdicate their calling to teach the fear of God to their families.

But, in spite of this failure, original sin has not blunted the ‘father hunger’ which children possess. I read of a Christian family in which the father died an untimely death. As the will was being read, one item remained, not assigned to any of his four children. It was the father’s spiritual diary. Each of the children began pleading to have that diary given to them. The reason why is heartwarming, but also painful. For, these young adults were craving to know even more of what their father thought of God, the Heavenly Father. They longed to peer into the relationship their earthly father had with the Heavenly Father, Who is the: “one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all of all” (Eph 4:6). The good news of the gospel for our sonship is profound. For, what sin has defaced, Christ restores. For, our Savior has graciously given the people He has redeemed a ‘sonship script’ by which we are empowered to live as sons, and overcome our passivity. For, Christ’s Spirit gives every true believer the consciousness of being a true son of the Heavenly Father (Rom 8:15-17; Gal 4:5-7).