

Whatever Happened to the Father?

by R. Stanley

The sermon emphasizes the importance of remembering the Father in worship, prayer, ministry, and evangelism, and highlights the consequences of forgetting the Father.

Scripture: Matthew 3:16-17

Topics: "Trinity Doctrine", "Fatherhood Of God"

Description

R. Stanley emphasizes the importance of understanding the doctrine of the Trinity as a foundational truth of the Christian faith, highlighting how deviations from this doctrine can lead to unscriptural teachings and practices in modern Christendom. He explains that the doctrine of the Trinity, though not explicitly named in the Bible, is progressively revealed in both the Old and New Testaments, and is a mystery that requires faith to comprehend. The sermon delves into the significance of restoring the Fatherhood of God in various aspects of Christian life, such as redemption, prayer, worship, ministry, and suffering, stressing the need to acknowledge the roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a balanced manner.

Transcript

A crack in the foundation will show up in the superstructure. Similarly any false doctrine can be traced to some deviation from the foundational truths of the Bible. One of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith that is ignored in practice, though not in theory, is the doctrine of Trinity. This has given rise to many unscriptural teachings and practices in the Christendom of today.

There are some who argue that the word "trinity" does not appear in the Bible. For that matter the word "Christianity" also does not appear! A simple and straightforward understanding of the Holy Bible teaches us that God eternally exists as three Persons-- the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Like any other doctrine, the doctrine of Trinity is progressively revealed in the Scriptures, a partial revelation in the Old Testament and a fuller one in the New. However, Trinity is a mystery. It cannot be fully and satisfactorily explained in human language or by any analogy. When we accept it in faith we will understand it in stages by experience.

If the Jewish interpreters had admitted the plurality of Persons in one God, they would have had no great difficulty in accepting the divine claims of Christ as the Son of God. It was by quoting Psalm 110:1 that Jesus cornered them. "No one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore!" (Mt 22:41-46). It is impossible for a fair-minded Christian to deny the fact of Trinity after carefully studying, for example, the following passages: Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Psalms 45:6,7; Isaiah 6:8;

48:16; 63:10; Hos 1:7; Mal 3:1,2; Mt 3:16,17; 28:19; Lk 1:35; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 4:4-6; 1 Pet 1:2; Jude 20,21. These passages are summarised into three statements by Wayne Grudem in Systematic Theology: (1) God is three Persons (Trinity); (2) Each Person is fully God (Deity); (3) There is one God (Tri-unity). Each of these statements is equally important to keep us from going astray. Many of the heretical views of the famous prophet and healing evangelist William Branham (1909-1965) had stemmed from his anti-Trinity doctrine. His teachings and influence still lie subtly under the couch of many a modern evangelist. The late Evangelist Paulaseer Lawrie is an example. Beware!

Eventhough the Son and the Holy Spirit are equal in deity to God the Father, they subject themselves to Him in their roles. This solemn truth is ignored these days in the Christian world. In some circles, they only talk about Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, and end up with another Jesus. In others, they always talk about Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, and end up with a different spirit. The Father is forgotten! Whatever happened to the Father?

Let's look into five vital areas where we need to restore the Fatherhood of God in our Biblical understanding and Christian experience.

1. Redemption

It is God the Father who planned redemption for mankind. Eventhough we read that Christ Jesus "came" into the world to save sinners, we must not forget that He was actually "sent" by His Father into the world (Jn 3:16,17). It was the Father who conceived the plan of redemption, but the Son accomplished it (Jn 6:38-40).

All sins are primarily against God the Father. "For all that is in the world the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the FATHER but of the world" (1 Jn 2:15,16). Therefore repentance is primarily towards the Father God and we receive forgiveness when we believe on the finished work of His Son (Acts 20:21). Reconciliation is to be made with the Father having Christ as the Mediator (1 Tim 2:5).

Faith on the Lord Jesus Christ makes us the children of the "Father" (Jn 1:12). This privilege is ours because of the unfathomable love of the "Father" (1 Jn 3:1). Jesus washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to "His God and Father" (Rev 1:6).

In Gospel preaching we declare that Christ is the only Way, but we fail to explain "to where?" Jesus said that He is the Way "to the FATHER" (Jn 14:6). Jesus ever lives to make intercession to save those who come through Him "to God" the Father (Heb 7:25). "Invite Jesus into your heart!" "Jesus, come into my heart!" These are all incomplete statements and partial truths. More Biblically a sinner's prayer should be, "God, I've sinned against You. I turn to You forsaking my sinful ways. I believe that Christ Your Son died for me and rose again from the dead. I thank You for accepting me in His Name. Amen!" At this point God sends forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts so we may cry out, "Abba, Father!" (Gal 4:4-6; Rom 8:15,16).

We are saved by the resurrection of Jesus. It is right to say that Christ Jesus "rose" from the dead. But we must not forget that it was the Father who "raised" Him from the dead. There are simply too many Scripture passages which establish this truth (Acts 2:20-24; 3:14,15; 10:39,40; Rom 6:4; 8:11; 10:9; 1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 4:14; etc). Jesus Himself acknowledged that it was from the FATHER that He had received the authority to lay down His life and take it again (Jn 10:18).

Apostle Paul explains our redemption graphically in Ephesians 2:4-7. The Father loved us. The Father raised us up together with His Son, when we were dead in trespasses. Then the Father made us sit together in heavenly places with His Son. The Father has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places with Christ. The Father is preparing to show towards us in the ages to come the exceeding riches of His grace. Oh, how much we miss in the understanding of the glorious redemptive plan of God if we forget the Father!

2. Prayer

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He pointedly told them whom they must address: "Our FATHER in heaven!" (Lk 11:1,2). This was not a casual statement but a deliberate teaching. In the parallel passage in Matthew chapter six, see how many times Jesus uses the phrase "Your Father" (vv 1,4,6,8,14,15,18,26,32). He linked every spiritual discipline like praying, forgiving, fasting and almsgiving, to the Father. After resurrection He sent word to the disciples, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (Jn 20:27). I cannot understand where, when and why Christians slipped into the habit of addressing Jesus in prayer and closing it in Jesus' Name! We can't ask Jesus in Jesus' Name! Quite illogical!

We have access TO the Father, BY the Holy Spirit, THROUGH Christ (Eph 2:18). In prayer we are to address "the Father" in the Name of Christ by the power and enablement of the Holy Spirit. This is repeatedly taught throughout the New Testament as seen below.

Referring to the dispensation of the New Covenant that would begin with the death of Christ, He pretaught His disciples, "In that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the FATHER in My Name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (Jn 16:23,24). Until Christ died the disciples had been straightaway asking Him whatever they wanted. They never had asked the Father in Jesus' Name. Jesus emphatically pointed out the change in prayer pattern beginning with the new dispensation by the words, "most assuredly I say to you!"

The early disciples very quickly grasped this truth and we see them addressing the Father in prayer and referring to Christ as the Father's holy Servant (Acts 4:24-30). This was also Paul's consistent practice. He invariably addressed the Father in prayer. "I bow my knees to the FATHER of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 3:14; 1:16,17).

In order to maintain an unclouded relationship with God we must walk in openness and transparency before Him. Sins must not be hidden but confessed. Apostle John teaches that sins must be confessed to the "FATHER," and the blood of "His Son" will cleanse us from all sin (1 Jn 1:6-9). When we confess our sins to the Father, the Son as a merciful and faithful High Priest at the right hand of the Father advocates for us (1 Jn 2:1; Heb 2:17,18) and intercedes for us (Rom 8:34). The Holy Spirit also intercedes to the Father for us and that He does from within us (Rom 8:26). Let's never forget this divine organisation in prayer.

Eventhough all spiritual blessings come through the finished work of Christ on the Cross, we are taught to ask the "Father" in order that we may experience them. Take for example the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the One who baptizes us with the Holy Spirit (Lk 3:16). But He has commanded us to ask the FATHER for this gift (Lk 11:13). Jesus Himself prayed to the FATHER for the gift of the Spirit to be bestowed on us (Jn 14:16). Peter rightly recognized that Jesus "received" from the Father the promise of

the Holy Spirit and poured it out on the disciples on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33; See also Tit 3:5,6). Every good gift comes down from the "Father" (Js 1:17).

Does this mean that we can never address Jesus in prayer? No. But praying to Jesus can be an exception and not a rule. Stephen died of martyrdom with these words: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). This was an exceptional and extraordinary situation in which Stephen saw the vision of the open heaven and the focus there was Christ. Moreover he was being stoned for the sake of Christ. This was not a general prayer but dying words of commitment. Similarly in Revelation 22:20, Jesus says, "Surely I am coming quickly." The response from earth is naturally, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" Who would expect the response in this context as, "Amen, Father, let Jesus come?" We must not quote exceptional situations and build up a doctrine on them. Rather we should learn from direct teaching and confirmed testimonies.

These are awful days of imitation. I call upon preachers and evangelists to correct their public prayer pattern. Otherwise people will be misled. Instead of directing people to the Father like Christ, we will be unconsciously keeping them ignorant of the Father. Pastors also have a solemn responsibility to restore this truth in their congregational life. The Church has its existence "in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" and not just in Christ (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). All religious activities are to be approved by the Father (Js 1:27).

3. Worship

One of the favorite texts used often in charismatic worship meetings is Philippians 2:10,11, "At the Name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Undoubtedly this is a very appropriate text for worship. But we tend to lose sight of its closing words: "TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER." The meaning is, all worship must ultimately be to the Father. We are to worship the Father "by" the Spirit of God and rejoice "in" Christ Jesus (Phil 3:3). "We give thanks TO the God and FATHER of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Col 1:3) "We bless our God and FATHER" (Js 3:9). In fact, Christ also joins us in praising the Father! He tells His Father, "I will declare Your Name to My brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise You" (Psa 22:22; Heb 2:11-13). He told the Samaritan woman how His FATHER was seeking for true worshippers to worship Him (Jn 4:21-23).

When we get to Heaven, the mediatory work of Christ will no more be necessary. We will be ushered into the literal presence of God and we shall see Him in all His glory and majesty (Rev 22:4). Christ's Name and the Name of His Father will be written on our foreheads (Rev 14:1; 22:3,4). There we find worship being addressed to the Father as well as to the Son, depending upon the subject of praise. See Rev 4:8,11; 5:9,10,12,13; 7:9-12; 11:16-18; 15:3,4; 16:5,6; 19:1-6. There is however no reference to the worship of the Holy Spirit.

The Father is not the Son. And the Son is not the Father. But the Father dwells in the Son, and the Son dwells in the Father (Jn 14:11). However, in the same passage Jesus ascribes all authority and glory to the Father (vv 10,13). In the same way, even though the Holy Spirit like Jesus is fully God, He does not attract worship towards Himself but directs it to the Father. When He came on people, He prompted them to magnify God for His wonderful works (Acts 2:4,11; 10:44,46). The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ; and Christ glorifies the Father (Jn 16:14; 17:4). This understanding will revolutionize our worship practices and add new dimensions to them. I counsel the composers of worship songs to bear this truth in mind and check the doctrinal correctness of their choruses and songs with reliable Bible teachers before releasing them.

Otherwise irreparable damage may be caused to the doctrinal understanding of Christians in a day when songs become popular for their tune rather than the truth.

4. Ministry

We are saved to save others. God desires that each of us be active in bringing the lost to Him. After narrating the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus said, "Even so it is not the will of your FATHER who is in Heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (Mt 18:14; 1 Tim 2:3-5). Jesus explained Christian fruitfulness with the illustration of grapevine. He is the true Vine, but do we remember that His FATHER is the Vinedresser or the Gardener? (Jn 15:1). We often say that fruitfulness is a necessary mark of the disciples of Christ. But do we realize that the purpose of fruitfulness is to glorify the FATHER? (v 8). The purpose of all good works is to glorify the FATHER in Heaven (Mt 5:16).

Jesus compared soulwinning and evangelism to harvest. He said that the FATHER is the Lord of the harvest and we are to pray to Him to send out labourers into "His" harvest (Mt 9:37,38). In Isaiah's vision the call was given by the FATHER on behalf of the Three Persons of the Godhead: Whom shall "I" send, and who will go for "Us?" (Isa 6:1,8). Understanding the burden and passion of the father heart of God is the greatest motivating factor in evangelism and missions (Lk 15:20). Any other is secondary.

Concerning the ministry of the Kingdom the Father had taught His Son to pray to Him for the salvation of nations: "Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance" (Psa 2:8). The Father has instructed the Son to sit at His right hand till He would make His enemies His footstool (Psa 110:1; Heb 1:13). The fight between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of darkness is getting fiercer and fiercer. Every progress in missionary work is capturing of another territory of the enemy.

The heavenly authority of the FATHER must be constantly kept in mind in all our evangelistic endeavours (Rev 2:26-28). We must not be shortsighted and be simply rejoicing over effects like healing and demoncasting. The more permanent reality is that our names are registered in Heaven with the Father who is the "Lord of Heaven and earth" (Lk 10:17-22; Rev 3:5). Though we are a little flock, it is our FATHER'S good pleasure to give us the Kingdom (Lk 12:32). We must pull ourselves out of fear complex and testify boldly because not one sparrow dies without the permission of our FATHER! (Mt 10:27-29).

Those in pastoral ministries also must not forget the relationship of the Father with the sheep. Jesus said that He is the true Shepherd. He also added that it was the FATHER who gave Him the sheep (Jn 10:14,29). The Corinthian believers were rallying around their favorite preachers and fell into deadly groupism. To solve this problem apostle Paul gave a revealing teaching. Addressing those Christians he said, "All ministers are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor 3:4,21-23). In other words, pastors must realize that the sheep don't belong to them, but they belong to the sheep; the sheep belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to the Father! The Church of God is fractured into fragments bringing dishonour to the Name of God among pagans. How important it is to realize at this hour that we have "one God and FATHER of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all!" (Eph 4:6). Nothing else will help to keep the unity (v 3).

5. Suffering

More than any other time the truth of the Fatherhood of God is appreciated when we pass through periods of suffering. The Father God has one Son without sin but none without scars! "For what son is there whom a father does not chasten?" (Heb 12:7). In this chapter on chastisement God is called the "FATHER of

spirits" (v 9). That means, He knows everything about everyone. "He knows our frame and He remembers that we are dust. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him... He will not always chide us" (Psa 103:14,13,9). As God takes us through trials and tribulations, let's stay submitted under Him with the confidence that He is the "FATHER of mercies" (2 Cor 1:3).

It is when we recognize God the Father's hand on us behind the trials of life that we can be assured of His "good purpose" according to which all things work together (Rom 8:28). The good purpose of the Father is that all His sons and daughters must become "conformed to the image of His Son" (v 29). Here lies the answer to all the puzzles of life (Job 12:9,10; 9:24c). As children of the Father God and joint-heirs with Christ His Son in the Father's house, if we share in Christ's suffering today we shall also share in His glory tomorrow (Rom 8:16-18). The Lord Jesus cheers us up today saying, "Let not your heart be troubled!" He states the reason why: "In My FATHER'S house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you..." (Jn 14:1-3). Reservation of rooms in the Father's mansions!

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials... Since you call on the FATHER... live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear" (1 Pet 1:6,17). The Son of God understands and sympathises with our weaknesses and pleads for us before His Father at the Throne (Heb 2:17,18; 4:14-16). Let's therefore sink into the Father's bosom with all our burdens.

The Final Scene

When the mother of Zebedee's sons requested Jesus to allot the left and right seats in His Kingdom to her two sons, He answered, "To sit on My right hand or on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My FATHER" (Mt 20:23b). When the disciples enquired Jesus just before His ascension concerning the time of restoration of the Kingdom to Israel, He replied, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the FATHER has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7). Similarly when the disciples asked Jesus in an earlier instant about the time of the end, He listed several signs but ended His answer saying, "But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the FATHER" (Mk 13:32), because it is the Father who would "send" His Son again (Acts 3:20).

Along these very words of Jesus, let's finally look at the truth revealed to Apostle Paul: "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the FATHER, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power...Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that GOD MAY BE ALL IN ALL!" (1 Cor 15:24-28).

Now dear friend, answer this age-old question: "If I am the FATHER, where is My honour?" (Mal 1:6).

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