

FATHERHOOD OF GOD AS SHOWN IN SCRIPTURE

(Newspaper article by Pastor Russell in the St. Paul Enterprise, Tuesday, July 25, 1916, Volume 7: Number 1. Typed by Sister Gloria Nussel of Berean Bible Students Ecclesia in Seattle.)

Only Those Who Are Sons of God by the Acceptance of His Terms May Call Him Father, the Bible Teaches—Spiritual Sons. Significance of the Word Father—This Relationship Means Responsibility—How Mankind Lost Their Sonship—God's Character Sadly Misunderstood—The Heavenly Parent's Love For His Human Offspring—Who Are Now Sons of God—All of the Fallen Race to Have Opportunity of Becoming God's Sons—Human Sons and Spiritual Sons—Blessing of Present Harmony With God.

Special to St. Paul Enterprise. Portland, Maine, July 23.—Pastor Russell spoke here today before the Bible Students Convention being held in our city last week. His discourse was based upon the opening clause of the Lord's Prayer—"Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name." (Matthew 6:9.) A condensed report follows:

The word Father and the thought behind it should be very impressive to us all; yet it is sadly true that many who bear this name manifest but little regard for what is right and obligatory in connection with their fatherhood. It is very different, however, with the Heavenly Father, who is the Perfect One, who meets fully all the obligations resting upon Him, and who is a Father in the truest sense. The imperfection and weakness of human fathers only manifest the more by contrast the glorious perfections of the Father in Heaven—His love, His power.

The term father signifies life-giver, one who bestows life. The Bible declares that the great Jehovah God is the Fountain of Life, the One from whom everything proceeds, the one "in whom we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28.) All life emanates from Him alone. Without Him nothing could exist. When we have before our minds the thought that God is a great Father, a true Father, we also have the thought which is properly connected therewith—that He recognizes the responsibility of a Father—a matter which very many of the fallen race of Adam little appreciate, but which Bible students are coming more and more to appreciate.

Every earthly parent has a responsibility in connection with his children. It is his duty to see that they are provided for, as respects clothing, shelter, food for both mind and body, etc. To make such provision is a part of a father's duty; and whoever does not expect so to provide or has no good reason to believe that he will be able to do so has no moral right to bring a child into the world. Thoughtful provision for such child should be made before it is brought into being. This seems to be a just and right principle, and one generally recognized by all intelligent people.

People Misled by False Theology

Then surely this principle would apply to the great Father from whom comes every blessing. But this contradicts much of the theology that has been given to us; for when the creeds tell us that God is all-wise, all-loving, kind and good, they spoil it all by stating that, notwithstanding His love, justice and wisdom, He is sending the vast majority of our race to endless torture. In other words, the creeds imply that God has made a miserable failure in creating mankind, and that His Plan of Salvation is a farce. We should have known better than this, even without a Bible. Could we not have seen that the Plan of the great Father of Mercies, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, who has all power at His command, could not be such a failure—that in harmony with His glorious character, He could not bring into existence an entire race, knowing that 999 out of every 1,000 of them would spend eternity in torture?

The only reasonable explanation for our credulity in this respect is that which the Apostle Paul gives; namely, that the Adversary, the Devil, has greatly misrepresented our just and loving Creator. Satan, the god of this world, has so blinded the minds of many by the delusive theories which he promulgated during the Dark Ages that the majority seem unable to reason intelligently upon the subject of religion. St. Paul declares that “the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils.” (1 Timothy 4:1.) This prophecy has been fulfilled. There has been a great falling away from the primitive faith of the Church; and heathenish theories, which were no part of the Scriptures, were introduced to frighten the people and to bring them into submission to ambitious leaders.

We have been deluded into thinking of our great God as a great demon, all-powerful and all-wise, but not all-good, who has brought into existence millions of people whom He knew would be compelled to suffer eternal torment. The Adversary has a shrewd way of continuing his deceptions. When the thought is suggested that if God knew that the result of Adam’s disobedience would be that the majority of his posterity would suffer eternally, He could not be just to have permitted the propagation of the race, Satan is quick to suggest, “God would have destroyed Adam if He could; but, having made man with an immortal soul, even the Creator cannot destroy mankind now.”

From no other source than from the great Adversary of God and man did this idea emanate—that in creating man God gave him something that even the Almighty cannot take from the race. How puerile such a God would be! This prevalent but erroneous thought is directly contradicted by our Lord Jesus Himself, who said: “Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna”—the Second Death. (Matthew 10:28.) The Almighty God, who knew the end from the beginning, would bring no beings into

existence whom He could not destroy when they had proved themselves unworthy of the blessing of life.

No Eternal Life in Misery

Furthermore, the Bible declares, “All the wicked will God destroy.” (Psalm 145:20.) How simple, how reasonable, the Bible is! We get our confusion of thought by neglecting the Word of God and taking instead the traditions and vagaries of men, which have been handed down from the Dark Ages. Bible students, however, are finding the wisdom of going directly to the Word of God. The wisdom from Above is what we need, not the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God, and which is becoming more and more foolish to all thinking people. The Heavenly wisdom comes only from the Word of God. 1 Corinthians 3:19-21; James 3:17.

In taking the text which I have chosen, and in saying that I greatly appreciate the thought there presented of a loving Heavenly Father, do not misunderstand me to mean what many today mean when they speak along this line. Some very learned people talk about “the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.” Doubtless they mean well enough in referring to God as the Father of the entire human race in their present fallen condition; but they speak contrary to the Bible. The Scriptures exhort us not to lean to our own understanding, nor to that of other people, but rather to inquire, “What saith the Lord? Does God’s Word say anything about the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man?”—Proverbs 3:5, 6; Isaiah 8:20.

There we find that mankind are the offspring of God, that He is their Creator, the One who gave them being. But the Bible does not say that He is now the Father of the race, in the sense in which many think that He is. These urge the theory of universal salvation of mankind, saying that because God is the Life-giver of the world therefore He will save the entire race. We are not faulting this class; for they are sincere in their thought. Personally, I would greatly prefer to believe in universal salvation than in universal damnation. But the Bible takes neither of these extreme positions.

What the Bible Teaches

The plain declaration of the Bible is that our first parents, Adam and Eve, received life from God, and its perpetuity was promised them only upon certain clearly specified conditions. They were plainly forewarned that if they met these conditions, they would continue to live; if they failed to be obedient, they would die—cease to live. There was not even a hint given of a life continued eternally in torture, as the penalty of disobedience.—Genesis 2:17; 3:19; Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Romans 6:23.

In forewarning our first parents as to the sure result of disobedience, God also intimated that in such a case He would disown them, would no longer be their Father. They became disobedient, and thereby lost all right to life. Thus from God's standpoint, the entire race of Adam is dead—condemned, not to eternal torment, but to death. The right to life has been taken away. They are under legal condemnation to death.

Thus we see that the human family are not now the children of God. Adam was a son until he forfeited that blessed relationship; but from his day onward no member of his race is called a son of God, except our Lord Jesus, while He was in the flesh. He was a Son of God before He came to earth a man; but His spiritual life was given up in order that He might become a perfect man, to die for Adam and his race, and thus to open up the way whereby the whole world might come back into the relationship of sons of God, might regain what Adam lost for himself and for his family. "Jesus Christ by the grace of God tasted death for every man." (Hebrews 2:9.) This does not mean universal salvation, however.

God's Plan Just and Reasonable

When our Lord Jesus came into the world, He opened up a way whereby those who would believe in Him and would sacrifice as He did, becoming His followers, might become sons of God on the spiritual plane, yea, the very highest plane in existence the Divine plane. These, if faithful unto death, would share the glorious reward which the Father had promised to our Lord Jesus immortality, life in its highest form. But the religious leaders of His day did not believe in Him, did not receive His Message; and during His ministry only about five hundred of the people believed. The god of this world, Satan, blinded their eyes.—2 Corinthians 4:4.

The people asked, "Have any of the Scribes and Pharisees believed in Him?" When they learned to the contrary, they concluded that there was nothing in the Message. They took the course that many are taking today. The Adversary was behind it all. There were many refined people amongst them. The Sadducees were an aristocratic class. Perhaps some of them were not bad men. The Apostle Peter afterward declared that in ignorance the people crucified the Prince of Life, as did also their rulers.—Acts 3:13-18.

It may be asked, Why did our Lord not open the way for the whole world to become spiritual sons of God, instead of for only an elect class? We answer, We are sure that God is taking the best way; for the whole Plan is of Him. He could have kept the way of salvation closed until the Millennium, and then have done for all alike. But this was not His Plan. He purposed first to gather out of the world an elect Church. This is not an arbitrary Plan, however; for He is not selecting any contrary to their own wills. All who are called have the privilege of accepting or rejecting the call. Whoever prefers to wait

until the next Age, and the opportunity then to be offered to the world, may do so; but the offer then to be made will not be nearly so glorious as that now held out.

There are some who desire to know and to do the will of the Lord, if only they are shown what it is. To this class God purposes to show His Plan and to give them His choicest blessings. He gives them the opportunity to join with Jesus in His sacrificial work for humanity, the privilege of suffering with Him now that they may reign with Him by and by, in the Kingdom. Foreknowing that there would be a class of this kind, who would gladly give up the pleasures and the ambitions of the present life for the far grander blessings which He has to bestow, God has given them the privilege. He has sent forth His message far and wide, to let this class know of their opportunity.

The Class Which God Now Seeks

For over eighteen hundred years this Call to saintship has gone forth in a quiet way. But comparatively few have responded, and the world has generally set it at naught. People in general do not think it worth while to go to some small upper room to attend a little prayer meeting or to some ordinary hall to hear preaching. They prefer to go to some fine edifice to hear an eloquent oration and charming music. God has permitted His Truth to be thus obscured from the worldly-wise and self-sufficient, and to let it appear as if the Gospel were accomplishing little or nothing. But all along He knew just what He was doing. He was accomplishing just what He had designed. He has always known them that were His.—2 Timothy 2:19, Isaiah 55:8-11.

The class which God is selecting now have sharp ears for the true Gospel Message. When they hear of the Love of God in Christ, they believe it. They listen to God's Word, rather than to human theories and traditions. They become pupils in the School of Christ, followers of the Lord Jesus. The Master did not have a smooth way. His path was rough and thorny. Some, when they learn this fact, stop immediately. Others, however, press onward, even though they know the way to be narrow and rough. They desire to get back to God; for they find satisfaction nowhere else.

These hear that our Lord Jesus will become an Advocate for whoever contract to follow in His steps, and that the Father will not receive them without this Advocate to make good for their weakness and blemishes. They learn that our Lord will become the Advocate of any who will accept His terms "If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." To deny self means, to give up one's own will and take the Master's will instead. Whoever takes this step will find various crosses and difficulties along the way. The contract is not to last for a month or for a year, but for life. Our Lord guarantees that His grace will be sufficient for all who follow Him, that His strength is made perfect in weakness. Surely this is sufficient assurance.

There are not many of this class anywhere. But it is only to these that God now becomes the Father. These are the sons of God, through the begetting of the Holy Spirit. These say with their Master, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God! Thy Law is written in my heart." If in their hearts they should say, "I know that I have to do God's will, and so I will do it," He would say to them, "Go back; for I am seeking only those who love My will, not those who serve merely through fear or compulsion." Those who take a stand with Christ must burn all the bridges behind them when they enter the narrow way. They are to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. Only such will constitute the Bride class.

"The Father Himself Loveth You"

It is only after we have received the begetting of the Holy Spirit that we are privileged to say, "Our Father which art in Heaven." The world cannot call God their Father, but through our Redeemer the Church has this privilege. And so the Apostle says, "Now are we the sons of God." (1 John 3:1, 2.) But as such, we are not free from the aches and pains incident to the groaning creation. While in the flesh we must suffer, but still we are the sons of God, in the sense that we have the begetting of the Holy Spirit. In the resurrection change, however, we shall really be the children of God.

By nature we were children of Adam, condemned to death in him. But when in our consecration we gave up everything pertaining to the human nature, our Lord received us and made us acceptable to the Father, who then begot us with His Holy Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father!" This is a blessed position; for our Heavenly Father is in perfection what earthly parents should be. He has made every provision for us. Our Lord Jesus is simply carrying out our Father's Plan.

Regarding the Last Seventh of the Passage to the Queen's Chamber.

If any of you have ever gone along a narrow dark passage, not knowing there was a step of 21 inches down at the end, and you came to that step, and fell over it, you can realize in some measure the condition of mankind when they will find all their earthly hopes and aspirations wrecked by the great time of trouble that is coming on this world. There will be a great fall, dear friends. There will be many little aches and bruises, and a great deal of groaning at that time. But afterwards, when men pick themselves up to their feet, as they will do, they will find to their joy that they can stand erect, because this portion of the passage from the floor to the ceiling is from 5 ft. 6 1/2 inches to 5 ft. 8 1/2 inches in height. In other words, it is the height of an average man. The burden has fallen from their shoulders and they are able to stand upright and then they shall progress along towards the Queen's Chamber, the post-millennial condition.

By Brother John Edgar, 1906 Convention Report, page 80.