

A Very Big Deal

From an ancient mountainside, Jesus taught a multitude to pray, "Our Father in heaven. . ." (Matthew 6:9). In a more intimate setting, Jesus responded to a request from one of His disciples:

"... Lord, teach us to pray ..."

²He said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father," - Luke 11:1, 2

In every prayer of Jesus recorded in the New Testament but one, He addressed God as His Father, and the whole of Christendom has heartily responded. In almost every prayer I recall uttering, public and private; I have addressed God as "Father", many of those times, as much by routine as by any profound premeditation. We have a few fellows around the church more creative in their praise than me, but for the most part, the vast majority of the prayers raised up around here – worship, communion, offering, Bible School, grace before meals - they each address "Father" quite early on.

As habits go, this is one of the best. There is nothing more basic to the practice of Christian prayer than to address God as "Father" when we pray. We are on solid ground because this is precisely how Jesus taught us to pray. It seems, however, that from time to time, there might be value in reflecting on what a big deal it is to be invited to address the Creator of all that is as "Father" lest it become less of a big deal in our thinking than it warrants.

After all, the world speaks of a "universal Fatherhood of God" which substantively amounts to nothing – a domesticating of the god (or gods) that earlier peoples used to fear. Every ancient culture has inherently known that god or something like god must exist. The orderliness of creation declared its creator, but no one dared to address him as "Father". Rather, at their best, they approached this unknown god in terror and with great superstition. At their worst, they exchanged the little of god's nature that could be known through creation for lies – turning to idols fashioned after created things.

God revealed Himself to the Hebrew nation in a unique way. He entered with them into a covenant of law that better reflected His nature of justice and holiness. He identified Himself to them by a variety of names. From childhood, the Hebrews were taught to address God with proper reverence in private prayer as well as in public worship. Many names for God were available. "Father" was *NOT* among them. In the Old Testament, there are rare references to God as a "Father" to Israel in a very corporate sense but not a single example of any individual Israelite addressing God directly as his own Father.

The first Jewish rabbi to call God "Father" in a clearly personal way was Jesus. How radical this really was is lost on us. The fact that Jesus spoke of God as His Father was one chief reason that His enemies despised Him. Particularly galling to them was the fact that He taught His rag-tag disciples to address God in the same way. How could unclean men who smell of fish dare to call God, "Father"?

When the chief priests and Pharisees pushed for the death of Jesus, His addressing God as His own Father was a primary grievance. After many false charges and attempts to manipulate the legal process, Jesus' enemies finally conceded to Pilate: "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God" (John 19:7).

To His enemies, Jesus was a blasphemer Who died a blasphemer's death. But, when He rose from the dead, He appeared to Mary Magdalene and instructed her to tell His brothers, ". . . I am returning to my Father and your Father. . ." (John 20:17).

It is no small thing, Christian, that you can now address the Creator as your Father and not in the syrupy sense that the world speaks of God's fatherhood. Your relationship with God was restored by Christ's work of atonement in the cross and the resurrection. Beyond those great events, Jesus sends to us the indwelling presence of the Divine that validates our practice of addressing God as our Father, making it the natural thing to do that it has now become:

. . . ⁶Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. – Galatians 4:6, 7

So, while calling God "Father" has become second nature to us, let us never lose sight of what a very big deal that right truly is.

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