

The Father and his Sons

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines a ‘metaphor’ as the ‘Application of a name or descriptive term to an object to which it is not literally applicable’.¹ While some may not understand the concept of metaphor, most are still familiar with metaphorical language and are usually not at all puzzled by such language as:

The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,

The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor²

In other words, people generally understand ‘picture language’. The moon is pictured as a galleon without the fact of likeness being specified.³ Likewise, we are not uncomfortable with language like, ‘When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers’ (Ps. 8:3) or ‘the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth’ (2 Chron. 16:9 AV). Language directly applicable to those with physical bodies like ours can be readily used to describe things which God does, without implying that God has ten fingers or two eyes⁴ as we do, especially since Jesus said that ‘God is spirit’ (John 4:24). We can go further and see that the LORD is called ‘the Rock’ (Deut. 32:4; 2 Sam. 22:32) and that, while the implications are not given to us by the text, the meaning is reasonably plain.

But what of the title ‘Father’ for God? That is often termed a metaphor in contemporary discussions. Is God’s fatherhood merely a concession to human thinking while the truth of God’s being remains essentially unknowable? Grant Osborne writes:

For instance, the titles of God (El Shaddai, Abba and so forth) are not simply literal terms that exactly denote God but are metaphors that we must interpret in their own context. To understand El Shaddai (“Almighty God,” Ex. 6:3), we must uncover the military roots of the metaphor and see the imagery of a God who defends and fights for his people. Abba is a similar metaphor and pictures God as a loving and protective “father” .⁵

If ‘Father’ only pictures God as a loving and protective father, what does that say of our knowledge of God? Well, certainly, we must admit that as creatures our knowledge of God will be partial. Thus:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law. (Deut. 29:29)

Likewise, 1 Corinthians 13 asserts:

For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.”¹²For now we see

¹ Definitions of ‘metaphor’ become more complex in works on linguistics; here I am referring to the popular use of the word.

² Alfred Noyes, *The Highwayman*, i.

³ If the likeness is specified, the result is a simile, as in ‘The road was *like*, or *in some way similar to*, a ribbon’. Of course the poetic value of the metaphor would be lost if we had always to adopt this explanation. However, the Scriptures utilise both.

⁴ Cf Zech. 4:10, where the prophet says that ‘these seven [lamps] are the eyes of the LORD’ and Rev. 5:6, where the Lamb has ‘seven horns and seven eyes’. Apocalyptic language has its own issues, but it is still, conspicuously, ‘picture language’.

⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, Inter Varsity Press, Downers Grove, 1991, p. 299.

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in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Cor. 13:9-12).

But the question to be asked is whether Paul means that 'then' we will know in a fuller way or whether we will happily dispense with metaphorical language because we will know differently.

GOD THE 'FATHER' IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Metaphors (and similes also) can be very powerful and may convey far more than at first appears. This may well be the case with some uses of 'Father' for God in the Old Testament. We should note, though, that the use of the title 'father' for a god was to be somewhat expected.

Invocation of the deity under the name of father is one of the basic phenomena of religious history. It is found among both primitive and culturally elevated peoples, both around the Mediterranean and in Assyria and Babylon.⁶

What is perhaps surprising is how infrequently the title occurs in the Old Testament. Israel did describe God as 'father' but that was one title among many and, what is more, 'father' was not a name so much as a function.

The name of God was revealed as Yahweh. This name was used as early as Genesis 2:4, where it appears in the form 'the LORD God'⁷ Either this name was first revealed to Moses as recorded in Exodus 3:14-15 and then used by the writers of earlier passages, or the revelation to Moses was a special reinforcement of what had previously been already known by men and women of faith, as in Genesis 4:26, 'at that time [of Seth] people began to invoke the name of the LORD'. Exodus 6:2-8 shows us the significance of the full revelation of God's name.

God also spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am the LORD. ³I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name 'The LORD' I did not make myself known to them. ⁴I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. ⁵I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. ⁶Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the LORD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. 'I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians' ⁸I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.'"

While this may be saying that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not know God as Yahweh (the LORD), it is also possible that the LORD is saying that although he had established his covenant with those patriarchs, the redemption that faithfulness to the covenant involved was not fully revealed. Only now, under Moses leadership, would the full meaning of his name Yahweh be revealed.⁸ This could also be implied in Exodus 3:13-15.

⁶ Gotlob Schrenk, *πατήρ*, in Gerhard Kittel (Ed), TDNT, Vol. V, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1967, p. 951.

⁷ Yahweh generally appears in our English Old Testament versions as 'LORD', with all the letters in capitals, in distinction from 'Lord', which translates the Hebrew *adonai*, meaning 'my Lord'.

⁸ Cf. Philip C. Johnson, 'Exodus' in Charles F Pfeiffer etc (Eds) *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Oliphants, London, 1962, p. 56.

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But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

Even here, the question need not imply some new revelation so much as an explication of an older one. 'What is your name' is evidently not the normal way to inquire of a person's name⁹ and here the request may well be for a fuller explanation of the meaning of the name, i.e. what is the substance of his name?

The replies in both Exodus 3 and 6 bears this out. Both refer to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with the covenant made with them either explicit (Ex. 6:4) or implied (cf Ex. 2:24). So the answer to the question, 'What is his name?' is, 'I am who I am'. This is not a philosophical statement about God's eternal being. It is a statement that the God who is sending Moses is the God who is now what he was when he made the covenant with Abraham. He made the covenant and he is keeping it.¹⁰

To know the name of God was, then, to know far more than simply the 'tag' which distinguished him from any other god. It was to have been given the privilege of insight into who he is and what he is doing. Thus Seth and others 'called on the name of the LORD' (Gen. 4:26; 12:8; 13:4 etc) and Moses, having seen the defeat of the enemy at the Red Sea, declared that 'The LORD is a warrior, the LORD is his name' (Ex. 15:3). Of significance is the request by Moses to see the glory of God and God's response:

The LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."¹⁸ Moses said, "Show me your glory, I pray."¹⁹ And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The LORD'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

'The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 'keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'" ⁸And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. (Ex. 33:17-19; 34: 6-8)

God knows Moses 'by name' and so Moses requests that God will reveal his true being, his glory, to him. Whatever the intimacy Moses already enjoyed with God (Ex. 32:11), he needed to understand more deeply the character of God. Moses had a moral problem; God had indicated that he would not go any further with Israel because of their sinfulness at Sinai and at the same time had promised to go with Moses and give him rest¹¹ (Ex. 32:14). So who is the God who sets the task and yet acts in such holy judgment? God's response is to tell Moses his name, Yahweh, the LORD, with all that

⁹ See G. T. Manley, 'God, Names of' in J. D. Douglas (Ed), *The New Bible Dictionary*, The Inter-Varsity Fellowship, London, 1962, p. 479.

¹⁰ Adrio König makes the point that 'God here describes his name by means of a *verb* and not a noun (substantive). From this we may therefore not deduce that God is the eternal, absolute being, but rather that God does something' (*Systematic Theology II, Guide 1*, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1973, p. 154, emphasis his).

¹¹ The pronoun 'you' in this verse is singular, referring to Moses alone.

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that implied in that situation (Ex. 34:6-7). The moral dilemma was solved, not by an explanation but by a (partial¹²) revelation of the name of the LORD.

The third 'word', in Exodus 20:7, can now be seen in its true light. There is no acquittal for those misuse the name of the LORD. His 'name is Holy' (Isa. 57:15).

Now when we return to the title 'father' within the Old Testament we can see that the fatherhood of God is always in the context of his revealed character. The God of the covenant, Yahweh, the LORD, has been faithful to his promise. He will redeem Israel from Egypt. In the process, Moses was to 'say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son. 231 said to you, 'Let my son go that he may worship me.' (Ex. 4:22-23; cf. Jer. 31:9). He carried Israel through the wilderness 'as a man bears his son' (Deut. 1:31). Yahweh was father to Israel, having created, made and established them (Deut. 14:1; 32:6; Isa. 64:8). In Isaiah 63:16, Isaiah recognises how far the nation was from its heritage, yet 'you, O LORD, are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name'. The LORD, as father, exercises his rights as next of kin to redeem Israel.¹³

The sin of Israel could be expressed in these terms. Yahweh, the LORD, speaks:

my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water. ... ²⁷[they] say to a tree, "You are my father," and to a stone, "You gave me birth." For they have turned their backs to me, and not their faces. But in the time of their trouble they say, "Come and save us!" (Jer. 2,13, 27)

Have you not just now called to me, "My Father, you are the friend of my youth-5will he be angry forever, will he be indignant to the end?" This is how you have spoken, but you have done all the evil that you could. (Jer. 3:4-5; cf v. 19)

A son honors his father, and servants their master. If then I am a father, where is the honor due me? And if I am a master, where is the respect due me? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. ... ¹⁰Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors? (Mal. 1:6; 2:10)

This is not language concerning a 'universal fatherhood of God'; it is the indication that the LORD, the covenant God of Israel, has dealt with Israel as a father.¹⁴

As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him. (Ps. 103:13; cf Ps. 68:5; Prov. 3:12).

His promises can be expressed in these terms also. In passages which later reveal a deeper significance, there are promises which concern David or his descendants.

I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my son; today I have begotten you. 8Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession." (Ps. 2:7-8).

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.... 14I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. (2 Sam. 7:12, 14)

God is father to Israel and will always be so, but what is prominent in all of this is that it is the LORD, Yahweh, who is father. Where he is father to David or to David's

¹² Cf. Ex. 33:20-23; Deut. 29:29.

¹³ Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, IVP, Leicester, 1993, p. 517.

¹⁴ Later, Lu. 3:38 says that 'Adam was the son of God', but this statement comes in the genealogy of Jesus. Because Adam was the son of God it does not follow that all 'in Adam' are sons of God. Only in Christ Jesus are we all sons of God through faith (Gal. 3:26).

offspring, it is kingship which is in mind, though the stress remains always on the fact that Yahweh, the LORD, is, himself, king (Ps. 96:10; 97:1 etc).

THE FULL REVELATION

The creed of Israel was the shema of Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

The Greek translation (LXX) of this passage has 'the Lord our God is one Lord', or 'the Lord our God, the Lord is one'.¹⁵ In what seems a deliberate reference to it, Paul wrote:

Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth - as in fact there are many gods and many lords - 'yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Cor. 8:5-6).

Paul, the highly educated Jewish Christian, knows only too well that there is but one true God, even though the world is filled with idolatry. But when he says that there is only one God, he does so in an extraordinary way. There is one God, the Father! and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ! Both 'God' and 'Lord' remind the readers of the *shema* but now there are two persons included in the 'one'.¹⁶ How can Paul write this? The answer is that something has happened in history which has not contradicted the revelation of the Old Testament but which has brought it to fulfilment. The reality behind the metaphor is now plain to see. Israel's God, Yahweh, is 'the Father'. If we ask how we can say that this is not a metaphor for something else, something beyond us, then we can also answer it simply.¹⁷ The Scriptures assert that we receive the Spirit when we believe in Christ. Romans 8 explains:

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you....

¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ - if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8:9-11, 14-17)

The Spirit dwells in the believer and does so as the 'Spirit of adoption' (NRSV, AV, NASB) or 'the Spirit of sonship' (RSV, NIV).¹⁸ The Spirit bears witness to his own

¹⁵ Ἄκουε, Ἰσραὴλ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστίν

¹⁶ He was not trying to articulate a doctrine of the Trinity, so we need not be concerned at the absence of a mention of the Holy Spirit in these verses.

¹⁷ This, of course, assumes that we hold that the Scriptures have the authority of God and that they are to be understood as using language which means what it expresses. Otherwise, we have no way of saying anything with certainty. That does not imply that we must take everything in the Scriptures literally, as is obvious, say, from the use of parables by Jesus and apocalyptic language in Revelation.

¹⁸ See J. M. Scott, 'Adoption, Sonship' in Gerald F. Hawthorne et al (Eds), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, IVP, Downers Grove, 1993, pp. 15-18. Preferring 'adoption' he says: 'any attempt to translate the term [*huiothesia*] more generally as "sonship" sets the study of the background off on the wrong foot from the start' (p. 16). This is in contrast with H. Haag, who says: 'the institution of adoption was not known in Israel' ('bēn' in G. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (Eds), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Volume II, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1975, p. 155).

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work in us, that is to our being children of God, by causing us to cry ‘Abba! Father!’ In a similar passage, Galatians 4:4-7, Paul adds to this picture.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” “So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then also an heir, through God.

He says that the cry ‘Abba! Father!’ is actually the cry of the Spirit himself. Christ came to effect adoption and because his work of redemption was accomplished, the Spirit of his own sonship was given to us.

So I am suggesting that Pentecost brought in an amazing realisation of who God is and what redemption has accomplished. That does not mean that explanation and teaching was not required but it does mean that here was no ‘appropriate’ picture language constructed for the hearers. Instead a powerful revelation came to the church which was born that day: God is Father!

Ephesians 3:14-15 introduces Paul’s prayer:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.

Far from ‘Father’ being a metaphor, the ‘Application of a name or descriptive term to an object to which it is not literally applicable’, quite the opposite is true. ‘Father’ is literally applicable to God alone, and then only to others by virtue of their being the image or reflection of the true Father.

Yahweh, the LORD, is Father. If Israel could identify with statements about the strong tenderness of God expressed in terms of a father with his children, we can now see why. It is because their initial image of fatherhood actually derived from their creator in whose image they were made.

The LORD is king, and the Lord is Father, so we can see that Jesus’ language in the Sermon on the Mount is thoroughly consistent with all that had already been shown in the Old Testament. Thus the command of Jesus:

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. (Matt. 6:33 RSV).¹⁹

We are to seek the Father’s kingdom. That is what the opening of the Lord’s Prayer says: ‘Our Father ... Your kingdom come’²⁰ As people of the kingdom, we are to be ‘children of [our] Father in heaven’ and be ‘perfect as [our] heavenly Father is perfect’ (Matt 5:45, 48), doing his will (Matt. 6:10; 21). To be children of the Father is to trust him for the supply of all our needs (Matt. 6:25-32; 7:11). It is to live before him, wanting only his approval (Matt. 6:16-18). The twelve year old Jesus was conscious of this: ‘I must be about my Father’s business’ (Lu. 2:49).

The cry of the Spirit, ‘Abba! Father!’ which is caused to well up within us is found only once more in the New Testament, at Mark. 14:36. There, in deep distress prior to his arrest, Jesus cried:

¹⁹ NRSV and AV have ‘kingdom of God’. MS evidence does not permit a dogmatic stance, though I think that the language of the Sermon on the Mount, indeed the whole Gospel, does point to the fact of it being the kingdom of God the Father anyway. Cf. also Matt. 13:43 and 26:29.

²⁰ That this prayer might have more than a general application is suggested by Matt. 12:28, where the kingdom is said to be actually present (cf. Lu. 17:21), and Matt. 28:18, where Jesus implies that the kingdom is now established in him.

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Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.

Here was the supreme expression of seeking first the Father's kingdom and his righteousness.

THE SON OF THE FATHER

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father....¹⁸No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known. (John 1:14, 18 RSV²¹)

The Synoptic Gospels do not record the Jewish leaders being angry with Jesus because of his use of 'Father' for God. John's Gospel certainly does.

But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working still, and I am working."¹⁸This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5:17-18)

Given that, in the Synoptics, Jesus had used 'Father' as a title for God without being threatened with death, why should this claim cause such a fierce response? I would suggest that it was not the title so much as the reality present in him which was the cause of the offence. He was the truth of the Father and in him the Father was doing his own works (Jn 14:6, 10). To see him was to see the glory of the Father (Jn 1:14:2:11). Far from him entering our world, 'his glory veiled'²² the problem was quite the opposite. Jesus was making the truth of God, and so the truth of who he himself was, quite plain to all. One look at the works he did would show that (Jn 14:10-11).

The problem lay in those who refused to believe Jesus. In order to see the kingdom they needed to be born from above (Jn 3:3; cf. 1:12-13; 2 Cor. 3:13-16; 4:3-4). Given that Moses had written about Jesus, and they did not genuinely believe Moses, they were incapable of believing in Jesus. Basically, they did not have the love of God in them, so they did not and could not and would not accept him (Jn 5:42-47). In fact, they had a different father.

Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."³⁵The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever.³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.³⁷I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word.³⁶I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father. ...⁴³Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word.⁴⁰You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in 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." (John 8:34-38,44-44)

²¹ NRSV, while noting in v. 14 that the definite articles are absent from 'only son' and 'father', fails to follow C. K. Barrett's observation that 'μονογονής and πατήρ are words too characteristic of the Johannine writings, and too theological in use, to permit us to render in general terms, "the glory as of a father's only son"' (*The Gospel According to John*, S.P.C.K. London, 1967, p. 139).

²² Graham Kendrick, *The Servant King*, v. 1.1.2.

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Faced with the truth of the Father in Jesus, those with a different fatherhood must rise up to suppress that truth (Rom. 1:18ff). Their difficulty was that what can be known about God was all too plain to them.

[They were] like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. (1 John 3:12)

Although not the primary intention of God, the coming of the Son into the world was, in fact, a horrible judgment.

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. (Jn 3:19-20)

The primary intention was that, by Jesus taking away the sins of the world, men and women might come to the Father through him. That means a most amazing relationship is to be established between God and humanity through Jesus. Jesus is uniquely 'Son of God'. He is the one who restores all that was abdicated in Adam. He is 'close to the Father's heart' (Jn 1:18). When he speaks of God, he freely uses the phrase 'my Father' (15 times in John's Gospel). Even when he had risen, he told Mary Magdalene,

Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' (Jn 20:17)

The Father loves this Son (Jn 5:20), showing him all that he is doing in order that the Son may participate with the Father in it. And the Father loved the Son before the foundation of the world (Jn 17:24). Jesus is the Son of the Father's love (Col. 1:13). What is more, the Father loves the Son because he lays down his life, not meaning

that the Father withholds his love until Jesus agrees to give up his life on the cross and rise again. Rather the love of the Father for the Son is eternally linked with the unqualified obedience of the Son to the Father, his utter dependence upon him, culminating in the greatest act of obedience just now before him: willingness to bear the shame and ignominy of Golgotha, the isolation and rejection of death, the sin and curse reserved for the Lamb of God.²³

Of course, this love is also fully the love of the Son for the Father. 'I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father' (Jn 14:31). Familiarity with biblical language must not make us insensitive to the amazing nature of this revelation. The only Son, who is close to the Father's heart is, by that intimacy, that is, by all that it involves in obedient love, making known the truth of the Father to the world (Jn 1:18). But there is more. For he does not make him known to our minds alone, nor only to a recalcitrant humanity but, by his death, to all the children of God scattered abroad (Jn 11:51-52). The Father will have his sons with him in worship:

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:23-24)

Jesus must go to the cross, and in doing so he is preparing a place for us, so that he may take us to himself, so that where he is we may be also (Jn 14:3). That place is the intimacy of the relationship of Father and Son. John chapters 14-17 spell this out

²³ D. A Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, IVP, Downers Grove, 1991, p. 388.

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in a rich tapestry of interwoven threads. There are many dwelling places in the Father's house (Jn 14:2) and the gift of the Spirit will lead us into all the truth (Jn 16:13) by making us the dwelling place of Father and Son (Jn 14:23). The divine *perichoresis*²⁴ opens up and includes all those in the Son, so that we may be participants in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.²¹ They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them. (John 14:20-21)

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word,²¹ that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.²² The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one,²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.²⁴ Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (Jn 17:20-24)

So there was the cross. Whatever our response to the physical suffering, who could respond to the suffering of the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world unless he is born of the Spirit (Jn 3:8)? Even with Jesus' words from the Thursday evening in their ears, on the Sunday evening the disciples were still behind locked doors for fear of the Jews when the risen Jesus appeared to them (Jn 20:19).

Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (Jn 20:19-23)

The act of breathing on the disciples was the act of re-creation, the words used by John being almost identical with the words used in the LXX of Genesis 2:7. The disciples, receiving the Holy Spirit, are born anew, born again. The implications of that rebirth are stupendous; 'As the Father sent me so I send you'. The Father sent Jesus as the Son, with all the intimacy, privilege and responsibility which we have seen. That is the way the disciples are sent, as sons of the Father, participating in the sonship of the Son.²⁵

The Spirit brings sonship to the sons just as he was the Spirit of sonship to the Son (Jn 1:33-34), enabling the Son to offer himself fully and completely to the Father (Heb. 9:14). 'The Spirit, by whom Jesus cried 'Abba! Father!' and who, as the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son, also cries 'Abba! Father!' now dwells in us, so that we can cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Son is revealed in us so that we can proclaim him: 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' The church is now 'in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). Truly, for us there is one God, the Father and one Lord, Jesus Christ.

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²⁴ This is not a word used in the Scriptures, but was in early use by theologians to describe the flow of life, love, worship and service, giving and receiving within the Godhead.

²⁵ For believers, 'son' is not a gender matter, it is our participation in the sonship of the eternal Son, in the same sense as us once being 'in Adam' but now being 'in Christ'. The words 'child' or 'children' for Christians have been defined as used to convey the sense of community (Kenneth Grayston, 'Family' in Alan Richardson (Ed), *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, SCM, London, 1957, p. 79.