

## Show us the Father

### The Authority of the Father

8 May 2014

Reading: Matt. 6:9-13; John 17:1-11

There are many issues that need to be worked through but our time is limited here. I want to point you to two books that are of help.

*Oh, Father! Our Father* by Geoffrey Bingham  
*God the holy Father* by P. T. Forsyth.

I will speak on the authority of the Father this morning. However, it is not possible to speak on the authority of the Father without touching on the other themes of holiness and love. They are all linked. The themes of holiness and love will be introduced this morning but I will deal with them more fully later on.

### Being and Doing

Before I begin, there is one other consideration following from last week topic, 'Why did Jesus come?' We have been pre-occupied with the 'doing' and hence we answer the question with what Jesus came to do. We pick out the verse that says just that.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10)

That is true, but we need to see beyond that to the true nature of the Triune God, and the nature of the Father. He is the Holy Father as that was the way Jesus addressed the Father when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

<sup>11</sup> And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. (John 17:1-11)

So the request by Phillip was an awakening in the lives of the disciples – 'Show us the Father'. Jesus came to reveal to us the Godhead and the 'drive' behind what He came to do. That 'drive' is the will of the Father, the will of the Holy Father. At this juncture we might just pause to introduce a brief statement of what we mean by holiness.

Holiness has been misconstrued. We've come to see it as something other than what has been revealed. In our ignorance we see it as something that we have to perform ourselves. But holiness as performance is simply not true! Holiness is being done unto us, not by us.<sup>1</sup>

That statement does not sound like holiness to many people. Our pre-occupation with the 'doing' has made us turn the whole concept of holiness on its head. When we can see the true nature of the Father and what it means to be holy, then we must start with the 'being', i.e. the relational and only then the 'doing' make more sense. That is difficult to hold together because most people will see us by what we do rather than by who we are.

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<sup>1</sup> Theme of the book by J Haughey, *Housing Heavens Fire: The Challenge of Holiness*, Loyola Press.

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In our technological age, the 'how-to' culture dispenses with the communion and it is precisely the communion that Jesus came to restore. When we have the 'know-how', then we can be on our own and we do not need anyone looking over our shoulders. We think we can become the master of our own destiny and are in a position to create our preferred future. That is not the case when we are living in the Triune communion.

It was Bonhoeffer who said that we should not approach God with the 'how' question, but rather with the 'who' question, i.e. who God is. Jesus came to show us the Father and the 'who' question is answered by our relationship with Him.

### **Fatherhood – authority**

When we come to see the Holy Father we see also His authority. It is difficult to talk about authority because this is so lacking today. Authority is not a word we feel comfortable about using. It connotes of absolutism and a touch of dictatorship. So we have gone away from it. The pulpit is situated in the front and elevated to symbolise the authority of the Word. However the modern generation feels that is a little overpowering and have taken the pulpit down to the level of the people. In so doing the preached word was changed to an opinion that was expressed and its acceptance is to be decided by the hearers. The authority of the Word is lost in our preaching.

Not only is the authority of the Word lost in the church, authority is also lost in our relationships, our marriages and family. Adam should have exercised his authority over Eve when she was on the verge of accepting the fruit from the serpent. He did not and therefore sin followed. Parents today do not exercise their authority over their children anymore for fear of upsetting them. So there result little princes and princesses, or in the Chinese setting, little emperors and empresses calling all the shots at home. There is loss of authority because the parents have not known the authority of the Father. When we do not know the authority of the Father, we will impose a semblance of what we think to be authority but which is not authority at all. We exchanged it for a process of negotiation and consensus, or by showering gifts upon them in our affluent society.

I am aware that earthly authority has been abused in the hands of ungodly people and therefore we feel that majority rule is a better option. I do not disagree with that practice in those situations. In our churches too, we have created church orders and majority rule to deal with those situations. That is not the ideal, but that is the situation when we have Christians who claim to be children of God, but have not known the Father. He is the Holy Father. To know the Father God is to know His authority and holiness. Authority should not be a bad word. When we are in the right relationship we embrace authority whole heartedly. The Father is the author of creation and our salvation. All authority belongs to Him and arises from Him.

### **The Authority of the Father**

<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. (Romans 13:1)

Why is the Father authoritative? Paul wrote these words following his argument on the gospel, and the gospel is about the redemptive work of God. So after twelve chapters on the gospel he affirmed the authority of God in the gospel. This is where authority is to be found – in the cross. So very often, we think that authority is to be found in power. Yes, God is omnipotent and He is

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creator. However, His authority is not to be found there. His authority is to be found in the cross. This is where Paul is coming from here after he has been arguing the case for the gospel.

We will not know the authority of the Father until we are able to pray from the heart, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. Those words are often a mere recitation. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, 'Not my will but Thine be done'. He lives in the authority of the Father.

The question is how should authority be expressed. We will find the answer in seeing how the Father's authority is expressed. We will not know true authority until we know the Father who is the source of all authority. The Father's authority is to be found in the cross which is the expression of His love and holiness. God is Triune and His redemptive work is carried out by the three Persons of the Godhead. This allows us to talk of the authority of the Son and the authority of the Spirit.

### **The Authority of the Son**

The authority of the Son is given by the Father. We see again in these following verses that authority is linked to the redemptive work of the Son of God.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>26</sup> For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; <sup>27</sup> and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. (John 5:26-27)

<sup>25</sup> to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 25)

<sup>10</sup> Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming,  
"Now have come the salvation and the power  
and the kingdom of our God  
and the authority of his Messiah,  
for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down,  
who accuses them day and night before our God. (Rev. 12:10)

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20)

Authority is located in the work of redemption. All the references to authority in the above passages relates to the salvific work of Christ.

### **The Authority of the Word**

<sup>16</sup> All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16)

The Word of God is the written image of God and hence we can talk of the authority of the Word.

### **The Authority of the Spirit**

<sup>16</sup> And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:16-17)

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The Spirit confirms the authority of Jesus at His baptism. Jesus lived His earthly life in communion with the Spirit and the Father, as He must because this is the Triune God. The Spirit also affirms our restoration through the cross.

<sup>15</sup> 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!" <sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> 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. 8:15-17)

This is Paul's supreme expression of our union with the Triune God – the Spirit confirming our restoration to the Father through Christ, children of the Father.

### **Delegated Authority**

I have briefly highlighted the authority of the Triune God, and again I need to point out that authority is related to the redemptive work of God. Authority is not to be found in might and power, but in the cross. This is the first sense of the word authority.

There is a second sense of the word authority, and that is a derived or delegated authority.

<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; <sup>4</sup> for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup> Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. <sup>6</sup> For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. <sup>7</sup> Pay to all what is due them — taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. (Romans 13:1-7)

<sup>13</sup> For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup> or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. (1 Pet. 2:13-14)

Every community needs an authority without which it cannot exist. Just observe a group of children playing and before too long, one of them will say, 'Let's play it this way'. An authority is emerging in that community. This is a sociological necessity. Yet it is an authority that is derived from the authority of the Godhead.

The church community is similar. While we may say that God is in our midst, yet we must acknowledge that not all in the church are truly indwelt by the Spirit of God. Furthermore, we are not all perfect and thus we need to be careful not to equate our decision as identical with the will of the Father. We may not equate our authority in a community with the authority of the Father.

### **A God-given authority**

While we need caution in exercising our authority as leaders in a community, yet there is a God-given authority as Paul says.

<sup>8</sup> Now, even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it. (2 Cor. 10:8)

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Just as the authority of the Godhead is rooted in the cross, similarly our God-given authority is for the ministry of the cross. That is why Paul is bold to say that the authority given to him is 'for building up', and that is the building up of the people of God.

How is this authority conferred? This is the authority of the Spirit who gives gifts to us for the work of ministry. The authority of the Spirit in the church of God is a much neglected theme and we can explore that another time. For now we need to hear what Paul is saying about this.

<sup>11</sup> The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-13)

So our pianist has an authority because of the gift given to her. The pastor has an authority because he or she has been called and this calling is recognised by the church. Yet each of them needs to know that this authority is only given because of our union with the Triune God. We do not have this authority in our own right. We need to acknowledge the gifts that the Spirit has conferred on the church. (Story of two pastors giving authority to the other.)