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God as Our Father – What Does that Mean?

June 18, 2017

Sermon Text: Matthew 6:1-15

Scripture Reading: Romans 8

I was going to speak to you this morning about the error of *libertinism*—namely, the idea that God doesn't really care how we live, that He is always kind and forgiving no matter, so sin all the more so His grace can abound. Many people who claim to be Christians today embrace that lie. Unless they repent of it, they are in for a real shock on the day when they must stand before the Lord.

But we will turn to that subject next time. For this morning, this being father's day, I thought would be appropriate for us to give thought to this great truth we find in the Bible – that the Christian is now a child or son

of God, and God, who once condemned us, now (because of Jesus Christ) has adopted us as His children, relating to the Christian as *heavenly Father*.

You see that this is true in many places in the Bible, one of the most familiar being what we call the Lord's Prayer:

Matthew 6:1-15 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. (2) "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. (3) But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4) so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

(5) "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to

stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

(6) But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

(7) "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. (8) Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

(9) Pray then like this: "**Our Father in heaven**, hallowed be your name.

(10) Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

(11) Give us this day our daily bread,

(12) and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (13)

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (14) For if you

forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,

(15) but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Understand? Not all "religious" people are children of God. In fact, they remain under His condemnation because they see no need for Christ's sacrifice of Himself on the cross to set

them right with God. Oh no, they are taking care of that themselves! How? *By practicing righteousness in front of people so that they all ooh and aah and comment on how holy they are.* This is why Jesus calls them *hypocrites*. They are wearing a mask. They give to the needy. They pray long and loud in front of others – and the whole thing is a sham. God sees right through it. Many such people practice their hypocrisy in local churches today. Beware of the guy who is always talking religion, always making sure everyone knows how much he prays, how much he gives, and so on.

Do not be like them, Jesus tells us.

And then here we have the Lord teaching His disciples how to pray. He tells them not to pray as the hypocrites, then He instructs them in the right manner of prayer. They don't need to babble on with some repetitive formula – "go home and say 100 Hail Mary's" – that sort of nonsense. No.

Rather, pray like this – and the opening phrase is what we want to look at right now. Our Father in heaven.

Jesus tells all people who believe in Him as the Son of God and Savior, that they can address the Creator of the

Universe in this familial manner: *Our Father*.

This is a far more incredible truth than we ever realize – even though perhaps most of us open our prayers with this very idea: “Father...”, “Father in heaven,” “Dear Father...” and so on. This is good and right, but what does it mean?

Listen to the Apostle Paul explain it a bit more fully in the 8th chapter of his letter to the Romans (which we read earlier) –

Romans 8:14-17 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (15) For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" (16) The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (17) and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Paul is speaking to Christians here. To people who, as he says, are *led by the Spirit of God*. This is true of every Christian. The Holy Spirit dwells in them and actively leads them to live in a righteous manner and say “no” to sin. Such people are, says Paul, “sons of God.”

They did not used to be. That is to say, the moment we are born into this fallen world, we are not born as children of God. In fact, we are alienated from Him, hostile toward Him, and under His condemnation:

Ephesians 2:1-6 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (4) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— (6) and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Having been forgiven, having our sins paid for by Christ on the cross, we become the sons of God. That is to say, God becomes our Father. What are the implications of this? Well,

Prior to being put right with God, Paul says in Rom 8:15 that we were slaves to sin and to the devil and that our notions of God were dominated by one thing – *fear*. And here, Paul is

reminding us that in Christ *our relationship to God has radically been changed*. In place of fear we have this assurance that we have been *adopted* as sons of God. And if this is true (as it is for every Christian) then that means much more. It means for one thing that we *have an inheritance*. That inheritance is the new creation that is yet to come, the new heavens and the new earth and every good thing God could possibly give us.

And it means something else:

Romans 5:5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Got it? This whole business of God as our Father, of us being His children, is dominated by a brand new relationship – one of *love*. And I want to tell you as clearly as I can right now that NONE of us fully grasps what this means. Not yet. One day we will, but not yet.

A very large part of growing in maturity as a Christian is *coming to grips with, coming to understand, the fact that God now loves us*. EVERYTHING has changed!

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Most Christians to one degree or another still feel that God is angry with them, that His mood toward them changes from day to day, that when we blow it and sin and ask Him for His forgiveness, He only grudgingly gives it. All of these ideas are absolutely false for the Christian.

Our thoughts of God are often unworthy of Him. We too often think of Him as a man like us. We approach Him coweringly as if we were annoying to Him.

You do all of this to one degree or another, and so do I – but it is wrong. It is unnecessary. Jesus said these words to point out how wrong it is of us to think that God our Father loves us less than WE love our own children!

Luke 11:9-13 And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (10) For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. (11) What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; (12) or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? (13) If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Those of you who have children. Is it not true that many times your thoughts of God actually make Him out to be less loving than WE ARE toward our own children!! But that is ludicrous. While God will never forgive those who persist in being His enemies, refusing to repent and believe in Christ, nevertheless toward His children He is pure love, eager to give us every good thing.

You see the thing in the account of the Prodigal Son, right? YOU are the Prodigal who came to your senses if you have come to faith in Christ. God is the Prodigal's father. Here it is then. This is what you find when you go back home, even though you grievously sinned against Him:

Luke 15:10-24 Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (11) And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. (12) And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

(13) Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. (14) And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in

need. (15) So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. (16) And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

(17) "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! (18) I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. (19) I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"

(20) And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. (21) And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' (22) But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. (23) And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. (24) For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

Now, think through this very, very carefully. *Is this not the reason we do not pray as we should?* I do not think it was just a random nicety to open up our prayers when Jesus told us to begin with, *Our Father in heaven*. No, it is a reminder to us in particular that we are addressing, coming into the presence of, making request of, asking forgiveness of, giving thanks to....our FATHER! Not some distant deity who is more like the fickle gods of the Greeks and Romans, but the living and true God who set out to make us His sons and daughters and has done precisely that through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Let me leave all of us with this thought then and encourage you to think through these things more diligently than perhaps you ever have before:

Is it not in fact true that every worry, every anxiety, every fear and discouragement in our lives would most certainly be remedied if we would just get hold of the fact that in Christ, God is our Father, He loves us, He desires to pour out every good thing in heaven upon us, that He is glad to see us and hear from us no matter when or how often.

places, (4) even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love (5) he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (6) to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (7) In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, (8) which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight (9) making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ (10) as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (11) In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

Ephesians 1:3-11 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly