

Messenger and Visitor

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The Fatherhood of God

The central truth of the gospel of Jesus is the Fatherhood of God. To the men of Old Testament times, the continent of the divine Fatherhood was an almost unknown land. Bold spiritual navigators had indeed discovered it and rejoiced in the discovery, though but dimly discerning the coast-line through the mist. But this continent which the seers of ancient Israel discovered, Jesus Christ explored. He traversed the territory from north to south, from east to west, threading it with highways and opening up its vast resources for the enrichment of human life. As mirrored to us in the consciousness of the divine Son, the continent of the divine Fatherhood is a land of peace and plenty, the great wheat belt of the spiritual kingdom, offering happy homesteads to all the ruined sons of men.

Perhaps there is no realm on all the globe of truth toward which the tide of Christian thought has set so swift and strong of late as that of the Fatherhood of God. The phrase is on every lip. It is the first article of the popular creed. Freely it is a man's whole creed. It is abundantly evident however, that the inner content of the doctrine has not yet been grasped by the popular mind. We have all felt, no doubt, that the fact of the divine Fatherhood guarantees to men an exquisite and infinite sympathy. Palsied be the hand that would for one moment blur that shining truth! It is the concentrated sweetness of this thought which Jesus gives us in the Sermon on the Mount, when he declares that the Heavenly Father marks the fall of the bird with a broken wing and counts the hairs on His children's heads. By deed as well as word the Son made manifest the yearning tenderness of the Father's heart. He wept with men and His tears were eloquent with divine compassions.

"To forge a sun, to rivet myriad stars,
Through serried veins to pour earth's flashing rills,
To kennel hungry seas in granite bars,
To whet the lightnings on the rock-brow'd hills,
Majestic wonders! But sweet to be kept,
And crowning wonder of them all, God wept!
Lo, our humanity hath touched God's crown,
As some frail leaf might touch the bending spheres,
And from the heights of Godship He stooped down
To bathe His forehead in a brine of tears.
He lived and talked with men, He toiled and slept,
But struck our human key-note when He wept.

The doctrine of the Fatherhood of God carries with it also the assurance of a recognized responsibility concerning men. It has sometimes been affirmed by religious teachers that God is under no responsibility to attempt man's rescue from destruction. But God is under responsibility to act consistently with His own nature. And does not parenthood involve a vast and inescapable obligation? Must not a father seek to the utmost of his ability to achieve the happiness and welfare of his offspring? How can we rightly image to our thought the Fatherhood of God, except through the fatherhood as we know it among men, and that idealized and multiplied by infinity? It is the glory of the divine Fatherhood that he accepts responsibility concerning men. "I have made, and I will bear; yea, I will carry and deliver you." Do not these words involve a relation between Creatorship and Saviourship? By the fact of His Fatherhood God is obligated, we say it reverently and thankfully, to do His utmost to recover the lost soul from sin.

But the fact most likely to be overlooked in connection with this doctrine, is that paternity involves authority. It is incumbent upon a father to command his children after him. He stands in the place of sovereignty and cannot abdicate his throne without imperilling the sanctity and security of the

family circle. And God's relation to men is a relation of sovereignty. He is "the universal king" because He is the "All-Father." The paternal relation is the ground of the regal relation. There is nothing therefore, in the doctrine of the divine Fatherhood to release men from a life of humble submission and unqualified obedience. The filial spirit is a spirit of liberty 'tis true, but it is a liberty to serve God under the impulse of love-loyalty; liberty for God to work His will in us.

Moreover as we look into the depths of this doctrine we do not find that sin is thereby minimized or palliated, but on the contrary that it is being magnified and shown to be exceeding sinful. Sin against love is more disgraceful than crime against law. On the other hand, as Dr. Fairbairn puts it, "there is something more terrible in the attitude of the Father to sin than of the judge to crime, for the judge sees in the crime only an offence against law, but the Father feels in the sin the ruin of His son. The judge regards the criminal only as a person against whom the law is to be vindicated, but the Father regards the Son as a person out of whom sin is to be expelled. Hence comes in the Father's case a severity to sin that does not exist in the judge's to crime. And so sin is the last thing that regal paternity can be indulgent to; to be merciless to it is a necessity. Nothing that defiles purity or threatens obedience can be spared." Paternal righteousness can never cease from its conflict with sin till sin ceases; and if sin never ceases, then the conflict must go on forever.

So, then, this doctrine of the Fatherhood of God is not calculated to lull men into spiritual indifference, but to call men everywhere to repentance. It does not preclude the necessity of atonement and regeneration. God cannot afford to give us the Son's place except as we possess the Son's Spirit. The reign of unfilial feeling in the heart must be overthrown, and the stain of its sin washed out with blood. Hence the necessity of Christ's mediatorial work. We were made for sonship and daughterhood in the family of God, but it is only by being redeemed and made partakers of the Spirit of the Eternal Son that we are "qualified for adoption out of the sonship of nature into the sonship of grace." The Son of God became the Son of Man, that sons of men might become, in place and spirit, sons of God. "There is one God, the Father and we unto Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, and we through Him."

Perhaps we cannot better conclude these reflections than in the sweet words of Whittier:

"Though heralded with nought of fear
Or outward sign or show,
Though only to the inward ear
It whispers soft and low;
Though dropping as the manna fell,
Unseen, yet from above,
Noiseless as dew-fall, heed it well,
Thy Father's call of love!"

J. D. F.

Courage, Brethren!

The Christian people should be a courageous people. Working toward the noblest ends, under the impulse of the mightiest motives, and backed by the strongest assurances of support which God can give, we should face every task with stout and fearless hearts. When God points our way and accompanies us in the way, we should tread that way with unflinching feet.

"To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin."

It seems, however, at the present time as if a spirit of trembling had been given to the Baptists of these Maritime Provinces. One can detect it in the churches. An air of timidity pervades them. Leading (?) members seem spiritless and unaggressive. Only a few have courage to leap out of the trenches and rush to the front to flout the flag in the face of the foe. Many of the ministers, too, are heartless and dispirited. They dread the winter's work that lies before them, fearful lest it may prove fruitless. They are looking over their shoulders fervently hoping for an early opportunity to beat retreat from present fields. We doubt if it would be an extravagance to say that every third Baptist minister in these provinces would abandon his church tomorrow, if another of the same rank should open up to him. Anything for a change, and for the brief momentum imparted by a launch into new waters, May not something be done just now to mend this

condition of things? There is surely no justification for timidity. The gospel has not lost its ancient power, nor were men ever more disposed to hearken to the voice of a true prophet of God. But we must preach the realities and vitalities of the Christian faith with a blood-red earnestness if we are to find a response. The people will listen to the man with a message when they will turn with impatience from the mere sermonizer. Wherever there is a minister who can lead the people beside the still waters of the Word and show them the face of Jesus reflected there, he will not lack a following. Let the people and the pastors seek the vision of God, seek it day and night, and under the inspiration of that vision they will cast all hesitancy aside and move forward all along the line. It should ever be remembered that the secret of success lies not in any outward conditions, but in ourselves. Owing to special adaptations, a minister may achieve a greater measure of success in one community than in another, but conditions cannot make him a failure in one place and a success in another. It is his business to achieve the greatest possible measure of success in his present field, until God by an unmistakable providence leads him elsewhere. Can the ministers who are scanning the horizon for fresh fields honestly say that they have put forth all the elements of power that are in them for success where they are now laboring? Would it not be to the glory of God and the strengthening of the churches, if a hundred of our ministers should at once settle down to the work at hand, and push it with all courage and holy boldness for at least another year? May not the wavering lines be steadied as we pass this word along: "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Make level the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left."

But it is not only in the churches that we detect this spirit of trembling. It is no less characteristic of the Boards which have the direction of our denominational enterprises. The spirit of confidence and aggression seems to have forsaken them. Representatives of the various interests are afraid of each other lest some one of them shall seize more than his share. When one man steps forward anxious to lay hot facts upon the hearts of the people, he is called down and bowed out. And this because other interests have not men at hand to do a similar work. The consequence is that all the interests are being starved. The people remain untouched. They never can be touched except as we send men to them who are specialists in appeal, men charged to the lips and finger-tips with missionary lighting. This work can never be done through the columns of the denominational press. It can only be partly done by the pastors. The men who specialize upon the various interests must move among the people. But just now stagnation reigns. No doubt the Convention plan panders to the situation. It has hampered us long enough. The time is at hand for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of our denominational work. We have not reached the limit of our ability as a people, but we are tied down by the rags of tradition and the ropes of pessimism. Let us make a break for liberty! Let us arise and put forth our strength! Courage, brethren! Courage!

"And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, what man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart melt as his heart."

J. D. F.

Editorial Notes.

—Rev. I. C. Archibald reports very encouragingly as to the success he is meeting in his canvass for the endowment of the Good Samaritan Hospital at Chicacole. The cash receipts are \$1145.00 and pledges \$2200.00. Total \$3345.00. Mr. Archibald is very anxious to secure the full amount of \$10,000.00 before he leaves this country about the middle of October. The pledges for this work are not to interfere in any way with offerings for the regular work of the denomination nor for the Twentieth Century Fund. We understand that the fund thus raised for the Hospital is an endowment and the income therefrom is to be used to meet current expense. The object is worthy, and the good done through its instrumentality none can tell.

—The sixty-ninth session of the Free Baptist General Conference of New Brunswick was held in Marysville, beginning on Saturday, Oct. 5. Rev. W. H. Perry was

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