

God the Father
Series: The Holy Trinity
Romans 8:15
January 17, 2021

Welcome again to worship. It is so good to see some faces in the sanctuary after 2 months of only about 5 of us, and I really couldn't see their faces. Of course, we appreciate all of those of you who are roughing it and trying to stay warm in the parking lot. I haven't heard any reports of steamed up windows out there, so that's good. And for those of you toughing it out in your wool PJs, slippers, and under a blanket, well, we love you too.

Last week, we began a series on the Holy Trinity, one of the fundamental tenants of the Christian faith. This doctrine is foundational to our faith, and yet, it is mysterious and difficult to comprehend in all its fullness.

The story goes of a non-Christian family originally from India who left their 11-year-old daughter with some Christian friends while they traveled around California on business. The young girl was curious that the family went to church, so she decided to go with them. Upon returning home, the girl was asked what she thought of the service. "I don't understand why the West Coast isn't included too," she replied. When asked what she meant, she added, "You know, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the whole East Coast."¹

Christians believe there is one God, and He reveals Himself in three different persons: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. All three are God and all are one. God is a Trinity, or tri-unity, three persons in one.

Western Christians struggle trying to explain the Trinity because we tend to understand and explain it from only one side. We look at the Trinity from the perspective of 1 God in 3. Eastern Christianity does not see the Trinity that way. They focus on community, 3 in 1.

For the next few weeks, we are going to focus on one person of Trinity each week, and today, we are going to look at God the Father. So, I invite you to turn to page 5 in your bulletin.

There you will see a portion of the Trinity Wheel that I talked about last week. Let me remind you what this diagram means.

"The **Father** is God, but not the Son or the Spirit. The Father **sends** the Son and **precedes** the Spirit."

In the Apostle's Creed that we shared just a moment ago, we declare:
I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth..."

Our Scripture lesson today is from Romans 8:15. Paul wrote:

So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father."²

So, what is our understanding of God the Father?

First, our understanding of God as Father primarily comes from the New Testament.

¹ Ann Spivack, Reader's Digest. Downloaded from www.sermoncentral.com

² Romans 8:15 (NLT2)

The Old Testament consistently focuses on one God. Examine the Old Testament, and you will find many verses commanding the Israelites to be a people of Monotheism – the belief and worship of one God. The first of the Ten Commandments states:

*“You must not have any other god but me.”*³

Yet there are a few verses where the Psalmist or one of the prophets speaks of God as Father.

Isaiah 63:

*Surely you are still our Father! Even if Abraham and Jacob would disown us, LORD, you would still be our Father. You are our Redeemer from ages past.*⁴

Isaiah 64:

*And yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We all are formed by your hand.*⁵

There are maybe 7 verses in the Old Testament that have this idea of God as Father, out of over 23,000 verses. That’s a minuscule percentage.

In contrast, there are 40 verses in the New Testament that clearly refer to God the Father.

Paul wrote in Galatians:

*Jesus gave his life for our sins, just as God our Father planned, in order to rescue us from this evil world in which we live.*⁶

Often Paul would open his letters referring to God the Father, as he did in 2 Corinthians 1:3:

*All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort.*⁷

So, it is the New Testament that teaches us about God the Father. Outside the New Testament, the thought of God as Father is not central, but rather an attribute alongside others, indicating more that God is Creator.

Second, Father is the preeminent name used by Jesus.

It is in the life and teachings of Jesus that we find God to be pre-eminently Father. No other name for God was so often upon His lips. It dominated His whole thought and experience of God and became the basis of deduction concerning the nature of God.

He said this in the Sermon on the Mount:

*“Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to him than they are?... So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.”*⁸

Of course, we know that when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He said:

³ Exodus 20:3 (NLT)

⁴ Isaiah 63:16 (NLT2)

⁵ Isaiah 64:8 (NLT2)

⁶ Galatians 1:4 (NLT2)

⁷ 2 Corinthians 1:3 (NLT2)

⁸ Matthew 6:26, 31-32 (NLT)

“Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name...”⁹

Jesus is beyond question the authority on God. He said in Matthew 11:27:

My Father has entrusted everything to me. No one truly knows the Son except the Father, and no one truly knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.¹⁰

Third, this understanding God as Father introduces relationship.

Think about it. For the most part, during Old Testament times, God was seen as the Law Giver who would punish you for your transgressions. So, the people followed strict laws for their conduct: what they wore, what they ate, and how they worshipped. They saw how God had judged the Egyptians and their other enemies, and didn't want to end up like them.

Even today, you see this in religions based on an Old Testament view of God. Orthodox Judaism and Islam are very much fear based. Adherents must worship and pray at certain times and in certain ways in order to appease a wrathful God. Obviously, radical Islamists seek to kill non-believers, all because their Allah hates the infidel.

And it's true that God is a God of judgment, for He is holy. But He is also a God of mercy, and we see that most clearly when the biblical writers saw God as relatable. He wants a relationship with us.

So, when the New Testament talks about God as Father, we begin to see that God wants a relationship with us.

Paul told the church in Ephesus:

So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.¹¹

Members of God's family. He wants a relationship with you. He is One with whom you could enjoy intimate, close fellowship, because He is Father.

Fourth, Jesus introduces the use of the word Αββα in referring to God.

Jesus introduces the use of the word Αββα in referring to God. In the Garden of Gethsemane, as He prayed for relief from what was to come, He prayed,

“Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”¹²

Αββα is an Aramaic word for “father.” In the Gemara (a Rabbinical commentary on the Mishna, the traditional teaching of the Jews), it is stated that slaves were forbidden to address the head of the family by this title. Αββα is the word framed by the lips of infants, and signifies unreasoning trust. Contemporary equivalents might be “Daddy” or “Papa.”

Today's Scripture verse – Romans 8:15 – is one you should memorize:

“So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, ‘Abba, Father.’”¹³

If God is your Father, you may be confident of His kindness and care; you may be sure that you are able and intended to His son or daughter; you may know that God

⁹ Matthew 6:9 (RSV)

¹⁰ Matthew 11:27 (NLT)

¹¹ Ephesians 2:19 (NLT2)

¹² Mark 14:36 (NLT)

¹³ Romans 8:15 (NLT)

is personal, approachable, merciful; and you may, if you choose, enjoy intimate, personal fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ. You are not a slave – you are His child! That’s what Αββα means.

There is one more thing I want to talk about. Even I was in seminary, 38 years, there has been a movement in liberal areas to remove any notion of the Fatherhood of God. That’s right. Don’t refer to God as Father or any gender designation; simply say “God.”

The reasoning behind this is that there are some people who have had bad, even horrendous relationships with a father or male figure. Therefore, just eliminate the language, and it’s okay. This brings me to my final point.

Eliminating the idea of God as Father is making God into the image of man.

Isn’t that what’s happening here. God can’t be a Father because my father was abusive. So, we make God into the image of an individual, and if we do that, we limit God. We say He can’t be our Father. Then what’s stopping us from saying Jesus is not enough for salvation and eliminating the Holy Spirit. When we make God in our image, God is not God, and we end up worshiping a false God.

Now, I’m not being insensitive to someone who has experienced trauma in their human relationships. But I am saying the God the Father is bigger and better than anyone who may have hurt you, and if you limit Him, you are limiting His ability to help you, heal you, restore you to the person He wants you to be.

God the Father is God. He is not the Son, nor is He the Spirit. In fact, He sent the Son on our behalf, then precedes the Spirit. He is here with us, now and always.

“So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, ‘Abba, Father.’”¹⁴

¹⁴ Romans 8:15 (NLT)