

Father's Day



“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16

A reflection on God's fatherhood and His love

Today we pay tribute to our fathers. We recognise and appreciate them for who they are, all they have done, and all they continue to do. It's good to have one day in the year when we can particularly reflect on our dads, especially if they are no longer with us.

The founder of Father's Day was actually an American lady by the name of Sonora Dodd. In 1910 she was moved to honour her father Jack, a single parent who raised six children on his own. Some years later, in 1966 President Lyndon Johnson issued the first presidential proclamation honouring fathers. Six years after that his successor Richard Nixon signed it into law as a national holiday in the USA. In the UK we celebrate Father's Day on the third Sunday of June. With this in mind, a few words exploring God's Fatherhood and God's love may be appropriate this week.

Most people will be familiar with the thought of God as Father. The Lord's Prayer begins, "Our Father in heaven...". Christians also know that when Jesus prayed to His father in heaven the word He used was 'Abba', a term of intimacy close in meaning to our word Daddy.

In previous generations people tended to picture God as a God of justice and even wrath, perhaps visualising Him with a rather severe face. Today people generally think of him differently. The pendulum

seems to have swung and the thought of a loving father rather than a strict judge springs more readily to mind. This is, of course, supported by one of the most well-known verses in the New Testament which speaks of God's love.

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John 3:16

It's a marvellous verse! God loved and indeed still loves the world so much. It stands out above other references to God's love because it speaks of God's deep concern for everyone everywhere. Another verse in the Bible penned by the same writer, says very simply, "God is love!" If this were a Psalm, here would be a good place for a Selah!

Wonderful though it is, we do need to tread carefully when we talk about God's love. The way we use the word love today is not entirely the same as back then. Today it is generally loaded with a great deal of emotion and sentiment. "Falling in love", "What the world needs now is love sweet love" and so on. The fact is that God the Father loves the Son immeasurably – and yet – He was willing to give him over to be crucified, before raising him and restoring him to his heavenly throne. God is love but he is not lovey-dovey!

It is important to recognise that the second half of John 3:16, which affirms God's love for the world, also contains an offer of a new kind of life, "eternal life", to be received by those who believe (trust) in Him (Jesus). The premise is that those who do not take-up this offer will perish. The same gospel states:

“...to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

John 1:12

These verses show that only those who accept the offer receive the new life and with it the entitlement to call God “Father” because they have the right to become his children. Before that they can appropriately address him as Almighty God or Creator God. Knowing Him as father is the privilege of those who have received his Son. And what a privilege it is! Selah!

Which comes first – our love for God or his love for us? Scripture is unequivocal. The initiative is with God. He invites us to respond to His love by loving him in return. In one of his letters the same Gospel-writer clarifies the order.

“We love because he first loved us.”

I John 4:19

There is nothing we can do to make God love us. The great news is there is nothing we need do. He has already taken the initiative. Our part is simply to respond to what he has done.

This means that when we mess up, and we all do, there is always a way back. His offer of love, mercy, forgiveness and grace are always there for those who approach him in an appropriate way. Without diminishing in any way, the seriousness of sin, we can be certain that God’s love and power to set things right is greater than our ability to go astray.

It also means that no challenge, sorrow, pain or trial can separate us from the love of God. This is a matter of fact even when things are so dark that we cannot feel it. The apostle Paul tells us:

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8:38-39

It is one thing to know in principle that God loves us. It is another thing to experience that love. My sense is that different people experience that love in different ways. After all we are individuals and have different love languages. We walk by faith, so of course we don’t *depend* on feelings which fluctuate. But the promise of Jesus below gives us the confidence to expect that as we live out our lives day-by-day, we can know for sure the comforting certainty that God is right there with us:

“Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” “

John 14:23

Surely this is one of the reasons the Spirit was given to the Church. Jesus made it clear that he would return to the Father but that in exchange he would then send his Spirit in his place permanently. It is through His Spirit that God’s presence is revealed to us.

It is highly significant that Jesus links this to obedience. Those who respond to God’s love for the world by believing (trusting) in Jesus, come into a father-child relationship with Him. Jesus is the way to the Father. Those of us who, in the words of Paul, have been adopted, then respond to God’s love by loving him in return. We express this by setting our hearts and minds to be obedient. That is the proof and evidence of our love for Him. And again, in return, the Father releases an even greater measure of his love to us. *He makes His home with us. A shared life with every day a Father’s Day.*

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