

### 3. GOD THE FATHER

*'A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.'* (Luke 15.11b-12)

We have been looking at the opening words of the Apostles' Creed: 'I believe in God the Father'. We have seen that everyone has a creed. Even the atheist believes certain things. He might believe, for example, that science is the only true source of knowledge but he cannot prove it. He might believe that the earth had a beginning even though he can give no description of it. He has a theory of development but no theory of origins. The teachings of Jesus Christ are the basis of what Christians believe. Our word 'prodigal' comes from a Latin verb meaning 'to squander away' and refers to a wasteful person. 'In the parable of the Prodigal Son God is revealed as 'Father'. In the opening words we read that the younger son 'said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.'

#### **'Father' reminds us of *relationship***

When a 'man' is mentioned it does not prompt us to think in the same way as when a 'father' is mentioned. When we hear 'father' we think of sons and daughters.

*Consider, firstly, the father-son relationship.* The father-son relationship is prominent in this parable. It is not a man-made metaphor for God's relation to us. It is not merely a God-given illustration based upon human relationships. It is rather that human relationships are the way they are because God designed the human race after the pattern of his own being where there is a father-son relationship. The creed is obviously Trinitarian. It speaks first of God the Father, then of God the Son and finally of God the Holy Spirit. This reminds us that the Father-Son relationship is eternal and is replicated in a creaturely way in the human race. The parable also reminds us that in his integrity Adam's original relationship to God was that of a son. Not an eternal son, not a co-equal son, not a begotten son but a created, creaturely son. In consequence of this each straying sinner can be viewed as a prodigal son who has wasted his inheritance.

*Consider, secondly, the father's authority.* The father's authority is seen

by the son's request and the father's dividing his property. The right and title belonged to the father to do as he would with his goods. These days sinners expect to take all that God has provided in this wonderful world without acknowledging God at all. Indeed, they reject God's paternal authority and pour scorn upon it.

*Consider, thirdly, the father's generosity.* The picture presented by the father's dividing *everything* to his sons is one of abundant generosity. This universe, even in the bondage of corruption, still startles sinners with its wonders. What then must Paradise past have been like? And what abundance will the perfect, eternal Paradise to come contain? Angels might wax eloquent concerning its 'pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb' or its 'tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month'. (Revelation 22.1 – 2). They have knowledge of the generosity of God beyond our reach.

### **'Father' reminds us of love**

*Our expectation of fathers is that they will love their children.* According to Paul 'no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it.' (Ephesians 5.29). He applies this to a husband's duty of love to his wife. Shall we expect less with respect to the fruit of the matrimonial union? Will fathers not love their offspring, those whom we refer to as our own flesh and blood? All right-minded folk regard it as unnatural not to love one's own children. When we do love our children, sinners that we are, there is a pale reflection of the Father's eternal love for his Son. Paul shows us our duty, 'fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' (Ephesians 6.4).

*It is of the essence of love not to forget.* A century of Remembrance Days reminds us that it is natural not to forget loved ones who gave their lives for our freedoms. Partaking of the communion bread and wine is an expression of our love to Jesus Christ. We remember him as the one who loved his own even unto death. In the Parable of the Prodigal, the youngest son departed and 'wasted his substance with riotous living'. (Luke 15.13). We might have expected an 'out of sight, out of mind' response from the father. The Prodigal did not go forth as a wise steward or valiant warrior but a waster. He is not an asset or honour to his father but a drain. He must have looked very different on his return, shabby, weak, and drawn. Here was no returning warrior

with the medals of hard fought campaigns. He has nothing in his hand but shame. He is destitute of everything else. His father, however, has not forgotten him. All the while he has remembered him, day in and day out. Such is the love of God to unworthy sinners! Mark the love of God to the undeserving: 'when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.' (Luke 15.20).

### **'Father' reminds us of *forgiveness***

*If fathers do not forgive there will be many closed doors.* The follies of youth fly in the face of the requirement of the fifth commandment: 'Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.' (Exodus 20.12). Adolescence often brings with it such self-confidence despite disobedience and the passing years entrench not respect for parents but further reproach. Think of it at the extreme and you have the Prodigal. He no longer denies it. Listen to his own words: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.' (Luke 15.21). The penitent sinner can see himself in this mirror. He confesses, 'I have sinned'. He can acknowledge, 'I am no more worthy to be called thy son'. There is no claim on forgiveness. It must be entirely gracious.

*Fathers do forgive but none like the divine Father.* Listen to what he says, 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. (Luke 15.22 – 24). Note the following. (1) The Father freely forgives the sinner *all* his wicked folly and diverse iniquity. He who devoured the Father's living with harlots is received! (Luke 15.30). Multitudes of filthy crimes were blotted out. (2) The Father clothes his sons with the very best. Christ's righteousness is 'the best robe' and is put upon believers. There is no substitute and it requires no supplementation. (3) The Father commands joy. There must be sorrow, even the godly sorrow that works repentance, but joy comes in the morning. When the sun of righteousness arises in our souls, the healing in his wings brings joy unspeakable and full of glory. There is a calf fattening for the marriage supper of the Lamb that will complete our joys.

*The question arises, how can these things be? God is infinitely just.*

How can such a one remember our sins no more? Is it not because the Father gave his Son? With respect to Christ God can truly say, 'this my son was dead, and is alive again' (Luke 15.24) and consequently it can be so spiritually with sinners. Paul confesses of the Saviour, 'he was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification.'

### **Closing Thought**

The personal challenge is obvious. Are you still a wayward son or are you a returned son? What difference faith makes! Peter tells us, Christ, the eternal Son 'bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.' (1 Peter 2.24 – 25).