

"OUR FATHER GOD II."

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for Sermon: Matthew 6:9; John 5:17-23

Introduction:

Imagine a church member helping with a VBS in an inner city neighborhood sharing the gospel with some children and talking about God being our heavenly father. And a child looking perplexed asks, "You mean God is someone who comes home on Friday nights drunk, hits mom, yells at us, takes our money and leaves?"

Imagine a woman growing up with deep emotional and physical scars of abuse and neglect from her father, reads the Bible about God as Father and Jesus as Son of Man and misunderstands what that means and exchanges the truth for lies about who God is and what He is like.

Imagine seminaries in our country telling the students not to use Father and "he" when referring to God in their papers and not to use "man or mankind" when referring to people.

Imagine denominations writing study papers recommending pastors change the Trinitarian formula from "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" to:

"Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer"

"Speaker, Word and Breath"

"Lover, Beloved and Love"

"Rainbow, Ark and Dove"

"Compassionate Mother, Beloved Child and Life-Giving Womb"

Imagine hymns and hymnals being re-written with more politically-correct gender-inclusive language. Imagine the publishers of the Bible making new translations like the NRSV, TNIV and the NLB changing the words used for God and Jesus, and man and Jews.

Now let's stop imagining and wake up to reality. To call God Father is a controversial concept in today's culture and in today's church.

When I was at Calvin Seminary a couple of years after coming here, I heard a couple of professors referring to God as God. I began to notice whenever they referred to God they always referred to God as God. Now you are thinking, so what? That's a good thing right? The clue something else was up was when I heard the words "God's self." It sounds like this in a sentence. "When God wanted to reveal God's self to us how did God describe God's self to us?"

What's going on here is a very intentional and careful avoidance of any masculine pronouns for God, like he or himself. Many of the religious institutions in our country have adopted gender-neutral inclusive language in their writing and their speaking, both with regard to God and with regard to humans.

It's an epidemic and it has been going on for 50 plus years and gaining ground. It was creeping into my seminary when I was there 40 years ago. The young pastors coming out of seminary today are being trained and taught to abandon masculine language when referring to God or to people.

The TNIV, Today's NIV is an intentionally gender-neutral, inclusive language version of the Bible.

Let me give you just two examples of how much the TNIV changes many texts, the first regarding people and the second regarding Jesus.

Mark 1:17 (ESV) Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

Mark 1:17 (TNIV) "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."

Jesus is de-gendered or neutered in:

I Corinthians 15:21 (ESV) For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

I Corinthians 15:21 (TNIV) For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a human being.

That is not what the Greek says and furthermore it changes the theology being taught here. It obscures the federal headship of Adam and the federal headship of Christ.

So what is going on here? Why the aversion to referring to God as Father and Jesus as Son? Why the absence of the masculine pronoun? There are no doubt several reasons. One is the sin and failures of human fathers and husbands.

The other powerful force behind these changes is the radical feminism of the past 60 years.

Feminism has an agenda to liberate all women everywhere from the tyranny of men. Male authority is rejected. God must be revisioned or reimagined. Feminist seek to eliminate all masculine language for God and any language that implied authority or dominion.

Is the Biblical language about God old, out of date, oppressive, patriarchal or exclusive?

Does referring to God as Father and Lord and Master and King and Judge somehow make Him mean and aggressive and harsh and unkind, lacking love and compassion?

Isn't God both father and mother? Isn't he "he, she and it?"

Our language about God is under direct frontal assault and it is being changed all around us.

George Orwell saw it coming in 1949 when he wrote *1984*. Change starts with language. Social engineering begins with verbal engineering. Homosexuality is called gay, and gay is good. Abortion is called pro-choice, and choice is good. God is not Father, Lord, Master and Judge but lover, giver, rainbow, light, mother and child, and all of this expands our imaginations about God and that is good. Right? Wrong! In a word it's idolatry, making God in the image of something else.

Scripture gives a clear warning in the Ten Commandments. "The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" or misuses or abuses or changes His revealed name.

Revelation 22:18-19 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

I want to make four statements from Scripture about masculine references to God in general and the Fatherhood of God in particular, debunking four lies or myths.

First, feminists argue that there are both feminine and masculine references to God in the Bible. Let's be clear, there is in Scripture no direct reference to God as mother or she or her and no feminine names or titles given to God. There are feminine allusions. For instance, God is "like" a hen that gathers her chicks under her wing." Or in Isaiah 66:13, "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you." They are all indirect references, and they are all cast as similes or metaphors. All references about God's revealed fatherhood are direct: "*He will be called...Everlasting Father,*" "*Our Father in heaven,*" "*The glory of God the Father,*" and "*I will be a father to you.*"

There is no more justification to call God mother based on a couple of feminine allusions than there is to call Paul a woman because he refers to himself in I Thessalonians 2:7 as being like a "nursing mother taking care of her own children."

Second, it's sometimes argued that the father-language in Scripture is a reflection of a patriarchal culture. This falls short when we consider there was no lack of mother-gods and goddesses all throughout biblical history. The "patriarchal" cultures had plenty of room for feminine forms of deity, Asherah in the OT was basically Mrs. Baal. Greek and Roman culture was full of goddesses. The Jews were surrounded by fertility cults, nature gods,

priestesses, and female deities. And there were plenty of patriarchal cultures in the ancient near east that worshipped masculine and feminine deities.

God's word is not contaminated by ancient misunderstandings or human additions.

The fatherhood of God is the result of revelation and not cultural bias or accommodation. The Jews did not get their ideas about God from their culture or from their own experiences. God is the source of all that we know about God.

Ephesian 3:14-15 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, **15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,

I kneel before the Father (pater) from whom his whole family (patria) in heaven and on earth derives its name. There is a play on words here that we miss in our translations.

The relationship between human fatherhood and divine fatherhood is not one of analogy, meaning God is our father like human fathers. We have not looked at earthly fatherhood and then by analogy applied such language to our concept of God.

It is not one of projection, like Freud's theory that we have invented God because we needed a heavenly father figure.

Rather, it is one of derivation. God is the source. The very idea of fatherhood first exists in God and our ideas of fatherhood and family are derived from Him.

Third, it is argued reason Jesus used masculine language is he had to accommodate Himself to the culture of His day. Have those who say that ever read the gospels. Jesus was never afraid to confront the social and religious evils of His day and to correct false notions about God and religion. Believe me if the Fatherhood of God was a false notion, Jesus would have taken it head on. One thing He wasn't was an enculturated, emasculated wimp. Neither God nor Jesus accommodated themselves to sinful human practices.

Just the opposite. Jesus is the one who teaches and reinforces the revelation of God as Father. When you pray, pray "Our Father."

Fourth and finally, just in case there is any question, we fully understand Jesus was not confused about God's gender. He Himself said, "*God is spirit*" (John 4:24). The fact that God has revealed Himself as Father has nothing to do with maleness or sex.

God reveals Himself to us in masculine terms like Father primarily to reveal His character and nature. The God of the Bible is personal, relational, loving, caring, compassionate, giving and forgiving. He desires to enter into personal relationships with His creatures. His fatherhood also implies initiative (Romans 5:8), children (Romans 8:15-17), discipline

(Hebrews 12:7-11), and authority. His fatherhood means He creates, sustains, provides, and protects.

What we have in scripture is not our view of God but God's view of God. Only God can name God. Only God can reveal who He is and what He is like, only God reveals Himself as triune, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God was Father, Son and Holy Spirit before He was Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.

The terms Father, Son and Holy Spirit are precise terms that reveal who God is and not just what He does. God purposefully revealed Himself in these terms through the inspiration of His Holy Spirit who preserved them in Scripture and in His Church. The church alone is the place where Jesus has delivered His Word. The church is called to be the pillar and foundation of the truth.

So the church is called to teach, preach, proclaim all the truth, it is to be heard, believed, and obey. It is to be remembered and protected and passed on. And it is my responsibility to teach and warn and guard the good deposit and to urge you to do the same.

Don't let anyone make you ashamed of the authority of God's Word or feel like you need to apologize for what it says.

The line here is not between traditional and contemporary, or ancient and modern, the line here is between biblical and unbiblical, between worshipping the one true living God and worshipping idols.

Implications and Application:

Father is the name Jesus teaches us to pray, "Our Father." This is one of the most remarkable and beautiful and significant truths in all of Scripture. That God has revealed Himself to us as Father is a rich and beautiful expression of how living and real and personal our faith is. This is the name that touches our hearts the most intimately and personally.

This personal relationship with God as our Father is without a doubt one of the greatest of all the blessings and privileges of being a Christian. This is the name made possible by the reconciling sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This is the ultimate expression of love, that our sins are forgiven so that we can be the adopted children of our Father in heaven. This is what Jesus has done for us.

To believe in God the Father is to believe that He is the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To believe in God the Father is to believe that through Jesus Christ He has cleared the way for our adoption. To pray Our Father is to acknowledge and embrace the grace of our adoption.

To believe God is my Father is to believe He has fatherly affection for me and all who are in Christ. To pray Our Father acknowledges His compassion and pity for His children.

This is why not a hair can fall from my head, and why all things must work for my good. Because I have God as my Father.

To believe God is our Father is to give hope and guidance to every human father what fatherhood should look like, and it is to give comfort and peace to every human being who has been hurt by their human fathers. We have a true father to turn to, a true home for every heart.

To believe God is our Father is also to give help and guidance to every man for what it really means to be a man.

When Jesus teaches us to pray to God as our Father He is teaching us to come to God for those things a true Father does, He provides, He pardons, and He protects. The petitions in the second half of this prayer reflect this.

God is our breadwinner, it is His job to provide for our needs and not only is He good at it, He is the very best provider of all. We pray to our Father confident of His perfect provision.

God is our discipliner. When we sin, when we do what is wrong, we have to answer for it to Him. We have a real authority figure in our lives who has set real boundaries. And when we confess and ask forgiveness it is His job to forgive and pardon. We can pray with confidence because we know that we have been adopted as His children and He will never leave or forsake us as long as we return to Him. He is infinitely merciful and takes pity on His children.

God is our protector and defender, our rock, our security. It is His job to protect us from evil and the evil one. This is His fatherly responsibility, and He does it very well.

Everything we ask for in this Lord's Prayer depends on God being a Father, a perfect Heavenly Father. Because God is a Father, we can pray with absolute confidence for the Father's provision, the Father's pity and pardon, and the Father's protection.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the almighty creator of all the heavens and the earth, and who upholds and governs everything, is also my God and my Father, who from the very beginning, in fact from before the beginning has ordered and arranged everything according to the eternal counsel of His will for my salvation and my good so that I may completely trust in Him for absolutely everything and rest in His eternal love. This is my comfort in life and death.