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GOD THE FATHER

God the eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. The qualities and powers exhibited in the Son and the Holy Spirit are also revelations of the Father.

GOD THE FATHER

The great day of judgment begins. Fiery thrones with burning wheels move into place. The Ancient of Days takes His seat. Majestic in appearance, He presides over the court. His awesome presence pervades the vast courtroom audience. A multitude of witnesses stand before Him. The judgment is set, the books are opened, and the examination of the record of human lives begins (Dan. 7:9,10).

The entire universe has been waiting for this moment. God the Father will execute His justice against all wickedness. The sentence is given: "A judgment was made in favor of the saints" (Dan. 7:22). Joyful praises and thanksgiving reverberate across heaven. God's character is seen in all its glory, and His marvelous name is vindicated throughout the universe.

Views of the Father

God the Father is frequently misunderstood. Many are aware of Christ's mission to earth for the human race and of the Holy Spirit's role within the individual, but what has the Father to do with us? Is He, in contrast to the gracious Son and Spirit, totally removed from our world, the absentee Landlord, the unmoved First Cause?

Or is He, as some think of Him, the "Old Testament God"—a God of vengeance, characterized by the dictum "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Matt. 5:38; cf. Ex. 21:24); an exacting God who requires perfect works—or else! A God who stands in utter contrast to the New Testament's portrayal of a loving God who stresses turning the other cheek and going the second mile (Matt. 5:39-41).

God the Father in the Old Testament

The unity of the old and New Testaments, and of their common plan of redemption, is revealed by the fact that it is the same God who speaks and acts in both Testaments for the salvation of His people. "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" (Heb. 1:1,2). Although the Old Testament alludes to the Persons of the Godhead, it doesn't distinguish Them. But the New Testament makes it clear that Christ, God the Son, was the active agent in Creation (John 1:1-3, 14; Col. 1:16) and that He was the God who led Israel out of Egypt (1 Cor. 10:1-4; Ex. 3:14; John 8:58). What the New Testament says of Christ's role in Creation and the Exodus suggests that even the Old

Testament often conveys to us its portrait of God the Father through the agency of the Son. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). The Old Testament describes the Father in the following terms:

A God of Mercy

No sinful human being has ever seen God (Ex. 33:20). We have no photograph of His features. God demonstrated His character by His gracious acts and by the word picture He proclaimed before Moses: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation" (Ex. 34:6,7; cf. Heb. 10:26,27). Yet mercy does not blindly pardon, but is guided by the principle of justice. Those who reject His mercy reap His punishment on iniquity.

At Sinai God expressed His desire to be Israel's friend, to be with them. He said to Moses, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8). Because it was God's earthly dwelling place, this sanctuary became the focal point of Israel's religious experience.

A Covenant God

Eager to establish lasting relations, God made solemn covenants with people such as Noah (Gen. 9:1-17) and Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3,7; 13:14-17; 15:1,5,6; 17:1-8; 22:15-18; see chapter 7 of this book). These covenants reveal a personal, loving God interested in His people's concerns. To Noah He gave assurance of regular seasons (Gen. 8:22) and that there never would be another worldwide flood (Gen. 9:11); to Abraham He promised numerous descendants (Gen. 15:5-7) and a land wherein he and his descendants could dwell (Gen. 15:18; 17:8).

A Redeemer God

As God of the Exodus, He miraculously led a nation of slaves to liberty. This great redemptive act is the backdrop for the entire Old Testament and an example of His longing to be our Redeemer. God is not a distant, detached, uninterested person, but One very much involved in our affairs.

The Psalms particularly were inspired by the depth of God's loving involvement: "When I consider Your Heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?" (Ps. 8:3,4). "I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Ps. 18:1,2). "For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted" (Ps. 22:24).

A God of Refuge

David saw God as One in whom we can find refuge—very much like the six Israelite cities of refuge, which harbored innocent fugitives. The Psalms' recurrent theme of "refuge" pictures both Christ and the Father. The Godhead was a refuge. "For in the time

of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock" (Ps. 27:5). "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people from this time forth and forever" (Ps. 125:2).

The psalmist expressed a longing for more of his God: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42:1,2). From experience, David testified, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved" (Ps. 55:22). "Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us" (Ps. 62:8)--"a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth" (Ps. 86:15).

A God of Forgiveness

After his sins of adultery and murder, David earnestly entreated, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies." "Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:1,11). He was comforted by the assurance that God is wonderfully merciful. "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:11-14).

A God of Goodness

God is the One who "executes justice for the oppressed, who give food to the hungry. The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord raises those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow" (Ps. 146:7-9). What a great picture of God is given in the Psalms!

A God of Faithfulness

In spite of God's greatness, Israel wandered away from Him most of the time (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28). God is depicted as loving Israel as a husband loves his wife. The book of Hosea poignantly illustrates God's faithfulness in the face of flagrant unfaithfulness and rejection. God's continuing forgiveness reveals His character of unconditional love.

Though God permitted her to experience the calamities caused by her unfaithfulness—attempting to correct Israel's ways—He still embraced her with His mercy. He assured her, "'You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away: Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand'" (Isa. 41:9,10). In spite of their unfaithfulness, He tenderly promised, "'If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me,...if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt—then I will remember My covenant with Jacob...with Isaac...with Abraham'" (Lev. 26:40-42; cf. Jer. 3:12).

God reminds His people of His redemptive attitude: "O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me! I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you" (Isa. 44:21,22). No wonder He could say, "Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isa. 45:22).

A God of Salvation and Vengeance

The Old Testament description of God as a God of vengeance must be seen in the context of the destruction of His faithful people by the wicked. Through "the day of the Lord" theme the prophets reveal God's actions on behalf of His people at the end of time. It is a day of salvation for His people, but a day of vengeance on their enemies who will be destroyed. "Say to those who are fearful-hearted, 'Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance; with the recompense of God; He will come and save you'" (Isa. 35:4).

A Father God

Addressing Israel, Moses referred to God as their Father, who had redeemed them: "Is He not your Father, who bought you?" (Deut. 32:6). Through redemption, God adopted Israel as His child. Isaiah wrote, "O Lord, you are our Father" (Isa. 64:8; cf. 63:16). Through Malachi, God affirmed, "I am the Father" (Mal. 1:6). Elsewhere, Malachi relates God's fatherhood to His role as Creator: "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?" (Mal. 2:10). God is our Father through both Creation and redemption. What a glorious truth!

God the Father in the New Testament

The God of the Old Testament does not differ from the God of the New Testament. God the Father is revealed as the originator of all things, the father of all true believers, and in a unique sense the father of Jesus Christ.

The Father of All Creation

Paul identifies the Father, distinguishing Him from Jesus Christ: "There is only one God, the Father, of whom are all things,...and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live" (1 Cor. 8:6; cf. Heb. 12:9; John 1:17). He testifies, "I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph. 3:14,15).

The Father of All Believers

In New Testament times this spiritual father-child relationship exists not between God and the nation of Israel but between God and the individual believer. Jesus provides the guidelines for this relationship (Matt. 5:45; 6:6-15), which is established through the believer's acceptance of Jesus Christ (John 1:12,13).

Through the redemption Christ has wrought, believers are adopted as God's children. The Holy Spirit facilitates this relationship. Christ came "to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Gal. 4:5,6; cf. Rom. 8:15,16).

Jesus Reveals the Father

Jesus, God the Son, provided the most profound view of God the Father when He, as God's self-revelation, came in human flesh (John 1:1,14). John states, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son...has declared Him" (John 1:18). Jesus said, "I have come down from heaven" (John 6:38); "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). To know Jesus is to know the Father.

The Epistle to the Hebrews stresses the importance of this personal revelation: "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;...being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person" (Heb. 1:1-3).

1. A God who gives.

Jesus revealed His Father as a giving God. We see His giving at Creation, at Bethlehem, and at Calvary. In creating, the Father and the Son acted together. God gave us life in spite of knowing that doing so would lead to the death of His own Son.

At Bethlehem, He gave Himself as He gave His Son. What pain the Father experienced when His Son entered our sin-polluted planet! Imagine the Father's feeling as He saw His Son exchange the love and adoration of angels for the hatred of sinners; the glory and bliss of heaven for the pathway of death.

But it is Calvary that gives us the deepest insight into the Father. The Father, being divine, suffered the pain of being separated from His Son—in life and death—more acutely than any human being ever could. And He suffered with Christ in like measure. What greater testimony about the Father could be given! The cross reveals—as nothing else can—the truth about the Father.

2. A God of Love.

Jesus' favorite theme was the tenderness and abundant love of God. "Love your enemies," He said, "bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5:44,45). "And your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Highest. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:35,36).

In stooping down and washing the feet of His betrayer (John 13:5, 10-14), Jesus revealed the loving nature of the Father. When we see Christ feeding the hungry (Mark 6:39-44; 8:1-9), healing the deaf (Mark 9:17-29), giving speech to the dumb (Mark 7:32-37), opening the eyes of the blind (Mark 8:22-26), lifting up the palsied (Luke 5:18-26), curing the lepers (Luke 5:12,13), raising the dead (Mark 5:35-43; John 11:1-45), forgiving sinners (John 8:3-11), and casting out demons (Matt. 15:22-28; 17:14-21), we see the Father mingling among men, bringing them His Life, setting them free, giving them hope, and pointing them to a restored new earth to come. Christ knew that revealing the precious love of His Father was the key to bringing people to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

Three of Christ's parables portray God's loving concern for lost humanity (Luke 15). The parable of the lost sheep teaches that salvation comes through God's initiative, and not because of our searching after Him. As a shepherd loves his sheep and risks his life when one is missing, so in even greater measure, does God manifest His yearning love for every lost person.

This parable also has cosmic significance the lost sheep represents our rebellious world, a mere atom in God's vast universe. God's costly gift of His Son to bring our planet back into the fold indicates that our fallen world is as precious to Him as the rest of His creation.

The parable of the lost coin emphasizes what immense value God places on us sinners. And the parable of the prodigal son shows the enormous love of the Father, who welcomes home penitent children. If there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7), imagine the joy the universe will experience at our Lord's second coming.

The New Testament makes clear the Father's intimate involvement with His Son's return. At the Second Advent the wicked cry to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" (Rev. 6:16). Jesus said, "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels" (Matt. 16:27), and "you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power [the Father], and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64).

With a longing heart the Father anticipates the Second Advent, when the redeemed will finally be brought into their eternal home. Then His sending of "His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9) will clearly not have been in vain. Only unfathomable, unselfish love explains why, though we were enemies "we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Rom. 5:10). How could we spurn such love and fail to acknowledge Him as our Father?