

CHAPTER 5 : THE FATHER-HEART OF GOD

And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me (2 Cor 6:18)

A. Introduction

This biblical truth is foundational to our understanding of how to respond to our God, our heavenly Father. ‘Agape’ (the sacrificial love of God), in the words of Leon van Daele, “is the most powerful single force in the universe,” it is this love that motivated the heart of God to reach out to us. God’s love is so totally different from any human love we have ever known: it is unconditional, undeserved and absolutely perfect. We do not have to work to receive this awesome love: this is something that we as humans find so difficult to accept.

1Co 13:4-7 is a well-known passage on love. Most Bible scholars agree that the love described in this passage is not human love but the love of God. It is impossible for us to have this love—it is given to us by the Holy Spirit. It describes perfect, divine love: the love that our heavenly Father has for us, His children.

God’s profound love for us is demonstrated in His choosing His only Son to die so that we, as fallen man, may have the privilege to know Him as our Father in heaven and spend eternity with Him (Mt 11:27).

B. Why The Father-Heart Of God?

Why devote a whole section of this manual to the father-heart of God? Because God is a person, He can enter into personal relationships, of which one of the easiest for us as humans to understand is that of “father.” Jesus taught those who entered the kingdom of God to regard God as their Father. He taught His disciples to address God as “our Father in heaven” (Mt 6:9). All Jesus’ teaching encourages a relationship with the Father that is intimate, close and tender. We need to understand that God as Father is the perfect Father—He eagerly desires that we rely on Him for:

- Care and provision in even the most practical matters of food and clothing (Mt 6:25-34).
- Protection (Mt 10:28-31).
- Provision of all good things (Mt 7:7-11).

Not all of us have had the privilege of having godly fathers. Many of our fathers have let us down in many ways on many occasions and are nowhere near perfect. Sin has destroyed countless father-child relationships to the point that they not only function sub-optimally, but in many cases, totally break down (for example, adultery, divorce, alcoholism, sexual abuse or attitudes of disinterest).

Floyd McClung, the author of *The Father Heart Of God*, quotes a psychologist as reporting that “70% of all violent-impulse crimes are committed by children from divorced homes or single-parent families” and that “the average parent in Europe watches television three and a half hours each day and spends thirty seconds communicating with his children.”

In Genesis we see that God created both male and female in his image and so both are part of His nature and character. In order for a family to receive a full revelation of God’s love, both father and mother are needed as they both represent unique aspects of God’s character. Where there is a single-parent family, it is important to know that God can compensate for the missing love of a parent.

Because we are continually faced with imperfect father figures, our concept of what a father should be becomes distorted and we, often sub-consciously, transfer this to our relationship with God.

It is at this point that we need to consider what thoughts come to mind when we hear the word ‘father.’ Is it the loving, gentle, warm, forgiving, protecting, providing, doting father that Scripture reveals, or have we allowed our earthly fathers and other authority figures to veil who God really is as our Father?

Picture these situations:

- A young boy spends all afternoon carving what he believes to be a horse out of piece of wood. At the end of the day he excitedly waits for his dad to come home to show him his handiwork. A tired, preoccupied man finally arrives and barely casts a glance in the direction of his son.
- A young teenager going out for the night with her friends looks eagerly in the direction of her father, hoping he will show some interest in her activities. All he does is reach for his wallet and ask her how much money she needs.
- A toddler's father places him on the kitchen counter and tells him to jump and he will catch him. As the little son trustingly jumps toward his father's arms, his father turns his back. Three times this happens and finally the father reveals the moral of the exercise to his son: "Son, never trust anyone!"

A parent with no time, a parent with no interest and a parent that cannot be trusted.

We need to ask God to help us set aside our preconceptions and experiences of earthly fatherhood in order that we may relate with Him as He intended.

In the words of Floyd McClung, "Don't ever resent the failings of your human parents. They are just kids that grew up and had kids. Rather rejoice in the wonderful love of your Father God."

In God we have a perfect Father. We can unreservedly trust Him to always be the same: His character and attributes are both constant and consistent (Mt 5:43-45, Mt 7:9-11, Jas 1:17). Unlike the fathers in the situations above, our heavenly Father always has time for us, delights in us, longing that we will come to him not with clasped hands, but open arms and He desires us to put all our trust in Him.

Scripture continually expounds God's passionate love and Goodness toward His children. 2Co 6:18 states, "and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

C. What Motivates Us To Serve God?

Fear? Selfish gain? A desire to be successful? A need to be accepted by others? Surely if this is the motivation, we do not know God! He is our Father and we are His children. He first loved us (1Jn 4:19) and in response to His divine care and protection, we need to serve and obey Him. 1Jn 5:3a says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.”

If we know our God as Scripture reveals Him, and also His love for us, His sons and daughters, then serving Him will not only come naturally, but will be a privilege. Think of how a young child looks upon his father with awe and passionately defends and boasts about his dad among his friends: “My dad’s bigger than your dad,” “My dad’s cleverer than your dad,” and so it goes on.

We need to be like children: we need to love and serve our heavenly Father simply because He loved us first. We need to seek out opportunities to boast about Him and to tell others of our love for Him.

D. Receiving God’s Love For Us

We live in an “if ... then ...” society where acceptance is performance-orientated and therefore conditional. Many children believe that they are only worthy to receive the love of their parents if they receive a good report card, if they are successful in sport, or if they work hard around the house. Their concept of love is that it is conditional: if you perform, then you will be loved and accepted.

But the ‘agape’ love of our God is so very different—God is love (1Jn 4:16). Because He is love, His very nature means that we do not need to do anything to get Him to love us. All He desires is that we be found in His presence and receive His love. As with any love relationship, there needs to be both giving and receiving of love.

Imagine how a wife would feel if she gave her husband a tender, loving hug to express her love for him and he pulled away, asking what he could do for her. She would be totally devastated. In the same way, you want nothing in return but the other person’s response of love.

What is your response to God when he tells you that he loves you? Do you tenderly receive his love or do you anxiously and actively search for a way to earn His approval? 1Jn 3:1a puts it this way, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God;"

If you have been disappointed by your natural father, soak yourself daily in scriptures that portray the qualities of your heavenly Father for it is only truth that will set you free.
(Jn 8:32)