

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON LXVIII : UNITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE CONGREGATION OF BELIEVERS (4:1-16)

Ephesians 4:4~6 —

beynge one body and one sprete even as ye are called in one hope of youre callynge. Let ther be but one lorde one fayth one baptism: one god and father of all which is above all thorow all and in you all. (Tyndale's New Testament, 1524)

There is one body, and one Spirit, euen as yee are called in one hope of your vocation. There is one Lord, one Faith, one Baptisme, One God and Father of all, which is aboue all, and through all, and in you all. (Geneva Bible, 1599)

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (King James Version, 1769)

one body and one Spirit, according as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in you all, (Young's Literal Translation, 1898)

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. (Revised Version, 1885)

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. (American Standard Version, 1901)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Revised Standard Version, 1952)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (New King James Version, 1982)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (New American Standard Version, 1995)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (New International Version, 2011)

There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call — one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (English Standard Version, 2011)

ἓν σῶμα καὶ ἓν πνεῦμα καθὼς καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν μιᾷ ἐλπίδι τῆς κλήσεως ὑμῶν· εἷς κύριος μία πίστις ἓν βάπτισμα εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν ἡμῖν. (Stephanus Greek NT, 1550)

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one God and Father of all — εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων [heis theos kai patēr pantōn] — **CLIMAX OF PAUL'S 'UNITY AFFIRMATIONS'** — The seventh and final affirmation of unity is also the climax of the series. *“The climactic acclamation of the one God in his universality is meant to provide the most profound ground for the Church’s unity. Paul himself had reflected on the significance of God’s oneness for the unity of Jew and Gentile in Rom 3:29, 30.”* [Lincoln, 240; see also Best, 370; Thielman, 259]

‘Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.’ (Rom 3:29,30 NKJV)

CORRELATES TO THE JEWISH ‘SHEMA’ — Paul’s statement here on the monotheistic nature of our God correlates to the faith of the Jews (repeating some comments mentioned several lessons ago): The central prayer of the Jewish prayer book is the Jewish ‘*Shema*’ —

‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!’ (Deut 6:4 NKJV)

The ‘*Shema Yisrael*’ (often shortened to simply ‘*Shema*’) are the first two words in Deut 6:4, ‘*Hear, [O] Israel...*’. This emphasis upon the monotheistic nature of our God is repeated throughout the OT, a couple notable passages being in Isaiah —

‘I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another’ (Isa 42:8 NKJV)

‘Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no savior.’ (Isa 43:10b,11 NKJV) [end of comments from our previous lesson]

Paul affirms the Jewish belief of monotheism in several other places:

'Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.' (1 Cor 8:4-6 NKJV)

'Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.' (Gal 3:20 NKJV)

'For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus' (1 Tim 2:5 NKJV)

James also makes the same assertion:

'You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble!' (James 2:19 NKJV)

“That there is but one God is the voice of nature and of revelation; and may be concluded from the perfections of deity, for there can be but one eternal, infinite, immense, omnipotent, all-sufficient, perfect, and independent Being; and from one first cause of all things, and the relations he stands in to his creatures: there is but one God, who is truly, and really, and properly God, in opposition to all nominal and figurative deities, and which are not gods by nature, and to the fictitious deities and idols of the nations.” [Gill, *Commentary on Whole Bible*; see also Best, 358, 370; Lincoln, 240; O'Brien, 284; Snodgrass, 199]

“One God and Father of all, who is over all, through all and in all. That declaration not only dethrones the idols of the world, but digs under the multitudinous and gross immoralities arising from the idolatries. Not only so, but it uproots all the false philosophies and cosmogonies; for example, materialism, pantheism, Stoicism, Epicureanism (more recently labeled Darwinian evolution), and the like.” [Carroll, 141]

Father of all — *καὶ πατὴρ πάντων* [kai patēr pantōn] — **GOD IS THE FATHER OF ALL** — ***“It also came naturally to Jews to think of God as Father, though this received a new emphasis and direction in the teaching of Jesus. Gentile Christians thus encountered God as Father from the beginning, yet since the idea was not entirely missing from Greek, in particular Stoic, thought, they were conditioned to accept it, even though they had previously understood it in a more pantheistic way.*** [Best, 370; see also Hoehner, 518f; Thielman, 259; Lincoln, 240; O'Brien, 284; **see also Appendix**] The form here of 'God and Father' is found in fourteen other places in the NT: Rom 15:6; 1 Cor 15:24; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Gal 1:4; Eph 1:3; 5:20; Phil 4:20; 1 Thess 1:3; 3:11, 13; Jas 1:27; 1 Pet 1:3; Rev 1:6.

THE TRINITY — ***“The basic doctrine of Judaism has always been, ‘The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!’ (Deut. 6:4; see also 4:35; 32:39; Isa. 45:14; 46:9), and God’s oneness is just as foundational to Christianity (see 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Eph. 4:3-6; James 2:19). Yet the New Testament also reveals the more complete truth that the one God is in three Persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; John 6:27; 20:28; Acts 5:3-4). God the Father is often used in Scripture as the most comprehensive and inclusive divine title, though it is clear from many New Testament texts that He is never separated in nature or power from the Son or the Holy Spirit. Paul’s point here is not to separate the Persons of the Godhead but to note their unique roles and yet focus on their unity in relation to each other and in relation to the church — manifested in the several different aspects mentioned in these three verses.”*** [MacArthur, 131]

Who is over all and through all and in all {of us} — *ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πάσιν ἡμῖν.* [ho epi pantōn kai dia pantōn kai en pasin {hēmin}] — **ARE THE FOUR “ALL’S” MASCULINE OR NEUTER?** — The word 'all' is used four times in this verse. As A. T. Robertson notes, because of how the Greek language uses endings these could be either masculine ('all men / mankind'), neuter ('all things'), or part one or the other. [Robertson, *Word Pictures*] There is no definitive answer to this puzzle with good men on both sides of the argument. I will attempt to summarize their arguments.

'ALL' ARE MASCULINE — some who favor this interpretation are Calvin, 269f; Hodge, 149; Albert Barnes, *NT Notes*; Moule, 105; Bruce, 337; Salmond, 322f; Hoehner, 519.

● **'God is the Father of all', 'God is in all' – some believe the context demands this be limited to mankind (contra 'the universal fatherhood of God' and pantheism) but in so doing they of course further limit the 'all' to believers only.** “[T]he next words of the verse would argue against the idea of a universal Father of all human beings since he is not only over all but through all and in all. The NT never envisions that God is in every human being but that he resides only in believers.” [Hoehner, 519] “Although God by his power upholds, and maintains, and rules, all things, yet Paul is not now speaking of the universal, but of the spiritual government which belongs to the church. By the Spirit of sanctification, God spreads himself through all the members of the church, embraces all in his government, and dwells in all; but God is not inconsistent with himself, and therefore we cannot but be united to him into one body. This spiritual unity is mentioned by our Lord. ‘Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast, given me, that they may be one as we are.’ (John 17:11) This is true indeed, in a general sense, not only of all men but of all creatures. ‘In him we live, and move, and have our being.’ (Acts 17:28). And again, ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?’ (Jeremiah 23:24.) But we must attend to the connection in which this passage stands. Paul is now illustrating the mutual relation of believers, which has nothing in common either with wicked men or with inferior animals. To this relation we must limit what is said about God’s government and presence. It is for this reason, also, that the apostle uses the word *Father*, which applies only to the members of Christ.” [Calvin, 269f]

● **the context of unity suggests Paul is speaking of believers – “Christian unity being here in view, the name applies to the special Fatherhood of God in grace, not to the universal Fatherhood of God and His relation to all**

men.” [Salmond, 322] *“God is further described as the God and Father ‘of all,’ which refers not to all humans but to all believers. This is substantiated in the present context because Paul is exhorting Christians, and not all humans, to preserve the unity.”* [Hoehner, 519] *“The meaning here is, that God is the common Father of all his people — of the rich and the poor; the bond and the free; the learned and the unlearned. He is no respecter of persons. Nothing would tend more to overcome the prejudices of colour, rank, and wealth, than to feel that we all have one Father; and that we are all equally the objects of his favour.”* [Barnes’ NT Notes]

- **earlier in Ephesians Paul speaks of God as the ‘adoptive Father of all believers’** – *‘having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will’* (Eph 1:5 NKJV)
- **earlier in Ephesians Paul speaks of believers having access to the Father through the Spirit** – *‘For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father’* (Eph 2:18 NKJV)
- **the statement ‘over all, through all, in all’ connects well with believers** – Paul speaks in Ephesians of God ruling over believers through Christ the Head (1:20-23), having access through the Spirit (2:18) and indwelling his churches (2:22).

‘ALL’ ARE NEUTER — some who favor this interpretation are Alford, 114; Abbott, 109; Lincoln, 240f; Thielman, 259f; Best, 371.

- **the NT elsewhere describes Him as ‘Creator of all things’** –

‘there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.’ (1 Cor 8:6 NKJV)

‘For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever’ (Rom 11:36 NKJV)

‘For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.’ (Col 1:16,17 NKJV)

While fully admitting the terms could be masculine, Ernest Best prefers the neuter: *“In the end it is probably better to give ‘all’ a neuter meaning throughout with the sense, ‘one creator God and Father who governs the cosmos, works through it and is present in it’.* [Best, 371]

- **Paul has already taught in Ephesians that the Father works His will universally** –

He will sum up ‘all things’ in Christ (1:10)

He works ‘all things’ to accomplish his will (1:11)

He has subjected ‘all things’ to Christ (1:22)

He has created ‘all things’ (3:9)

He is the Father who names ‘every’ family, whether earthly or heavenly (3:15)

“[I]t may well be better to take ‘all’ as neuter and as continuing its cosmic connotations from 1:10, 22, 23; 3:9, which will also occur in 4:10. Formulations about God which use ‘all’ have a cosmic reference in Paul, and the elaboration on the universal fatherhood of God earlier in Eph 3:14, 15 surely tips the balances against restricting the scope of that fatherhood here.” [Lincoln, 240] *“He is ‘over’ all in the sense that he created everything (3:9), named all the tribes of the universe (3:15), and subjected everything to Christ (1:22). He is ‘through’ and ‘in’ all in the sense that he is summing up all things in Christ (1:10) and works all things to accomplish his will (1:11).”* [Thielman, 260]

- **the NT describes all as having their life and foundation in God** –

*‘And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; **for in Him we live and move and have our being**, as also some of your own poets have said, “For we are also His offspring.”*

*Therefore, **since we are the offspring of God**, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.’* (Acts 17:26-29 NKJV)

- **while the immediate context is that of believers, Paul has not used the word ‘all’** – *“It is arbitrary to limit [‘all’] to the faithful. It is true the context speaks only of Christians, but then [the word ‘all’] has not been used.”* [Abbott, 109]

- **there is a progression from believers to all mankind** – *“[Paul] advances from the Lord of the Church to the God and Father of all.”* [Abbott, 109] *“[G]od’s universal sovereignty and presence are set forth as the climactic ground for the unity of the Spirit that believers are to maintain. His universal rule is being exercised to fulfil his ultimate purpose of unifying all things in Christ. The unity of the church is the means by which the manifold wisdom of God is being displayed to the universe. The church is the eschatological outpost, the pilot project of God’s purposes, and his people are the expression of this unity that displays to the universe his final goal.”* [O’Brien, 285f; it should be noted Peter

O'Brien does not give his support to either interpretation but gives what he believes Paul is saying if it would be masculine or if it would be neuter]

● **the neuter sense would coincide with secular beliefs at that time** – while not Scripture and therefore not authoritative in that sense, observations from the secular world at the time of Paul does support the ‘neuter’ interpretation. “As interpreters at least since Jerome have sometimes noticed, this understanding of the phrase is consistent with the use of similar expressions within Stoicism of God’s presence everywhere (e.g., Marcus Aurelius, *Med.* 7.9; cf. 4.23). The expression also resembles affirmations in Hellenistic Judaism that the ‘one’ God is the Creator of ‘all’ (e.g., Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.193) or that God is the ‘one Father of all’ creation (e.g., Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.14; cf. *Heir* 62). In both the Stoic and the Jewish texts, the term ‘all’ refers to everything that exists, and this broader religious context makes it likely that when Paul speaks in a similar idiom, he uses ‘all’ in the same way. Paul, then, brings his preface to the second main part of his letter to a climax with the affirmation that the one God is Father of and sovereign over all things. He has created everything and works intentionally through and in all things to accomplish his intended goal for the universe he created.” [Thielman, 260]

THREE PROPOSITIONS — Paul concludes with a series of three small statements, each using the simplistic formula “_____ all” and each beginning with a different preposition:

Who is over all

and through all

and in all {of us}

“Thus by three prepositions Paul has endeavoured to express the universal sweep and power of God in men’s lives.”

[Robertson, *Word Pictures*] **“This is a further identification of the God and Father of all. Paul accomplishes this through three different prepositions. The variation of the preposition is a skillful way of condensing thought, each preposition adding a new idea.”** [Hoehner, 520]

Who is over all — ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων [ho epi pantōn] — **GOD IS TRANSCENDENT AND SOVEREIGN, RULING OVER ALL** — Most who take this in the sense of ‘all’ as masculine believes Paul to be saying that God the Father rules over all believers, those who consider this ‘all’ as neuter opens the sovereignty of God to all His creation. Note that by limiting Paul’s statement to believers would not be to deny the latter truth. **“[H]e is over all, indicating his sovereign position over all believers. This has reference not only to his spiritual authority over us but also in every aspect of the life of the believer. God is ‘supreme and transcendent.’ If believers take God’s sovereignty seriously, the result is unity and contentment and joy for believers, even ill the midst of trials. The believer will trust God in his wisdom and care for all things that transpire in life.”** [Hoehner, 520; see also Lincoln, 240; Abbott, 109; Alford, 114; Salmond, 323]

So we ask ourselves the question: Is God sovereign over all? Is He in control of all good that happens to we who are His children — we would be quick to reply ‘yes’. Let us pursue this further: is He in control of all the bad that happens to we who are His children? *Is He even in control of our mistakes, failures and sins? Is God sovereign over all?*

If God is sovereign over all things then to be disgruntled about some believer who has hurt us ultimately is directed towards the Lord Himself! I am not saying it does not hurt and sometimes it may take time to accept what has happened, but I believe the key is to lay it in the hands of God and pray, ‘I do not understand and it hurts, but you had a reason for it all.’ When we begin to look beyond the initial actions and see the providential hand of God to conform us to the image of His Son, we may begin to forgive and move ahead in serving the Lord. To refuse to do so keeps us in a place of pain, hurt and inward anger and eventually comes between our hearts and our Lord.

PARALLEL TEXTS — “The liturgical expression ‘who is over all and through all and in all’ is paralleled in several texts, most notably 1 Corinthians 8:6 (though this text is different in that all things come through Christ). Variation occurs in the way liturgical expressions are applied (see Romans 9:5, 11:36; 1 Cor 8:6; 12:6; 15:28; Col 1:16; 3:11. Romans 9:5 has the only other occurrence of ‘over all’ in Paul’s letters but whether he is referring to Christ or to God is debated.)” [Snodgrass, 199]

‘of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.’ (Rom 9:5 NKJV)

‘For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.’ (Rom 11:36 NKJV)

‘Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.’ (1 Cor 15:28 NKJV)

‘where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.’ (Col 3:11 NKJV)

and through all — καὶ διὰ πάντων [kai dia pantōn] — **GOD’S PERVASIVE, UNIVERSAL PRESENCE** — ‘Pervasive’ means to be spread throughout. Most who take this in the sense of ‘all’ as masculine believes Paul to be saying that God the Father is present throughout His people, His family as a whole, those who consider this ‘all’ as neuter considers this a statement of the omnipresence of God throughout His creation. Whichever belief is considered stronger, neither group would deny the truths of which the other is speaking. **“Through’ expressing the pervading, animating, controlling presence of that One**

*God and Father.” [Salmond, 323] “Here the emphasis is on God’s immanence. He accomplishes his purposes through the instruments of believers. This is in keeping with 2:10 where the believer is God’s workmanship created for good works which God prepared beforehand in order that he or she should walk in them. However, since God provides the power for good works, he is to receive all the glory. Such a wonderful provision shows that he is alive and active in the world today.” [Hoehner, 520; see also Lincoln, 240; Vincent, *Word Studies*, Bruce, 337f] “It is a truly mystical union; not a mere union of opinion, of interest, or of feeling; but something supernatural arising from a common principle of life. This life is not the natural life which belongs to us as creatures; nor intellectual, which belongs to us as rational beings; but it is spiritual life, called elsewhere the life of God in the soul.” [Hodge, 148f] The same thought was expressed by Jesus in these terms:*

‘Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.’ (John 15:4,5 NKJV)

and in all {of us} — και ἐν πᾶσιν ἡμῖν. [kai en pasin {hēmin}] — GOD IS IMMANENT — To be ‘immanent’ is to remain within, indwelling, inherent. Probably the distinction between ‘through all’ and ‘in all’ is that the latter would be more individualized: each believer is indwelt by the Spirit of God individually. Those taking this ‘all’ in the neuter would agree with the indwelling of the Spirit in all true believers but believe this to be speaking of God’s presence in all the universe. This would not teach pantheism nor would they consider the lost to be ‘indwelt’ in the sense in which believers are indwelt. **“This signifies the indwelling Spirit (John 14:16-17; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 2:12; 6:19-20; Gal 3:2; 4:6; 1 John 2:27; 3:24; 4:13), his intimate presence. In 3:17 Paul prayed that Christ might be at home in their hearts. Although Christ was already in them, Paul wanted him to be the very center of their lives. Believers have the joy of knowing that God not only is over them and working through them, but he is also residing in them.” [Hoehner, 520] “The [in] expressing the constant abode of the One God and Father in His people by His Spirit.” [Salmond, 323]**

IN REGARDS TO UNITY — These three truths are true whether someone has been saved only one week or for seventy years! These are common to all believers! Therefore we should be united, even though the new believer may have much he does not understand and a lot of baggage from their former life. We should be united, even though the older believer may have grown cold and distant in his relationship with the Lord. We all have Christ and therefore we should be united as believers. Forgive. Help. Pray. Guide.

TEXTUAL VARIANT: ALL ‘OF US’ — Above we noted these ‘all’ statements could be considered either in a neuter or a masculine sense. There is a textual variant that adds ‘of you’ at the end of the verse, changing from ‘in all’ to ‘in all of us.’ If this was a part of the original writing by Paul, that would settle the above debate. For those interested in these type of things, below is a good summation of the issue:

“In a number of ancient witnesses (e.g., D, F, G, Ψ, 0278,1739, most Byzantine manuscripts, the Old Latin and Syriac versions, and Irenaeus), the term [‘of us’] appears immediately after the phrase [‘in all’]. If this is correct, then the debate over whether the four uses of [‘all’] in 4:6 are masculine or neuter can be decided with a reasonable degree of certainty in favor of a masculine reference to the body of believers in the church. If Paul concluded 4:6 with the statement that God is [‘in us all’], then the pronoun [‘us’] must refer to believers, as it has throughout the letter. The other three occurrences of ‘all’ in 4:6, then, would also refer to believers. On the strength of the geographical diversity of the witnesses that have [‘us’], Hoehner accepts this reading and interprets the rest of the verse accordingly.

“Most commentators who address the issue, however, have decided to omit [‘us’]. Some in the early church, such as Origen and Marcion, were concerned with the question of whether God was the Father of all people or only of Christians, and a desire to confine God’s fatherhood to believers may have led an early scribe to add the [‘us’]. The addition also conformed the text to the first-person plural [‘us’] in 4:7. A later addition of [‘us’] to the text becomes even more likely when we consider the strength of the witnesses against including it (e.g., P⁴⁶, 8, A, B, C, P, 082, 6, 33, 81, 104, 1175, 1739*, 1881, 2464, the Coptic tradition, Marcion, Jerome, and Augustine). It is true, as Hoehner says, that this is primarily Alexandrian evidence, but the evidence is so early that it is still quite strong. It is likely, then, that [‘us’] was not part of the original letter.” [Thielman, 261]

APPENDIX — ‘THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD’

[from Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology]

Throughout the Bible we find God portrayed as a Father. This portrayal, however, is surprisingly rare in the Old Testament. There God is specifically called the Father of the nation of Israel (Deut 32:6 ; Isa 63:16 ; [twice] 64:8 ; Jeremiah 3:4 Jeremiah 3:19 ; 31:9 ; Mal 1:6 ; 2:10) or the Father of certain individuals (2 Sam 7:14 ; 1 Chron 17:13 ; 22:10 ; 28:6 ; Psalm 68:5 ; 89:26) only fifteen times. (At times the father imagery is present although the term “Father” is not used [Exod 4:22-23 ; Deut 1:31 ; 8:5 ; 14:1; Psalm 103:13 ; Jer 3:22 ; 31:20 ; Hosea 11:1-4 ; Mal 3:17]). This metaphor for God may have been avoided in the Old Testament due to its frequent use in the ancient Near East where it was used in various fertility religions and carried heavy sexual overtones. The avoidance of this description for God can still be found in the intertestamental literature. There its use is also rare: Apocrypha (Wis 2:16; 14:3; Tob 13:4; Sir 23:1, 4; 51:10); Pseudepigrapha (Jub 1:24, 28; 19:29; 3 Macc 5:7; 6:4, 8; T. Levi 18:6; T. Judah 24:2); and Dead Sea Scrolls (1 QH 9:35f).

The teaching of the Fatherhood of God takes a decided turn with Jesus, for “Father” was his favorite term for addressing God. It

appears on his lips some sixty-five times in the Synoptic Gospels and over one hundred times in John. The exact term Jesus used is still found three times in the New Testament (Mark 14:36 ; Rom 8:15-16 ; Gal 4:6) but elsewhere the Aramaic term Abba is translated by the Greek pater. The uniqueness of Jesus' teaching on this subject is evident for several reasons. For one, the rarity of this designation for God is striking. There is no evidence in pre-Christian Jewish literature that Jews addressed God as "Abba." A second unique feature about Jesus' use of Abba as a designation for God involves the intimacy of the term. Abba was a term little children used when they addressed their fathers. At one time it was thought that since children used this term to address their fathers the nearest equivalent would be the English term "Daddy." More recently, however, it has been pointed out that Abba was a term not only that small children used to address their fathers; it was also a term that older children and adults used. As a result it is best to understand Abba as the equivalent of "Father" rather than "Daddy."

A third unique feature of Jesus' teaching concerning the Fatherhood of God is that the frequency of this metaphor is out of all proportion to what we find elsewhere in the Old Testament and other Jewish literature. (Note 165+ times in the four Gospels compared to only 15 times in the entire Old Testament!) This was not just a way Jesus taught his disciples to address God; it was the way. They were to pray, "Father, hallowed by your name" (Luke 11:2). This is why the Greek-speaking Gentile churches in Galatia and Rome continued to address God as Abba. They used this foreign title for God because Jesus had used it and taught his followers to do so. It should be pointed out that although Jesus addressed God as "Father" and taught his disciples to do the same, he never referred to God as "our Father." (Matt 6:9 is not an exception, for here Jesus is teaching his disciples how they [plural] should pray.) His "Sonship" was different from that of his followers. He was by nature the Son; they were "sons" through adoption. This is clearly seen in John 20:17 in the distinction between "my" God and "your" God. It is also seen in Matthew 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6; 7:21; 10:32-33, where Jesus refers to "your" (singular and plural) and "my" father but never "our" father.

Because of Jesus' use of this metaphor, it is not surprising that the rest of the New Testament also emphasizes the Fatherhood of God. In the Pauline letters God is described as "Father" over forty times. It occurs in blessings (Rom 1:7 ; 1 Cor 1:3), doxologies (Rom 15:6), thanksgivings (2 Cor 1:3 ; 1 Thess 1:2-3), prayers (Col 1:12), exhortations (Eph 5:20), and creeds (1 Cor 8:6 ; Eph 4:6). For Paul this fatherhood is based not so much on God's role in creation but rather on the redemption and reconciliation he has made available in Jesus Christ. This is why Paul refers to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 15:6 ; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31). It is through the work of Christ that God invites us to call him "Abba, Father." It is through Christ that grace and peace have resulted and we have become God's children (Rom 8:12-16 ; 1 Peter 1:3-4 ; 1 John 3:1).

The description of God as "father" is under attack today in certain circles. It is charged by some that this leads to a false view that God is a male. This criticism should be taken seriously in that God is not a "man" (Num 23:19). He is a Spirit (John 4:24) without sexual parts. When God is referred as a father, this is simply the use of a metaphor in which he is likened to a kind and loving father. Elsewhere God's love and care can be compared to that of a concerned and caring mother (Isa 49:14-16 ; Luke 13:34). Yet to avoid the metaphor of father as a description and designation for God is to lose sight of the fact that Jesus chose this as his metaphor to address God and that he taught this as the metaphor by which his disciples should address God. It also loses sight of the continuity established by the use of this metaphor with those who have called God "Father" over the centuries. These include the disciples; the earliest congregations (Rom 8:15 ; Gal 4:6); the earliest church councils ("I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth"); and Christian churches all over the globe who over the centuries have prayed together "Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed by thy name." [Robert H. Stein, *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*]