

## God as Father

Scripture uses various metaphors in speaking of God, and “father” is a salient biblical metaphor for God. Because God is not literally a father (i.e., a man who procreates), God is, therefore, a father in a metaphorical sense.

The picture of God as a mother is also present in Scripture, such as when Jesus describes himself as a mother hen. However, to make this observation is not to imply that the “father” metaphor is on a par with the “hen” metaphor.

It should also be noted that God’s fatherhood is not about gender. The divine nature is not sexual or gendered in any sense. Although the human nature of Jesus is gendered, the divine nature is not. The fatherhood of God is *not* tantamount to the inherent masculinity of God. Therefore, the question of gender equality is simply not at issue in understanding the meaning of God’s fatherhood.

It seems at least two things are clear from Scripture. First, “mother” and “father” are not interchangeable or equivalent expressions with respect to addressing God. The New Testament view is unmistakable: God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Mary was his (merely human) mother. And God is not only Jesus’ Father, God is “Our Father.” We have been adopted to “sonship” and are heirs of God, coheirs with Christ. This is the picture and terminology that the Bible uses to present the family relationship of believers to God and Christ. There is no place in this picture for a Mother God alongside or instead of a Father God.

Second, it is abundantly clear, especially in the Old Testament, that God is both mother and father to his people. This is rightly understood in a metaphorical sense, pure and simple. God is to us like a mother and like a father. So in our times of prayer and devotion to God we may say, for example, “You comfort me as a mother comforts her child” (Isaiah 66:13) and “When my mother and father forsake me, you will take me up” (Psalm 27:10).

However, God as the Father of Jesus Christ—as the first person of the triune Godhead—is not “Father” merely in the sense of a simple metaphorical descriptor. Here “Father” serves as a metaphorical name. (A metaphorical name is to be distinguished from a simple metaphor, a figure of speech used to describe one or more attributes of someone or something.) Because the name “Father” is metaphorical and not literal, it does not speak literally of God’s having a male or masculine nature. But because it is a name and not merely a metaphor, it is not interchangeable with “Mother.” Although the Bible speaks of God in metaphorical imagery that is motherly and feminine, “Mother” is never used in Scripture as a name for God.

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