

led to Israel's rejection of the Messiah. For Paul, Abraham is the prime picture of the justified person, so one gets the feeling that justification for him includes more than a change of legal status.

The royal/legal metaphor is certainly a basic biblical metaphor crucial to our understanding of the gospel. But it is not the only metaphor. Even a casual reading of the Bible will reveal significant portions where other metaphors enrich and illuminate our insight about the communion God seeks with his creatures. Each metaphor has its own logic and its own demands. Each one casts a different light on what the incarnation and atonement are all about. We need the entire biblical witness to see the full richness of the salvation God has provided for us in the cross.

THE FAMILIAL METAPHOR

A second metaphor is the familial one. This metaphor begins early in the Old Testament and develops slowly until it reaches center stage in the life and teaching of Jesus. When God called Moses to liberate the descendants of Abraham from Egyptian bondage, he instructed him to tell Pharaoh to let Yahweh's "son" go. Yahweh speaks of Israel as his "firstborn son" (Ex. 4:22-23). Clearly, God sees his family as extending someday beyond Israel's borders. Israel is to be the door through which other children ultimately may be brought to him. Thus, God's call to Moses is a development of the promise to Abraham that through him all the nations of the earth would find blessing.

Yahweh sees his relationship to Israel as a familial one. This is confirmed in the story of the destruction of the firstborn sons of Egypt on the night of the Passover. It was a matter for Yahweh of firstborn in exchange for firstborn. Little wonder that we find Moses at the end of his life pleading with Israel in these terms:

*Is this the way you repay the LORD,
 O foolish and unwise people?
 Is he not your Father, your Creator,
 who made you and formed you? (Deut. 32:6)*

Yahweh's relationship with Israel is a very tender one. Note the emotional speech of Yahweh in Hosea:

*When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.
But the more I called Israel,
the further they went from me...
I led them with cords of human kindness,
with ties of love...*

*How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, Israel? (11:1-2, 4, 8)*

What begins as a special relationship to the people of Israel takes a different turn with the appearance of David. The relationship of David to Yahweh and Yahweh to David takes on a unique character, a familial one. The second Psalm, which is considered Davidic and which the New Testament interprets messianically, speaks of the king as Yahweh's own son: "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (Ps. 2:7). When Yahweh speaks to David about his own son, Solomon, who will succeed David, he says: "I will be his father, and he will be my son" (2 Sam. 7:14). Now it is not just the people of God who are called Yahweh's child, but a single individual, Israel's king.

This is the background for the identification of the throne of David with Israel's messianic hope. That is why the crowd in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday can sing: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Matt. 21:9; Luke 19:38). The New Testament insists that the unique relationship David and Jesus share with the Father is now, through Christ, open to all who will believe in him. The Son of God, who is the eternal Son of God the Father, has become a son of David so that all of us who are the children of men might become the children of God.

In fact, Jesus' purpose in the incarnation is that all of God's human creatures might know an eternal relationship with God the Father and the Son that is analogical to the ontological relationship that exists between Father and Son in the triune being of God. So Paul can speak in Romans about our adoption, and John can give us the promise of Jesus himself: "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne" (Rev. 3:21). Evidently God who determined that we

would all be part of human families intended that those families should image the inner life of God himself and serve as pedagogical devices that would better enable us to understand the intimacy he seeks with us.

A natural consequence of this language is that the Scriptures develop a familial concept of salvation. Thus, we get the biblical teaching on regeneration and the new birth. Nicodemus may have been surprised when Jesus suggested to him that he needed to be born again. The shock came not only in the concept of new birth but in the suggestion that he, a Jew, needed such change. The language of a second birth was the language Judaism used to explain what happened to a Gentile who converted to the faith of Moses. For a Gentile to become a Jew meant entering into a brand-new life, totally discontinuous with his past in the same way Israel's new life with Yahweh after the Exodus was totally distinct from its past. It meant entrance into a new family and a new life. Jesus linked such conversion with the Spirit and spoke of a birth of the Spirit in contrast to the birth in the flesh (John 3:5-8). He was connecting regeneration to a significant Old Testament theme.

A new life of conformity with the will of Yahweh through a new heart brings hope. This is seen in the different figures used in Old Testament writings. The language of circumcision was the sign that one was in a living relationship with Yahweh. In Deuteronomy God begins to promise that he can take away the uncircumcised heart and give a circumcised heart. That new heart will enable us to fulfill Yahweh's desires, that we should love him with all of our hearts and all of our souls (Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26). Ezekiel speaks directly of the possibility of a new heart in which the Spirit dwells, enabling the believer to follow Yahweh's decrees (Ezek. 36:24-28). Jeremiah foresees a new covenant where the law will not be written on tablets for the sanctuary but will be placed within Yahweh's people and inscribed on their hearts so that they will know Yahweh (Jer. 31:31-34). All of these prophecies are part of the promise of grace that runs through the Old Testament and finds its fulfillment in the provisions of the cross. It is possible for us through Christ and through the Spirit to be new creatures because we have a new life flowing through us. We have become members of a new family, the family of the one true God. We have a

new legal status, but we have more: We are part of a new family. We experience a resurrection to a new life lived in communion with a holy God through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The idea of new life is the conceptual context in which we must see the references of Jesus to God as his Father. As the people listened to his comments, some, particularly the temple leadership, began to sense that he was speaking for himself of more than a spiritual relationship. They realized that he thought of his relationship as the Son of God to the Father as different from that of David or a devout Jew. He spoke of oneness with the Father, an identity with him, and said and did things that rightfully belonged only within the province of God's authority. He also accepted responses reserved for God alone; for example, he permitted the man to whom he had given sight to worship him. When he referred to himself as the Son of God, he was speaking of a relationship to God that others did not experience when they called God their Father (John 8:41). His insistence that he was not of this world and that he had come as the "sent one" from the Father simply intensified their conviction. They had no categories to handle such comments as, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58)—nor his resurrection! Thomas surely could not have justified his exclamation theologically a week later when he cried out, "My Lord and my God!" but he knew there was no other appropriate response (John 20:28).

Left to work their way through the implications of Jesus' references to his relationship to God as his Father, the church fathers concluded that the parent-child relationship, which they had felt was a rich way of explaining how persons were related to God, was really an ontological reality in the case of Christ. This meant that in the very being of God himself, one finds a relationship that is the prototype for all of the family relationships of all of the descendants of Adam. In other words, they became convinced that in Jesus Christ they had not just met a human being in whom God dwelt; rather, in Jesus Christ they had met a person who was himself divine. They had met more than a godly man. They had met one who called himself the Son of God and who, when he said "Father," meant something different than what they meant and experienced when they prayed, "Our Father." Paul was obviously thinking some

of these thoughts when he wrote to his Ephesian friends, "For this reason I kneel before the Father, *from whom his whole family* in heaven and on earth derives its name" (Eph. 3:14-15, emphasis added). The term *Father* when used of God has a double thrust.

Therefore, we conclude that in terms of parent-child relationships, God is not like us but we are like God. The full implications of this cannot be developed here. But at least we can make two observations. First, the roots of the family ultimately are in neither biology nor sociology but in theology. Second, the family cannot be explained primarily in human terms; it requires divine categories. If we would fully understand this sociological institution, we must see it in terms of the nature of God and the eternal purposes of God. He made a creation in which every person who ever lived or will live knows what it means to be someone's child or someone's parent or both. To be human means that one has a father. Consider the possibility that every human person is a member of a family with earthly parents because our heavenly Father wills that every human person know him as Father and become a member of his family.

What does this say about the desire in the heart of God for intimacy with us? That we should be servants of God, subjects in his eternal kingdom, is not enough. He wants a closer, more personal relationship, one based not simply on law but one that arises from a shared, common spiritual life. This is a much more intimate and existential relationship than that of a subject with his sovereign. So we must define *salvation* very differently in this context than in terms of the royal/legal metaphor. It is one thing to pray, "O King" and another to say, "Father." Wesley understood this distinction and never ceased to glory in it.

*My God is reconciled;
His pardoning voice I hear;
He owns me for His child,
I can no longer fear;
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And, "Father, Abba, Father," cry.²*