



2. Who am I now?

MEANWHILE, DOWN AT THE PIGSTY
Prodigal Preoccupied, part 1

When I was at Spurgeons we had a lecturer there called John Colwell. John had an unusual style as a lecturer. Apart from the fact that he always prayed at the beginning and end of every lecture, he communicated quite complicated things in a way that newcomers to theology could understand. I liked his approach. In the end theology (the study of God and the things of God), and for that matter our Christian faith, could be boiled down to answering two questions.

1. WHAT SORT OF GOD?
2. SO WHAT?

The sort of God that we have will determine what sort of faith we have. As I said last time, we live in an age where many Christians live in defeat. They don't grow spiritually, they live in fear of death, they are carried along by whatever is the latest thing, there is little hope, they have no sense of the power and presence of God, they may not even be able to see how God could be a part of their lives. God doesn't want us to be that way or live that way.

So what sort of God do we have? Let me turn it the other way around; what sort of God does God want to be to us?

GOD IS OUR FATHER. He wants to be Dad (that's the word the Bible uses). The question then is, what sort of Dad? The problem is that many Christians think He's like **VICTOR MELDREW!** A grumpy old man who's notoriously hard to please. Or worse they think He's like **SIR ALAN SUGAR?** Do this or that wrong and ... you're fired! Or of course, the **ELDERLY GREY GENTLEMAN.** You'll have guessed from these pictures and the poem earlier that there are some stereotypes of God floating around

Distant and uninterested in me
Insensitive and uncaring
Stern and demanding
Passive and cold
Absent or too busy for me
Impatient, angry, or never satisfied with what I do
Mean, cruel, or abusive
Trying to take all the fun out of life
Controlling or manipulative
Condemning or unforgiving
Nit-picking or a demanding perfectionist

You've heard them all and as Christians you should know that the Bible says that God is the exact opposite of all of these. The trouble is that as Christians it is possible to live like some or most of them are true! Their judgement is clouded by these images of God that just aren't true. When things go wrong, it's easy to suggest that God doesn't care. "Why didn't He do something about it? He's supposed to love me. And look at the laws and commandments – does He really mean for me to keep all those – and then He says I only need to do one small thing wrong and... ": you know the rest. It's easy to exchange the truth of God for lies – that's exactly what Satan wants to do because it destroys our relationship with God. And this morning we need to affirm that we will not believe his

lies.

What sort of God do we have? Let's find out what the Bible says because that tells us what God has made us in Christ. Here are three basic facts about what God has done in Christ for each believer here this morning

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

2 Corinthians 5:17

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord"

Ephesians 5:8

"He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves"

Colossians 1:13

Let me ask you a question? **WHAT ARE YOU NOW? Are you a SAINT, OR ARE YOU A SINNER?**

Many Christians would say. Yes, I'm a sinner saved by grace, or I'm a sinner that's been forgiven. After all, "for all have sinned and come short of God's glory". "I'm not good enough to be a saint. After all, look at all the great saints there have been down the ages, could I be like one of them? I don't think so."

What does God say you are? Here's a clue **THE SAINT 1**(music to The Saint). **THE SAINT 2**

I AM A SAINT. If you are a Christian this morning, whether you've been one 5 minutes or 50 years, God has turned you into a Saint! Surely not? Surely yes. Look at the New Testament – whenever the word sinner is used, (300) – it is always in connection with unbelief or unbelievers. Whenever the word saint is used (200), it is always in reference to believers. In fact a word that's always used to describe Christians in the Bible is Saint!

So what is a Saint? *Saints are "holy ones", "righteous ones" - people who have been made right with God; accepted, secure and significant in Christ.* If you're a Christian, that's what you are. Yes, you're special because God has made you to be that. When He looks at you, he doesn't see a sinner, He sees a saint. *Not a forgiven sinner but a redeemed saint!*

Even the youngest Christian is a saint – it's a term that describes our new identity and position in Christ, but not necessarily our maturity as a Christian. Let's look at those verses again:

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

2 Corinthians 5:17

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord"

Ephesians 5:8

"He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves"

Colossians 1:13

You see, when you came to Christ, God didn't just forgive you and leave it like that. No He changed you into being something you weren't and never could be. Let me put it like this.

Before we came to Christ we were **DEAD** in our trespasses and sins. God saved us through Jesus when we were dead!

HOW DO YOU SAVE A DEAD MAN? First he would need to be cured of the disease he died of ... and then he's need to be given **LIFE**.

Stupid? When you're dead, you're dead aren't you. We were dead in our trespasses and sins but God has made us alive in Christ! We're not like those who don't know Christ. They are dead and don't realise it. We are alive. The problem is that so many Christians walk around alive but act like they're dead!

Why do I say all this? Because one common misconception is that God only clothes us in righteousness when we trusted Christ. At our core we are still sinners. Some point to the story of the Prodigal Son and say that even though he was a rotter, the father clothed him in the best robe. Not so, he was given the best robe because his father honoured him as his son, having accepted him back home. Like the son the father had lost, that which was dead is now alive again.

PLAYING DEAD

How we see ourselves in Christ is so important. Satan loves to make Christians they are useless by getting them to accept a lie about who they are. If we think we are sinners, always prone to sin and that God is just a grumpy man with a big stick, or worse, a Father that just allows us to get into a mess that we should get ourselves out of; then we will live life accepting that we are limited in what we can be, what we can do and worse of all we think that God can't or won't do much in our lives because we're not good enough. Rather than enjoying life, we play dead and just accept what comes at us or what we can achieve ourselves because that's how people without Christ do it. That's rubbish because God has already made us so much more than that. There seem to be two major lies we need to debunk?

Number 1: No child of God is inferior or useless, but if satan can get you to believe that you are, that's how you'll act.

Number 2: No child of God is dirty or abandoned any more. But if satan can get you to believe that, then that's how you will act.

We have trusted Christ, found forgiveness and acceptance, so God does not condemn us any more; He welcomes us into His presence like the father welcomed the son in our story because He loves us.

Some may say:

"But you don't know what's been done to me"

"You don't know how bad I've been." It doesn't change who you are in Christ.

Our new life is a free gift, not earned or deserved. Even though the son wasted his fathers cash and made a mess of his life, the father still welcomed him when he came home and treated him like his son. Here's a basic principle of the Christian faith.

YOU'RE NOT SAVED BY HOW YOU BEHAVE BUT BY HOW YOU BELIEVE

But if God has made me a whole new person, what happens when I do sin?

SLIDE

That's why this is so important .. as new creations in Christ, sin is not our nature – we have the capacity to choose not to sin because we've died to sin. By His Spirit in us, God gives us the power not to sin; to do things differently. Sin isn't inevitable – it's avoidable. And it shouldn't be a characteristic of our lives because we are new people in Christ.

But we do sin. So what happens?

When We Sin

Our fundamental relationship with our Heavenly Father does not change

His Spirit lives in us (Romans 8:9)
We share His very nature (2 Peter 1:4)

We restore harmony by turning back to Him and away from our sin

Agree that we were wrong (confess)
Turn away from our sin (repent)

We need to come before our loving God and confess our sin – GOD DOES NOT CONDEMN US

WE ARE ALREADY ACCEPTED - when the son came home and did his speech, the father didn't say "push off you good for nothing", "do you realise what you've done with what I gave you", "go down and live with the servants then" or "you're no son of mine". No the father embraced him and threw a party for him. That's the love of a parent.

The problem is that as Christians we so often try to do things the wrong way around. We think we have to please God in some way by doing things – whether that's coming to church, being charitable, serving the church, being pious. The trouble is that we are trying to become something we already are – nothing extra needs to be done.

**It is not what we do
that determines who we
are.
It's who we are
that determines what
we do.**

The day you accepted Jesus, you became a child of God, accepted, secure, significant. Remember the sheet last week?

God just wants us to be like who He's made us. It's who we are that determines what we do. Because He loves me and accepts me, I want to worship Him. Because He's made me part of His family, I want to be a part of it and grow in it. Because God wants me I want to spend time with Him and know more of His love and presence. Because God has given me His Holy Spirit, I want to experience more of His presence and power in my life. Because He has made me new, I want to show His love and power in the way I live my life and in the words I say. That's why I don't want to sin and dishonour God – because of the love He has shown me and continues to do.

So as we are faced with the lies about God, what do we do – I hope we don't do this:

Prodigal Preoccupied, part 2

MEANWHILE, DOWN AT THE PIGSTY

We are new creations, we are alive, we are the family of God, let's renounce the lies and nonsense about our Father this morning and affirm again who He is to us.

MY FATHER GOD

Prayer

*Preached by Mark Reid
MRBC Felixstowe 17/5/09
Based on The Freedom in Christ Discipleship Course
by Neil Anderson and Steve Goss*

My Father God

<i>I renounce the lie that my Father God is:</i>	<i>I joyfully accept the truth that my Father God is:</i>
Distant and uninterested in me	Intimate and involved (Psalm 139:1-18)
Insensitive and uncaring	Kind and compassionate (Psalm 103:8-14)
Stern and demanding	Accepting and filled with joy and love (Rom. 15:7; Zephaniah 3:17)
Passive and cold	Warm and affectionate (Isaiah 40:11; Hosea 11:3-4)
Absent or too busy for me	Always with me and eager to be with me (Hebrews 13:5; Jeremiah 31:21; Ezekiel 34:11-16)
Impatient, angry, or never satisfied with what I do	Patient, slow to anger and delights in those who put their hope in His unfailing love (Exodus 34:6; 2Peter 3:9; Psalm 147:11)
Mean, cruel, or abusive	Loving and gentle and protective (Jeremiah 31:3; Isaiah 42:3; Psalm 18:2)
Trying to take all the fun out of life	Trustworthy and wants to give me a full life; His will is good, perfect and acceptable for me (Lamentations 3:22-23; John 10:10; Romans 12:1-2)
Controlling or manipulative	Full of grace and mercy, and gives me freedom to fail (Hebrews 4:15-16; Luke 15:11-16)
Condemning or unforgiving	Tender-hearted and forgiving; His heart and arms are always open to me (Psalm 130:1-4; Luke 15:17-24)
Nit-picking or a demanding perfectionist	Committed to my growth and proud of me as His growing child (Romans 8:28-29; Hebrews 12:5-11; 2Corinthians 7:14)

I am the apple of His eye!

Adapted from Neil Anderson's "Freedom in Christ Discipleship Course".

PRODIGAL PREOCCUPIED

Part 1

Disillusioned, discouraged, dejected; his resources dissipated;
The Prodigal determined to seek reconciliation
With father and home.
But on his journey
He was waylaid by a septet of female strangers:

Miss Apprehend, a pseudo scientist,
Offered him an unproven theory
That his father didn't exist.

Miss Givings, an agnostic,
Said to him that if there was such a person as 'father',
And a place called 'home',
She didn't know about them.

Miss Belief, calling herself an atheist,
Bluntly said that there was no such place as 'home',
And no such person as 'father'.

Miss Taken, a pseudo-psychoanalyst,
Suggested that he had a father-fixation,
And that 'home' was but a dream fantasy.
She also suggested treatment at 50 quid a session.

Miss Informed, a cynic,
Smiled at him, with curled lip,
And mocked his every step.

Miss Guided, a humanist,
Told him he didn't need a father,
And that the fulfilment of his needs
Could be found only within himself.

Miss Chief, a liberal theologian,
Told him, glibly, that his father was dead!

Part 2

The father, a very real father,
A very out-of-breath father,
Running to meet the Prodigal,
Stopped,
Then wept tears of love
As he saw the fast-disappearing
Figure of his son, with back turned,
Moving even further away.

The Prodigal meanwhile, armed with an aerosol spray,
Marched back towards the pigsty,
Determined to make the best
Of the very worst.

Gordon Bailey
from Plastic World, STL 1971

Meanwhile, down at the pigsty

Luke 15:17 At last he came to his senses and said, 'All my father's hired workers have more than they can eat, and here I am about to starve! **18** I will get up and go to my father and say, Father, I have sinned against God and against you. **19** I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired workers.' **20** So he got up and started back to his father.

“He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms round his son, and kissed him. **21** 'Father,' the son said, 'I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.' **22** But the father called his servants. 'Hurry!' he said. 'Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. **23** Then go and get the prize calf and kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast! **24** For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.' And so the feasting began.

Good News Bible