

Catechetical Lecture VII

Cyril of Jerusalem

Early Church (pre-Nicene) · Nicene & Post-Nicene · Catechesis

STROMATA 43

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INTRODUCTION

Delivered in mid-fourth-century Jerusalem to candidates preparing for Easter baptism, the seventh of Cyril's catechetical lectures turns from the oneness of God to the specific claim that this God is Father, first of the Only-begotten Son, and through him of those being initiated into the faith. Cyril speaks as a bishop walking new Christians through the clauses of the creed they will soon profess, pausing here to confront Jewish and heretical readings of divine fatherhood with a barrage of psalm citations. The lectures as a whole stand at the headwaters of the catechetical tradition that would shape Christian initiation for centuries, preserving a rare record of what a pre-Nicene-era congregation actually heard before the font. Expect direct, pastoral instruction punctuated by polemic, a teacher pressing scriptural proofs into the hands of listeners about to make a vow.

The Father.

Ephesians 3:14, 15

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father,...of whom all fatherhood in heaven and earth is named, etc.

Of God as the sole Principle we have said enough to you yesterday : by enough I mean, not what is worthy of the subject, (for to reach that is utterly impossible to mortal nature), but as much as was granted to our infirmity. I traversed also the bye-paths of the manifold error of the godless heretics: but now let us shake off their foul and soul-poisoning doctrine, and remembering what relates to them, not to our own hurt, but to our greater detestation of them, let us come back to ourselves, and receive the saving doctrines of the true Faith, connecting the dignity of Fatherhood with that of the Unity, and believing In One God the Father: for we must not only believe in one God; but this also let us devoutly receive, that He is the Father of the Only-begotten, our Lord Jesus Christ.

For thus shall we raise our thoughts higher than the Jews , who admit indeed by their doctrines that there is One God, (for what if they often denied even this by their idolatries?); but that He is also the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, they admit not; being of a contrary mind to their own Prophets, who in the Divine Scriptures affirm, _The Lord said to me, You are My Son, this day have I begotten you_. And to this day they _rage and gather themselves together against the Lord, and against His Anointed_

, thinking that it is possible to be made friends of the Father apart from devotion towards the Son, being ignorant that _no man comes unto the Father but by_ John 14:6 the Son, who says, _I am the Door, and I am the Way_. He therefore that refuses the Way which leads to the Father, and he that denies the Door, how shall he be deemed worthy of entrance unto God? They contradict also what is written in the eighty-eighth Psalm, _He shall call Me, You are my Father, my God, and the helper of my salvation. And I will make him my first-born, high among the kings of the earth_. For if they should insist that these things are said of David or Solomon or any of their successors, let them show how _the throne_ of him, who is in their judgment described in the prophecy, is _as the days of heaven, and as the sun before God, and as the moon established for ever_. And how is it also that they are not abashed at that which is written, _From the womb before the morning-star have I begotten you_ : also this, _He shall endure with the sun, and before the moon, from generation to generation_. To refer these passages to a man is a proof of utter and extreme insensibility.

Let the Jews, however, since they so will, suffer their usual disorder of unbelief, both in these and the like statements. But let us adopt the godly doctrine of our Faith, worshipping one God the Father of the Christ, (for to deprive Him, who grants to all the gift of generation, of the like dignity would be impious): and let us Believe in One God the Father, in order that, before we touch upon our teaching concerning Christ, the faith concerning the Only-begotten may be implanted in the soul of the hearers, without being at all interrupted by the intervening doctrines concerning the Father.

For the name of the Father, with the very utterance of the title, suggests the thought of the Son: as in like manner one who names the Son thinks straightway of the Father also. For if a Father, He is certainly the Father of a Son; and if a Son, certainly the Son of a Father. Lest therefore from our speaking thus, In One God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and of All Things Visible and Invisible, and from our then adding this also, And in One Lord Jesus Christ, any one should irreverently suppose that the Only-begotten is second in rank to heaven and earth — for this reason before naming them we named God the Father, that in thinking of the Father we might at the same time think also of the Son: for between the Son and the Father no being whatever comes.

God then is in an improper sense the Father of many, but by nature and in truth of One only, the Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; not having attained in course of time to being a Father, but being ever the Father of the Only-begotten. Not that being without a Son before, He has since by change of purpose become a Father: but before every substance and every intelligence, before times and all ages, God has the dignity of Father, magnifying Himself in this more than in His other dignities; and having become a Father, not by passion , or union, not in ignorance, not by effluence , not by diminution, not by alteration, _for every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow of turning_. James 1:17 Perfect Father, He begot a perfect Son, and delivered all things to Him who is begotten: (for _all things_, He says, _are delivered unto Me of My Father_ Matthew 11:27:) and is honoured by the Only-begotten: for, _I honour My Father_ John 8:49, says the Son; and again, _Even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love_. John 15:10 Therefore we also say like the Apostle, _Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and God of all consolation_ 2 Corinthians 1:3: and, _We bow our knees unto the Father from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named_

Ephesians 3:14-15: glorifying Him with the Only-begotten: for _he that denies the Father, denies the Son also_ : and again, _He that confesses the Son, has the Father also_ ; knowing that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father Philippians 2:11 .

We worship, therefore, as the Father of Christ, the Maker of heaven and earth, _the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob_ Exodus 3:6; to whose honour the former temple also, over against us here, was built. For we shall not tolerate the heretics who sever the Old Testament from the New , but shall believe Christ, who says concerning the temple, _Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house_ Luke 2:49? And again, _Take these things hence, and make not my Father's house a house of merchandise_ John 2:16, whereby He most clearly confessed that the former temple in Jerusalem was His own Father's house. But if any one from unbelief wishes to receive yet more proofs as to the Father of Christ being the same as the Maker of the world, let him hear Him say again, _Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and not one of them shall fall on the ground without My Father which is in heaven_ ; this also, _Behold the fowls of the heaven that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feeds them_ Matthew 6:26; and this, _My Father works hitherto, and I work_ John 5:17 .

But lest any one from simplicity or perverse ingenuity should suppose that Christ is but equal in honour to righteous men, from His saying, _I ascend to My Father, and your_ _Father_, it is well to make this distinction beforehand, that the name of the Father is one, but the power of His operation manifold. And Christ Himself knowing this has spoken unerringly, _I go to My Father, and your Father:_ not saying 'to our Father,' but distinguishing, and saying first what was proper to Himself, _to My Father_, which was by nature; then adding, _and your Father_, which was by adoption. For however high the privilege we have received of saying in our prayers, _Our Father_, _which art in heaven_, yet the gift is of loving-kindness. For we call Him Father, not as having been by nature begotten of Our Father which is in heaven; but having been transferred from servitude to sonship by the grace of the Father, through the Son and Holy Spirit, we are permitted so to speak by ineffable loving-kindness.

But if any one wishes to learn how we call God Father, let him hear Moses, the excellent schoolmaster, saying, _Did not this your Father Himself buy you, and make you, and create you_ Deuteronomy 32:6? Also Esaias the Prophet, _And now, O Lord. You are our Father: and we all are clay, the works of Your hands_. Isaiah 64:8 For most clearly has the prophetic gift declared that not according to nature, but according to God's grace, and by adoption, we call Him Father.

And that you may learn more exactly that in the Divine Scriptures it is not by any means the natural father only that is called father, hear what Paul says:— _For though you should have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I begot you through the Gospel_. 1 Corinthians 4:15 For Paul was father of the Corinthians, not by having begotten them after the flesh, but by having taught and begotten them again after the Spirit. Hear Job also saying, _I was a father of the needy_ Job 29:16: for he called himself a father, not as having begotten them all, but as caring for them. And God's Only-begotten Son Himself, when nailed in His flesh to the tree at the time of crucifixion, on seeing Mary, His own Mother according to the flesh, and John, the most beloved of His disciples, said to him, _Behold! Your mother_, and to her, _Behold! Your Son_ John 19:26-27: teaching her the

parental affection due to him , and indirectly explaining that which is said in Luke, and _His father and His mother marvelled at Him_ Luke 2:33: words which the tribe of heretics snatch up, saying that He was begotten of a man and a woman. For like as Mary was called the mother of John, because of her parental affection, not from having given him birth, so Joseph also was called the father of Christ, not from having begotten Him (for _he knew her not_, as the Gospel says, _until she had brought forth her first-born Son_ Matthew 1:25), but because of the care bestowed on His nurture.

Thus much then at present, in the way of a digression, to put you in remembrance. Let me, however, add yet another testimony in proof that God is called the Father of men in an improper sense. For when in Esaias God is addressed thus, _For You are our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us_ Isaiah 63:16, and _Sarah travailed not with us_ , need we inquire further on this point? And if the Psalmist says, _Let them be troubled from His countenance, the Father of the fatherless, and Judge of the widows_ , is it not manifest to all, that when God is called the Father of orphans who have lately lost their own fathers, He is so named not as begetting them of Himself, but as caring for them and shielding them. But whereas God, as we have said, is in an improper sense the Father of men, of Christ alone He is the Father by nature, not by adoption: and the Father of men in time, but of Christ before all time, as He says, _And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Your own self, with the glory which I had with You before the world was_ John 17:5 .

We believe then In One God the Father the Unsearchable and Ineffable, _Whom no man has seen_ 1 Timothy 2:16, _but the Only-begotten alone has declared Him_. John 1:18 _For He which is of God, He has seen God_: whose face the Angels do always behold in heaven Matthew 18:10, behold, however, each according to the measure of his own rank. But the undimmed vision of the Father is reserved in its purity for the Son with the Holy Ghost.

Having reached this point of my discourse, and being reminded of the passages just before mentioned, in which God was addressed as the Father of men, I am greatly amazed at men's insensibility. For God with unspeakable loving-kindness deigned to be called the Father of men — He in heaven, they on earth — and He the Maker of Eternity, they made in time — He _who holds the earth in the hollow of His hand_, they upon the earth as grasshoppers. Yet man forsook his heavenly Father, and said to the stock, _You are my father, and to the stone, You have begotten me_. Jeremiah 2:27 And for this reason, methinks, the Psalmist says to mankind, _Forget also your own people, and your father's house_, whom you have chosen for a father, whom you have drawn upon yourself to your destruction.

And not only stocks and stones, but even Satan himself, the destroyer of souls, have some ere now chosen for a father; to whom the Lord said as a rebuke, _You do the deeds of your father_ John 8:41, that is of the devil, he being the father of men not by nature, but by fraud. For like as Paul by his godly teaching came to be called the father of the Corinthians, so the devil is called the father of those who of their own will _consent unto him_.

For we shall not tolerate those who give a wrong meaning to that saying, _Hereby know we the children of God, and the children of the devil_ 1 John 3:10, as if there were by nature some men to be saved, and some to be lost. Whereas we come into such holy sonship not of necessity but by choice: nor was the traitor Judas by nature a son of the devil and of perdition; for certainly he would never have cast out devils at all in the name of Christ: _for Satan casts not out Satan_. Mark 3:23 Nor on the other hand would Paul have turned from persecuting to preaching. But the adoption is in our own power, as John says, _But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the children of God, even to them that believe in His name_. John 1:12 For not before their believing, but from their believing they were counted worthy to become of their own choice the children of God.

Knowing this, therefore, let us walk spiritually, that we may be counted worthy of God's adoption. _For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God_. Romans 8:14 For it profits us nothing to have gained the title of Christians, unless the works also follow; lest to us also it be said, _If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham_. John 8:39 _For if we call on Him as Father, who without respect of persons judges according to every man's work, let us pass the time of our sojourning here in fear_ 1 Peter 1:17, _loving not the world, neither the things that are in the world: for if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him_. 1 John 2:15 Wherefore, my beloved children, let us by our works offer glory to _our Father which is in heaven, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven_. Matthew 5:16 _Let us cast all our care upon Him, for our Father knows what things we have need of_.

But while honouring our heavenly Father let us honour also _the fathers of our flesh_ Hebrews 12:9: since the Lord Himself has evidently so appointed in the Law and the Prophets, saying, _Honour

your father and your mother, that it may be well with you, and your days shall be long in the land_. Deuteronomy 5:16 And let this commandment be especially observed by those here present who have fathers and mothers. _Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing to the Lord_. Colossians 3:20 For the Lord said not, _He that loves father or mother is not worthy of Me_, lest you from ignorance should perversely mistake what was rightly written, but He added, _more than Me_. Matthew 10:37 For when our fathers on earth are of a contrary mind to our Father in heaven, then we must obey Christ's word. But when they put no obstacle to godliness in our way, if we are ever carried away by ingratitude, and, forgetting their benefits to us, hold them in contempt, then the oracle will have place which says, _He that curses father or mother, let him die the death_.

The first virtue of godliness in Christians is to honour their parents, to requite the troubles of those who begot them , and with all their might to confer on them what tends to their comfort (for if we should repay them ever so much, yet we shall never be able to return their gift of life), that they also may enjoy the comfort provided by us, and may confirm us in those blessings which Jacob the supplanter shrewdly seized; and that our Father in heaven may accept our good purpose, and judge us worthy _to shine amid righteous as the sun in the kingdom of our Father Matthew 13:43_ : To whom be the glory, with the Only-begotten our Saviour Jesus Christ, and with the Holy and Life-giving Spirit, now and ever, to all eternity. Amen.

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