

## **“GOD IS A FATHER GOD.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Sermon Texts: Ephesians 1:3-6; 3:14-19**

### **Introduction.**

My plan last week was to move on to Belgic Confession, Article 10 and how Jesus is God. But the more I thought about it the more I realized we have to say something very important about God the Father. Something that must be said now days more than ever, something that is being lost, neglected, denied, something considered politically incorrect and out of fashion.

We need to stop and take time to carefully understand the question of God’s gender. Is God male or female or both or neither? How are we to understand all the masculine pronouns and images used in Scripture concerning God?

What is God or more to the point, who is God? And is God a He?

Article One of the Belgic Confession begins by describing God with a list of attributes. These attributes tells us what God is like. It’s interesting and strange that it isn’t until Article Eight that we find out who God is.

Why do we start our studies of the Doctrine of God by answering the “what” questions before we answer the “who” question? Why do we start with a bunch of parts before considering the whole? The “who” questions is the more central question.

When God decided to reveal Himself to mankind, and make Himself known, He did so in very specific and very intentional ways.

If we just talk about attributes and characteristics that can come off as generic. Our God is not a generic God. We must be clear who He is. We must begin with God the Father, the divine source of everything.

“The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 2, Article 3).

For about four decades now feminists and evangelicals alike have been trying to neuter God. There is a powerful movement to eliminate all masculine references, pronouns, images and roles of God in the Bible and in our liturgy and music and writing.

We now have neutered Bibles (called gender neutral), we have neutered hymnals, we have pastors who speak very carefully of Gods-self, never saying Himself. We have women pastors changing the Trinitarian formula, in the name of balance and inclusivity, they say. Our Christian and Reformed colleges and seminaries are being neutered, term papers and tests must use gender-neutral PC language, sermons must be preached using inclusive language, mixing masculine and feminine terms, names and pronouns.

If you think what I am talking about isn't very relevant to us here in Lynden let me give you two quick examples. A member of our church came up to me just this morning while I was eating my fourth cookie and told me about a service she had just been to where the women worship leader started the Lord's Prayer with "Our Creator in heaven."

Furthermore, we sang a hymn this morning from the Psalter Hymnal that changed one line from "Though the eye of sinful man they glory may not see" to "Though the eye made blind by sin they glory may not see."

### **Is God masculine?**

Is God masculine? Or let me ask it this way, is God He?

The Bible was written over a time span of 1600 years by 40 different authors from a variety of cultural and social backgrounds and occupations in three languages and yet from Genesis to Revelation God is only and always referred to by the pronoun He, and nowhere in Scripture is God she. It clearly matters to God.

### ***What are the images of God that are revealed in Scripture?***

What are the images or analogies God uses to reveal Himself to us in the Holy Spirit inspired Scripture?

Father, Son, Master, Lord, King, Ruler, Warrior, the Lord of Hosts, Judge, Savior, Priest, shepherd, bridegroom. God is pictured as a kinsman-redeemer and as the husband of Israel.

He is Father not Mother.  
King not Queen.  
Lord not Lady.  
Priest not Priestess  
Bridegroom not Bride

Furthermore, Jesus repeatedly speaks to God as Father and speaks of God as Father, telling us to pray to the Father. He pictures God as Father in parables, like the Parable of the Forgiving Father.

### ***What is God described as doing in Scripture?***

God creates, begets, initiates, takes responsibility, fights, judges, defends, protects, provides, loves, leads, corrects, disciplines, is authoritative and takes authority.

God is not a generic or neutered or impersonal God, He is our heavenly Father and He does all the things a perfect, godly Father would do.

### ***Three common objections or criticisms of the Fatherhood of God:***

**First**, some argue there are passages that speak of God in feminine ways as well as masculine.

There are fewer than two dozen feminine images compared to the thousands of masculine texts and not once is the feminine pronoun “she” used of God. Furthermore, there is a key difference in these texts. They are used only as simile or comparison. He is like, not He is.

A couple of times in Scripture God is said to be like a mother, but God is never called a mother. None of these Scripture references include or suggest any feminine titles for God. The religions that use mother imagery for their gods are all fertility religions, cults, and heresies.

Finally, there are Scripture texts where male authors apply feminine imagery to themselves, without any suggestion that they are somehow both male and female.

**Galatians 4:19** my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

**I Thessalonians 2:7** But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

No one questions Paul’s masculinity from these illusions, nor should we God’s.

*Second*, some argue that prophets and apostles were immersed in profoundly patriarchal cultures and either they couldn’t see their bias or they wrote in those terms because that was the culture they were in. God chose just to go with where they were in that time and accommodated Himself to their culture. They argue we are dealing with an outmoded sexist cultural bias.

This argument suggests the Holy Spirit was impotent to control or direct the ideas and terms the writers used.

What’s false here is also the notion that patriarchal cultures would only have masculine deities. Both the OT and the NT worlds were filled with female deities, maybe even more than male ones. Every ancient religion and all of mythology were filled with goddesses and priestesses. Only one religion was different, only one stood out from all the rest, Judaism.

The scandal of the Bible was not a masculine God, but that the Jew’s said there was only one God. And the second scandalous thing was that this God had no wife or mistress or female counter part. Every other eastern god had a queen or companion or girl-friend.

Today the scandal is that God is masculine. Today feminist theologians are rushing to incorporate aspects of the goddess religions and fertility cults into Biblical faith. But what feminists seem to ignore is that in goddess religions women are reduced to sex objects and are dominated by men.

In Biblical faith women are held in high esteem and given a place of stature. Biblical faith transforms patriarchy after the image of the Trinity and after the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

Biblical patriarchy isn’t bad. It’s a reflection of the Trinity and the foundation for male headship and masculine leadership, the kind that protects, provides, initiates and serves.

**Third**, many argue that God is a-sexual, beyond gender, a spirit without sexual identity or personality. This is a position that even evangelicals have picked up and espouse to avoid the criticism of the feminists or to accommodate themselves to the PC culture of our day.

Christianity is a revealed religion. All that we know about God comes from God Himself. As Francis Schaeffer says, *He is There and He is not Silent*.

God has revealed Himself through the prophets and the apostles who wrote down the very words of God. Yes, God is spirit and no He is not male. But, to say God is not masculine is to say God and the Bible are wrong, and all that is left for us to do at that point is to reject it.

To change the language about God or to change the names of God, to insert more politically correct or gender neutral terms is a rebellious act, it's man dictating to God how it should be and that is ultimately an idolatrous action. It's seeking to make God conform to our image rather than us submitting to God and conforming to His image.

Why does it matter what we call God? I will tell you why.

**Isaiah 64:8** O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Since when does the clay have the right to name its maker or say how He should be spoken of or understood? We are not in a position to judge or change divine sovereignty and divine will.

In the final analysis, how we think and speak about God rests on the truth that the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of the living God, it's not based on man's opinions or man's worldview or man's culture.

Christianity is not a man-made religion, Christianity is a revelation from God. It is unchangeable and non-negotiable.

Jesus settled it. The unknown God is made known to us in Christ, the one in whom the fullness of God dwells bodily, who bears the very image of the invisible God and He taught us to call God Father. When you pray, pray like this, "Our Father who art in heaven ..."

God is not a genderless deity, but a masculine deity, with masculine roles, responsibilities, traits, characteristics and activities. To deny this is to deny the truth and authority of God's self-revelation in the Scriptures.

When we allow feminists to refine Christianity we are saying that either they and culture are right or that it is no big deal.

[In her book *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions*, Naomi Goldenberg (a pagan) predicted that the continued feminist presence in religion would force a redefinition - one that would alter the very essence of Judeo-Christian belief. Goldenberg writes:

"The feminist movement in Western culture is engaged in the slow execution of Christ and Yahweh. Yet very few of the women and men now working for sexual equality within Christianity and Judaism realize the extent of their heresy" (p. 4).]

### ***So why is God always defined in masculine terms and masculine roles?***

There is more to it than just the Bible says so. He has revealed Himself in this way for a reason. There is the supreme glory of God in this, all over it.

If God is not masculine then He is not Lord and if He is not Lord His is not sovereign over all and He doesn't have authority over all.

Part of the rejection of God's Fatherhood is a rejection of His absolute sovereign authority over us and all aspects of our lives.

Without this we have a Christianity without authority, a church without a backbone, and men who are leaders but without chests.

God in the masculine is seen as the ultimate authority figure, the everlasting Father and eternal Lord and King. A God like this can make demands on us and call us to obedience.

But today a God like that offends our sensitivities, and curtails our liberties. A God like that has to be emasculated. We prefer a generic God.

The rebellion against God as Father is a rebellion against authority and submission, against leading and obeying. The rebellion against God as Father is a rebellion against being judged and held accountable.

Finally, the masculine revelation of God maintains His transcendence, His otherness. Mother gods and goddesses are portrayed as giving birth to creation and created beings. They are spoken of as emanating from or coming out from. There is language of feminine attributes, gods birthing, nursing, nurturing and carrying creation like an infant. There is a sense of oneness with god and creation. This has led to ideas like pantheism and panentheism.

The world was created by divine fiat, meaning by an authoritative command. It was not birthed from the womb of some Father/Mother god. The world and all of creation is utterly different from God, not like Him at all. He is complete above and beyond and over all that He has created.

### **Application and Conclusion.**

What does God's Fatherhood imply? What it means for His Son, it also means for us, His adopted sons. J.I. Packer in his wonderful classis, *Knowing God*, mentions four things.

#### ***God's Fatherhood implies Authority.***

Our Father God takes initiative and responsibility. He commands and expects obedience. Jesus perfectly obeyed all the Father said and God has the authority as our Father to demand and expect the same. We render to Him our glad obedience.

#### ***God's Fatherhood implies Affection***

Our Father God loves His Son, with whom He is well pleased, and He has loved us from before the foundation of the world.

**I John 3:1** See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

***God's Fatherhood implies Fellowship***

Jesus said He was never alone because the Father had sent Him and was with Him (John 8:29; 16:32). And our Father God is true to His promise that He is will use always even to the very end of the age.

**I John 1:3** ... our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

***God's Fatherhood implies Honor***

God honors His Son and glorifies Him, and one day the Father will ensure that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. And our Father God will honor us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3) and will supply every need of ours out of His riches in glory (Philippians 4:19).

**John 17:24** Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.