

Stunted Gods (3)

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In this series of article we have been examining some of the ideas that we tend to have about God. Because of culture, tradition, or immaturity, we tend to craft an image of God in our mind that is rather limited, and does not accurately or completely reflect His true nature. Our last “stunted god” that we will consider is the idea that God, who is our Heavenly Father, is limited by our own bad experiences with an earthly parent.

Parental Hangover

We are invariably affected by the parenting we receive, some for good and some for bad. Those who had great parents growing up do not have a problem perceiving God as a “father-figure”, for this fits the mental prejudice that he or she has developed. People who had mostly bad experiences with their parents, however, may see the Biblical idea of God the “father” as being wholly disturbing or psychologically traumatizing. So what does this have to do perceiving God as too small? Naturally, if one’s conception of God is based on a bad image of “fathers” then he or she will always have an unhealthy, fearful, or resentful attitude toward God.

We need to be very careful, therefore, not to project our negative experiences on a Biblical metaphor to the detriment of its object. In the same way, if I were to say, “You are as sweet as honey” to a person who had an extreme distaste for honey, that may come across as less than complimentary. God is a father only in the metaphorical sense, and He is not limited by the sins and shortcomings of real, physical fathers. When we project those shortcomings onto God, we end up manifesting some very abnormal attitudes:

- We may be afraid of a God who wants us to be intimate with Him (**Matthew 11:28-30, Psalm 42:1-2**).
- We may reject His authority because our own fathers abused their position in the home.
- Unfortunately, there is the real possibility that unholy fathers lead their children into sinful situations (by example, habit, or otherwise).
- How hard would it be to believe in a God who says He will never leave or forsake you, when your own father left and forsook your family?
- Our fathers are human, just as we are. They sin, God does not, but this still remains a barrier to many people’s faith.

The danger is that we can project all of these negative feelings onto God, without giving Him the benefit of being a perfect father (**2 Corinthians 6:16-18**). *“For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’”* (**Romans 8:15**). Only in the sense that He is the *ideal* father, is God a father at all. He is not your alcoholic father. He is not your abusive father. He is not your deadbeat father. All of these fathers are some lesser, fallen version of the *ideal*, which can only be embodied by the original, true, Holy Father, who created all things and gives life to every living being.

Instead of carrying our bad experiences with us into the realm of spiritual inquiry, let us strive to start fresh and seek a Father who will never disappoint, never abandon, and never abuse!