

Take up and read! I first read Candlish's discourses a number of years ago, only for them to leave an indelible mark on both mind and heart. It is exciting to learn of them being made available once again. The themes contained in these discourses occupied much of the meditative thought of this leading Scottish churchman throughout his ministry. It is evident that the heart of Candlish was much enlarged by such themes as the Fatherhood of God, union with Christ, sonship, grace and glory, spiritual brotherhood ... and more! A thoughtful reading will aid in heart-enlarging for Christ.

— **Rev Thomas Buchanan**, Brora Free Church of
Scotland (Continuing)

Here is the heart of a true pastor. Laid aside from his people for a season, Candlish has a desire to still be a blessing to them, so he determines to make available to them a book of sermons so that they may be edified. To him it seems like a morsel, but what he gives them is nothing less than a feast, a banquet of profound discourses full of Christ and a warm evangelical spirit. Enjoy!

— **Rev Harry Woods**, Emeritus Lecturer in Practical Theology,
Free Church (Continuing) Seminary

Candlish was wrong on the Establishment Principle and advocated critical theories, but few impeached his piety or godliness. In contrast to today's craving for superficiality, which has engulfed us in legalism and antinomianism, Candlish's discourses take us to the centrality of who God is and who we are — he is no general Father, but only of his children who are his by adoption. This book will encourage a focus on Christ, aid the Christian walk, strengthen assurance, and give thoughts of glory, by showing us that we are justified by faith and sanctified by the Spirit, receiving all through being in 'union with Christ.'

— **Rev Raymond Kemp**, Scalpay-Harris Free Church (Continuing)

The Sonship and Brotherhood of Believers

Robert S. Candlish



Ettrick Press

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*Discourses Bearing upon the Sonship and
Brotherhood of Believers and Other Kindred Subjects*

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Foreword

My old geography teacher would often exhort us, 'Read, learn, and assimilate!' The benefits of doing more than merely regurgitating memorised material are self-evident and manifold. When I think of the nineteenth-century Scots, the same advice applies. Arguably, there has never been a more concentrated galaxy of spiritual giants and powerful preachers in Scotland's rich history. Many people are familiar — justly so — with the names of Robert Murray M'Cheyne and Andrew Bonar. However, there are others — many others — whose theology and sermons we would do well to read, learn, and assimilate.

Several striking characteristics define the preachers and preaching of this generation. First, their theology is manifestly rooted in the text of Scripture. You may or may not agree with all their conclusions, but there is a clear effort to ground their theology and preaching in the biblical text. The light emanating from their writings and pulpits is not the product of clever speculation but rather an insightful comparison of Scripture with Scripture. One notable feature in this regard is their frequent use of the Psalms. The Psalms were read, sung, and digested. For instance, many of the precious insights Hugh Martin provides in his matchless treatment of Gethsemane in *The Shadow of Calvary* come from mining the Christology of the Psalter.

Second, there is a healthy balance between doctrinal robustness and fresh insight. These men were churchmen. They knew, loved, and freely cited their creeds and confessions. However, there was a recognition that regarding some subjects,

not everything had been said that could be said. This was particularly notable concerning the doctrine of adoption. Martin lists several missing features in the Westminster's treatment of adoption, such as the grounds of the privilege, God's procedure in constituting the relation, the connection between regeneration and adoption, and the relationship between Christ's sonship and the sonship of his people.¹ When reading these men, one rarely senses — as is too often the case today — that this is merely repackaged material from elsewhere. Their thought and insight are both doctrinally orthodox and fresh.

Third, there is a clear trajectory from the academy to the pulpit. They were not armchair or ivory-tower theologians. William Cunningham, James Buchanan, George Smeaton, and John Kennedy of Dingwall — just to name a few — produced lectures and articles of the highest quality. There is so often a meticulous and invincible logic in their work. They were penetrating and absolutely thorough. Yet, rather than detracting from the pulpit, the gold they mined drove them to it.

All this is true of Robert Candlish (1806–1873). Sandy Finlayson writes, 'During his life Candlish would become one of Scotland's most highly regarded preachers, churchman and theological thinkers.'²

In the spring of 1864, Candlish delivered the first series of lectures in the Cunningham Lectureship, established in memory of the late William Cunningham D.D. (1805–1861).³ Candlish

¹ See Hugh Martin, 'Candlish's *Cunningham Lectures*,' *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 14 (1865): 724.

² Sandy Finlayson, *Unity and Diversity: The Founders of the Free Church of Scotland* (Fearn, Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 2010), 59.

³ Other prominent lectures in the series included James Buchanan's *Doctrine of Justification* and Patrick Fairbairn's *Revelation of Law in Scripture*.

delivered the first series on *The Fatherhood of God*, encompassing six lectures. His aim was to ‘bring out the import and bearing of the Scriptural doctrine respecting the Fatherhood of God as an influential element in Christian experience.’⁴ In these lectures, he argues persuasively that, properly speaking, Adam was created as a servant and not as a son. A father, he argues, does not put a son under such probation that, if he fails, he is cast out of the house (cf. John 8:35–36). This leads him, in turn, to the great doctrines of the sonship of Christ and the believer’s union with him — that our sonship by adoption is found not in the first Adam but in the Last Adam. There has never been, nor could there ever be, a sonship to God as Father apart from union and communion with the Son of God. However, to enjoy such a sonship — a sonship in union with Christ himself — presents untold wonders of grace and glory.

For all the polemics in these lectures and debates, no one who possesses or desires the Spirit of Adoption, by which we cry, ‘Abba Father,’ can overlook the devotional and pastoral contribution Candlish’s theology makes to the pulpit and to the life of the church. The doctrine of union with Christ captivated Candlish; he embraced it and did not let it go. He sought to work it out, demonstrating its grace and glory so that God’s people would see, know, and enter into its full enjoyment. This can only be fully realised when the doctrine of union with Christ is apprehended. If Christ is loved by the Father, then those united to him experience the same love (John 17:26). They have the same security as ‘the Son [who] abideth ever’ (John 8:35). They share the same access and inheritance (Eph. 2:18; Rom. 8:17).

In the present volume, Candlish continues to revel in the theme of adoption. The sonship named in the title refers to

⁴ Robert S. Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God: Being the First Course of the Cunningham Lectures* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1865), 5.

believers as the adopted sons of God the Father, while the brotherhood refers to their relationship with Christ their Elder Brother. This volume was published in 1872, a few years after the 1864 publication of *The Fatherhood of God*, and although he references his Cunningham Lectures at points in this book, the material is a fresh expansion of these topics. The discourses are mostly arranged in pairs or triplets, so that the discussion he opens in one chapter can extend into its subsequent parts in further chapters.

Yet his extensive treatment of his various subjects does not become tedious; he simply takes the space he needs in order to share with the reader the glorious aspects of the magnificent truth which have caught his attention. A striking feature of his style is how frequently he breaks out of a straightforward explanation to address the reader directly ('I urge you to enter more and more into the full meaning of your being justified ... Make a point — make conscience — of learning to know and believe that in justifying you God does really love you!'), or alternatively, to put himself in the shoes of an unassured believer, or a delighted child of God, and present their thoughts and responses in terms of 'I' and 'me,' voicing for us what we might be too inarticulate to phrase for ourselves. 'Do not tell me, then, that my adoption is simply ... so as to be called, in some vague and indeterminate sense, a child of God ... It is as being one with himself that I would have this sonship. And if I have it as being one with him, it must be his own very sonship that I have.'

In his breathtaking sermon in this volume on 'The Oneness of Christ and His People in the Prayer of Faith and Love' (Sermon 7), Candlish develops the idea of Christ as the elder brother taking his people by the hand to his loving Father. In the finest of experiential theology, he captures both the love of the Father and the feelings of unworthiness in the saint. Yet, Christ takes his

people by the hand and will not stop until they realise just how much the Father loves them. He writes,

[My elder brother] carries or conducts me through the judgment hall of God, the righteous judge, into the secret place of God, the loving Father. He presents me there as one whom he loves; as one who loves him; as one who, being forgiven much, loves much. He bids me take courage, assuring me that the Father loves me well because of my love to his Son, that love being in a measure like his own love to him. I hang back abashed; as if I would still have some other than myself to come in between me and the Father, and to speak for me to the Father. But no. My guide, my elder brother, will not have it so. He thrusts me forward with a sort of kindly violence. 'Speak for yourself,' he cries; 'speak yourself boldly to the Father.'

If you do not know God as your Father in Christ, or if you lack assurance concerning your sonship, if you struggle to call upon God as your Father, preferring to think of yourself as a servant (Luke 15:19), or if you desire to know more about what it means to have God as your Father — to know and experience the intensity and tenderness of his love — if you desire to understand the blessed and inviolable order of grace then glory, if you want to see the closeness of the union and the warmth of the communion you have with God in Christ, if you want to know how to teach and preach this blessed doctrine to the church today, then please read, learn, and assimilate this wonderful volume on *The Sonship and Brotherhood of Believers*.

Dr Ian Macleod
Pastor of the Free Reformed Church in Grand Rapids

1

The Invocation of the Lord's Prayer — 'Father'

Our Father ... — MATTHEW 6:9.

God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. — GALATIANS 4:4–5.

There are two topics which may be considered in connection with this invocation, 'Our Father.'

The *first* has reference to the nature and character of the relation indicated on the part of God when he is invoked as Father; the *second*, to the standing or position of those who may warrantably use this mode of address.

The first raises the question, *What is implied in God's making himself known and desiring to be worshipped as a Father?* The second raises the question, *Who are they who are in circumstances thus to worship him?* What is God to us as a Father? Who are the 'we' whose Father he is? The two topics or questions cannot be kept quite distinct; they run into one another. But they may be treated

separately, as I propose to treat them; giving this brief opening discourse chiefly, though, not exclusively, to the first.

I observe then, in regard to it, that I can conceive of two ways or methods of reaching the notion of a fatherhood in the Deity, or of arriving at the use of this form of address to the Supreme Being, and calling him Father. The *first* may be characterised as an ascending, the *second* as a descending, process — the first having its rise in an earthly and human relation, the second in a relation that is heavenly and divine.

1. The earthly and human process by which we call God 'Father'

The earthly and human relation of a child to a parent — a son to a father — is very close and tender. All along the line of troubled life, the earliest image or impression stamped upon the memory by the fond smile and warm embrace of parental love keeps its place and power, fresh to the end as at the beginning. Or, if sad clouds of estrangement have come in between to dim its brightness or impair its force, it is there still — ready, at a touch of the magic wand or breath of any old familiar loving home association, to charm the hardened soul of care or crime into the softness of sweet childhood again.

In some important and interesting aspects, this peculiar earthly and human relation — the most peculiar of all earthly relations — alone among them all — may be viewed as a fitting type of the character and attitude in which the Supreme Being desires and designs, from everlasting to everlasting, to make himself known.

We owe to God our being, and are all his offspring — especially as deriving from him the nature, intelligent and moral, which assimilates us to him, and in respect of which he has made

us in his own likeness and after his own image. Then, his treatment of us has been of the most fatherly sort; marked by fatherly bountifulness and fatherly tenderness all our days. So much has it been so, that on this very ground he is well entitled to rest his calm expostulation with us and affectionate charge against us: 'I have nourished and brought up children.' 'A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master. If then I be a father, where is my honour? if I be a master, where is my fear?' But still he pleads pathetically, as with a spouse of early and tender years, 'Wilt thou not from this time cry, Thou art the guide of my youth?'

There is much practical power in our thus viewing God as a Father; upon the ground and warrant, and after the pattern and analogy, of the corresponding relation among ourselves.

Thus, *in the first place*, we call God 'Father.' And does not our so addressing him convince us of sin? and of a special aggravation of sin? For it is an acknowledgment, on our part, of his just title to occupy the parental position in our esteem, and to receive from us accordingly true filial obedience. We own our obligation, not merely to serve him as our ruler, by keeping his commandments, but to do so in a childlike frame of mind, with all a child's loving warmth of heart, mingled with all a faithful subject's conscientiousness. Thus we recognise him as, in respect of right in us and over us, a father to us. He has a right, in that view, to a father's place in our hearts. Do we give it to him? If not, will his being recognised as thus, in right, our father — will our calling him 'Our Father' — save us, or do us good? Does it not, on the contrary, condemn us the more?

But, *secondly*, cut to the quick by this very consideration — humbled and penitent — we still venture, guilty as we are, to say, 'Our Father.' And we do well to say so. For in his heart — in his inclination and disposition towards us — he is a father to us. He longs to have us as his children. He has a father's yearning bowels

of compassion over us. He looks out for us and waits for us with a fatherly love which 'many waters cannot quench, nor great floods drown.' Lost as we are, and as good as dead to him, he pities us still 'as a father pitieth his children,' and sends his own Son to save us, and would rather that he should die the death of doom, in unknown agony, than that we should perish. We believe this; he himself moving and helping us to believe it. We arise and go to him as a father.

Then, *thirdly*, again we say, 'Our Father.' And we do well to say so — this time, surely, well! For now we hail and worship him as our father indeed — a father to us in fact — not merely in respect of a paternal right in us and over us, nor even in respect merely of a gracious paternal feeling towards us, but a father to us really and truly — a father, not to blame and censure us as disobedient and rebellious children; nor to pity us simply, and long after us, as self-ruined and miserable children; but to rejoice over us as children recovered and reconciled, once dead but now alive, once lost but now found.

Thus, by a sort of ascending process, rising by analogy from an earthly to a heavenly relation, we may reach the position or attitude of 'sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty;' calling him 'Father;' invoking him as 'Our Father.'

In so calling and invoking him, we have 'fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord' — even when our doing that seems to rest only on a natural human analogy. For it is in Christ that we are taught and enabled, by the Spirit, to pass upwards through all these spiritual and filial experiences of, *first*, relenting conviction; *secondly*, penitential homeward return; and *thirdly*, affectionate home-reconciliation.

In Christ himself personally we see the exact and complete model of what God, as a Father, is entitled to expect his children to be to him, and so we are smitten with a sense of our own unfilial

character and conduct. In Christ, as the gift of the Father to us — given to seek and save the lost, and to be 'the first-born among many brethren' — we see the depth and height of God's fatherly pity for his fallen offspring; its depth, in the Son stooping so low; its height, in the Son raising us so high — according to his Father's will. In Christ as our kinsman-redeemer — our elder brother — through faith in him as sustaining to us that character and uniting us to himself accordingly, we apprehend God as a father, loving us as sons with the very love with which he loves him. We realise our participation with Christ in his filial standing, receiving in him 'the spirit of adoption.'

2. The heavenly and divine process by which we call God 'Father'

Here we touch the other and higher view which, as I think, Scripture suggests and warrants of the relation now in question; the relation in respect of which we call God 'Father,' and invoke him as 'Our Father.'

For it is doubtful, to say the least, if this human analogy — according to which God is regarded as being to his intelligent creatures, simply as such, what an earthly parent is to his child who derives his being from him — has much or any warrant of Scripture. It is at all events very doubtful if the great thought of God's fatherhood of his people is ever made in Scripture to rest on that ground. Rather it is represented as having its root in a more celestial soil — in the very nature of the Godhead itself — to which indeed we may be helped to rise by some such process of analogical induction as I have been tracing, but from which again we have to make a fresh start downwards, as it were, from 'heavenly things' to 'earthly things.'

It is essential to the very being of the Supreme that he should be a Father, and that of him there should be a Son. From all eternity, accordingly, in the terms of the Creed of the Council of Nice, the Son is of the Father; 'begotten of his Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God.' He is 'the everlasting Son of the Father,' 'begotten, not made.' The relation therefore of paternity or fatherhood in God precedes creation, as well as redemption, and is indeed from everlasting. By the very necessity of his nature — not by any voluntary act in time, but by the eternal mode of his subsistence — the Highest is everlastingly a Father; and has in his bosom, of his own substance and as his fellow, a Son whom he loves, and with whom, in the communion of the Holy Spirit, he is one.

This is what is implied in the doctrine of the eternal and necessary existence of the Son, as distinct from the Father in respect of personality, though one with him in nature and substance; in attributes, works, and ways. It is what is brought out in the descriptions which Scripture gives of the Son's fellowship with the Father from everlasting.

Thus, under the name of Wisdom, denoting his inward community of creative mind with the Father, he is represented as saying, 'The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled; before the hills was I brought forth: while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there ... when he appointed the foundations of the earth. Then I was by him as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight' — from day to day of that wondrous creation week — 'rejoicing always before him; rejoicing