

# Argument: The Christian God Doesn't Seem Like Such a Good Father

Is God a “good Father”?

My answer: No. At least, not as many people conceive God.

Consider two claims that I hear about God quite often:

**Claim 1: *God does not owe us anything.***

**Claim 2: *All glory, honor, and praise must go to God alone.***

It seems to me that when these claims appear alongside of the metaphor of God as Father—by modern standards at least—God is quite a horrible parent.

Surely if any parent actually lived by these claims (e.g., I owe my child nothing), we would call him or her monstrous. Yet with God, these monstrous things are not only acceptable, but fully good and worthy of praise! How odd!

God creates, but is not obligated to care for God's creation? If I had a child and didn't care for him, I would go to jail. God is not obligated to rescue those who bear the burden of someone else's original sin? North Korea has concentration camps that punish children for the actions of their parents. But I certainly would not want Kim Jong-Un to be my father or leader. God does not want us to take credit for our accomplishments? If my child does something great, I certainly don't want him to feel guilty about acknowledging the work he has put into his accomplishment.

Here's my point: *If any human parent actually took many Christians' understanding of God as Father and applied it to their own role as a parent, we would probably find legal*

*grounds to arrest them. But with God, "our heavenly Father," we embrace this role as good and proper.*

Here are some responses I anticipate:

**"God's fatherhood is utterly different than ours."**

Then why use the metaphor?

**"God is a Father because God cares for us. That is the meaning of the metaphor."**

The metaphor still fails. God cares for us more like a distant king, but not a father.

**"You are taking the metaphor out of its original context."**

True. And perhaps such parental images were appropriate thousands of years ago when God could repay the harm done to Job by simply replacing the children who died with shiny new children. But is it still appropriate today?

**"People don't really mean that God hoards all glory, honor, and praise."**

Perhaps not all Christians *mean* this claim literally. But they *do* use the language. Why?

**"What are you hoping to accomplish by bringing up this point?"**

I think Christians need to re-envision God's goodness as a parent. I would like to see the above claims qualified as follows:

**Claim 1:** God *does* owe us something. God created us. To turn your back on what you've given life to is not good, even for God. God is Father *because* God owes us parental care. It is God's *covenantal faithfulness* to us that renders God a *good Father*.

**Claim 2:** I think some people need to be told they *should* take

pride in their work. They shouldn't feel ashamed to receive praise. When my child does a great job and someone compliments him, I am deeply moved for his sake. He gets praise for his work, and I'm damn happy about that.

To sum up: I'd like to see a vision of God as Father/Mother than I can embrace as a pattern for my own parenting, not one that will land me jail.

—

*Ryan Patrick McLaughlin, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at Siena College. You can find his academic work at his [academia.edu page](#).*