

Knowing God in the Word

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Philippians 3:10.

Sonship

There are some major issues involved with Christianity about which I believe that most Bible-believing Christians simply have the wrong idea. Sometimes this is caused by Bible ignorance, sometimes by bad translations, sometimes by lack of teaching on the part of Christian leaders, and sometimes by misunderstanding of the cultural framework under which the Bible was written.

There is one misunderstanding that would fall under the last category, and that is a misunderstanding concerning the Biblical concept of sonship. There is an idea in our minds borne out by our use of the word that makes a son to be nothing more than the male child of a parent, or someone's "little boy." This is the way we use this term in English, as in the term "sons and daughters" or "my son Frank." This is perfectly fine for our everyday usage, as we all ascribe this meaning to the word "son," and when anyone speaks of a son we all know what he is talking about. When we run into problems though is when we try to carry this definition of the word "son" into our understanding of the Bible.

The word "son" occurs many times in the Bible. In the Greek it is the word "huios," which means "son." One thing which must be kept in mind, however, is that even the Greek portion of the Bible was written by Jews who had a Hebrew, not a Greek, way of thinking. It is therefore to the Hebrew concept of a son that we must look for clarification as to what the Bible means when it talks about a son.

When one starts to look to the Old Testament to see what one can learn about sonship, it becomes obvious before we even get out of the first book of the Bible, Genesis, that a son is not someone's "little boy." In Genesis 22:2 God tells Abraham to take his "son, thine only son Isaac" and sacrifice him to God on the mountain God would show him. Of course, this was long after the birth of Ishmael, so it is obvious that Isaac was not Abraham's only "little boy." Why then was Isaac his only son?

The answer is that the Hebrew idea of a son was not only of male progeny, but rather of who would take over the family when the father stepped down. We know that families were very patriarchal back then, and the head male was the ruler of the entire family. The ruler was usually the firstborn male. However, this was not a set-in-stone law, as Reuben was not made the ruler in the case of Jacob's children because he had slept with Jacob's concubine. Joseph was made the ruler, even though he wasn't even close to being the firstborn. Moreover, Jacob himself was the ruler after Isaac, even though he was younger than his brother Esau.

But these are Bible stories that we all know well. The point is that it was this rulership that constituted one as a "first-born son." One might not actually be the oldest boy child in the family, but this did not mean that one could not be the first-born son. So that the first-born is the head of all the other sons, and not necessarily the oldest male progeny.

So that establishes what a first-born son is. But what about a son in general? We can again best demonstrate this in the case of a first-born son. When a child was declared to be a man's firstborn son, he was from that point on considered to be equal in all business matters with his father. This was not bestowed in childhood, but when the father either considered his son old enough to take over family affairs or himself too old to handle them himself any longer. From the time a child was declared as the son, however, he was from that time forth to be considered as the very image of his

father. In other words, if he made a business deal with you, you could consider the deal as if his father himself had made it. He was the first-born son, and thus the official representative of his father. Not a decision could he make which did not mean that his father was also bound to it. He now was his father's representative, and was authorized to speak for his father in all things. Therefore it was unnecessary to hear the son's and the father's opinions on a matter...if the firstborn son made a decision, then that was the way it was, and consulting the father was unnecessary.

So it is that the Hebrew concept of a son is the representative of the father. Although we do not have this in our society to the same extent, the idea of sonship can still be seen in some ways today. For example, we are all, whether we are man, woman, or child, sons of Adam (that is, as he was originally created). Our outward form and appearance...eyes, nose, ears, mouth, legs, hands, walking, talking...all that makes us the way we are is passed down to us through our lineage from Adam. Any being of another race of intelligent beings could look at us and immediately know that we are descendants of the man Adam. This is so of women equally with men, for womanhood was taken out of Adam, who in the beginning contained both sexes within himself. Thus, whether women or men, we have the image of his original creation obvious in our bodily form. We have his characteristics stamped all over us! And just as his outward characteristics are stamped upon us, his inward failures are as well. He took and ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, and the results of that sin are stamped upon each and every one of us. The way we act, the way we think, the way we live...these are all characteristic of one descended from Adam. Thus we are all representative of him...we are all sons of Adam.

But the same is true of our own parents as well. Just as we bear the general characteristics of sons of Adam, so we bear the specific characteristics of the sons of our parents. We often look like them, talk like them, act like them, think like them...in many ways, we represent them far more than most of us would like to think! This is as true for women as it is true for men. Remember, although the concept of sonship is usually applied only to men (for women in general were not allowed to be first-born sons in the Hebrew culture,) nevertheless the root of sonship is representation, and women are representative of their parents as much as men are.

So we are all sons first of all of Adam, and second of all of our parents. But what about sons of God? And perhaps more importantly, what about THE Son of God?

First of all let us consider sons of God mentioned besides Christ. First Adam was mentioned as a son of God. This is NOT because God created him rather than his being born so he was thus "God's little boy." This is because he was created in the image of God. The concept of an image and a representative go hand in hand. An image represents how I look, and a being created in God's image not only represents how He looks but also what He is. Adam was created to reflect the very nature of God. And although he was indeed descended from God as no one has been since, the important point of his sonship is that he was created in the image of God, not just that God was his only parent.

So why aren't we sons of God as well? Because Adam fell! And a fallen being can no longer be an image of God's character. Although Adam originally showed forth a representation of the very image of God Himself, he fell into sin and lost that image. And since we are all sons of Adam, we all carry that fallenness within us as well. Thus we are sons of Adam, but not sons of God.

Then there are angelic beings which are spoken of as being sons of God, for example the heavenly beings called "sons of God" who present themselves to God in Job (and Satan joins them.) Notice that Satan is not called a son of God although he accompanies them. Some have erroneously assumed that the reason these are called sons of God is because God created them without their going through a normal birth process. I do not know that much about angels, but I do know that the "sons of God saw the daughters of Adam that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose." (Genesis 6:2) So if they were able to take wives, then they must have been sexual beings. Some have speculated that they were not, and Satan through some evil power gave them sexual ability so they could carry out a diabolical plot against mankind. This cannot be so,

however, as then these would be foul creations of Satan, not "sons of God." No, these beings were sons of God, at least before they fell into this sin (at which point they would have lost that image, of course.) They had not yet been corrupted until they "saw the daughters of Adam, that they were fair." So these beings are sexual beings, and probably have marriages and families just like we do.

For this reason I do not believe that all angels are created directly by God without having angelic parents. Many of them do have angelic parents, but they are still "sons of God," and this is because, not having sinned, they retain the image of God.

So finally we come to the most important Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. First of all, Christ is the one and only firstborn Son of God. There is no other to whom God would give all His authority.

The New Testament, however, and particularly the book of John, is full of statements by Christ as to His having received all power from the Father. By this statement He was claiming to be God's firstborn son, and thus the one to whom all power, all authority, all judgment, and even all worship due to the Father could be given. So Jesus Christ is the only one who is God's firstborn Son.

But Christ is also God's Son in the simpler sense. In other words, He is the representative of God's character. But He is different from other beings in that His representation is TOTAL. Although other sons may have displayed very much the same qualities as their fathers, no son has ever claimed to actually BE his father! But Christ did in the book of John. For when Philip asked Him to "show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," He asked him, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" (John 14:8-9) Thus, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Adam may have shown forth some of His characteristics, angels may show forth some of His characteristics, and we in the future may show forth some of His characteristics...perhaps more and more as eternity goes on! But only one son of God actually IS God, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ, the only absolute Son of God.

But He is also the Son of Man. This is the term Christ uses of Himself most often in the gospels, far more often than the Son of God. This tells us something else about Christ...that, although Christ was the total representative of God, He is also the total representative of Adam. He carries all of Adam's (original) characteristics, for He was "born of a woman," Mary. So He was as much a Son of Adam as you or I, except for the fact of Adam's fall, which characteristic is passed through the male line, not the female. So Christ was as much an Adam as any of us, only without sin, even as the Scripture says. And as the representative of God to man and the representative of man to God, He could at last be the go-between who could reconcile us to God.

So what is my point? That we need to carry this sort of thinking into our use of the word "son" in our Biblical studies. First of all, we must stop our politically correct alteration of the Bible by adding "and daughters too" whenever the Bible speaks of our becoming God's sons. To be a son of God means something, but to be "God's little girl" is something which is carried quite well in the term "children of God." We are indeed all children of God who have believed upon Him, but becoming sons of God is something far more precious and far more to be desired than merely being His children. We are His children now, but we will be His sons in the future, and that is a fact that women can look forward to as much as men. So let us stop letting our desire to be politically correct distract us from the real hope which is being offered when God tells us He will make us "sons of God."

The second thing realizing this should teach us is that we must stop thinking of Christ as "God's little boy." Christ is NOT "God's little boy," He IS God. He is not descended from God, created by God, or anything else that would take away His equality with God. He is the representative of God Who has been with Him from the beginning. His Sonship did not begin at His conception, as though God had produced Him through Mary in the usual way. His Sonship was eternal. The birth from Mary was identifying Him with Adam, but His being the "Son of God" was something that had always been true. So let us stop thinking of Christ being the "Son of God" in conjunction with His birth and life here on earth, and rather think of it in conjunction with Him being the complete representative of God Himself. This is the truth about Christ, this is the truth that should cause us to worship Him, and any English concept of male progeny will only blind us to the

truth and make us uncomfortable with the truth, that to worship Christ is to worship God, and there is no difference. You cannot worship God without Christ, and you cannot worship Christ to the exclusion of God. They are one and the same.

So it is that a correct idea of sonship will clear up many issues for us, first of all in regards to our own standing before God and second of all in our comprehension of Christ. Christ's being the one and only Son of God tells us that He is THE representative of God, the only One Who in His entirety shows forth His image. And the promise to us as to our sonship tells us the wonderful hope that God has laid out for us. Let us not reduce ourselves to being "sons and daughters of God," and let us not reduce Christ to being "God's little boy." Sonship is representation of the Father, and that is what Christ does now and ever, and what we will be granted to do someday when all of God's plans at last come to fruition. May God speed the day!

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