

The Father/Son Relationship With God

[Part 1]

The climax of biblical revelation is our participation with Jesus in a Father/Son relationship. We cannot go higher or deeper into the heart of God than to know Him as Father.

Jesus, just before His death, told His worried and concerned disciples that He was going to leave them. This prompted the question from Thomas as to where Jesus was going.

John 14:6-7 [NIV] *“Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. **No-one comes to the Father except through me.** If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*

Jesus is the door to our relationship with God as our Father.

In the Old Testament God is called Father only 15 times. In the New Testament 245 times, and 100 of these are in John’s epistle.

The Old Testament **never** spoke of God as “*abba*”, an intimate term that indicates a loving and unreasoning trustful relationship.

This term was **never** used by a slave or servant **only** by a loved son.

The New Testament gives us two yardsticks with which to measure the love of God.

1 The Cross

1 John 4:9 [NIV] *“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.”*

God sending Jesus to die in our stead.

2 The Gift of Sonship

1 John 3:1 [NIV] *“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that **we should be called children of God!** And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”*

On accepting Jesus’ sacrifice in faith God considers us and calls us His children.

In a similar way, there are two confessional cries in the New Testament.

1 Jesus is Lord

1 Corinthians 12:3 [NIV] *“Therefore I tell you that no-one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no-one can say, “**Jesus is Lord,**” except by the Holy Spirit.”*

Revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

2 Abba Father

Galatians 4:6 [NIV] *“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “**Abba, Father.**”*

Also revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:15-16 [NIV] *“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”*

This close relationship is **not** available to those who are slaves to sin.

Sonship and Physical Creation

The whole of the physical creation was designed to express the life of the Son, Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:16 [NIV] *“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; **all things were created by him and for him.**”*

All physical things were created **for** Jesus Christ not just by Him. They were to reflect His character.

Romans 8:19-21 [NIV] *“**The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.**”*

All the physical creation is longing for the time when it will be liberated to express what it was designed to express, the life of the created sons of God. True Christians who are a reflection of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Jesus used physical creation to reinforce this principle.

Matthew 6:28 [NIV] *“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the **lilies of the field** grow. They do not labour or spin.”*

Luke 9:58 [NIV] *“Jesus replied, **“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”**”*

John 1:36 [NIV] *“When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, **“Look, the Lamb of God!”**”*

John 3:8 [NIV] *“**The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.**”*

Sonship and Incarnation

The relationship between Jesus and His Father is central to the gospel story.

Luke 2:49 [NIV] *“Why were you searching for me?” he asked. **“Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”**”*

Jesus’ **first recorded words** at the age of 12 years.

Luke 23:46 [NIV] *“Jesus called out with a loud voice, **“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”** When he had said this, he breathed his last.”*

Jesus’ **last words before His death** on the cross.

Luke 3:22 [NIV] *“and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: **“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”**”*

Jesus’ **ministry opened** with the words of His delighted Father.

John 20:17 [NIV] *“Jesus said, **“Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, **‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’**”**”*

Jesus’ **ministry concluded** with His longed-for return to the Father’s side.

Mark 14:35-36 [NIV] *“Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. **“Abba, Father,”** he said, **“everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”**”*

“Abba” is **not** a formal word for father in the Aramaic language. It belongs to the intimate family relationship where obedience and respect is the heart of that relationship.

This relationship of Jesus with His Father defines and exemplifies for us the meaning and content of fatherhood and sonship.

We have **not** been left guessing what this relationship should be by using any physical analogy or personal experience.

The Basis of Sonship

Just as the climax of biblical revelation is the Fatherhood of God, so our adoption as sons is the highest privilege scripture offers us.

This adoption is by far a richer relationship than a justified relationship.

Justification

Is a legal term related to the idea of acquittal. Referring to the divine act whereby God makes humans, who are sinful, acceptable in God’s presence, who is Holy and righteous, viewing God as a judge.

This does **not** imply any intimate or deep relationship.

Adoption

God’s act of making otherwise estranged human beings part of God’s created family by including them as inheritors of the riches of divine glory.

This views God as a Father and is conceived in the terms of an intimate loving family relationship.

To be right with God the judge is a great thing but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is far greater.

Romans 5:6, 8 [NIV] *“You see, at just the right time, **when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.**” ... **“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: **While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**”**”*

The wonder of our adoption is that the only potential we were exhibiting was sin and rebellion. The process of adoption was started with the death of Jesus Christ.

Luke 15:11-13 [NIV] *“Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.”*

We were all prodigals with an appalling track record, yet the Father set His Love on us.

The Definition of Sonship

John 1:18 [NIV] *“No-one has ever seen God, but God the **One and Only**, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”*

Jesus is the **only** non-created Son of God.

John 10:34 [NIV] *“Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are gods’?”*

This is no proof of humans being incarnations of the Deity.

This is a direct quote from Psalm 82:6 where the Hebrew can be just as easily translated “judges”, the root word means “power” or “authority”.

Genesis 1:27 [NIV] *“So God created man in his own **image**, in the **image of God** he created him; male and female he created them.”*

God created human beings in His own “image” [Hebrew shadow not real substance].

Both male and female reflecting the image of God.

Fatherhood in the Bible embraces motherhood.

Isaiah 49:15 [NIV] *“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!”*

God compares Himself to a mother.

A firm understanding of the reality of sonship is crucial if we are to mature spiritually.

The way we live as Christians must be controlled by our understanding of sonship.

There are four levels of sonship.

a) The perfect sonship

John 14:9-11 [NIV] *“Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? **Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.** How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that **I am in the Father and the Father is in me**; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.”*

Jesus is the only perfect example of sonship.

Hebrews 1:3 [NIV] *“**The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being**, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”*

The radiance and exact representation of the Father, no-one else will ever be in this position. **b)**

b) Potential sonship

Luke 15:11-24 [NIV] *“Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no-one gave him anything. “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. **For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.**’ So they began to celebrate.”*

This parable of the son who strayed far away from the father shows us that all humans have the possibility of return to the father.

When we do this we will be accepted into the heart and the created family of God. **c)**

c) Positional sonship

John 1:12-13 [NIV] *“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, **he gave the right to become children of God**, children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”*

We receive the right to become sons of God by our faith in Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:14 [NIV] *“because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”*

When we are led by the Holy Spirit, when we yield to His will, God looks on us as sons.

All who repent and believe in what God has done for all humanity, have the status and standing of sons of God, even if they are not aware of it.

d) Conscious and realised sonship

Sonship in the New Testament is experiential and a real condition that must control the way we live.

Philippians 2:12-16 [NIV] *“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, **for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.** Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life, in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour for nothing.”*

God working in us by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

1 John 3:1-3 [NIV] *“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But*

we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”

With the active presence of the Holy Spirit in us we are already created sons of God. Our response to such a glorious adoption by God should be stimulating in us every possible desire to reflect Jesus Christ in our lives.

As we realise who we are **now** we will gradually grasp the implications of sonship.

We will do this in the second part of this article.