

GOD'S FIRSTBORN SON

PART I "THE CHURCH"

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHURCH ONE DAY BECOMING GOD'S
FIRSTBORN SON

By Arlen L. Chirwood

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God...

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:18, 19, 22, 23).

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [*lit.*, 'a new creation']: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new [*lit.*, 'behold, he has become new,' *i.e.*, he has become a new creation] (II Cor. 5:17).

God presently has two firstborn Sons — *Christ* and *Israel* (Ex. 4:22, 23; Heb. 1:6). And He is about to bring into existence a third firstborn son — *the Church*.

Christians, because of *creation* (II Cor. 5:17), are seen in Scripture as "sons" of God, with *the adoption* yet future (Rom. 8:23). And following *the adoption of Christians*, God will have a *third firstborn son* — a corporate or national son, as Israel (*cf.* Heb. 12:23; I Peter 2:9, 10).

Only then can God's purpose for man's creation, six millenniums prior to that time, be realized.

"Sonship" portends *rulership*; only "sons" can occupy *regal positions in God's kingdom*. That's the way it has always existed in the angelic realm, prior to, at the time of, and following man's creation. And, once man had been brought into existence, for *the regal purpose* revealed at the time of his creation (Gen. 1:26-28), that's the way it had to exist in the human realm as well.

In the human realm though something additional was subsequently revealed. Not only *must* the one holding the sceptre be a *son*, but *he must also be a firstborn son*. Within the human realm, *only firstborn sons can rule in God's kingdom*.

That's why Scripture places such a heavy emphasis upon Christ not only occupying the position of *God's Son* but that of *God's Firstborn* as well.

Note how the author of Hebrews brings both to the forefront in the opening two Messianic quotations in chapter one:

"Thou art my Son...

And again, when he bringeth [*lit.*, 'And when He shall again bring'] in the firstbegotten into the world [*lit.*, 'the inhabited world']..." (v. 5a, 6a; *cf.* II Sam. 7:14).

And even in a passage such as John 3:16, attention is called to God's "only begotten Son," a direct reference to not only *Christ's Sonship* but to *His Firstborn status*.

(The statements to this effect in both the opening verses of Hebrews and John chapter three should be expected.

The opening verses of Hebrews form the manner in which the Spirit of God arranged seven Messianic quotations, introducing *the subject matter in the book*. The Holy Spirit, when He moved the author of this book to pen the recorded words, arranged these seven Messianic quotations from the Old Testament in such a manner that the One Whom God would ultimately place upon His "holy hill ['holy mountain'] of Zion" [Ps. 2:6, 7] — *His only begotten Son, His firstborn Son* [Heb. 1:5, 6] — would be brought to the forefront at the beginning, *forming the foundational basis for all which follows*.

Then, John 3:16 forms a part of Christ's discourse to Nicodemus, where the subject matter begins through referencing *the coming kingdom*, responding to Nicodemus' question about *the signs being manifested* [vv. 2-5]. "Signs" in Scripture always have to do with two inseparable things: *Israel*, and *the kingdom*. And it would be in complete keeping with the subject at hand to continue the thought portended by Nicodemus' question surrounding "signs" into the latter part of the discourse [into v. 16], which is exactly what is seen.)

Within the family relationship, Christians are referred to as both *children and sons*. And the two are closely related but are not really the same.

All Christians are referred to as "children" (Gk., *teknon*), but Scripture does not use "sons" (Gk., *huios*) in the same all-encompassing manner. Though all Christians are "sons" because of *creation*, the New Testament usage of the Greek word *huios*, referring to Christians through this means, appears only within contexts where *regality* is seen and *where Christians are seen actively progressing toward the goal set before them*. In this respect, the word is used

relative to Christians in complete keeping with that which “sonship” portends — with *rulership*.

Children, Sons

In the New Testament epistles (in both the Pauline and the general epistles), Christians are referred to as “children [*teknon*] of God” and “sons [*huios*] of God” about an equal number of times, though *teknon* and *huios* are not always translated correctly in the English text. In a correct translation, Christians are referred to as “children of God” in Rom. 8:16, 17, 21; Phil. 2:15; I John 3:1, 2, 10; 5:2. And they are referred to as “sons of God” in Rom. 8:14; Gal. 3:26; 4:6, 7; Heb. 12:5-8 (the word “sons” alone, rather than “sons of God,” is used in the latter reference; but a Father-son relationship is in view throughout, showing God dealing with Christians as *His sons*).

In all three sections of Scripture where Christians are presently referred to as “sons,” *adoption* is also in view.

In both Romans and Galatians, in the Greek text, the word *huiothesia* (the word for “adoption [‘son-placing’]”) appears in the context of the verses where Christians are referred to as “sons” (Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:5). And in Hebrews chapter twelve, adoption is seen in the context as well, though from a different perspective. It is seen following the verses referring to Christians as “sons” (in vv. 16, 17, 23 — verses forming the heart of the fifth and final major warning in the book, dealing with Esau [the firstborn] forfeiting his birthright (vv. 16, 17), extending to “the church of the firstborn [*lit.*, ‘a called out group of firstborn sons’]” (v. 23).

In the antitype of the account pertaining to Esau forfeiting his birthright (vv. 16, 17), the thought of *adoption* would have to be brought

into the picture (v. 23), for Christians must not only be sons but they must be *firstborn sons* to realize *the rights of the firstborn* which Esau in the type forfeited. And the only way Christians can be brought into this position is through *adoption* (as also seen elsewhere in Scripture where Christians are dealt with as *sons*).

(Aside from Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:5, the only other place in the New Testament where the Greek word *huiothesia* is used relative to Christians is in Eph. 1:5. And the use of this word early in the Book of Ephesians is in complete keeping with how the subject matter of the book is introduced in this first chapter — a future “redemption” and “inheritance,” in connection with the “mystery” revealed to Paul [vv. 7, 9, 11, 14, cf. 3:1-6; 4:30], to be realized “in the dispensation of the fulness of times” [v. 10]. These interrelated things *are presently being made known*, “by [‘through’] the Church,” to “the principalities and powers in heavenly places” [Satan and his angels], which accounts for the warning and instructions concerning the spiritual warfare at the close of the book [3:9-11; 6:10ff].

As in any New Testament epistle, the central subject seen in Ephesians is *not* salvation by grace, though that subject is dealt with in the book. Rather, the central subject has to do with the things seen in the opening chapter, which introduce the things about to be developed in the book — *things pertaining to Christians in relation to the coming kingdom of Christ*. And if this epistle, or any New Testament epistle, is not studied after the manner in which the epistle is introduced, the central message of the epistle will invariably be lost to the reader.)

Sons, Adoption

Thus Christians, though “sons” because of creation, are referred to as “sons” *only in sections of Scripture where adoption is in view*. Both *sonship* and *adoption* place matters within a *regal setting*; and Christians, in all

three passages where adoption is dealt with, are seen actively moving toward the goal set before them — *the adoption of sons, allowing those adopted to be brought into a realization of the rights of the firstborn*.

On the other hand, Scripture refers to Christians as “children” within a *regal setting* as well, *but not with respect to adoption*. This is *the main difference* concerning how the two words are used in the New Testament epistles. It is *sons who are adopted*, not children.

(In Rom. 8:16, 17, 21, the Greek word for “children” [*teknon*] is used in a context with the Greek word for “sons” [*huios*]. And an inheritance, an adoption, and a manifestation of sons are seen in the passage [with *huios* alone used relative to the latter two (v. 14)]. In Phil. 2:15, *teknon* appears in connection with present Christian activity, with a view to the coming day of Christ [v. 16]. And in I John 3:1, 2, 10; 5:2 the context shows the same thing as seen in Phil. 2:15, 16.

Teknon is used in these verses to depict present Christian activity, with a view to *the hope* set before Christians, *Christ’s future appearance*, and being shown as *an overcomer* in that coming day.)

Thus, there is the central distinction between the way in which “children” and “sons” are used in the New Testament. Both are used in *regal settings*, with the latter used more specifically in connection with *the rights of the firstborn*. Both can be used of Christians today; but, *only “sons” is used when adoption is in view*.

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