

## “Our Father . . . “

When Jesus was delivering the Sermon on the Mount, He gave His followers instructions how to pray. Our prayers, He taught, should be like this model: **“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by they name . . .”** (Matthew 6:9-13). Huh? God is our “Father”? No Jew, however pious at that time (or even today), would dare to call God his “Father.” No pagan ever even thought of calling the idols and gods they worshiped their “Father.” But we, followers of the living, risen Christ, have been told to call God our Father. Everything about Christianity is radical and unique.

**“We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us”** (1 Corinthians 2:12). God has, in super-awesome and infinite goodness, given us the most precious of all possible gifts. Let’s understand this: the Gospel that we hear almost every Sunday morning in our church meetings isn’t merely that we have forgiveness of sins and the assurance of eternal life in heaven when we die. Dear reader, if that’s all that the Gospel is to you, something’s very wrong. The forgiveness of sins and justification by the atoning work of Jesus at Calvary is only what God had to do *in order that* we sinful and failure-prone humans may enter into an infinitely precious relationship with the eternal Creator God. The forgiveness of sins in the Gospel message is *so that* we may be in an intimate relationship with the living God. The transcendent God, who cannot be limited to time and space, who pervades His entire creation, who created life and judges life, and who is infinitely and ineffably holy, has freely and graciously given to us the gift of adoption. Adoption! So God is our Father – if we are a disciple following Christ Jesus. *This is big.* We need to think about what Sonship in the Bible means.

The Genesis creation narrative doesn’t refer to Adam as God’s “son,” but the N.T. does (Luke 3:37). That’s because Adam was made in the image of God, in other words, Adam was created to be like God in certain ways. And in the Scriptures, as it was in biblical times, a son was expected to resemble his father. A father also had the right to be honored by his son and for the son’s obedience; a father had authority over his sons. A son had privileges that others didn’t. And sonship carried responsibilities. So, let’s understand that from Creation on, a major theme of the Bible is sonship. Let’s explore it.

At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, we read that the Persons of the Godhead are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the Trinity, the “Son” is the Son not because He came into existence from the Father at a certain point in time, but that the Son is of the very same nature as the Father. In John 3:16, we again read of God’s “Son,” the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity, who has the very same identity, will, character and nature as the Father. A son is just like his father.

The Abraham narrative in Genesis is long, but the Isaac narrative is short. Yet in many respects, the story of Isaac is not only similar to the story of Abraham, it appears to be an almost exact repeat. It’s as if Isaac is a clone of Abraham. This serves to highlight the idea that a son resembles his father and continues the work of his father.

After the Exodus from Egypt, God took the people of Israel to be His “son” (Exodus 4:22, Romans 9:4). It’s biblical, although not acknowledged by rabbis. Moses was the mediator of that relationship, because it was really an adoption (although the term “adoption” isn’t used). An adopted son has the very same rights, identity, privileges and responsibilities as a natural-born son. The people of Israel were therefore expected to (a) be personally pure, as their God is, and (b) serve God according to His will. Those are the characteristics and duties of sonship. The nation of Israel had the Creator God dwelling in their midst, protecting them, revealing Himself to them, and providing for them. That’s a privilege of sonship. Their service to God was taking the knowledge of Him to the Gentile nations on earth. That, along with displaying in their lives their God’s righteousness and being faithful to Him, is a responsibility a son has to his father.

The O.T. Scriptures were given to Israel for this great purpose: To reveal their Father’s good character and values, and to make explicit their privileges and responsibilities as His sons. And to anticipate the future advent of an obedient and faithful Son who would have the unique mission of redeeming not only a failed, fallen Israel, but the elect among the nations. That Father-son relationship necessarily means, by the way, that Israel, although now in spiritual exile (and many in literal exile) due to repeated failure of sonship, has the hope of future restoration. Israel is a nation under discipline by their heavenly Father.

God promised to David someone who would be of David yet also be as a son to God. (That’s in 2 Samuel 7:14, **“I will be his father, and he will be my son.”**) An adoption is implied. In Psalm 2, the term “Son” is used prophetically, surely anticipating the One referred to in that 2 Samuel covenant. The Psalmist’s term refers to someone who is to come who would continue the theme of sonship, but to an even greater extent or with vastly greater significance. Isaiah also anticipated this “son” (9:6), as did Daniel (7:13-14). In the New Testament, Jesus is presented as that promised Son. **“In these last days [that is, in that future time the Psalmist and prophets referred to] He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe”** (Hebrews 1:2). Jesus came to fulfill Sonship. By the way: How is Jesus of the line of David, yet He was conceived miraculously by the Holy Spirit? Adoption! David posthumously adopted Jesus as his son, so He had all the authority and rights of a natural-born son.

Jesus called himself "Son of man." Taking upon himself a human form, he identified as a human, of the line of Adam who was by creation the "son" of God. But Jesus is a 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam, a Son who is obedient to His Father and who reflects perfectly the Person of his Father. He is personally pure and righteous. He is filled with the Holy Spirit. And He is on His Father's mission to carry out His Father's will to redeem a failed Israel and a lost humanity. So He exhibits both the privileges and responsibilities of Sonship. In Matthew, Jesus also is presented as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Israel. Jesus is the Son that Israel was supposed to be, except that this Son, Jesus, doesn't fail. He is perfectly obedient despite suffering, and He reflects perfectly the lovely, good, wise and just character of the Father in heaven. He honors the Father as a son should. He called out the Pharisees (John 8:31-47) for being sons of Satan because they were not only not honoring God, as they should have, but were reflecting the character and person of the devil, a liar and a murderer. (See also 1 Samuel 2:11 in the KJV.)

Jesus is also the new Moses, a 2<sup>nd</sup> and better Moses to effect a better Exodus. He was, for example, as an infant saved from an evil pagan king; He taught as Moses did; He worked miracles as Moses did; and His face shone (at the Transfiguration) as did Moses when he came down from Mt. Sinai after being with God. In Deuteronomy 18:15-19, Moses prophesied that a new and better Moses would come whom the people would be required to obey. (There are other similarities between Moses and Jesus, but these few examples suffice.) So just as Moses mediated the adoption of the people of Israel to sonship, Jesus is the mediator of another sonship, and it's also an adoption. But this is a more stupendous one with far greater privileges and greater responsibilities.

Followers of Jesus are taken to be God's "sons." In the New Testament, this adoption is repeatedly made explicit so we don't miss it. See, for example, Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5; John 1:12 and 1 John 3:1-2. We have the same privileges and responsibilities as do all the sons in the Bible. In several letters, Paul identifies himself as the spiritual father of his converts, implying that they all had an obligation to be just like Paul. Paul repeatedly implored his readers to imitate him. A believer in Christ is an adopted son of the living God, to be personally pure as God his Father is, and to obediently carry out his Father's will. In love, we imitate the Son, our older brother, so to speak.

What are our privileges as sons of the Most High? We have, for example, the privilege of intimacy with our Father in heaven, the Creator and sovereign ruler of all. And intimacy with the Son, who loves us with an everlasting love. We have the privilege of prayer, of making our requests known with the explicit promise that He hears our prayers. We have the privilege of receiving the forgiveness of sins, and of mercy, and of help in time of need. We have the absolutely extraordinary promise of peace, **"My peace I give you, not as the world gives. In this world you will have trouble"** (John 14:27 and 16:33). That doesn't mean our lives will be comfortable and happy. This privilege gifted to us is an inner peace we can rest in even if war, violence and injustice are raging all around us.

And we have the privilege of God's own nature in us. I refer now to the gift of the Holy Spirit, the most blessed component of the Gospel message. All that the Spirit does for us is the subject of another full-length Sunday School lesson. Let's say for here that the Spirit empowers us to live responsibly, to reflect our Father's Person, and to enjoy all the privileges of Sonship. Thus the "fruit" of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, goodness, patience, gentleness and self-control, are ours so we can live here and now as sons of the living God.

More privileges: Whereas God's wrath abides on all those not in Christ, our Father in heaven has set his abiding and deep love on all His children. His love is unconditional; He loves us just as He loves His Son the Lord Jesus (John 17:23b). Our Father knows our circumstances and our needs, and we can be certain that as any father would provide for his son in need, so will our Father, according to His holy will. (See Matthew 7:9-11.) Better, in love, God will take us one day to be with Him, to forever enjoy His infinite Person and glory. We have the privilege of being justified, of being just as righteous as Jesus Himself (Romans 5 and 6), which is absolutely necessary because God is infinitely holy and we certainly are not. And we have the incredible privilege, one that'll be realized in the future, of being "partakers of the divine nature." What exactly that means is yet to be revealed, for it's probably something beyond our ability as finite mortals to grasp now. This relationship of Father/son is the purpose of the Gospel. It's the goal of salvation.

Responsibilities? As sons of the Most High we have been given commands and teachings to fulfill and tasks to do. The Holy Spirit, by grace, indwells us to empower us to carry them out. Our role is to take the Gospel message to others so that they too by faith in Christ may become sons of God. We're to do that regardless what persecution or loss or suffering comes as a consequence. We're commanded to love one another, to be united, to be forgiving and kind, and more. We're responsible to know God and to reflect His character. We're responsible to be changed persons (1 Peter 1:14), living according to Christ's teachings in the Word of God (John 12:36, for example). We're responsible to be perfect and mature, as befitting a child of the transcendent, holy God.

And if we fail? As our Father, having authority over us, God disciplines us (Hebrews 12:7-11). His discipline is not in anger but in love. Discipline is necessary because He wants us to be as He is, perfect. But His discipline is not pleasant. So, let's be faithful and responsible sons of our loving, heavenly Father.