

# OpenTheo

## The Status of Sons - Part 2

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### The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier

John Stott shows us that for us to be sons of God we must be united to Him by faith in Jesus Christ, making us God's children by adoption.

### Transcript

What is the identity of the children of God? Answer, you have to be in Christ. You have to be united to Jesus Christ by faith. And if we are united to Christ by faith, all Christian people who belong to Christ are God's children by adoption and grace.

That is the teaching of the Bible. Welcome to The Bible for Today with John Stott. There are few evangelicals who have ever influenced the global church in the 20th century as much as John Stott.

And it was very grim who called him the most respected clergyman in the world. Always remaining faithful to the word of God and unswayed by current trends, the person of Christ blazed from maybe sermon he preached. Whilst John Stott impacted the church across the world, his home church was always all souls laying in place in the heart of London's West End.

And it's from 600 sermons he preached there that were marking his centenary with some of his most powerful messages. In last week's message on what it means for us to be a child of God, we saw that although God is the creator of all mankind, this does not mean that all mankind are children of God. So this week John Stott shows us how we become a child of God through the coming into this world of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Now in distinction from these two fanatical extremes, the universalistic and the sectarian, we come back to the Scripture and to my text. And before we look at Galatians 4 and these verses, ask you to glance back at verse 26 of the previous chapter. Galatians 3 verse 26, "In Christ Jesus, you all are sons of God through faith." What is the identity of the children of God? And so you have to be in Christ.

You have to be united to Jesus Christ by faith. And if we are united to Christ by faith, all

Christian people who belong to Christ are God's children by adoption and grace. That is the teaching of the Bible.

So then after that, perhaps rather long introduction to the whole series as to why I think this subject is important, because of these confusions about the Christian life and the identity of the children of God, what we're going to do this week is to delve into this biblical doctrine of being a child of God, into this rich concept of being a Christian. And I hope we shall learn more clearly and more completely together what it means to be a Christian, to be a child of God that will make us more grateful to our heavenly Father, make our hearts sing, behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God, and that will make us more aware of our privileges and of our responsibilities. Now let me read you my text again.

Galatians 4 verse 4, let's assimilate it. Let's bring ourselves under the authority of this wonderful Scripture. Galatians 4-4, when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, say that in order that we might receive adoption as sons, because your sons, God, assent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father, say through God you're no longer a slave but a son." I'll stop there because the remaining praise of a son and an heir will be the subject of the last of our five addresses.

Now what is immediately striking to any alert reader of this text is its Trinitarian structure, its references to God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, and the wonderful way in which the three persons of the Godhead are related to our status as sons. For first we may discern here the eternal purpose of God the Father. You will notice my text begins in verse 4 when the fullness of the time had come, and that phrase the fullness of the time indicates that God had been working out a program.

And it was a program that concerned not only the centuries before Christ but the eternity which preceded the centuries of time before Christ. And the Apostle Paul has a wonderfully unified philosophy of history and of eternity. And in the previous chapter in Galatians chapter 3, the Apostle Paul has served 2,000 years of the Old Testament.

He has referred especially to God's promise to Abraham some 2,000 years before Christ and the law that God gave to Moses. And now he goes on to say that both of them look forward to Christ. Moreover all these the promise to Abraham the law to Moses the fulfillment in Christ, this 2,000 year program all this was conceived in a past eternity before the foundation of the world.

And the Apostle unfelt this in many passages of his letters. He says for example in Ephesians, "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world." That we might be blameless and holy before him in love, having predestined us in eternity to be his sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will. And if we are the sons of God today, it is because God conceived this purpose not just 3, 4, 5, 6, 10,000 years ago but

in a past eternity.

Or again he writes in Romans those whom God for knew he predestined to be conformed to the image of his son. And whom he predestined he called, whom he called he justified, whom he justified, he glorified in a future eternity. Why it's a mind stretching perspective is it not? From a past eternity to a future eternity, beginning with God's eternal purpose before the foundation of the world to make us his sons, continuing with a promise to Abraham and a law given to Moses, both of which were subservient to this eternal purpose.

And then when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his son in order to fulfill this purpose, to redeem us and that we might receive the adoption of sons. And this predestinating purpose of God worked out in history will be consummated in eternity to come when we will be conformed to the image of God's son. Jesus Christ, how longs that some of our little petty views of Christianity could be stretched to take in eternity that is past, in eternity that is to come.

You can't talk about being a child of God without thinking about eternity. God thought of it in eternity, he decided it in eternity, he's going to consummate it in eternity. And our experience of being the children of God today is a little tiny part of an eternal purpose of God.

It's wonderful, isn't it? Then we turn from the eternal purpose of God, second letter, the historic mission of God the Son. Verse 4, "When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his son." Here is the historic mission of God the Son, fulfilling the eternal purpose of God the Father. God had been working through Abraham and through Moses and through the prophets, but now he sent forth his son.

And this sending of the Son involved the incarnation, the birth of Jesus in which he took our human flesh. See what is written in the text, God sent forth his son, born of a woman. The sending forth, the historic sending forth of the Son from the Father involved his being born in loneliness of a woman.

He was sent from the Father, he was born of a woman. And he was born under the law in order that he might obey the righteousness of God's moral law. And here are the three qualities of Jesus Christ which fitted him to be the one and only mediator between God and man.

But in simple language these essential truths about Jesus are first that he was fully divine. God sent forth his son. He is God the Son.

He is fully human. He was born of a woman. And he is fully righteous.

He was under the law and obedient to the law. And these three qualities fitted him to be the only mediator there is. But he was not only born for us.

He died for us. As Paul has been arguing in the previous chapter and he was made a curse for us on the cross. And he could never have born our sin and guilt and curse unless he was divine, able to represent God, unless he was human, able to represent men, and unless he was righteous with no sin and guilt of his own.

But as it is by the death of this unique person, the perfectly righteous God man. Because of his death for us, sin and guilt on the cross, he is redeemed us from the condemnation of the law and his brought his adoption as the sons of God. And if we are the sons of God today and the daughters of God and enjoying our status, it's because of the historic mission of Jesus.

The eternal purpose of God the Father, the historic mission of God the Son. And thirdly, there is the contemporary indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God the Spirit. Very important to go on in Galatians 4 from verse 5 to verse 6. Because verse 5 says, God send forth his Son.

And verse 6 says, God send forth his Spirit. And in the Greek it is the same verb and it is in the same tense. God send forth his Son into the world and secondly, God send forth his Spirit into our hearts.

And God send forth his Son into the world in order that we might receive the adoption of sons. And God send forth his Spirit into our hearts in order that we might know it. In order that having become the sons of God by adoption, we might cry ever, further, because we're conscious of being the children of God.

And the Holy Spirit bears witness in our hearts that we are what Jesus Christ was sent into the world to make us. It's beautiful, isn't it? This wonderful unified purpose of God. And this is the privilege of every Christian believer, verse 6, because you are the sons of God.

God sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts to cry ever further. Every Son of God has the Spirit of God. Everybody who is led by the Spirit of God is a Son of God.

The gift of the indwelling Spirit in our hearts today as a contemporary experience is the privilege of every Christian. Indeed it is the distinctive mark of the true people of God. Say then here are the three persons of the eternal Trinity, cooperating to give us the immense privilege of adoption into the family of God as his sons and daughters.

The Father planned it in eternity. The Son secured it in time. The Holy Spirit bears witness to it now in our hearts from eternity to the historic mission of Christ to our contemporary experience today.

This is how the New Testament unifies the work of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the experience of being the children of God. Now verse 7. So then the consequence you see of all is tremendous theology. So then through God, through the

cooperative work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, through God, thou art.

The Greek is singular. It's very interesting how he goes from the plural that we might receive the adoption of sons or Christian people. So then, thou and thou and thou each individual Christian person is no longer a slave but a son.

It is in this contrast between being a slave and a son that poor pinpoints are privileged in the status of God's children as Christians. Could we think about this for a few moments? Of course, all of us are slaves if we're Christians in a sense, we're slaves of Christ, we're slaves of one another, we're called to serve Christ, to serve one another, but in another sense we are not slaves. But the mark of a slave is fear and the mark of a son is confidence, confidence before his father, living in his father's family and in his father's world.

That before Christ came, men and women, even the people of God were dominated by fear and were living in a kind of slavery. Paul mentions two slaveries which are still in people today, and I doubt not that there is some in the congregation who've got these fears. Some people are afraid of God.

They were afraid of God in El Testament days because they were afraid of his law which condemned them. They could not keep the high standards of the moral law, God's law, God's law condemned them, and it brought them into bondage to his just judgment, and as condemned sinners they were under the judgment of God and they were afraid. And it is a right and a healthy and a proper thing to be afraid of the judgment of God if you're not a Christian.

I wish there were more fear of God, of that kind and of the judgment of God in the secular world today. Yes, but we're not talking about them. We're talking about God's people.

We're talking about ourselves as a Christian congregation who profess and call ourselves the children of God. If we put our trust in Christ as our Savior and have received through Jesus the forgiveness of our sins and adoption into the family of God so that God is no longer our judge but our father, what business have we to be afraid of him? Is there anybody here who is afraid of God and yet you claim to be a Christian? You know many church people are afraid of God. They haven't got this liberty of confidence so that they can look God in the face and know that their sins are forgiven and that they're going to heaven when they die.

You can see it in their lives. You can see it in their good works. Many of the good works they do are in order to accumulate merit with God, not in order to serve the people in love and even sometimes they come to church, not out of the glad exuberance of gratitude and worship but because they're hoping to clock up a good mark in heaven.

They're afraid of God and they're still trying to accumulate merit. John Wesley was an outstanding example of this before his conversion and in 1729 when he founded the Holy Club you know he and his friends, they met each evening in order to revise the timetable of their lives in order that every moment of every hour of every day should have a fixed and definite duty. They started social work.

They visited the prisoners in the Oxford Castle, the prison and in the dentist prison, the Bacardi. They founded a school in the slums of Oxford. They fed and paid the teacher out of their own pockets.

They were full of good works and full of religious observances but John Wesley according to his own admission later wasn't really a Christian at all at that time. You know how he described his religion in those days looking back later referring to our text he said well it may have been the religion of slaves but it was certainly not the religion of sons. He was afraid of God trying to accumulate merit by his good works.

Don't be afraid of God. Then secondly they were afraid of evil spirits called in this passage in Galatians the elemental spirits of the universe and it's very hard for us to understand how frightened, how terrified the ancient world was of the powers of the universe which they believed ruled men's lives now conceived as the stars. There are many people still interested in that and in their horoscopes and they're just superstitious and think the stars rule their lives or they think of the impersonal evil and malevolent spirits and in the ancient world people lived in terror of the celestial powers.

Now in primitive animistic cultures today in the third world in some parts of it there are people who live in terror of the spirits and in the sophisticated west people are afraid of the dark either literally the physical dark or the dark or cult powers with which they sometimes tamper and of which they're sometimes terrified. How can we be afraid if God is our father? Is God not strong enough to be in control of these powers? Is he not God? While these powers are what Paul calls them here beings that are not gods? Does God not love us with a father's love? Are we not safe in our father's love? Has he not promised that nothing, not even the principalities and powers can ever separate us from his love? And if we are his sons and daughters how can we be afraid? Afraid of God or afraid of beings that are no gods? This was the double fear, this was the double bondage and it still is so I conclude. I beg some of you to take with you into this week as I'm going to verse 7 "Said over and over to yourself during the week, so then." It's tremendous in the Greek this consequence that is drawn so then through God.

Because of what God has done the father, the son and the Holy Spirit so then I'm no longer a slave that I should live my life in fear of God or of beings that are no gods or of human beings or of anybody or anything. So then through God I am no longer a slave that I should fear I'm a son that I should have confidence before God and live my life in exuberant joy and confidence. May God lead us into that.

This very week from day to day, let us pray. Father, Abba, Father, we thank you that we may address you thus and lift our hearts to you and know that we're your children and you're our father. We thank you that through God we are children of God.

Our minds can scarcely take in this tremendous truth. We ask that we may believe it and so lay hold of the basis upon which it is grounded your eternal purpose and your son's historic mission and your holy spirits in dwelling witness that we may believe with all our hearts that we're not slaves any longer to fear but sons to have confidence and to be without fear. Help us to live like your sons and daughters this week.

We humbly pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. You've been listening to the conclusion of a message by John Stott or what it means to be a child of God.

If you found listening to this message from the book of Galatians helpful you'll be pleased to know that John Stott also wrote a commentary on the whole of Galatians. It's just one in the popular the Bible speaks today commentary series of which there are full details on our website [premier.org.uk/JohnStott](http://premier.org.uk/JohnStott) The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing touching every level of society across the world. Today Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership.

To find out about this and other ministries John Stott founded go to [premier.org.uk/JohnStott](http://premier.org.uk/JohnStott) Join us at the same time next week for more from the Bible for today with John Stott.

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