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The Status of Sons - Part 1

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The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier

John Stott explains what is involved in being a child of God and living as God's children in the world with God as our Father.

Transcript

The Holy Spirit is a shy and a retiring spirit. And when the Holy Spirit occupies the heart of the Christian, do you know the two cries that he causes us to cry? The first is Abba, Father. And the second is Jesus is Lord.

The nobody can say Jesus is Lord except through the Holy Spirit. So when the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, he doesn't make us occupied with himself at all. He causes us to cry Abba, Father, and Jesus is Lord.

Welcome to the Bible for today with John Stott. The 20th century gave us a number of great evangelical Bible teachers, and for many, John Stott stood above them all. Perhaps no one raised the standard of biblical teaching as did Stott.

When a TV reporter once asked him, "You've had a brilliant academic career, a first at Cambridge, rector at 29, chaplain to the Queen," what's your ambition now? John replied, "To be more like Jesus." It was Jesus Christ that he made preeminent in all his teaching. Whenever he preached his home church of all souls, Langham Place, it was packed, and people even sat on the stairs. During John Stott's centenary, we are bringing you some of his finest Bible teaching from almost 60 years of ministry.

As Christians, we can appreciate what it is to have Jesus as our Savior, our Lord and friend. But perhaps it isn't as easy to think of God as being our Father. It's important to know how this makes us his children and how such a relationship comes about.

God made every one of us, so it might be said that everyone is a child of God. But as we'll see today from the book of Galatians, that isn't true. We are beginning this morning a series of addresses on this main theme that we've already considered several times this morning with God as our Father.

The purpose of the series is to portray the Christian life as the New Testament so frequently does portray it as the life of the children of God. And to try to draw out some of the major implications which the New Testament gives us as to what is involved in being a child of God and living as God's children in the world. And our first subject this morning concerns the status of sons, that with God as our Father, we have this status, this privileged status of being his sons and daughters.

Now I would ask you if you will immediately to turn to my text and then after that I want to introduce it. It's the New Testament sections of the Bible. It would be a great help if everybody could turn to it.

I think you'd find it much easier to follow if you do. And I read in the letter of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians chapter 4, beginning at verse 4. Galatians 4, 4. But when the time had fully come, literally when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into your hearts crying Abba, Father, so through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son and an heir.

Let's keep our Bible open there. We shall come to seek to expand and unfell the meaning of this text in a few minutes. But I want to introduce the subject by reminding you that this whole area of living as a son or daughter or child of God is much neglected among many Christian people today because it is much misunderstood.

And I thought it might be helpful if I referred to two common misunderstandings and confusions. The first is a confusion about the Christian life. I wonder if you would agree with me that God the Father is suffering today a kind of eclipse.

There is little doubt, I think, that he is the least popular among many Christian people of the three persons of the Trinity. For there are many Christian people today who are altogether preoccupied with either the second or the third person of the Trinity and think very little about the first. For example, there are some young people today who have embraced what they call a Jesus religion.

And indeed they term themselves Jesus people. They wear Jesus shirts, they distribute Jesus stickers, they attend Jesus celebrations, they sing Jesus songs and they shout Jesus shots. Fine, splendid, far as it goes.

The Christian religion is, to some extent, to Jesus religion. And Christianity is Christ and the Lord Jesus Christ is at the center of our faith. But these Jesus people sometimes forget that when the Lord Jesus calls people to himself, it is in order to introduce them to the Father.

The reason Jesus came into the world was to show us the Father and to bring us to the

Father so we can't stop with the Son. But then there are other people who are obsessed with the Holy Spirit and in particular with what they call the baptism of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. And these people often forget that the Holy Spirit is a very reticent spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a shy and a retiring spirit. And when the Holy Spirit occupies the heart of the Christian, do you know the two cries that he causes us to cry? The first is Abba, Father. And the second is Jesus is Lord.

The Nebedek can say Jesus is Lord except through the Holy Spirit. So when the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, he doesn't make us occupied with himself at all. He causes us to cry Abba, Father, and Jesus is Lord.

And therefore, when the Holy Spirit fills our hearts, he draws attention and best witness not to himself, but to the Fatherhood of God and to the lordship of Jesus. So you see the Christian life in the New Testament is the life of the children of God. And this word adoption, adoption of sons is an absolutely key word to understand.

Paul can sum it up in another of his letters to the Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 18, when he says through Christ and by one spirit we have access to the Father. This is the Christian life. It's access to the Father, living as his children through Jesus Christ, his son, and by the inspiration and power of the Holy Spirit.

So that is the first reason for, I think, the importance of our theme in these weeks. There is this confusion about the Christian life. Secondly, there is a confusion about the identity of the children of God.

We're talking about living as God's children in God's world and in God's church who are the children of God. And there is in the world today, very surprisingly, a couple of opposite tendencies. One I will call universalistic and the other sectarian.

The universalistic tendency is a tendency to say that since God is the Father and we've affirmed our faith in God the Father, Almighty Maker of Heaven and Earth, therefore everybody must be God's child. Now that is a frequent confusion. It's a non sequitur, of course.

To give you one example, very few days after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, President of the United States. The new President, Albie Johnson, made a strong plea in his Thanksgiving Day message to the American people that all citizens should be granted equal rights before the law. Very fine speech, very fine ideal.

But this was the basis on which he grounded his appeal. God made all of us, not some of us, in his image. That's good biblical theology, quite true.

God made all of us, not some of us, in his image. And all of us, not some of us, are his

children. It's a non sequitur.

All of us, not some of us, are God's creatures. It's what he meant to say. I hope what he ought to have said, because that is the case.

God is the creator of us all. He's made all men in his own image. And since he is the creator of all, we are all his creatures.

But we are not all the children of God. If you remember the Lord Jesus Christ on one occasion's speck to some unbelievers who were resisting his appeal, he said to them, "You are of your father the devil." Did you know that Jesus himself said that there are some people whose father is not God, but the devil? And the apostle John echoes this in his first letter. He divides mankind into the children of God and the children of the devil, and he supplies us with certain tests by which we may discern who is who.

So there you say, is a universalistic confusion that everybody is, the children of God. It's not so. The popular notion of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man is offensive.

It's not a biblical truth. It's not a Christian doctrine. There is a general brotherhood in the sense that we are all created by God.

We share a common humanity, but we do not share a common salvation through Jesus Christ unless we have come to Christ and found new life in Jesus Christ. Then you see there is an opposite tendency from the universalistic that I will call the sectarian. And many of you will have heard about one of the most disturbing sections of the so-called Jesus movement who actually call themselves the children of God, as if there were no others but themselves.

They seem to have been founded round about 1969 by David Berg in California and Texas, and the children of God are still directed, understood by David Berg's family. And the children of God have communes or colonies as they call them in a number of different countries. The children of God are an exclusivist sect.

They believe that by society and the institutional church are of the devil and that God's judgment is about to fall upon birth. So they call people to drop out of the system, whether it's the institutional system, the state and secularism, or whether it's the institutional church. They call people to renounce secular education and secular employment, to hand over all their capital and their possessions to the movement, to leave their parents and their other relatives, and even hate them in a quasi-literal sense, and to submit instead to the authoritarian discipline of the groups elders.

And this little tiny sect that numbers perhaps three or four thousand people at the most say that they are the faithful remnant and the only true uncompromising Christians who are left in the world. And that during the coming great tribulation they say they and the

Christian church will be synonymous. It's fantastic, but it's true.

That's what they're teaching and it's sectarianism. 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, I 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 these weeks 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, so that in order that we might receive adoption as sons." Because your sons, God has sent 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 phrase 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 this the previous chapter in Galatians chapter 3 the apostle Paul has surveyed 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 foreknew 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 is 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 long is it 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 secondly to the historic mission of God the son.

First, for 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 lowliness 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. You've been listening to the first part of a message by John Stott on what it means to be a child of God, which will continue at the same time next week. 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 of the hugely popular, "The Bible Speaks Today" commentary said is of which there are full details on our website, 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. Join us at the same time next week for more from The Bible for

Today with John Stott.

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(buzzing)