

## Divine Sonship

Luke 3:21-38

### (Discussion Guide on pg. 11)

In his book, *Adopted for Life*, Russel Moore shares several deeply moving experiences involving his adoption of two children from a Russian Orphanage. Concerning one of those experiences, he writes: “When Maria and I first walked into the orphanage, where we were led to the boys the Russian courts had picked out for us to adopt, we almost vomited in reaction to the stench and squalor of the place. The boys were in cribs, in the dark, lying in their own waste.

Leaving them at the end of each day was painful, but leaving them the final day, before going home to wait for the paperwork to go through, was the hardest thing either of us had ever done. Walking out of the room to prepare for the plane ride home, Maria and I could hear Maxim calling out for us and falling down in his crib, convulsing in tears. Maria shook with tears of her own. I turned around to walk back into their room, just for a minute. I placed my hand on both of their heads and said, knowing they couldn’t understand a word of English, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” I don’t think I consciously intended to cite Jesus’s words to his disciples in John 14:18; it just seemed like the only thing worth saying at the time.

When Maria and I at long last received the call that the legal process was over, and we returned to Russia to pick up our sons, we found that their transition from orphanage to family was more difficult than we had supposed. We dressed the boys in outfits our parents had bought for them. We nodded our thanks to the orphanage personnel and walked out into the sunlight, to the terror of the two boys.

They’d never seen the sun, and they’d never felt the wind. They had never heard the sound of a car door slamming or felt like they were being carried along a road at 100 miles an hour. I noticed that they were shaking and reaching back to the orphanage in the distance... I whispered to Sergei, now Timothy, ‘That place is a pit! If only you knew what’s waiting for you—a home with a mommy and a daddy who love you, grandparents and great-grandparents and cousins and

playmates and McDonald's Happy Meals!' But all they knew was the orphanage. It was squalid, but they had no other reference point. It was home.

We knew the boys had acclimated to our home, that they trusted us, when they stopped hiding food in their high chairs. They knew there would be another meal coming, and they wouldn't have to fight for the scraps. This was the new normal. They are now thoroughly Americanized, perhaps too much so, able to recognize the sound of a microwave ding from forty yards away. I still remember, though, those little hands reaching for the orphanage. And I see myself there."

Teaching about the believers' adoption into the family of God, the apostle Paul writes in Galatians 4:3: *"In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world."* In context, Paul was speaking of the prior spiritually orphan state of the Galatians before coming to saving faith in Christ. They were enslaved to the law and to sin. They had religion—they had legal guardians and rules, but they didn't have a real relationship with God the Father.

Because of false teachers, the Galatians began to wrongly believe that to be right with God, one had to keep the law of Moses, like circumcision, and other religious ordinances. As a result, like the two Russian orphans, they were looking back to their former religious practices to find security, when all that they needed was provided in their new identify in the Son of God.

To remind them of their new identity, Paul writes: *"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."* Galatians 4:4-7

As Christians, to live fully in the freedom, inheritance, and security that we have in Christ, we must know who we are and whose we are

because of the redemption that Jesus secured at the cross. And nothing speaks more to our identity in Christ than the biblical doctrine of Sonship.

**Main idea:** Christ the Son of God obeyed His Father as the Son of man (even to the point of death) so that sons and daughters of men can share in His divine Sonship.

This morning we are going to consider God the Father's verbal and audible affirmation of Jesus as His beloved Son which he uttered when Jesus came to John to be baptized. From this important event in the life of Christ before the start of His public ministry, we are going to consider three demonstrations of His divine Sonship, which should also be evident in all adopted sons and daughters of God.

### 1. **Sonship was shown by His Allegiance to the Father**

As John was proclaiming the good news in the region of Judea and baptizing all who repented of their sin and looked to God for forgiveness and salvation, Doctor Luke records: *"Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened,<sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."* Luke 3:21-22

Now the first point I want us to see is that Christ's Sonship was shown by His allegiance to the Father. We read in verse 21 that along with all the others that came to John to be baptized, Jesus was also baptized. Why did Jesus, the sinless, spotless, lamb of God submit to baptism?

Remember, doctor Luke recorded in verse 3 that John proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Again, if baptism was a sign of repentance, forgiveness, and cleansing, why did Jesus submit to baptism? You know, John the Baptist had the same question?

The gospel of Matthew records: *“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.”* Matthew 3:13-15

So, Jesus didn't submit to baptism as a sign of His repentance from sin. He knew no sin. Rather, he was baptized because He was fulfilling an act of righteousness, along with John. And by doing so he was identifying with the righteous actions of His people to the delight of His Father.

Jesus was publicly declaring His allegiance to His Father in whose sight He was being baptized. He wasn't being baptized to appear righteous before men, but to fulfill the righteousness of God, a righteousness that will be imputed to all who believe.

You see, Jesus didn't just identify with the righteous actions of His people, He also identified with sinners in that on the cross He became sin—He took the punishment of sin so that we can become the righteousness of God by faith alone in Christ alone.

Let me add also that according to 1 Peter 3:31b when we as believers get baptized, which identifies us with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, we're pledging before God our Father that in good conscience we will live the life Jesus saved us to live by His resurrection power.

Now what ought to motivate us above all else to, like Jesus, live our lives in allegiance to God the Father? According to Paul, the love of the Father displayed most supremely on the cross of Jesus, is what ought to motivate us to give our all in love to the Father. We love Him because He first loved us. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 John 4:19

Listen to what Jesus said in John 14:31a: *“But I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.”* Jesus submitted to baptism and lived a righteous life out of love for

His Father who He knew loved Him. Likewise, the more we know the love of the Father for us as His adoptive children, the more we will love Him, and the more we love Him the more we will trust and obey.

In his classic book *Knowing God*, J.I. Packard asked, “What is a Christian? The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God as Father.” But cannot this be said of every person, Christian or not? Emphatically no! The New Testament has a world vision, but it shows God as the Father, not of all, but of those who, knowing themselves to be sinners, put their trust on the Lord Jesus Christ as their divine sin bearer. Eph. 2:12-13; John 1:12

The New Testament gives us two yardsticks for measuring God’s love. The first is the cross; and the second is the gift of sonship. As the apostle John in awe declared, “*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are*” (1 John 3:1). Of all the gifts of grace, adoption is the highest. The gift of pardon for [sin] is great, [but the gift of adoption is greater].

When you realize that God has taken you from the gutter, so to speak, and made you a son [or daughter] in his own house—you, a miraculously pardoned offender, guilty, ungrateful, defiant, perverse as you were—then your sense of God’s ‘love beyond degree’ is more than words can express.”

Again, it’s knowing God’s adopting love by which we are secure in this life and forevermore, that motivates us to live our lives to bring pleasure to our Father in a way that honors His name. And the opposite is true. When we are not secure in the love of God the Father, we will not care to do His will or please Him, but instead, like orphans, we will look to the scraps of this world to find security and live our lives fending for ourselves.

As Oswald Chambers observed, “The root of all sin is the suspicion that God is not good.” But if adoption is the highest gift of God’s goodness, grace, and love, then the more we understand the

privileges of adoption, and embrace the Father's love, the more we will live a life of dependence and allegiance to Him.

Therefore, if you're struggling with overcoming the pull of the world and sin, the strength to prevail doesn't come from fixating on your struggles, but from focusing on and pursuing the love of the Father who always has your best interests at heart.

We don't obey God—we don't do acts of righteousness, like baptism, to be adopted. We obey God because He adopted us, because we are no longer orphans or slaves, but sons and daughters of God the Father who loves us with an everlasting love.

## 2. **Jesus' Sonship was shown by His Access to the Father**

Secondly, Christ's sonship is shown by His access to the Father. In addition to Jesus the Son of God submitting to baptism, before God the Father affirmed Him as His beloved Son, Jesus was also praying. Luke writes: *"Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened..."*  
Luke 3:21-22

Do you know that all four gospels record the baptism of Jesus, but Luke is the only gospel that informs us that Jesus, the Son of God was also praying. Beloved, when you know God as your loving Father, when you know that you are the son or daughter of the King of kings who has all wisdom, power, and authority, who has set His love upon you, who wants you, who delights in being your Father, you will pray without ceasing—you will praise God in the good times and cry out Abba Father in the hard times.

Recounting another moving experience concerning the adoption of his two Russian children, Russel Moore shares: "Of all the disturbing aspects of the orphanage in which we found our boys, one stands out above all the others in its horror: it was quiet. The place was filled with an eerie silence, quieter than the Library of Congress, despite the fact that there were cribs full of babies in every room. If you listened intently enough, you could hear the sound of gentle rocking—as

babies rocked themselves back and forth in their beds. They didn't cry because no one responded to their cries. So they stopped. That's dehumanizing in its horror.

The first moment I knew the boys received us, in some strange and preliminary way, was the moment we walked out of the room for the last time on that first trip. When little Maxim, now Benjamin, fell back in his crib and cried—the first time I ever heard him do it—it was because, for whatever reason, he seemed to think he'd be heard and, for whatever reason, he no longer liked the prospect of being alone in the dark.”

Similarly, when we are born again—when we are adopted into family of God through faith in Christ, the Spirit of Christ takes up residence in us to reassure us that we are not orphans anymore, that we are not alone in the dark anymore. Remember, concerning our divine adoption Paul explained: *“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” Galatians 4:7*

Brothers and sisters, as adopted beloved children of God the Father, we have immediate access to God, we have the full attention of our *Abba Father* when we cry out to Him in prayer. Abba, as you may know, is a personal and deeply intimate way that first century Jews referred to their own fathers.

When teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus gave them a pattern for prayer and encouraged them to pray persistently. But he did so not because repeating a rote prayer would get God's attention. We pray as Jesus taught us to pray not to overcome God's reluctance to answer, but to lay hold of His willingness to answer. And His willingness to answer, Jesus said, is rooted in the Fatherhood of God. In the climax of His teaching on prayer in Luke 11:13, Jesus says, *“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*

As adopted children of God, Jesus, our elder brother, who shed His blood so that we can have access to His Father as our own Father,

assures us that His ears are open to the Abba cries of His children. And He is ready to give them more than just scraps to fight over, but the greatest gift of all, Himself, His presence, His power, and His provision to meet our needs. Beloved, what should motivate us to pray is not first our needs, but that we have a Father in heaven who cares for us and knows our needs better than we do.

### 3. **Sonship was shown in the Approval of the Father**

Lastly, Jesus' Sonship was shown in the approval of the Father. After Jesus was baptized and while he was praying Luke records: *"the heavens were opened,<sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."* Luke 3:21-22

Notice that as Jesus came out of the waters of baptism in fervent prayer, Luke records three significant occurrences. We don't know exactly what Jesus was praying, but like He prayed in the garden, and throughout His earthly ministry I can assure you that His prayer was connected with fulfilling the will of His Father. And in answer to His prayer, the curtain of heaven's throne room was pulled back, the Holy Spirit manifested like a dove as He came upon Jesus, and the voice of God was heard from heaven affirming His pleasure over His beloved Son.

I want to submit to you that when we pray to our heavenly Father as Jesus taught us to pray in word, by example, and in His name, we can be assured that spiritually the curtains of heaven's throne room are open to us, that the Spirit will be available to help us, and that we will receive the greatest blessing of prayer which is to know that in and through Christ the Father is pleased with us.

Moreover, because the Father was pleased with the submission of His Son who was made in the likeness of men so that He might live the righteous life that we could not live, and taste death for every man, we can receive forgiveness of sins, be reconciled to God the Father, and live a life that pleases God through the Spirit. Like Jesus, we can know the dove like gentleness of the Spirit bearing witness with our



Spirit that we are children of God, and making us more like Jesus, who didn't come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for sinners.

Again, the greatest blessing of prayer and the greatest gift of our salvation in Christ is to know the assurance of the Father's everlasting love, and the pleasure of living to fulfill His kingdom purposes. When you know the love of the Father and the joy of living in communion with Him, you have it all.

When you know His adopting love through Christ, His approval not man's approval is all you need. You live your days on earth confidently knowing, "If you please God, it doesn't matter who you displeased. If you displease God, it doesn't matter who you please." Adrian Rogers

Now, notice also that immediately following God's public affirmation of the divine Sonship of Jesus, Luke turns to the genealogy of Christ's human sonship. And Luke begins this record of His genealogy by writing: "*Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli...*" (Luke 3:23). What's more, Luke's genealogy, which goes all the way back to the beginning, ends with God. In his final entry, Luke records, "*the son of Adam, the son of God.*" Luke 3:38

Before we consider Luke's central purpose for listing the genealogy of Jesus, it's important to note that there are some differences between Luke's record and the record that Matthew lists in his gospel account. And one of the differences is found right at the beginning of Luke's record. Luke lists Heli as Joseph's father, who was the supposed father of Jesus, while Matthew lists Jacob as Joseph's father.

Concerning the differences between the genealogies of Jesus listed in Luke and Matthew, scholars have pointed out that the reason for the difference is that Matthew is listing the actual genealogy of Joseph, whereas Luke is listing the genealogy of Mary. "This would be the case, as one commentator suggest, "if Mary had no brothers, because then her father Heli (in accordance with biblical tradition) would have legally 'adopted' Joseph as his own son and heir when Joseph

married Mary. Apparently, Matthew gives Joseph's ancestry by birth, while Luke gives it by *adoption*. The introductory phrase [in verse 23], "Jesus...being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph," may allude to this situation, the implication being that Jesus was the son of Mary, whose genealogy then follows." Hughes

I find this plausible explanation astonishing, especially in light of the fact that we are heirs with Christ because through Him we've been adopted into the family of God and our spiritually children of Abraham and partakers of His covenant promises (Galatians 3:7). But besides the strong probability that Luke recorded the genealogy of Mary through adoption, the more significant point of this genealogy is that it ends by indicating that Adam was the son of God.

What is the significance of this? Kent Hughes explains: "As the first man, Adam can be referred to as "the son of God." But Jesus, the eternal Son of God, has become part of the human family and its flawed sonship (flawed because of Adam's disobedience). The great thing about this is that Jesus exercises his perfect, eternal Sonship as he takes on Adam's (and our) flawed sonship—and therefore he can redeem it. Paul put it this way: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. . . . Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:22, 45). And again in Romans 5:17, "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ."

Beloved, at the baptism of Jesus God the Father was pleased with His Son not simply because He submitted to John's baptism, but because He was submitted to His redemptive plans to bring many sons into the glory of His inheritance through suffering (Hebrews 2:10). "He was pleased that the failed, flawed children of the first Adam would be redeemed by the blood of the flawless, triumphant second Adam." Hughes

## Conclusion

If you've received Jesus as Savior and Lord, you've been adopted into the family of God. And because you are an adopted son and daughter of God, as Paul explained in Galatians 4, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying Abba! Father! You are no longer a slave, but a son. And do you know that the reason Paul wrote you are a son and didn't also add daughter, is because in his culture sons not daughters had the right to their father's inheritance. But in God's upside-down Kingdom the daughters are heirs along with sons, along with the Son of God. We are heirs together with Christ.

We will struggle in our Christian lives when we lose sight of our identity in Christ, of who we are and whose we are in Christ. We will look back to the scraps of the orphanage rather than resting in the security of our Father's adopting love.

If that's you, don't fixate on your struggle, but focus on your new identity as a child of the King. The more you know His love, the more you will gladly give your full allegiance to Him, the more you will see your access to God the Father as your greatest asset, and securely live only for His approval to the glory of His name.

## Discussion Questions

*Read Luke 3:21-22 and Galatians 4:3-7.* Why is it vital to our Christian walk and maturity to fully understand and rest in our identity in Christ?

- In view of God the Father's verbal and audible affirmation of being pleased with His beloved son, what was the purpose of Jesus' baptism? What should be the motivation for believers' baptism today? (1 Peter 3:31b)
- Why was Jesus praying as He came up from the waters of baptism?

- What were the three things that occurred after Jesus was baptized and Luke's statement that Jesus was also praying? How can those 3 occurrences spiritually apply to adopted sons and daughters of God? What do they say about our inheritance in the Son of God?

*Read Luke 3:23-38.* Immediately following God the Father's affirmation of Jesus's divine sonship, Luke gives a record of Jesus' ancestry which speaks to His human sonship. What is the significance of Luke showing the genealogy of Jesus?

- Why are there differences between the genealogy listed in Luke and Matthew's gospels?
- Do you believe that much of our struggle to live the Christian life has to do with an identity crisis? If this is so, how can we overcome the temptation to look to the world and former life to find security and satisfaction?
- Do you struggle with insecurity? How can we be more secure through Jesus?