

# To Be Like Jesus

Biblical Theology of Sonship

# Introduction

- Why is a proper understanding of sonship so important?
- What is the difference between Jesus as the son of God and the believer as the son of God?
- In his famous book [Knowing God](#), J. I. Packer writes, “If you want to find out how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity at all.”
- A Christian is one who has been adopted by God—brought into the family of God, all by the Son of God. And this changes everything.
- To better understand just how precious it is to be a “son of God,” we need to pay attention to the Bible, especially as we see the theme of sonship unfold.

# Sonship in the OT

- Today, people determine sonship by DNA or other technological means.
- Sonship is not established by paternity in the Old Testament. The overwhelming majority of sons in the ancient world ended up doing vocationally what their fathers did and girls ended up doing vocationally what their mothers did.
- So, if your father is a baker, you end up with the overwhelming likelihood in becoming a baker. If your father is a farmer, you become a farmer. If your father is a candlestick maker, you become a candlestick maker. And, thus, sonship is bound up, in part, with family identity and vocation.
- That is why Jesus is often referred to as the son of a carpenter ([Matthew 13:55](#)) and that is because he is identified as belonging to the Joseph family.
- And in one remarkable passage in [Mark 6:3](#) he is referred to as the “carpenter.” Apparently, Joseph has died and Jesus, for a period of time before he entered his public ministry, took over the family business.

# Believers as Sons of God

- The Bible often uses the term “son” in metaphorical ways to denote a wide range of meanings.
- For example, if somebody calls you a son of another person (e.g., Johnson), he is saying that you act so much like your father.
- Jesus, likewise, says in the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” ([Matthew 5:9](#)), literally—not children of God— “sons of God,” referring to both men and women, of course.
- The metaphor itself is powerful. What it is saying is that God is the supreme peacemaker and, insofar as we are making peace, we show ourselves to belong to God’s family.

# Believers as Sons of God

- The metaphor is not talking about ontology. It is talking about what a believer looks like when we act like God or Jesus.
- Being a peacemaker is just one of the ways of saying that is that you are a son or a child of God.
- Believers are called sons of “**children of Abraham**” ([Gal 3:7](#)).
- Who is the true son of Abraham? The true son of Abraham is the one who lives out the faith of Abraham, not the one who has Abraham’s genes ([cf. Rom 4:1-25](#)).
- And that explains quite a lot of passages in the New Testament that we sometimes glance over and don’t integrate into our thinking.

# Jesus the Son of God

- The Bible applies the title “Son of God” to Jesus in various ways
- **The True Israel:** Israel is called God’s son: “**Out of Egypt I called my son**” ([Hos 11:1](#)), referring to failures of their exodus experience.
- Jesus is also “called” out of Egypt, as the true unfailing Israel: “**And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt I called my son’**” ([Matt 2:15](#))
- The nation was tested and tempted during the 40 years in the wilderness. But Jesus is tested and tempted during 40 days and nights in the wilderness, but he proved to be the true Son of God ([Matt 4:1-11](#)).
- “The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread’” ([Matt 4:3](#))

# Jesus the Son of God

- **The True Davidic King:** As with other kings in David's line, when Solomon ascends to the throne, God declares, "I will be his father, and he will be my son" ([2 Sam 7:14](#)).
- In that same passage, God promises to David (ca. 1000 BC) an unending dynasty ([2 Sam 7:16](#)):
- "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."
- Less than three centuries later, Isaiah foresees a king "on David's throne" whose "government and peace" will never end and who will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" ([Isa 9:6-7](#)).
- Other passages identify this coming Davidic king as "Messiah."

# Jesus the Son of God

- Mark's gospel begins by announcing "Jesus Christ [i.e., Messiah referring to the Davidic king], the Son of God" ([Mk 1:1](#)).
- This is confirmed almost immediately at the baptism of Jesus, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" ([Mk 1:11](#)).



# Jesus the Son of God

- **The Unique Son**, One with the Father: NT writers find different way to distinguish Jesus' sonship from ours.
- In Pauline epistles, believers become sons/children of God by adoption: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the spirit of sonship" (Rom 8:15).
- Yet the same thing is never said of Jesus.
- It is John who repeatedly insists that Jesus is the "one and only Son" ([Jn 1:18; 3:16](#)).
- While believers are called sons/children of God, because we act like God (e.g., making peace, loving our enemies, reigning in David's line), only Jesus is the perfect Son of God.
- Jesus says "because whatever the Father does the Son also does" ([Jn 5:19](#)). Later he says, "I and the Father are one" ([Jn 10:30](#)). Jesus is God.

# Theological Significance of Sonship

- Likewise, it is important to think how we Christians are sons of God.
- In one sense, this is the result of the new birth, something working within us. That is another whole theme that needs separate development.
- But in the climactic scene of the Bible, in Revelation 21–22, we are told that the “overcomer”—the Christian who perseveres to the end—will be called God’s son because he or she has persevered to the end.
- Thus, “He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son” ([Revelation 21:7](#)).

# Theological Significance of Sonship

- In this context, the “son of God” metaphor is appropriate because the Christian will be so much like Christ in that he or she is no longer subject to sin, death, corruption, decay, or rebellion.
- As a result, he is thus called “son of God”—whether men or women called sons of God—because they reflect God as perfectly as finite human beings made in the image of God can.
- There is no taint. There is no sign of death or decay. Their reflection of God is as perfect as it is possible for a finite human being to reflect the infinite God.

# Conclusion

- Thus, the notions of sonship, even though they begin with a certain kind of emphasis on functionality and replicating the behaviour of one's Father.
- However, this eventually develops into the most profound theology and the most demanding ethics as we worship the true Son of God, in order that we may on the last day be so transformed by the gospel in glorification that we act perfectly as sons of God in a way that we measure up to only very imperfectly until Jesus returns.
- Christianity is never just about *hearing* the word of God, but *doing* the word of God, because that is what *being* a son of God is all about

# Discipleship Pointers

- Consider how the teaching on sonship challenges your growth in Christian discipleship. Name some examples.
- Rev 21:7 claims that only the one who overcomes—i.e., perseveres to the end—will be called God's son.
- What must you do in order to persevere in Christian faith and practice?