



A Question of Sonship

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What does the Bible mean when it refers to Jesus as “the Son of God”? The significance of this title of Christ has been a matter of serious debate among Christians. The most basic understanding is that the incarnated Lord was born of the virgin Mary to be called the Son of God (Luke 1:32; 1 John 5:18). In sharing my understanding of the topic, I hope to motivate your continued study.

1. Son(s) of God: In the Old Testament the phrase “son(s)/children of God” designates three types of persons. *The heavenly beings* who met with the Lord in the divine council are called “the angels” (Heb., “sons of God,” Job 1:6; 2:1).¹ At the moment of creation we are told that “all the angels [Heb., “sons of God”] shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). *The people of God are called* “the children of the Lord your God” (Deut. 14:1; see also Hosea 2:1; Isa. 45:11). They became God’s children through creation and redemption (Ex. 4:22, 23). Finally, the *Israelite king* was called the “Son of God” (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:14). God appointed the king as “my firstborn” (Ps. 89:27; cf. Ps. 2:7). In these cases the word “son” is used figuratively. Heavenly beings are sons of God through creation; the people of God are God’s children through creation and redemption; and the king becomes a son of God through his appointment as king. In the Bible God does not have children through natural conception and birth.

2. Eternal Sonship of Christ: Christ is the eternal Son of God. Paul wrote that “when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4). Christ was the Son of God before He was born of a woman. Through the preexistent Son, God “made the universe” (Heb. 1:2). However, the sonship of Christ is unique. Believers are spiritually born of God as children of God, but the Son is never described as being spiritually born of God; He is the Son, who came directly from the Father (John 16:28). He has life in Himself and is one with the Father in will (John 14:31; 15:10), character (John 14:8-11), purpose (John 15:16; 16:15; 17:4-8), and nature (John 8:58). Yet He is a different person. We are dealing with a metaphorical use of the word “son.”

3. *Metaphorical Significance*: In our humanity the image of a child conveys some obvious ideas. *First*, it indicates that a child is of the same nature as that of the parents; they are human beings. When Christ is called “Son of God,” we are being told that He, like the Father, is a divine being (John 5:18). *Second*, a child is distinguishable from their parents. The metaphor of sonship means that although Christ and the Father have the same nature, they are different persons, implying a plurality of persons within the Godhead. *Third*, the relationship between parents and children is unique. Their union is practically indissoluble. The metaphor is therefore a good symbol for the deep unity that exists within the members of the Godhead (John 17:5). *Fourth*, a human child comes from its parents through natural birth. In the case of the Godhead, however, the Son proceeded from the Father, not as a divine emanation or through natural birth, but to perform a work of creation and redemption (John 8:42; 16:28). There is no biblical support for the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. The Son came from God but was not generated by Him. *Fifth*, the father-son image cannot be literally applied to the divine Father-Son relationship within the Godhead. The Son is not the natural, literal Son of the Father. A natural child has a beginning, while within the Godhead the Son is eternal. The term “Son” is used metaphorically when applied to the Godhead. It conveys the ideas of distinction of persons within the Godhead and the equality of nature in the context of an eternal, loving relationship.

Ellen White wrote: “The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father.”² This statement summarizes the main purpose of the metaphor.

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²Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958, 1980), book 1, p. 247.

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