



SONSHIP • A BIBLE STUDY SERIES

What Is Sonship?

SESSION ONE

Halifax Christian Fellowship • August 9, 2026

OPENING PRAYER

It is the Lord who is at our right hand. It is the Lord who has taught us to build and to war, to build with one hand and to hold a weapon with the other. So, Lord, we thank You and bless You, for You have made it right for us to be here; You have made it possible for us to be here. For truly, unto the Lord shall the guardian of the people be.

We praise You and love You and adore You, again and again. Praise be unto Your holy name, Almighty God, Father of spirits, the Lord God of the holy prophets. It is to You that all flesh will bow, for they will come from the north and the south, the east and the west, and they will gather at Your table and say with one voice, “Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Your ways, Thou King of the saints.” So we honour You and worship You in the church of the living God.

Lord, stir up our spirits; let there be a deposit of Your strength, of Your power. Draw us nearer. Give us a peace that surpasses our understanding. In the name of Jesus, we look to You. We worship You in the highest place, Almighty God.

Heavenly Father, we thank You once again for bringing us here, and we thank You for Your word coming to us. We pray that as we hear it, it would encourage us and lift us up, drawing us closer to You, to live a life pleasing in Your sight, because we are adopted now to belong to the family of God, no longer rebels but children of God, sons of the living God. We give You praise and glory. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

SECTION 1

The Framework of Sonship

JOHN 1:12-13

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

We thank God for bringing us to this moment, where we begin the first session of our Bible-study series on sonship. It is a word we are well acquainted with; anyone who has been around church circles will have heard it. And if you have not, if you are hearing it for the first time, what a blessing. We thank God to have you as part of this teaching.

Being born again is a profound experience, and it underscores our entire journey of being reconciled to God. It is the turning point in the life of every believer. But it is more than a speech we make or a confession we say once. Being born again brings us into a new state of being, in which we now live between two realms.

Before we were born again, we lived in this present world and were of it, the old creation, dead in our sins by default. But being born again makes us believers; and a believer, by definition, is one who believes in Jesus Christ and has experienced the new birth. Now you live between two realms: this present world, which is characterised by evil, and the world to come, which is characterised by righteousness. While we are in this world, we are no longer of it. We have received a new-creation man, a new spirit; and it is in this that we have obtained the right to become the sons of God, the children of God.

This “right to become” is the process by which we now actively engage in repentance and in the work of sanctification, growing in the grace of our Lord

Jesus Christ. To receive Him is what makes us believers; and having received Him, we obtain the right to become children of God. So we are children of God, and we are becoming children of God, we are growing in that state of being.

When you were born into this world, you were born of blood and of the will of the flesh, a man and a woman decided to come together, and you were born of the will of man. You celebrate that each year on your birthday. As a baby you were fed, and you grew into a natural man, independent; and some go on to have children of their own by the will of the flesh. But now we are born again, not by the will of the flesh or of man, but by the will of God, and we have it as a duty to grow, to become mature sons of God. This is the heart of sonship: obtaining the right to become children of God.

SECTION 2

Our Plan, and Our Five Lenses

In this series we will move through a line of sons, each one pointing to Christ. Today we look at the framework, what sonship is, and the words for articulating this work of God. We will define sonship as Scripture defines it: predicated on covenant and relationship, not on feeling. We will look at some of the root words, so we can understand more concretely what it means to be a son of God. And we will trace sonship from Adam to Israel to David to the King to Christ to us, the church, and on to glory, from glory to glory.

Most importantly, we will come to know our place. You cannot know who you are until you have known who God is. In knowing Christ, we know who we are: our purpose, and what our time in this world is about, for His glory.

Through every session we will draw depth using five lenses. Historically, we ask when and where an event took place, and we see that faith stands on real events. Anthropologically, we ask what the rest of the world was doing at that time, and we see God at work on the world stage, involved in His grand plan for the whole human race. Theologically, we ask what this teaches us about God, so that we can build sound doctrine as we go. Christologically, we ask how this points to Jesus, for the goal is to see Christ on every page of Scripture. And prophetically, we ask what is the type and the anti-type, so that we see God's design across the ages.

Scripture can only be understood as we see Christ. Without Him, the Scriptures are opaque to us.

LUKE 24:27

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

There is no light in Scripture except the light of the Lord's day, and the Lord's day is none other than Christ. This is the Lord's great day, and it is marvellous in our sight, Jesus revealed in us and through us forever.

SECTION 3

A Timeline of Sons

Throughout the ages we see a timeline of sons. One line runs from Eden to the new creation, and the line points to Christ. God spoke through many sons, and at last He has spoken to us in His Son, for the purpose of bringing us to glory.

We see the progression: from Adam in Eden, to the covenant at Mount Moriah, to Israel chosen as a nation. In each we see the covenant of election showing itself along the timeline. David was chosen from the back side of the desert, tending sheep, unseen, not expected to be seen or heard, and right there God chose him. Then Christ, the monogenēs, the only begotten of the Father; and then us, the church: from many, made one in Christ. And finally the New Jerusalem, the new creation, where the church is made perfect and brought into perfect union with Christ. That is the goal of sonship: to be brought into oneness with Jesus Christ.

SECTION 4

Sonship Among the Nations

God did not reveal sonship in a vacuum. The nations around Israel had their own ideas of divine sonship, and seeing the contrast makes God's gift to Israel very clear.

In Egypt, Pharaoh was held to be the bodily son of the sun-god, a god-king. But to Israel, sonship is a covenant gift, never a god-man. In Mesopotamia, Babylon, the Chaldeans, the gods were said to choose and adopt the king to rule; but God's revelation to Israel shows Him adopting a whole people, not one ruler. The whole nation is adopted to be children of God. Among the Canaanites, sonship was thought to come by blood from fertility gods; but Scripture shows sonship coming by grace and by calling. And in Greece and Rome, heroes and emperors were held to be sons of the gods.

When they came to kill Polycarp of Smyrna for confessing that Jesus is Lord, they demanded he say, "Caesar is Kyrios, Caesar is Lord." Polycarp replied, "Iēsous Kyrios, Jesus is Lord." And he was martyred for it. For sonship is not

heroes and emperors; it is legal adoption by receiving the gospel of grace. We do not climb up to sonship, God brings sonship down to us by grace.

The nations tied sonship to power, to blood, to myth. But the God of Israel ties it to covenant, to love, and to grace. The nations longed for a divine king who would set the world right, and God answers that longing with a Son who is the true King.

ISAIAH 9:6

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

SECTION 5

Rome, and the Meaning of Adoption

Paul wrote to a Roman world under one peace, the Pax Romana. Roman law made adoption a binding act. When a child was adopted in Rome, they received four things: a new name, a new father, a clean slate (former debts cancelled), and full rights of inheritance, sometimes even above natural sons.

We see this in a famous adopted son, Octavian. Julius Caesar adopted him, and he became Caesar Augustus, the emperor of Rome at the very time of the incarnation, when Jesus came into the world.

Into this world God sent His Son, to buy our freedom and to place us as sons. And the price was a heavy one: the price of blood and suffering. Christ purchased for us rights and an inheritance that are in God.

GALATIANS 4:4-5

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

That is the anthropological picture, what was happening in the world at the time these critical events took place.

SECTION 6

Five Kinds of Sonship

Now the theological perspective. Scripture calls many people “sons of God,” and these must not be confused, for each is true in the sense in which it is spoken. Christ is Son by nature; we become sons by grace, because He is the Son. Holding the different kinds of sonship clearly lets us see the true counsel of God more beautifully. There are five.

One, By Creation

God made us in His image, so our first sonship comes by creation, not by choice or merit.

GENESIS 1:26-27

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion...” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

The takeaway: we carry dignity, since we bear God's image; and we carry duty, since a son answers to his father, and every person we meet bears that same image. Much of the suffering in the world is a loss of this dignity and duty, a disconnect from our first identity. Depression, anxiety, fear, and much human wickedness flow from that disconnect. If your first identity were sonship by evolution, you would belong to the universe, and the universe would not care whether you are happy, a distant, indifferent god. But our sonship is by creation: made by God, for God, and to God. Sin marred this image in us, but Christ is the image of the invisible God, and He is restoring in us what Adam lost, shaping us to look like the true Son.

COLOSSIANS 1:15

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Two, By Nation and Covenant

God chose a whole nation, Israel, and called that nation His firstborn son.

EXODUS 4:22-23

Thus says the LORD: "Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me."

HOSEA 11:1

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.

The basis of this sonship is election and covenant, not blood or worth; and a son exists to serve and worship his Father. Privilege carries purpose: God set

Israel free so that the son could serve Him. Grace always calls us into obedience. Yet the son failed in the wilderness, turning to idols and rebellion. But Jesus is the true Israel, God called Him out of Egypt too. Where the nation failed, the Son obeyed.

MATTHEW 2:15

“Out of Egypt I called My Son.”

Three, By Royal Office

God promised David a son who would sit on his throne, and bound Himself as Father to the king.

2 SAMUEL 7:14

I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.

PSALM 2:7

I will declare the decree: the LORD has said to Me, “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.”

The king stood for God before the people. The son who came physically and sat on the throne was Solomon, but Solomon went after other gods, the kingdom was torn in two, and in time the nation was carried away. No president or ruler of Israel today is a direct descendant of David. So this office was always pointing beyond Solomon to Christ, the Son by royal decree, who sits on the throne of David. Hebrews applies both royal verses to Jesus.

HEBREWS 1:5

For to which of the angels did He ever say: “You are My Son, today I have begotten You”? And again: “I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son”?

God did not lie to David: his throne is an everlasting throne, and his Son reigns on it forever. The throne of Christ is called the throne of David, and of the increase of His kingdom there shall be no end.

Four, By Eternal Generation

Christ is Son from eternity to eternity. He shares the Father’s nature, and one word marks Him apart: *monogenēs*, the only begotten. This kind of sonship belongs to Christ alone, which is why He alone can bring many sons to glory.

JOHN 1:14

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

From now on, when we see “sonship” in Scripture, we must not read it first as being about us. The word is about Christ. We find ourselves only as we see Christ in God; the more we see Him, the more we see who we are, for we are nothing apart from Him. Jesus is not the best of many sons, He is God the Son, the exact expression of God, and we worship Him.

HEBREWS 1:3

Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

His sonship is by eternal generation; He remains the one and only begotten Son, one in divine nature with the Father. In Him all fullness dwells, and we are complete only in Him, brought into the estate of sonship, because Jesus Himself is the estate of sonship.

Five, By Adoption and New Birth

We were slaves to sin, and God took us out and placed us in His family as sons. Adoption is a legal act, by grace, through faith; and it is the Spirit who moves us to cry, “Abba, Father.” When Jesus was on earth, He was the first to call God “Abba”; and we who have come into Christ now cry, with Him, “Abba, Father.” This is why, when we pray, we begin, “Our Father.”

ROMANS 8:14–17

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

So we are no longer slaves. We hold a settled place and a sure inheritance. We do not earn the welcome; we rest in it. Sonship is not something you earn, it is something you rest in.

SECTION 7

A Word About Rank: “Firstborn”

There are several words for “son” in Hebrew: ben, belonging to the family, a son or descendant; banim, sons, children; bekor, firstborn; and bene elohim, sons of God. Consider bekor, “firstborn.” It points not to birth order but to rank. God called David His firstborn; He called Israel His firstborn; and He calls Christ the firstborn, and Christ is the true Firstborn. David and Israel were only pointing to Him.

So Christ is first in rank over all, and the first to rise from the dead, and this is one of the anchors of our worship. One of the ways our sonship is perfected is through death and resurrection; this is the heart of the kingdom message: from suffering to glory. Christ suffered, died, and rose again; and because He lives, we can face tomorrow, and all our fear is gone.

SECTION 8

From Suffering to Glory

The work of Christ and the person of Christ are what we are taken up into; from Him we derive our identity, even the meaning of what we are going through now must be drawn from the pattern of Christ. He is the patterned Son. As Richard Baxter said, “Christ leads us to no darker rooms than He went through Himself; and he that unto God’s kingdom comes must enter by that door.”

PHILIPPIANS 3:10

...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings...

To know Christ is to know who we are. The fellowship of His sufferings,

worked out in our experience, is how we come to ponder the power of His resurrection. And that resurrection power is moving in us today, giving us victory over sin, over the flesh, and over the devil.

SECTION 9

Resting in His Love

We do not earn sonship. We rest in it.

We are not trying to live as sons; we live as sons, free from fear. Our adoption rests on His sonship. Because He is the Son, our adoption is perfect, so we rest in His sonship. Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us: He has given us His sonship, Jesus, the only begotten. The eternal Son became a brother to us; we are joint heirs with Christ. He is the Firstborn, and He shares His Father, His name, and His inheritance. And because He sits on the throne of God, we will sit with Him, united to God, one with God.

So sonship does not mean adoption. Sonship is the estate of Christ in God; our adoption is only made possible by the sonship of Jesus Christ. Our adoption rests on His sonship.

ZEPHANIAH 3:17

The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.

We will rest in His love, and He will rejoice over us with singing. We do not earn sonship; we rest in it.

REFLECTIONS & DISCUSSION

A cleaned account of the conversation that followed, with participants kept anonymous.

Several of us admitted the same thing afterward: we had always thought of sonship as being about us, about who we are. And this first session made us stop and ask, “Wait, have we been getting it wrong all along?” Because as it was laid out, our identity is derived from Christ being the Son. Sonship is Christ, the only begotten, whom we worship; our adoption is built on that framework, already set.

One person put words to a burden many of us carry: so much of church life becomes trying to “work out” our sonship, striving to be a proper son of God, as if we were under a rock. But if the idea is to rest in it, then the weight lifts: I just need to rest in it.

Think of it this way. A father can tell his son, “Be a better son”, meaning, walk in good character. But in terms of placement, there is nothing the child can do to become more his son. He is already set: “That’s my boy.” If a child lives trying to win his father’s approval, he ends up with all kinds of anxiety. But if he simply knows that he is set, that his father loves him, he can rest, and even begin to enjoy the benefits of belonging. We will rest in His love, and He will rejoice over us with singing.

One of us recalled a word received years earlier: that you could set out to walk from one city to another to try to prove your love for God, and it would never be enough, there is nothing you can do in your own strength to earn the Father’s love. If anything, it is a waste of time, because the Father already loves you. So we simply remain in that place, and dwell in the estate of His

love.

That is where we landed together: the intention of the Lord from the very beginning has been that we would see ourselves in the light of Christ, deriving our identity from His sonship. Sonship is Christ; our adoption rests on Him. We do not strive to make it, we rest in it.

CLOSING PRAYER

Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us, that we should become sons of God. We did not earn it; we rest in His love. So we say: I do not care what the enemy suggests, I will rest in His love, because He loves me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

We will stop here for now and continue in the next session, still on “What is sonship?”, completing the theological perspective, and moving on to see Christ at the centre. We thank God for His word. To Him be praise and glory.