

Sonship

Lesson One

John 1:12 ~ But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right (**exousia**, authority, right, liberty; ability, capability) to become children of God

Romans 8:15 ~ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

The goal of this lesson is to help us grow in attaining a deep confidence and understanding of the nature of our relationship to God, to one another and to the broken world around us, as sons and daughters of the Most High God, who have been chosen by God, by grace, to become the agents of his righteousness and healing in every area of brokenness in this world through our union with Christ and the promised power of the Holy Spirit.

- A. The confidence of being sons and daughters of God includes having a deep sense and knowledge of our freedom: freedom from the kingdom of darkness in all its lies, deceptions and emptiness, and freedom to be restored as the very image of God in this world

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed," John 8:36

1. Freedom because we are Sons -- not Orphans

- Freedom from fear of abandonment by God [*John 14:15-21; Hebrews 2:10-18*]

Orphans are on their own; often fearful and insecure and equally often over-compensating by a manipulative distrust of others; trying to gain for themselves the basic securities of life that a loving parent would normally provide.

When we live in this world and approach any issue or set of relationships as if we are spiritual orphans, we lose the confident freedom of knowing and seeing the loving hand of our Father provide our needs, direct our steps and fulfill his kingdom purposes. In place of that confident trust, we can be driven to anxiety, self-protection and our old, customary idols.

- Freedom to openly relate to God as a loving Father who is going to bring our "sonship" to full expression [*Gen 6:1-4 cf Psalm 82:1-8; John 10:31-38 cf Luke 4:18-20; Rom 8:28-29; Eph 1:3-6*]

The sonship God is committed to bringing to expression in us is rooted in bringing righteousness and compassion (love), in a humble walk with God to this broken and hurting world. The true “sons” are those who image God, and Jesus our older brother, in their goodness. This is the manifestation of the glory of God. God is relentlessly, faithfully committed to maturing us into the dignity of being his image bearers in this world.

2. Freedom because we are Sons in a family -- not isolated individuals

- Freedom from fear of abandonment or isolation from others, either because of past or current sins [*Eph 2:11-22 cf 1 Peter 2:9,10, 1 John 1:1-4; Galatians 3:26-29; Phil 2:1ff*]

The hyper-individualism of our culture is actually the old lie of the deceiver in Genesis 3:4-5 that our greatest good is wrapped in our greatest, individual self-expression, totally independent from God and by extension, independent from others.

When we relate to one another in the church as a group of individuals each seeking our own greatest good (even the things we refer to as “my ministry”), we undermine the very image of God in us as “male and female” (Gen 1:27) that is meant to reflect the goodness and glory of the Trinity as one God (unity) in three persons (diversity).

The more we focus on ourselves, the more isolated we feel from others, and the more we miss the value of the diversity of gifting and insights and help that we absolutely need from others.

- Freedom to completely embrace one another, celebrating and benefiting from the diversity of God’s gifting [*2 Cor 5: 14-19; 1 Cor 12:12ff*]

The pain, the injustice, the betrayal and the brokenness of sin in our relationship to one another (Gen 3:12ff) that turn our hearts to condemnation of others and turn our differences into points of division, are all healed in the work of Christ on the cross. It is here that the wrath of God against each of us, as well as our hostility against one another is forgiven and healed (Eph 2:13-16).

We are not simply sons and daughters in a spiritual sense in our relationship with God; we are sons and daughters in a real, living, human family of God’s people who are bound together across all racial, ethnic, tribal and class lines of division. Together we

are each gifted to complement one another as we seek together to fulfill God's purposes of bringing his love and righteousness to this world.

3. Freedom because we are Sons by grace -- not by works of the Law

- Freedom from a guilty conscience and condemnation in our present struggle with sin

One of the most basic points of wrestle and insecurity in the Christian life can be self-condemnation because of the ongoing presence of sin (I John 3:19-24); and it is one of the greatest areas of attack from Satan, the "accuser of the brothers" (Rev 12:10).

The remedy is to not falsely judge, measure and condemn ourselves by a standard of perfection in keeping some external guidelines of the law we attach central importance to. Instead, we need to freely recognize we are sinners who never have been able to keep the heart of the law based on our own efforts, and the only hope for us is for God to freely work in us, through faith in Christ and the gift of the Spirit what we could never produce on our own (Romans 8:1-4).

The "works of the law" were not caring for the poor; helping the widow and orphan; feeding the hungry; taking in the stranger; loving your enemies – but a simplistic externalizing of the law that left sinful injustice intact and self-justified.

- Freedom to deal honestly with our sin in a context of grace and to ask for the Spirit's power to become the expression of God's righteousness in this world [*Luke 11:5-13; Galatians 3:1-5; I John 1:5-10; Romans 6:12-14*]

One of the greatest freedoms of the Christian life is the freedom to no longer live in denial about our sinful tendencies, but to know that our sure hope for change and growth is found in repentance, faith and the gift of the Spirit. Gal 5:16-25

4. Freedom because we are Sons - not slaves in bondage to the injustice of others

- Freedom from fear of slavery to either the unrighteous systems, or the personal bondage to sin that once enslaved us [*John 8:31-38; Gal 4:4-6; Rom 8:12-16*]

The constant references to slavery-bondage-freedom throughout the New Testament, no doubt, have a background reference to the slavery-bondage-freedom issues of Israel's experiences in Egypt.

While a crucial part of the application of this freedom is to our personal bondage to sin, there is also an undeniable reference to the application of these truths to the bondage that injustice in the systems of the world can impose on us, whether through evil dictators, oppressive employers (masters) or oppressive spouses (husbands, almost exclusively in the NT context). The message of the gospel is that we are ultimately free because God's redeeming love cannot be defeated, and our willingness to righteously suffer will be redemptive in the lives of our oppressors, even as it was redemptive in the life of Christ (1 Pet 3:13-22).

- Freedom to boldly love this world and enter into the sufferings of Christ because the Lord, Messiah is on his throne [*Rom 8:15-16; Phil 1:27-30; Col 1:24-25*]

In all our relationships, as sons and daughters, we are free to embrace the hardship of dealing with a broken world because of God's commitment to ultimate healing and setting all things right.

5. Freedom because we are Sons who are heirs of the world – not servants of futility

- Freedom from futility that our labors are in vain [*Mt 5:5 Rom 4:13; 8:18-25; 1 Cor 15:12-28, 58*]

Because this is God's world (Psalm 24:1) and because he created the physical world as good (Gen 1) and because he created us as physical-spiritual beings (Gen 2:7), his intention is that our labors in making his love known, both spiritually and physically, will not be wasted. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is God's ultimate stamp of eternal commitment, not just to our bodies, but to the redemption of the physical universe (Col 1:15ff). Our labors of love, healing, restoration and compassion -- our physical/spiritual labors -- are not in vain because all the nations of this world and the very creation itself will become the eternal home of God's people.

- Freedom to boldly enter into the sufferings of Christ as the means of expressing God's love because our inheritance is secure [*Rom 5:1-5; 2 Peter 2:11-18; Phil 2:4-11*]

B. The Context of Our Sonship: the reconciliation of all things under the headship of Christ

Shalom; Peace; Grace; Restoration; Healing; Righteousness; Justice; Compassion; Humility

1. God setting all things "right" -- the reversal of the curse of Genesis 3; Col 1:3-23

- Between us and God
- Between us and each other
- Between us and creation
- Between us and our "self"

2. The basis of the confidence of our sonship: faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone

-- versus the hindrances that lead to insecurity, fear and doubt [*Romans 8:28-30*]

- Predestination: confidence that God's goodness and glory in Christ over us, in us and through us will come to expression, despite the obstacles and opposition of evil and brokenness in this world, because God has predetermined the outcome of every difficulty we face as a gift in Christ [*Eph 1:11-4*]

-- versus fear that something will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ [*Rom 8:29-39*]

- Calling: God's agenda to be his agents of righteousness and reconciliation in this world as a gift in Christ [*2 Cor 5:14-21; Rom 1:5-6*]

-- versus the insecurity and fear that arise from seeking a god to fulfill our own agenda, which in turns leads to fear of others, fear of suffering and the brokenness of creation in Christ, as a gift, by faith [*1 Tim 6:1-10*]

- Justification: things set right (righteous) in every area as a gift in Christ [*Col 1:15-23*]
-- versus the insecurity and fear of building a record of self-righteousness based on keeping a limited number of outward, external, religious signs of righteousness [*Gal 3:10-14, cf 5:2, Col 2:16-23; Isa 1:10-18; Matt 23:23-26, cf Mark 12:38-40*]

- Sanctification: his faithful work to make us holy as a gift versus living under the fear and insecurity that our real wrestle with sin will stop the process [*Phil 1:6-11, 3:7-11; I John 1:5-2:6; Heb 4:14-16*]

- Glorification: the guaranteed inheritance of all things versus the insecurity and fear that we must grab after self-protection to ensure our inheritance [*Gen 3 versus Phil 2:1-11*]

Heirs with Christ as a gift

- The Spirit and the Father: both the power from God as a gift and the relationship with God that is necessary to see this through as a gift in Christ [*John 16*]

- Family status as a gift in Christ [*Gal 3:26-29*]