

Revisiting "Sonship"

John R Gavazzoni

Very shortly after coming to Christ as a teenager, I found that I had, on one hand, the desire to fit into and be accepted by the church of my early mentoring, even trying to accept unquestioningly their claim to know what "the Bible says," but on the other hand, I rather soon found that I couldn't suppress a healthy skepticism toward their insistence of having the truth pretty well nailed down. I was pretty sure I could see at least some holes in their doctrinal assumptions.

(By the way, be aware that there is among Christian leadership, what the psychologist would call, "the adaptive child." The kind of leader who will never, in any serious way, break rank with what his group has determined to be the best version of the truth. You can only advance spiritually so far with that kind of leadership.)

Back to my story: I had joined a fairly representative congregation of the fundamentalist, independent Bible church movement-branch of the contemporary empirical church of that day. I had come to Christ in the midst of a genuine revival that swept through our city, especially impacting young people. The congregation that I had joined had been part of that revival.

There was, for a time, a wonderful, pristine spiritual dynamic that energized a network of youth fellowship that came to center in an inter-denominational weekly Saturday youth rally sponsored by several churches, including the one to which I belonged. In fact, the rally was the brainchild of my pastor who provided most of the adult leadership.

He was a man who genuinely loved us kids.

When say that I came to Christ in the midst of revival, I mean it. There were times as we would gather on those Saturdays when the atmosphere would fairly crackle with presence of God. I have looked back and realized that, though there was no charismatic movement in those days, and we were not at all "pentecostal," the same atmosphere prevailed when we came together, as I came to experience when I became involved in "Pentecost" and the Charismatic Movement.

But as time went on, my theological skepticism grew and became more intelligent. The independent, Bible Church fundamentalism of my early mentoring seemed more and more inconsistent with the essence of my experience of Christ.

I share this life-passage with my readers as classically representative of what would become almost a way of life for me; joining up with some grouping of believers who I would soon discover was claiming a corner on the truth; claiming more than they ought to.

I won't belabor the point by going into all the details of how the above syndrome repeated itself several times with several groups over the last 50 plus years. Lest you misunderstand, in nearly every instance, I did not leave in a huff because I hadn't found the perfect church. I went to great pains to try stay, yet "be myself."

What nearly always happened was that "they" either made it clear that I had worn out my welcome by thinking outside their box, or they went so far as to announce publicly that I was demon-infested and a danger to the congregation. I remember one time expressing my dismay about this repeated, very tearing feature of my life during an intimate time of fellowship with several close brethren. The man who had become a spiritual father to me, quite unlike his usual manner, very tersely said to me, "What did you expect? That's the reward of a prophet."

Now, I find myself, nearly a septuagenarian, thinking, "Oh, oh, the signs are appearing again." I'm finding myself questioning some rather basic assumptions held by the majority of those who had come to think of me as one of them, and who have opened their doors to our ministry.

I will say, though, that the last time I "let my hair down" and challenged the status quo definition of what could be called a revelation-distinctive of our tradition (yeah, I've got to call it that), the openness of hearts was deeply gratifying, indicating that something is happening in other hearts besides my own in such matters.

Let me make one thing very clear, I have always been intensely averse to "majoring on the minors," but when a focus of Christian expectation has a seriously flawed element, I must speak out. Specifically, in this case, I'm talking about the particular expectation regarding the "revealing of the sons of God," as has been held by brethren associated with a move of God, most often referred to as "latter rain and/or manifest sonship," or the message of "kingdom-sonship."

Up front, before I challenge certain assumptions, I simply must acknowledge the tremendous turn in the direction of the mark of the true gospel of Christ, and with many, the full universal scope of salvation in Christ, and the nature of the administration of God that the Lord has accomplished among my brethren, through this move that began in 1948 and continues to this very day.

Through this company of believers, possibly more than any others, serious attention has been focused on the restoration-constitution of the gospel and the centrality of the revealing of the sons of God being intrinsic to the deliverance of all creation from its bondage to decay.

The perversion of the gospel as a message having to do with the possibility of "shunning hell, and gaining heaven" has been dealt a telling blow. Many, many thousands, even, I dare say, millions of Christians have come to repent of accepting a heaven or hell context in which to understand the Divine Nature, and have come to understand that Jesus, indeed, is Lord, and that His lordship means that "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it," and that the kingdom element of the gospel lies at its very heart.

We have come to see that the grace of God, the gospel of Christ, and the power of God, are not about saving people from an imaginary eternal pit, and getting them to heaven, but about all creation enjoying the rule of a King who is Love. The gospel is the good news that death has been defeated for ALL men, and ALL creation will be infused with the glory of God because of the perfect work of the Father through His Son(s).

But a subtle spin has been put on the grand theme of "the revealing of the sons of God" proclaimed by Paul, as recorded in Romans 8:19-21 (please read it again). Allow me to explain what I mean by a subtle spin, by asking a question or two. First: Who are these sons of God, by whom God shall deliver all creation?

Are they--- as many have come to believe and are inclined to maintain inflexibly and unyieldingly---a select "company" of sons within the family of God, who will, at the close of this age, emerging out of the larger community of saints, and possessing, by some definition, a level of spiritual maturity distinguishing them from the rest of their brethren, be a final, elite, divine instrument for the fulfillment of nature's divine destiny?

Brethren, listen to me; while I hold dear the hope of the deliverance of creation from corruption by it's participation in the freedom of the glory of the sons of God, I no longer hold to the particular spin put upon that truth as explained above. Let's return to the question, who are the sons of God of whom Paul writes? Well, dear ones, in a word, they are the children of God, grown up.

They are the children of God (all of them) fully grown up, not relatively, but absolutely to that goal of maturity that can only be attained when "we ALL attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to A mature Man (singular)(emphases, mine), to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ."

You see, the measure of maturity required to deliver creation is not a maturity relative to all lesser maturity, it is the absolute maturity which is "measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. (Eph. 4;13 NAS). This is the final maturity of the whole body of Christ grown up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the WHOLE body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (vs.16).

This colossus of God is a corporate body comprised of every child of God, fully matured by the life of Christ within, and that life is a life with a quality of unity consisting of the Son of God's faith in, and knowledge of, the Father. The unity of the body of Christ, is the unity of the Father and Son, marked by the Son's complete dependence on the Father, based upon His knowledge of the Father's love-nature and the absolute faithfulness that is rooted in that love. It is the very unity of the Godhead, of Deity Itself.

The New Testament admits to no maturity that stand on its own, that is not interdependent. All spiritual maturity is interdependent. All spiritual maturity draws from the life and members of the whole body of Christ. Whenever any one or several members advance in maturity to some degree beyond all the members, it is because the life of the body has, at that stage, required a maturity on the part of that member, or those members, toward the larger and final, absolute maturity of the whole body.

Has it occurred to many of my readers, that for one, or a few, to make some relative advance, it is required that others be slower than they, for the relative immaturity of some spurs the advance of others. This is a divine principle. Haven't you noticed that stubbornness and resistance to further light, has the effect upon the ones sharing the greater light, of causing their roots to sink deeper into the truth the others are, for a moment, rejecting. What would you "mature" ones do without the weak and opposing brethren?

Conversely, the slower are dependent upon the more advanced if they are to mature, and the roles can, at any time, become reversed. But in respect to that absolute maturity that is "the measure of the stature that belongs to the fulness of Christ," until we ALL attain to that unqualified maturity, ALL penultimate maturity, though advanced by comparison to that of some others, is not sufficient to be that by which God shall "fill all things." (vs.10b).

We have failed to connect Romans with Ephesians. Only the One New Man (Eph. 2:15), complete, will be up to the task of filling all things with the fulness of God.

If I have at least influenced you a little to revisit, to rethink "sonship," may I apply just a little more pressure and encourage you to ask the

question, "How great is the number of children who will grow up to be sons revealing in themselves the glory of God?"

How large is the family of which they are members? Hear the word of the Lord, church: It is as large as the family of man. To conceive of the family of God as being smaller than the family of man, is to, in some measure, miss what the family of God is all about.

We will turn again to our brother, Paul, as he reveals his understanding regarding that childhood out from which sonship has been coming, is coming and will continue to come unto consummation. If the sons of God are the children of God grown up into an absolute, corporate maturity, the question arises, who are the children of God?

Paul's answer is that all men are the children of God, and he is very precise in His wording. We have the record of the breadth of Paul's understanding of the family of God recorded in Acts 17:28,29. In his address to the religiously and philosophically-inclined Athenians who gathered regularly at the Areopagus, he declares all men to be God's kin, God's offspring.

Yep, that's the word he used. Look it up in Strong's Concordance #1085:

"Genos." The root of the word, to which Dr. Strong refers us, reinforces the truth that we are kin of God, His offspring, for he refers us to a Greek word meaning "generated," "caused to be."

Paul could have easily chosen a Greek word indicating only physical creation, but he did not. He specifically called upon a word to convey generation, kinship, same-species birth. We are all the offspring of God, the fruit of His loins. In the aeion, we return to that Being in which we have our being by REgeneration. We become in the aeion, what we are from eternity. This is the nature of the aeionian administration of God, to reproduce in time---in the face of the lie that seeks to separate us from our Father---what is true of us from eternity.

So the conclusion is that nothing less than the totality of humanity will finally manifestly comprise the body of Christ, the family of God, the

one new Man, the sons of God. What presently appears as the body of Christ and the family of God, is only representative of that final, universal family that all creation is waiting upon to lead it to glory.

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