

LIVING FOR GOD IN AN

UPSIDE

A STUDY IN THE EPISTLE OF I JOHN

DOWN

WORLD

*Christ
Baptist
Church*

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Lesson 8
**“Benefits of
Sonship”**

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There is a number of appellations applied to Israel in the Scriptures, many of which indicate a “relationship” with the nation.

- ▶ Israel is the **daughter of Zion** (D.O.Z) speaking of her in a loving, caring relationship with God.
 - ✓ *Daughter* implies that God is a loving father, Who cherishes and loves His people, even while they reject Him.
 - ✓ Usually in prophecy and once in poetry, “Zion” meant Jerusalem and, later, Israel as the people of God.
 - ✓ **II Kings 19:21** D.O.Z is a people confident in the deliverance of their God. When Assyria threatened Jerusalem, God sent Isaiah to reassure Hezekiah their threatening was insult and personal affront to “the virgin daughter of Zion.”
- ▶ Israel is called **Jeshurun** (upright one; blessed and beloved one—Deut. 32:15) is **poetical name** for the people of Israel, used in token of affection, meaning, “the dear upright people”
 - ✓ The association of “beloved” suggests the election of Israel to a divine mission

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- ▶ Jacob my servant (Isa. 41:8; 44:2) – how seemingly oxymoronic is Jehovah’s declaration that the trickster (Ya’aqōb--heel catcher; supplanter) is “my servant”
 - ✓ “But now listen, **Jacob**, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen. This is what the Lord says—He who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, **Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun**, whom I have chosen.”
- ▶ Israel is called children (Gen. 36:21) thus implying descendance from an ancestor
 - ✓ **Deut. 14:1** Ye *are* the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead.
 - ✓ **II Kings 17:34** “To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the Lord, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment which the Lord had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel.
- ▶ Israel is called son/ firstborn son
 - ✓ **Exd. 4:22-23** And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel *is* my son, *even* my firstborn: ²³And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, *even* thy firstborn.

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✓ **Jer. 31:20** *Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child?* for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD

DAUGHTER, SERVANT, SON/ FIRSTBORN SON are all references to relational connectedness where there is a replication of the nature of the Father (“sameness of nature.”)

Judaism repeatedly stressed that God knew the hearts of all people (Jer. 29:23) and most assuredly He would know the hearts of His progeny.

This “**sonship motif**” is an important biblical theme which is often overlooked by Christians as we focus simply on our grace laden relationship with God.

When we hear the expression, ***son of God***, we think of Jesus (as we should), but we forget that the **first *son of God*** mentioned in Scripture is the nation of Israel.

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The privileges afforded to the nation are outlined in **Romans 9:2-5** *“My heart is filled with **bitter sorrow and unending grief** ³for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be **willing to be forever cursed**—cut off from Christ!—**if that would save them.** ⁴They are the **people of Israel, chosen to be God’s adopted children.** God revealed his glory to them. He **made covenants** with them and **gave them his law.** He gave **them the privilege of worshiping him and receiving his wonderful promises.** ⁵Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and **Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.**(NLT)*

- The text delineates two Israeli privileges in Romans 9:4 (a) “They are Israelites” and (b) They were adopted

God adopted Israel as His son at Mt. Sinai when He gave Israel the law and they officially became adopted children when He constituted them as a nation at Mt. Sinai.

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It was common for ancient Near Eastern nations to boast of having a father-son relationship with their gods.

- Most ancient religions believed that the gods bore their sons through some companion
- They considered themselves to be the “natural” born sons of their particular god(s)
- We must announce that Jesus is the only Son of God **by nature** and not **by grace**
- **You and I are adopted children** by the grace of God through faith (Eph.2:8)

In the Heidelberg Catechism of the Reformed Church (used by Presbyterians and standard of Westminster Catechism), there is a summary of the major Scriptural teachings in one hundred and twenty-nine memorable questions and answers; we find in Question 33:

Question 33. Why is Christ called the “only begotten Son” of God, since we are also the children of God?

Answer: Because Christ alone is the eternal and natural Son of God; but we are children adopted of God, by grace, for his sake.

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Thus, for Israel and the Church, the Father-son prism provides the religious and cultural context in which Israel entered into relationship with God.

- I repeat they entered into this relationship through adoption (Exd. 4:22; **Hosea 11:1; Rom. 9:4**)
- **Hosea 11:1-7** “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols” (v. 1–2).

This passage reveals God’s heart toward His covenant people, lamenting their turn from Him to the Baals and other idols.

As a whole, Israel clearly failed in its calling to worship and serve the Lord; and yet as God has made His honor dependent on transforming Israel into a holy nation (Gen. 15; Ex. 32:1–14; I Sam. 12:22), He had to keep this promise in some way.

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Consequently, there would be a new exodus of a new Israel (Covenant people; The Church) which would fulfill God's purposes, and this new Israel would have continuity with the old.

But since even the holiest saint does not possess the righteousness the Lord demands, the outworking of His plans for this new Israel would take on a new form.

The NT says that this all happened in Christ, who is Himself the new Israel, and who makes all who trust in Him alone, ethnic Jew and Gentile alike, into true Israelites.

In Romans 11:11–24 Paul compares Israel to the natural branches of a cultivated olive tree and the Gentile believers to the branches of a wild olive tree.

The natural branches (Israel) were broken off, and the wild branches (Gentiles) were grafted in (verse 17). The Gentiles, then, have been made partakers of the promises and inherit the blessings of God's salvation.

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Paul anticipated a question that could arise among his Gentile readers: “I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?” (Rom. 11:1)—Gentile believers would be tempted to dismiss Israel because it **appeared they would never recover**.

Even today, there are those who advocate **super-sessionism** or **replacement theology**, which holds that the Church has completely *replaced* Israel and will inherit the promises to be fulfilled only in a *spiritual* sense.

According to this view, ethnic Israel is forever excluded from the promises—the Jews will not literally inherit the Promised Land.

- What then would happen to Israel?
- What about the OT prophecies that Israel as a nation would repent and be re-gathered to the land in the last days as a permanent possession (Deut. 30:1-10)

Romans 11 conclusively shows Gentile believers that **God is not yet “done” with Israel**, who has only *temporarily* lost the privilege of representing God as His people.

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Since “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (11:29), “all Israel will be saved” in order to fulfill God’s covenant with ethnic Israel (11:25–28), including the promise of land inheritance.

While the “natural branches” were cut off because Israel failed, God’s purposes are not complete until Israel is also grafted back into the people of God to share in the promises to Abraham and his seed.

This brings full circle God’s larger redemptive plan (Rom. 11:30-36) for both Jews and Gentiles as distinct populations within the people of God.

Indeed, the prophets saw this Kingdom as the “final form” of the olive tree, so that Israel—reversing roles—would then bless the Gentiles, enabling them to join the people of God (Zech 8:13, 20-23).

Although Israel was not a “natural” son of God, they were not to demean their adoptive sonship or consider it a second-class sonship in any way.

- Rather, the nation was to cherish and value its adoptive sonship.

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- They were not to look at the sonship status of the other nations and think of theirs as somehow inferior because they were adopted.
- In other words, Israel's adoptive sonship was not to be viewed negatively at all.

Given this religious and cultural context, it is significant that God tells Moses to go to Pharaoh to inform him that Israel is His *firstborn* son (Exd. 4:22).

The blessings of the firstborn are significant: (a) They grow up with a **special destiny**, (b) They are thrust into the **role of trailblazers and leader** succession rights, (c) They **represent the future hope** of the family's name, and (d) They are also regarded as the **first heirs of the family**.

To understand what is going on here, one would need to correlate the Jewish concept of being the first-born son with the stature of Israel as God's first-born.

- The first-born son received a double portion of the inheritance (Gen. 25:25 Deut. 21:17)
- He was considered the favored one of God.

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- Israel is never called God's one and only son, but Israel, like all of us, is adopted as God's special son
- As God chose Jacob as the first-born over Esau even when he was not naturally the first-born – thus implying all nations have the opportunity to be adopted to favored status
 - ✓ **John 3:16** "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

God's declaration to Pharaoh from His representative, was followed by Moses' warning that God would kill Pharaoh's *firstborn* son if he refused to let Israel go (Exd.4:23).

Here's why this is significant: God treated His adopted son, Israel, as if he were the *firstborn* son; i.e., God did not treat Israel as if Israel's sonship were inferior.

The implicit message of Exodus 4:22-23 is that **Israel was the same to God** as Pharaoh's firstborn son was to him.

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And it is clear from Moses' words to Pharaoh that it was God's great pleasure to give His adopted son all the rights and privileges enjoyed by a firstborn son.

God's Father-son love was demonstrated for Israel not only through His deliverance from their affliction in Egypt, but also through His unfailing care for them in the wilderness.

Israel's subsequent history was a display of God's deep love for His son, despite their deplorable behavior and lack of trust, God continued to providentially deliver and guide them.

The NT teaches us that God was so committed to Israel, His adopted son, that He sent His natural Son to deliver him (i.e. Israel) from his habitual sin and prodigal unfaithfulness.

Jesus, God's natural Son, became a curse for God's adopted son so that He could redeem him (Gal. 4:13-14).

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God the Father, laid the responsibility on the shoulders of His natural Son to bring His unfaithful son back to Him

- Thus He, the natural Son succeeded doing the Father's will where His adopted son failed

So, the Old and New Testament together elevate the status of “adopted child” by showing God's unswerving commitment to Israel, the son He adopted.

There are many who are opposed to calling a child who has been adopted an “**adopted child,**” but this theological truth of the adopted is a declaration of worthiness

- Adoption does not make us second-class members of the family

Rather, the “**adopted child**” has **identity**, whereas “**child who was adopted**” simply relates a historical fact about how the child entered the family.

Where do you and I stand – consider **Ephesians. 1:5-6** “Having **predestined us to adoption as sons** by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

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Son-ship affords us the ability to discern the validity of any and all truths that present themselves as valid when they are contrary to the nature of the Father.

In I John 4, we are going to deal with the theme of love for the third time, and its not because John has exhausted his ideas and need to repeat himself.

Rather, the Holy Spirit, Who inspired John to write, is moving us into a deeper understanding of what is entailed in the love of God.

- **1st** love for the brethren shows as **proof of fellowship with God** (I John 2:7–11)
 - ☐ This proof is a **matter of light and darkness** (*he that hates his brother walks in darkness*)
- **2nd** it has been presented as **proof of sonship** (I John 3:10–14).
 - ☐ This proof is a matter of life and death (*passed from death unto life*)
 - ☐ In the earlier passage, love for the brethren is a matter of light or darkness; in the second it is a matter of life or death.
- **3rd** love is a valid test of our fellowship and sonship. (I John 4:7-16)
 - ☐ Love is part of the very being and nature of God and is the test of our spiritual life

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One uses a compass to help determine his course, because a compass shows the same direction to everyone who uses it.

- It always shows which way is North and which is South because of the magnetic influence
- As the compass is responsive to the nature of the earth, so should we be to that of God

If the nature of God is love, anyone who is in fellowship and sonship with God, there ought to be a resemblance of His nature in everything we think, say, and do.

- As naturally as the compass functions, so naturally should we evidence unforced love

Three times, in this section, John encourages us to love one another (1 John 4:7, 11–12). He supports these admonitions by giving us three foundational facts about God.

I. Who God Is: “God Is Love” (1 John 4:7–8) -- None of these is a *complete* revelation of God, for all of Who is he is past finding out.

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- John has already informed us that **God is light** (I John 1:5)
 - ❑ This refers to His holy nature for in the Bible, light is a **symbol of holiness** and **darkness is a symbol of sin** (John 3:18–21; 1 John 1:5–10).
 - ❑ God cannot sin because He is holy and because we have been born into His family, we have received His holy nature (I Peter 1:14–16; II Peter 1:4).
- Later we will review that **God is love** (I John 4:7-21)
 - ❑ Contrary to Euclid’s axiom, this does *not* mean that “love is God.”
 - ❑ And the fact that two people “love each other” does not mean that their love is necessarily holy.
 - ❑ It has accurately been said that “love does not define God, but God defines love.”
 - ❑ God is love and light; therefore, His love is a *holy* love, and His holiness is expressed in love.
 - ❑ All that God *does* express all that God *is* and even His judgments are measured out in love and mercy (Lam. 3:22–23).
 - And in I John 4 he tells us that **God is spirit** (11 times in Ch. 4 and 4 times in Ch. 5)

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- ☐ *God is spirit* speaks to His essence; for He is not flesh and blood.
- ☐ To be sure, Jesus Christ now has a glorified body in heaven, and one day we shall have bodies like His body.
- ☐ But being by nature spirit, God is not limited by time and space

II. What God has already done: “He Sent His Son” (I John 4:9–11)

- Since love is an action word and because God is love, He communicates His love, not only in words but in deeds.
- True love is never static or inactive and God is always busy on behalf of mankind
- He has purposed that all of creation works to the meeting of the needs of mankind
- Until man’s sin brought creation under bondage, man had a perfect home in which to love and serve God.
- In the Bible we witness the love of God being manifest in so many ways:
 - 1) In the **way He dealt with the nation of Israel**—Deut. 7:7-8 “The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people. But because the Lord loved you ... hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand.”

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- 2) The greatest expression of God's love is **in the death of His Son – Rom. 5:8**
“But God demonstrates (manifested KJV) His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
- The word *manifested* means “to come out in the open, to be made public.”
 - It is the opposite of “to hide, to make secret.”
 - Under the Old Covenant, God was hidden behind the shadows of ritual and ceremony (Heb. 10:1)
 - But in Jesus Christ “the life was manifested” (I John 1:2). “He that hath seen Me,” said Jesus, “hath seen the Father” (John 14:9)

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