

## SON OF GOD,

1. Use of Title in the Synoptists
2. Meanings in the Old Testament
3. Sense as Applied to Jesus
4. Physical Reason
5. Alleged Equivalence to "Messiah"--Personal Sense Implied
6. Higher Use by Jesus Himself
7. The "Son" in Matthew 11:27
8. The "Son" in Mark 13:32
9. The "Son" in Matthew 28:18-20
10. Apostolic Doctrine:  
Deity Affirmed
11. The Fourth Gospel:  
Deity, Preexistence, etc.

## LITERATURE

1. Use of Title in the Synoptists:

While the title "the Son of man" is always, except once, applied by Jesus to Himself, "the Son of God" is never applied by Jesus to Himself in the Synoptists. When, however, it is applied to Him by others, He accepts it in such a way as to assert His claim to it. Now and then He Himself employs the abbreviated form, "the Son," with the same intention; and He often speaks of God as "the Father" or "my Father" or "my Father who is in heaven" in such a manner as to betray the consciousness that He is the Son of God.

2. Meanings in the Old Testament:

While to the common mind "the Son of man" is a title designating the human side of our Lord's person, "the Son of God" seems as obviously to indicate the divine side. But scholarship cannot take this for granted; and, indeed, it requires only a hasty glance at the facts to bring this home even to the general reader, because in Scripture the title is bestowed on a variety of persons for a variety of reasons.

1, it is applied to angels, as when in [Job 2:1](#) it is said that "the sons of God came to present themselves before Yahweh"; they may be so called because they are the creatures of God's hands or because, as spiritual beings, they resemble God, who is a spirit.

2, in [Luke 3:38](#) it is applied to the first man; and from the parable of the Prodigal Son it may be argued that it is applicable to all men.

3, it is applied to the Hebrew nation, as when, in [Exodus 4:22](#), Yahweh says to Pharaoh, "Israel is my son, my first-born," the reason being that Israel was the object of Yahweh's special love and gracious choice. Fourthly, it is applied to the kings of Israel, as representatives of the chosen nation. Thus, in [2 Samuel 7:14](#), Yahweh says of Solomon, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son"; and,

in [Psalms 2:7](#), the coronation of a king is announced in an oracle from heaven, which says, "Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee." Finally, in the New Testament, the title is applied to all saints, as in [John 1:12](#), "But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name." When the title has such a range of application, it is obvious that the Divinity of Christ cannot be inferred from the mere fact that it is applied to Him.

### 3. Sense as Applied to Jesus:

It is natural to assume that its use in application to Jesus is derived from one or other of its Old Testament uses; and the one almost universally fixed upon by modern scholarship as that from which it was derived is the fourth mentioned above--that to the Jewish kings. Indeed, it is frequently asserted that in the Jewish literature between the Old Testament and the New Testament, it is found already coined as a title for the Messianic king; but the instances quoted by Dalman and others in proof of this are far from satisfactory.

### 4. Physical Reason:

When we come to examine its use in the New Testament as applied by others to Jesus, the facts are far from simple, and it is not applied in a uniform sense. In [Luke 1:35](#), the following reason for its use is given, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee:

Wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God." This is a physical reason, akin to that on account of which the angels or the first man received the title; but it is rather curious that this point of view does not seem to be adopted elsewhere, unless it be in the exclamation of the centurion at the foot of the cross, "Truly this was the Son of God" ([Matthew 27:54](#)). As a pagan this soldier might be thinking of Jesus as one of those heroes, born of human mothers but divine fathers, of whom the mythology of his country had so much to tell (compare the margin).

### 5. Alleged Equivalence to Messiah--Personal Sense Implied:

#### (1) Baptism, Temptation.

It has been contended, not without plausibility, that for Jesus Himself the source of the title may have been the employment of it in the voice from heaven at His Baptism, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" ([Matthew 3:17](#)). By these words, it is usually assumed, He was designated as the Messiah; but in the adjective "beloved," and the words "in whom I am well pleased," there is something personal, beyond the merely official recognition.

The same may be said of the voice from heaven in the scene of the Transfiguration. Milton, in *Paradise Regained*, makes Satan become aware of the voice from heaven at the Baptism; but this is also implied in the terms with which he approached Him in the Temptation in the wilderness, "If thou art the Son of God" ([Matthew 4:3](#), etc.); and, if this was the sense in which the prince of devils made use of the phrase, we may conclude that in the mouths of the demoniacs who hailed Jesus by the same title it must have had the same meaning.

#### (2) At Caesarea Philippi.

When, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus evoked from the Twelve their great confession, this is given by two of the synoptists in the simple form, "Thou art the Christ" ([Mark 8:29](#); [Luke 9:20](#)); but Mt adds, "the Son of the living God" ([Matthew 16:16](#)). It is frequently said that Hebrew parallelism compels us to regard these words as a mere equivalent for "Messiah." But this is not the nature of parallelism, which generally includes in the second of the parallel terms something in excess of what is expressed

in the first; it would be quite in accordance with the nature of parallelism if the second term supplied the reason for the first. That is to say, Jesus was the Messiah because He was the Son of God.

### (3) Trial before Sanhedrin.

There is another passage where it is frequently contended that "the Christ" and "the Son of God" must be exactly parallel, but a close examination suggests the reverse. In the account of the ecclesiastical trial in the Gospel of Lk, He is charged, "If thou art the Christ, tell us"; and, when He replies, "If I tell you, ye will not believe:

and if I ask you, ye will not answer. But from henceforth shall the Son of man be seated at the right hand of the power of God," they all say, "Art thou then the Son of God?" and, when He replies in the affirmative, they require no further witness ([Luke 22:67-71](#)), Matthew informing us that the high priest hereupon rent his garments, and they all agreed that He had spoken blasphemy and was worthy of death ([Matthew 26:65](#)).

The usual assumption is that the second question, "Art thou .... the Son of God?" implies no more than the first, "Art thou the Christ?"; but is not the scene much more intelligible if the boldness of His answer to the first question suggested that He was making a still higher claim than to be the Christ, and that their second question applied to this? It was when Jesus affirmed this also that their angry astonishment knew no bounds, and their sentence was immediate and capital. It may be questioned whether it was blasphemy merely to claim to be the Messiah; but it was rank and undeniable blasphemy to claim to be the Son of God. This recalls the statement in [John 5:18](#), "The Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only brake the sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God"; to which may be added ([John 10:33](#)), "The Jews answered him, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God."

### 6. Higher Use by Jesus Himself:

Naturally it is with the words of Jesus Himself on this subject that we are most concerned. He speaks of God as His Father, and to the disciples He speaks of God as their Father; but He never speaks to them of God as their common Father:

what He says is, "My Father and your Father" ([John 20:17](#)). H. J. Holtzmann and others have attempted to make light of this, and even to speak of the opening words of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven," as if Jesus might have uttered them in company with the disciples; but the distinction is a vital one, and we do not agree with those who can believe that Jesus could have uttered, for Himself along with others, the whole of the Lord's Prayer, including the petition, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

### 7. The "Son" in Matthew 11:27:

Of the passages in the Synoptists where Jesus speaks about God as "the Father" and Himself as "the Son," a peculiar solemnity attaches to [Matthew 11:27](#) parallel [Luke 10:22](#), "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father:

and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him." There is a Johannine flavor in these words, and they reveal an intimacy of the Son with the Father, as well as a power over all things, which could not have been conferred by mere official appointment, unless there had been in the background a natural position warranting the official standing.

Not infrequently has the word "Messianic" been allowed by scholars to blind them to the most obvious facts. The conferring of an office on a mere man could not enable him to do things beyond the reach of human powers; yet it is frequently assumed that, if only Jesus was Messiah, He was able for anything, even when the thing in question is something for which a mere man is wholly incompetent.

#### 8. The "Son" in Mark 13:32:

There is a saying of Jesus ([Mark 13:32](#)) about His own Sonship which may seem to refute the church doctrine on the subject, as in it He confesses ignorance of the date of His Second Coming:

"Of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." Yet, while there is much in this passage fitted to produce sane and sober views as to the real manhood of Jesus, there are few sayings of His that betray a stronger consciousness of His being more than man. Four planes of being and of knowledge are specified--that of men, that of angels, that of Himself, and that of God. Evidently the Son is above not only men but angels, and, if it is confessed that He is ignorant of anything, this is mentioned as a matter of surprise.

#### 9. The "Son" in Matthew 28:18-20:

The conclusion would seem to be that He is a being intermediate between the angels and God; but this impression is corrected by the greatest of all the sayings in which He calls Himself the Son ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)), "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit:

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Here the Son is named along with the Father and the Holy Spirit in a way suggesting the equality of all three, an act of worship being directed to them jointly. By those who disbelieve in the Deity of Christ, the most strenuous attempts have been made to get rid of this passage, and in certain quarters it is taken for granted that it must have been an addition to the text of this Gospel.

But for this there is no ground whatever; the passage is the climax of the Gospel in which it occurs, in the same way as the confession of Thomas is the climax of the Gospel of Jn; and to remove it would be an intolerable mutilation. Of course to those who disbelieve in the bodily resurrection of our Lord, this has no more substance than the other details of the Forty Days; but to those who believe in His risen glory the words appear to suit the circumstances, their greatness being congruous with the entire representation of the New Testament.

#### 10. Apostolic Doctrine:

Deity Affirmed:

Indeed, it is the Son of God, as He appears in this final scene in the First Gospel, who dominates the rest of the New Testament. Thus, in [Acts 9:20](#), the beginning of Paul's testimony as a Christian is given in these words, "And straightway in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus, that he is the Son of God"; and what this meant to Paul may be gathered from his own statement in the opening of Romans,

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, which he promised afore through his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according

to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead; even Jesus Christ our Lord" ([Romans 1:1-4](#)).

In He the equality of the Son with the Father is theme throughout the entire book; and in [Revelation 2:18](#), "the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire," speaks from the right hand of power to the church.

On this subject there was no division of opinion in the apostolic church. On many other questions the followers of Jesus were divided; but on this one they were unanimous. For this the authority of Paul is often assumed to be responsible; but there was a prior and higher authority. This was the self-testimony of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Though this may not have been put in literary form till all the other books of the New Testament had been completed, it was active and influential in the church all the time, affecting Paul and the other New Testament writers.

#### 11. The Fourth Gospel:

Deity, Preexistence, etc.:

There is no real disharmony between the expression of our Lord's self-consciousness in the Synoptists and that in John; only in the latter it is far ampler and more distinct. Here Jesus is not only called "the Son of God" by others, but applies the title to Himself in its full shape, as well as in the abbreviated form of "the Son."

He further calls Himself the "only begotten Son of God" (3:16,18), that is to say, He is Son in a sense in which no others can claim the title. This seems expressly to contradict the statement, so often made, that He makes others sons of God in the same sense as Himself, or that His Sonship is ethical, not metaphysical.

No doubt it is ethical--that is to say, He is like the Father in feeling, mind and will--but it does not follow that it is not at the same time metaphysical. In fact, the perfection of ethical unity depends upon that which is metaphysical. Between a dog and a man there may be deep sympathy, yet it is limited by the difference of their natures; whereas between a woman and a man there is perfect sympathy, because they are identical in nature.

Another feature of Sonship in the Fourth Gospel is preexistence, though, strange to say, this is more than once connected with the title "Son of man." But the strongest and most frequent suggestions as to what is implied in Sonship are to be found in the deeds attributed to the Son; for these are far beyond the competence of any mere man. Thus,

He executes judgment ([John 5:22](#));

He has life in Himself and quickeneth whom He will ([John 5:26,21](#));

He gives eternal life ([John 10:10](#)), and it is the will of the Father that all men should honor the Son, even as they do the Father ([John 5:23](#)). Nevertheless, the Son does nothing of Himself, but only what

He hath seen the Father do ([John 5:19](#)); and only that which He hath heard of the Father does He speak ([John 14:10](#)). In short, God is not only His Father, but His God ([John 20:17](#)).

To statements such as these a merely official Sonship is not adequate; the relation must be ethical and metaphysical as well; and to a perfect Sonship all three elements are essential.