

# A Child or a Son

By George Davis and Michael Clark

Paul the apostle paints an earthly picture of spiritual growth and development in the kingdom of God by comparing the natural stages of human growth to the stages of freedom. A child requires much more supervision than a full-grown son.

**Note:** *In this article the word son (huios), unless otherwise specified, is used in a non-gender-specific sense, applying equally to mature sons and daughters of God. When God created "man" He created them "male and female." Those who have "put on Christ" are not defined by gender. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one (and the same) in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28 Emphasis mine) Therefore the term "sons of God" should be viewed, in a larger sense, as descriptive of all mature believers.*

"Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child (*teknion*), does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father." (Galatians 4:1-2)

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Romans 8:14)

The above passages delineate two very different spiritual existences, one of a child, the other of a mature son. Each has its own distinctive form of guidance. One is external (religious), driven by the rudimentary principles of the world; the other is internally (spiritually) enabled by the spirit of adoption--the Spirit crying, "ABBA."

Paul the apostle paints an earthly picture of spiritual growth and development in the kingdom of God by comparing the natural stages of human growth to the stages of freedom. A child requires much more supervision than a full-grown son. We cannot fully understand Paul's teaching regarding the sons of God without first comprehending the relationship of a child to a son. Paul pictured the child as one "kept under guardians" and as long as the heir remains under this babysitter (schoolmaster) he/she is no different than a slave. Throughout the Pauline epistles there are repeated references to the contrasts between religion and bondage vs. Christianity and freedom.

## A Child

". . .the heir, as long as he is a child (*teknon*-an infant, little child), does not differ at all from a slave." Both are under guardians and stewards. A first century child was guided through the external medium of guardians and stewards. A guardian (Greek *epitropos*) is one who has the care and tutelage of children--a "tutor." In the first century household, a governor (Greek *oikonomos*) was a superintendent or "schoolmaster" (Galatians 3:24,25), probably a freed-man or a slave. The head of the house made this person the custodian and caregiver of his children who were not of age. This background is critical to the understanding of Paul's teaching regarding the sons of God.

## The Schoolmaster

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:23-24)

In the above passage the law is depicted as a schoolmaster. The word schoolmaster is a translation of the compound Greek word *paidagogos*, which literally means, "child-leader." (*pais*, "a boy, or child," *ago*, "to lead"). The *paidagogos* was not the instructor of the child; he was the disciplinarian who followed the child everywhere he went. Thayer defines the word like this: "1) a tutor i.e. a guardian and guide of boys. Among the Greeks and the Romans the name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys belonging to the better class. The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them (*paidagogos*) before arriving at the age of manhood."

The *paidagogos*' imposing, confining and restraining influence could best be described by the words "kept under" and "shut up." The Greek word translated kept in the above verse is *phroureo*, which means "to guard, protect by a military guard, either to prevent hostile invasion, or to keep the inhabitants of a besieged city from flight" (to besiege and detain). The Greek word translated shut up is *sugkleio*, means "to shut up together or to enclose." In Luke 5:6 *sugkleio* is used of a multitude of fishes trapped in a fisherman's net.

In the absence of inward discipline in the heart of the child, the *paidagogos* imposed an outward discipline, to (*sugkleio*) completely shut up and keep the child in check. Like a fish in a net, the child was forced to do and go where he otherwise would not. You must force a child to wash behind his ears and few are the brave parents who wait to see if the child ever does it of his own initiative.

Paul's figure of the law as the irksome *paidagogos*, leading us to Christ (the Teacher), speaks of our spiritual coming-of-age, the adoption of sons. The external control of the *paidagogos* (the law) should give way to a greater inner reality and control of the Spirit. Our goal is to no longer be children, "kept under the law" and "shut up unto faith" but become mature sons, led by the Spirit.

Like the *paidagogos* or "child-leader," religion provides an outer order or control, calling it structure. In this environment, there is a belief that the Christian will most certainly go astray without constant (weekly) direction and maintenance from the clergyman. The current preoccupation with accountability and accountability groups also springs from the misguided idea that being answerable to other Christians is the impelling force for right behavior. In that context, the church, its clergy, its ministries, and its programs are the new schoolmasters and the heirs are shut up, like children and slaves, under the siege of ecclesiastical guardians and stewards.

## Carnality and the Child

Another characteristic of a child is carnality. The term "carnal Christian," used in some Christian circles today, is an oxymoron. Carnal means controlled by animal appetites, and Christian means like Christ. Christ was a Son, led exclusively by the Spirit of God, not by carnal appetites.



In 1 Corinthians 3:1, we see that carnality is the earmark of babies. "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ."

Paul continues, "for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of

Apollos,' are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?" (1 Corinthians 3:3-5, NKJV).

The carnal baby tends to seek external leadership and divides the body of Christ. A carnal baby always looks for a leader other than the Spirit of God. Paul said to them "I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual." Things are very much the same today. One person says "I am of Apostle wonderful." Another says, "No! You must join Prophet Sensational's Church!" And yet another says, "You are both wrong. Reverend Stupendous is the one we should all follow!"

In his book "Call to Discipleship," Juan Carlos Ortiz writes,

"As I understand it the church of today faces three basic problems. The first is eternal childhood of the believer. The second is misplacement of the believer. The third is lack of unity. This became evident when I surveyed my own situation in our church.

Although we were adding more and more people to the membership roll, all were remaining children, little babes who had to be taught the same things year after year.

"The hymns we sang, the prayers we prayed, told us that we were only children. Not only were we content to use the same hymns and prayers for forty years, but they were always the same subject: asking. Yet I knew that when a child grows, the clothes don't fit him anymore. . . .

"People who sing the same hymns for years, pray the same prayers for years, keep the same church structure, and need the same messages are not really growing, period. They are eternal children. . . .

"Our childishness is shown in our prayers. 'Heal me, help me, baptize me, prosper me, me, me.' The 'me' center, the 'I' center, is childhood. . . .

"Children are always seeking for gifts--more than for fruit. If a healer or evangelist comes to our church, you see in the crowd those who never come to the regular meetings. The children all turn out to see the spectacular gifts, much as children love to go to magic shows. But only the mature people will seek the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, etc.

"Materialism is also an evidence of childhood. Children do not know how to value things. ...Church members demonstrate their childishness by craving for material things--good homes, good cars, money--while they leave spiritual things in second

place. Eternal childhood."(*Call to Discipleship*, copyright 1975, Logos International, pp. 4-7)

The writer of Hebrews continues this theme,

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age; that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14)

When the author of Hebrews calls everyone who partakes of milk an unskilled babe, he was not just talking about dependency on milk. The word unskilled denotes the infant's inability to feed himself. This explains why he starts by saying, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers." Enough time had passed that they should have been mature contributors, not infantile consumers. Those who are of full age do not need to be told what is good and evil, for they are exercised unto the development of Spiritual discernment. They are no longer carnal babes, but spiritually mature adults.

In view of this, Paul presses his point that the church at Corinth fell into the category of carnal, not spiritual. Paul had to relate to them as carnal babes or infants. "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ." (I Corinthians 3:1) I can almost feel Paul's disappointment here! He could have no deep and abiding fellowship with these believers. They waded in the shallows, knowing nothing of the deep things of God. Since fellowship is realized when "deep calls unto deep," Paul could have no fellowship with them in the deep things of God but was instead limited to nursery duty. "I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal." Then Paul proceeds to offer the proof of their carnality. "For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?"

Paul saw the believer's utter dependence upon the Holy Spirit as the goal of Christian growth, while continued dependency on men is a sign of carnality. Paul offers their

confessed dependence on and preference for as evidence of their infantile and carnal status.

## "The Kingdom of God is within you"

Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you." Simply put, the kingdom of God is the place or condition where God rules, where He is King. By virtue of the indwelling Spirit of God, the kingdom of God is within every true believer. Those who have learned to yield to this inner rule are the sons of God.

The kingdom of God does not come with observation as some outward event or like the kingdoms of the world. It is an interior kingdom--the inner rule of God, marked by righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. In Colossians 3:15 Paul wrote, "[And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.](#)" (Colossians 3:15 WEB)

The exhortation here is to allow God's peace to *rule in the heart*. We should pay close attention to word rule, which means to act as umpire. When we lose our peace, it is because God is acting as Umpire in our hearts, officiating, ruling, and either giving or withdrawing our peace to teach us the things that are pleasing in His sight.

## Sons of God

["For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."](#) (Romans 8:14)

The child (*teknion*) of God is not necessarily a son (*huios*) of God. The child (*teknion*) is an heir but does not yet reflect the Father's likeness and nature. The likeness of the Father is what defines a mature Son of God. Jesus used the word *huios* to clearly show the difference between children and sons. "[Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.](#)" (Matthew 5:9) "[Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that you may be \(Greek ghin'-om-ahee- to become- be fulfilled- come to be\) sons of your Father which is in heaven.](#)" (Matthew 5:44-45)



Regarding this scripture, W.E. Vine wrote, "The disciples were to do these things, not in order that they might become children of God, but that, being children (note 'your Father' throughout), they might make the fact manifest in their character, might 'become sons.' (See also 2 Corinthians

6:17,18) The difference between believers as 'children of God' and as 'sons of God' is brought out in Rom. 8:14-21. The Spirit bears witness with their spirit that they are 'children of God,' and, as such, they are His heirs and joint-heirs with Christ. This stresses the fact of their spiritual birth (Rom. 8:16,17). On the other hand, 'as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God,' i.e., 'these and no other.' Their conduct gives evidence of the dignity of their relationship and their likeness to His character."

## **Suffering -The Pathway to Sonship**

The path to sonship is the way of suffering--the way of the cross. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us." (2Timothy 2:12)

"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." (Philippians 1:29)

"For I calculate that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to compare to the coming glory to be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. For the creation was not willingly subjected to vanity, but through Him subjecting it, on hope." (Romans 8:18-20 LITV)

The suffering of this present time is a prelude to the coming glory to be revealed in us! Even Jesus learned obedience by the things He suffered. (See Hebrews 5:8.) Creation itself earnestly waits the unveiling of the sons of God--those who know the sufferings of Christ and reign with Him. Sonship is costly. In fact, as Paul and Barnabas traveled throughout Asia Minor preaching the gospel, they also taught "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." (Act 14:22) Sons, like diamonds, are formed under pressure.

## **The Adoption of Sons (*huiiothesia*)**

"But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, having come into being out of a woman, having come under Law, that He might redeem the ones under Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba! Father!" a(Galatians 4:4-6 LITV)

The Greek word son here is *huios* (a mature son), and the adoption of sons refers to the ceremony called "placing of sons." At maturity, a son would be given charge over much of his father's business. A son is so full of his Father's spirit, so careful for his Father's interests, and so driven for his Father's glory that he can be trusted to do nothing else.

Compare the following two passages:

"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. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?" (Galatians 4:4-10, NKJV)

"But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 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.'" (Romans 8:9-15, NKJV)

Let us reflect for a moment on what Paul meant by "the weak and beggarly elements." He is referring to religious knowledge, the basic principles of religion, which existed among the Jews before Christ came. Paul wrote, "For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to Jerusalem, which now is, and is in bondage with her children." (Galatians 4:25) Paul did not mince words! Religion is synonymous with bondage.



Paul cautioned the Colossian believers about being spoiled, or led away captive "through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." (Colossians 2:8) The word "rudiments" here is the same Greek word *stoicheion* also translated elements as in weak and beggarly elements. Paul goes on to ask, "if we are dead with Christ from the rudiments (elements) of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to ordinances, 'Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle.'" These basic principles of the world indeed do "have an appearance of wisdom," but it is only appearance. These worldly principles encourage the denial and neglect of the body, in a self-imposed worship, but are of no value whatsoever in subduing the flesh or sinful nature. (See Colossians 2:23) There is but one cure for the flesh, and that is death, i.e., "the cross."

The child who is under the schoolmaster (the law) endeavors to relate to God through external precepts and traditions. He minds external "earthly things." (See Philippians 3:19) His approach to God is powered primarily by the human will and ultimately finds its expression in outward, ceremonial observances. The child finds security in bylaws and creeds, practicing fruitless abstinence and austere self-discipline. Like fighting fire with gasoline, he seeks to subdue the flesh in the energy of the flesh. The weak and beggarly elements, religion, posing as something life-giving, have deceived him. All the while the child senses a call, a knowing, a desire to become! He secretly aspires to rise above the worldly; to apprehend that for which he has been apprehended. To know Him whose image beckons like some ancestral calling, a reminder of things lost and yet sought!

"Let us make man in our image". All was lost! Or was it? He who is the express image, the Son of God, has come to restore God's likeness and image in mankind. Those so restored are called "sons," or more appropriately, "Sons of God."

### **A Child Is Born, But a Son Is Given**

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6, NASB)

Children are born, but sons are given. A man and a woman can come together and nine months later a child is born. This is a miracle that we call life, but it is not the greatest

miracle. The greatest is sonship in Christ, the First Son. This is something that only God can do in us.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12,13, KJV).

Nothing that man can do can duplicate this miracle, because it is not "of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Mere men cannot wish it into existence. We can't make it happen by our most concentrated "positive thinking" or hardest efforts. Sons are "given" by the intervening power of God in the lives of mankind. As Jesus put it, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." (John 6:65, NKJV).

Paul expands on this theme even further when he wrote:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love. He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." (Ephesians 1:3-5, NASB)

This should take away any thought that God chooses us because we have finally become good enough. No, we were chosen before the foundation of the world that we might be holy and blameless and manifest His vitality to all men. It was by His love that He predestined us to be His adopted sons by the intention of HIS will. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. To comprehend this is to comprehend faith. Sons are given into the lives of mere men by the intervening power of God, the process of His workings. Thank you, Father, that you have given us to be your sons!