The Adoption of Sons

Our sonship status in this dispensation of grace

A 3-Lesson Study by Keith Blades | Enjoy the Bible Ministries®

Study Overview & Lesson Summaries

About This Series

These three conference sessions of The Adoption of Sons cover an aspect of our sanctified position in Christ: sonship — "a dispensational issue" — and our sonship status in this dispensation of grace. A son is not the same as a child: God dealt with His heirs in time past as children under tutors and governors, and now treats us as adult sons. The adoption is Israel's right, yet God has made us partakers of it in this dispensation of grace, in accordance with the revelation of the mystery. The last session turns to living as sons: liberty from the tutor and governor principle, grace rather than fear as motivation, and making decisions on your own regarding God's will from Bible doctrine.

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Lessons at a Glance

Lesson	Core Focus
L1	Sonship Is a Dispensational Issue — Romans 8:12–15; Galatians 4:1–6: Heirship, Child, and Son
L2	Tutors and Governors, or Treated as Sons — Galatians 4:1–6; I Timothy 4:1–3; Romans 9:4; Romans 15:25–27: The Adoption, Israel's and Ours
L3	Living as Sons: Liberty from Tutors and Governors — I Corinthians 6; Romans 8:14–15; Titus 2; Romans 12; Romans 14; Philemon

Lesson Summaries

L1

Sonship Is a Dispensational Issue *Romans 8:12–15; Galatians 4:1–6: Heirship, Child, and Son*

Not Debtors to the Flesh (Romans 8:12–15)

- Romans 8:12 is Paul putting together a conclusion based on everything he has said from Romans 6:1; verse 13 is the first main reason, and the death there is not physical but "a functional death. You don't live unto God."
- Verses 14 and 15 give another reason we are not debtors to the flesh; you need to appreciate the fantastic position of liberty you have from the flesh,

with God dealing with you and treating you as a son

Sons, Not Only Children

- Most of the time when Christians think of being a son of God, they simply have in mind belonging to the family of God; John 1:11–13 has regeneration in view — members of the nation Israel responding to the Messiah's presence and the gospel of the kingdom
- In Paul's epistles sonship has far more meaning than becoming part of God's family; Paul also calls us children, but being a son and being a child "aren't the same thing" — we're not only children of God, we're sons of God
- Sonship has to do with not being under the law, but having the Holy Spirit work within you in a very special way; verse 14 says "as many as are led by the Spirit of God," not as many as have the Spirit — and verse 15, "ye have received the Spirit of adoption," which, as the lesson puts it, "is the issue of sonship"
- Verse 15 sets sonship in contrast to another system God used before: "ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear" — the spirit of bondage is a reference to the law

Sonship Is a Dispensational Issue

- Sonship is a dispensational issue: a privilege to possess in this dispensation of grace, not possessed by any of God's children before the dispensation of grace began
- Regenerated people in God's program with Israel in time past were children of God but never made sons — Abraham among them; regenerated men in Matthew through John were also still under the law and not being treated by God as sons
- Israel will possess sonship only once the kingdom gets established; God, in accordance with the revelation of the mystery, is privileging us by the riches of His grace "to be treated as sons right now"

Whereby We Cry, Abba, Father

- When you understand the privilege of the position God has put you in, you ought to cry, Abba, Father — "a glorious, fantastic privilege of God's grace that makes you cry"; when you cry something there is emotion and fervency involved
- The only other person in the Bible who ever said "Abba, Father" was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, in Mark's Gospel; we may deal with God the Father in the same position of sonship He possessed

Heirship, Child, and Son (Galatians 4:1–6)

- Sonship is being treated by God like an adult, in contrast to being treated like a little irresponsible, immature child; there are three concepts to understand: heirship, child, and son
- The moment you trusted Christ you became a child of God; "You're gonna inherit what your heavenly Father has because you're a child of God through faith in Christ Jesus"
- While the heir is in childhood the father treats him no different from a servant; at the time appointed of the father the heir doesn't change, but the father deals with him differently
- In time past God dealt with His heirs as children, under tutors and governors; the cross work "provided for God to start dealing with His heirs as sons, as adults," but He began it when He ushered in the dispensation of grace
- The childhood treatment system of time past under the law isn't in effect

today with you — "He's treating you like a son"; for the Galatians to go back under that law is contrary to the way God is dealing with them today, having given them the adoption of sons

L2

Tutors and Governors, or Treated as Sons *Galatians 4:1–6; I Timothy 4:1–3; Romans 9:4; Romans 15:25–27: The Adoption, Israel's and Ours*

Two Ways a Father Deals with His Heir

- There are two ways a father deals with his offspring: as a child, and — from the time appointed of the father on — as an adult, without the methods he used with his child
- Sons get treated as adults, and "the law really is a system of dealing with people as children"; that is how God dealt with Israel under the law in time past, but not how He deals with us in this dispensation of grace

The Tutor and the Governor

- A tutor is entrusted by a father to bring up his child in the elementary education that child needs; children came to fear the tutor, which ought to ring a bell from Romans 8 — not the spirit of bondage again to fear
- It is the tutor who put the fear and motivation in the individual; under the law, not performing meant not only losing the blessing but getting the curses
- The governor lived in the house, supervised the child 24 hours a day and made decisions for him; the child had no liberty to decide on his own — why Paul says he differs nothing from a servant
- Having a tutor and a governor over you in childhood restricts the child's fellowship with his father

Adoption: Placing a Son, and Liberty

- Paul uses the word adoption differently than we do today: it is placing a son — taking your own child and putting him in the position of a son, an adult; in Paul's day girls could be called sons also
- Keith encapsulates that entirely new system in one word: liberty — an intimacy of fellowship with the father, and great liberty to make decisions on his own in the details of his life
- The aspect in view here is God giving you the responsibility and the privilege of making decisions on your own concerning His will; renewing the mind to prove God's will is consistent with sonship
- Under the law no individual Israelite had that liberty — difficult cases went up to the high priest with the Urim and Thummim; a pastor has no right to tell you the will of God in the details of your life

Doctrine from Israel's Program (I Timothy 4:1–3)

- I Timothy 4 warns of Satan's policy of evil against us in this dispensation of grace; the two things Paul gives as examples there are both part of Israel's program
- It is doctrine from Israel's program "to make you walk like an Israelite," treating you like a child; rightly divide, then recognize Israel's principles of operation — people "Christianize Israel's program, and try and bring a tutor and governor principle into our program today"

The Adoption: Israel's and Ours

- God hasn't treated any of His heirs like sons until this dispensation of grace; our sonship wasn't in the prophets but is given by the riches of His grace in

accordance with the revelation of the mystery

- Romans 9:4 — "to whom *pertaineth* the adoption" — the adoption is Israel's right; when the kingdom gets established God will deal with Israel as sons, and "Israel will still get the adoption"
- The adoption is one of Israel's spiritual things Gentiles are made partakers of (Romans 15:25–27); Paul is looking at the cross work in connection with the revelation of the mystery, and applies the grace situation to us in this dispensation of grace: "that we might receive the adoption of sons"
- God has placed us in the position of sons and doesn't expect us to put ourselves back under the tutor and governor principle; He expects us to recognize He's dealing with us as adult sons and to function accordingly

L3

Living as Sons: Liberty from Tutors and Governors *I Corinthians 6; Romans 8:14–15; Titus 2; Romans 12; Romans 14; Philemon*

Displayed as Sons Later; the Spirit of Adoption Now

- We are God's heirs in accordance with the mystery program; when the rapture takes place we'll be manifested and put on display as the sons of God in the heavenly places
- Keith says that is when our adoption is at its fullness, "so to speak," with the redemption of our bodies; but we have the spirit of adoption right now, with God dealing with us as sons right now — "as the sons he's made you to be"
- We don't have to wait until we're displayed as sons to function as sons; every exhortation in Romans through Philemon is in accordance with living as sons — "He expects you to think of yourself as a son"

Judging in a Governing Sense (I Corinthians 6)

- The saints judging the world and angels is not condemning judgment but judging in a governing sense — making decisions as to God's will, and giving information to the angelic beings in the heavenly places
- Having given you the spirit of sonship now, God expects you to make decisions on your own regarding His will, discerned from Bible doctrine resident within your soul — not setting God aside and acting independently
- Paul appeals to the Corinthians to act like sons rather than go to the law courts as if they needed a tutor and a governor to tell them what to do: "Aren't you sons?"

The Spirit of Bondage

- The spirit of bondage is the law system with its tutor and governor concept, used with Israel in time past; it binds you to sin's mastership, to being dealt with as a child, to a restricted relationship with God, and to fear
- Paul doesn't list what comprises sonship; it is liberty from the tutor and governor principle — "You got the liberty of adulthood"
- An enemy within your flesh wants to go back to that system; the most foolish thing a member of the body of Christ could do, in view of his position in Christ, is to go back and live like that

From Fear Motivation to Grace

- There are a lot of differences, and three are examined; under the tutor and governor principle fear was the motivating factor — step out of line and you get cursed, judged, chastened — but that is not the motivating factor with sons

- Our motivation to live honorably is “love, gratitude, thanksgiving, and appreciate what God’s done for you by his grace”; “If grace isn’t motivating you folks, God isn’t motivating you”
- In Titus 2 the doctrine of God our Saviour — what He did when He saved you and who He made you to be in Christ — produces the lifestyle: “He’s made you a son. He’s made you his peculiar people”

Rudiments, Governorship, and Proving God’s Will

- The other liberty is freedom from the rudiments of the world — observing days, months, times and years, and ritual ceremonies like water baptism and physical circumcision; there is also the freedom from governorship and limited decision-making
- Renewing the mind is the sonship practice; Romans 12:2 says “that ye may prove” God’s will — ye, as an individual member of the body of Christ; sonship status is “not a license to sin”
- In Romans 14 Paul lets the weaker brother be fully persuaded in his own mind because God is treating him as a son; the stumbling block is not letting him act like a son
- Paul beseeches Philemon for love’s sake rather than telling him what to do — “I’m not your tutor. I’m not your governor” — just as God does with us all as sons

Key Doctrinal Distinctions

Child vs. Son

In Paul’s epistles there’s a big difference between sons and children; we’re not only children of God, we’re sons of God. Sonship is being treated by your father as an adult and no longer like a little child; the heir doesn’t change, but the father deals with him differently.

Time Past vs. the Dispensation of Grace

In time past God dealt with His heirs as children, under the law; that’s not how God is dealing with us today in this dispensation of grace. Don’t expect God to treat you like He treated His heirs Israel in time past; expect Him to deal with you differently, as the sons He has made you to be.

Israel’s Adoption vs. Ours Now

The adoption is Israel’s right; Israel will possess it only once the kingdom gets established, and in that kingdom the Gentiles will be dealt with as children under a tutor and governor system. God suspended His program with Israel and deals with us Gentiles today, not making us spiritual Israelites; He has given us the adoption right now.

The Cross: Provision vs. Beginning

The cross work provided for God to start dealing with His heirs as sons; He began it when He ushered in the dispensation of grace. The cross was also the provision to get Israel the sonship status in the kingdom; our sonship wasn't something you could find in the prophets, but is given in accordance with the revelation of the mystery.

The Spirit of Bondage vs. Grace

The spirit of bondage is the law system with its tutor and governor concept; grace is God's system today, with the Holy Spirit instead of your flesh the motivator. Under the tutor and governor principle of the law fear was the motivating factor; that's not the motivating factor with sons.

Demanded Service vs. Reasonable Service

The law demands and threatens; love beseeches — in view of what God has done by His grace, it is reasonable that you live unto Him. Paul with Philemon: for love's sake he beseeches, not as his tutor or governor — "just like God's doing to us all as sons."

Liberty vs. License

Your sonship status is not a license to sin; "It's a license to serve God as an adult." Making decisions as sons is not taking God out of the picture, setting God aside and acting independently.

Key Scripture References

Genesis 15:6	Abraham was justified and a child of God, but not a son
Leviticus 26	(Israel under the law contract) Five courses of punishment or chastisement — fear motivation
John 1:11–13	Regeneration of members of the nation Israel in response to the Messiah and the gospel of the kingdom — not Paul's meaning of sonship
Romans 7	The law's bondage: it binds you to sin's mastership
Romans 8:12–13	We are not debtors to the flesh; the death in verse 13 is a functional death
Romans 8:14	"led by the Spirit of God" — not as many as have the Spirit; God is dealing with you today in an entirely different manner than He has dealt with His people before
Romans 8:15	"ye have received the Spirit of adoption" — not the spirit of bondage, which is the law; liberty from the tutor and governor; "whereby we cry, Abba, Father"
Romans 8:16–17	Paul also calls us children and differentiates being a son from being a child. Verse 17: "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together."

Romans 9:4	The adoption pertains to Israel — Israel's right
Romans 12:1	Living to please the Lord on the basis of responding to the mercies of God; love beseeches
Romans 12:2	Renewing the mind is the sonship practice; ye, as an individual member of the body of Christ, prove God's will
Romans 14:1–5	The weaker brother, fully persuaded in his own mind — God acknowledging sonship; God is in charge of the edification of the soul
Romans 15:25–27	Gentiles made partakers of Israel's spiritual things, including the adoption
I Corinthians 6:1–3	Judging the world and angels in a governing sense; Paul appeals to the Corinthians to act like sons
Galatians 3:26	The moment you trusted Christ you became a child of God
Galatians 4:1–2	The heir in childhood differs nothing from a servant, under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father
Galatians 4:3	The elements of the world: the tutor and governor principle's elementary teaching aids
Galatians 4:4–5	The fullness of time: God ready to deliver His heirs from the tutor and governor principle; "that we might receive the adoption of sons"
Galatians 4:6–7	The same doctrine as Romans 8; we possess the privilege of sonship status in the dispensation of grace
Galatians 5:1	The law is a yoke of bondage
I Timothy 4:1–3	Doctrine from Israel's program to make you walk like an Israelite
Titus 2:10–14	The doctrine of God our Saviour: He has made you a son and His peculiar people — your motivation
Philemon	For love's sake Paul beseeches rather than acting as tutor or governor