

A Scriptural Primer: CHILD OF GOD

Our identity as a child of God through Jesus Christ is how the Father sees us. This beautiful reality begins with ADOPTION. It is at this moment that everything changes for us, for prior to this moment, we lived as slaves under the authority of satan's kingdom, but we are now transferred out from it into the Kingdom of Heaven by becoming children of God the Father. Before this moment, we are all "dead" to God because of sin and the FALL—we are children of the world enslaved to satan's kingdom:

"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:1-10 NASB).

THE SON OF GOD

Adoption was made possible by God's Son coming into the world. Jesus Christ is God's only "natural" Son. Jesus made our adoption possible by purchasing us from our slavery to satan by payment with His own life. Because of sin, we were separated from God's protection and under His judgment. Jesus took the place of each of us before God's judgment and took the penalty for our sins—death and complete separation from God. Yet, death could not keep Him, and He rose again. In His death, God's Son "exonerated" from judgment and penalty everyone who accepts His substitution for them, and in His resurrection, He intercedes for everyone who has come to God through Him. We have been reconciled to God through Jesus! Jesus freed us from satan's enslavement of us through sin's condemnation resulting in death: *"Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed'"* (John 8:34-36).

"By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9).

"But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings" (Hebrews 2:9-10).

“Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

In God’s mercy, He has always desired mankind to be reconciled to Him in love: *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!” (Luke 13:34).*

ADOPTION THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

The Jews didn’t understand “adoption” because they believed “God’s children” were those in Abraham’s bloodline. They believed that their salvation came by their genetic relation to Abraham. This is why Jesus confronted them and said, *“And do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham” (Matthew 3:9).*

Paul explains that genetics has nothing to do with what makes a Believer: *“Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, **be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.** The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer” (Galatians 3:6-8).*

The Children of God are not a family of particular genes or bloodlines. They are not a family planned by mankind: *“He [Jesus] came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:11-13).*

“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 would 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, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:3-6).

Jesus revealed to Nicodemus that the children of God are born again by the Spirit: *“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, “You must be born again.” The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:3-8).*

*“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the **child** born of Him” (1 John 5:1).*

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27).

When we receive Christ, God’s Holy Spirit “adopts” us. He changes, guards, manages, and leads us: *“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him” (Romans 8:14-17).*

As adopted children of God, we are heirs to an immeasurable inheritance, beginning with eternal life (a free gift of grace through Jesus Christ) and additional “gifts” and “crowns” (given to us for our works for God on earth). We are adopted while still living in the world, and while we are here, we are “little children” or minors in God’s eyes: *“And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, ‘Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:2-4).*

“But Jesus said, ‘Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these’” (Matthew 19:14).

This means we are not yet “of age” to receive our inheritance (hence why we do not have eternal life presently), and we are commanded to obey God in all things as a slave or bondservant. Paul makes sense of this in Galatians when he says, *“As long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father” (Galatians 4:1-2).* Like any six-year-old, the adopted child of God cannot have their own way. Perhaps the guardians and managers here refer to the Holy Spirit, which Paul said in Romans “leads” the Sons of God. Paul then compares God’s management of His children to when we were children of the world before adoption: *“So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God” (Galatians 4:3-7).*

It is important to note that only sons received an inheritance from their father in Jewish custom, which is why Scripture refers to all Believers as “sons” regardless of whether they are male or female, because all God’s children will receive an inheritance from their Father:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away,

reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4).

While we live in the world, we eagerly await the manifestation of our inheritance, for though we have been adopted by God, we are still subject to the Fall and struggle with our flesh nature, groaning within ourselves: *“For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:20-23).*

THE WORLD HATES GOD’S CHILDREN

“And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also” (Galatians 4:28-29).

CHILDREN ARE TO IMITATE THEIR HEAVENLY FATHER

Jesus is God’s only “natural” Son. We are adopted, yet God treats us no differently, and we are to follow the example of Jesus, the “*first-born*” (Romans 8:29). Jesus perfectly imitated His Father, as we are to do also: *“Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes” (John 5:19-21).*

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (Ephesians 5:1-2).

A child is raised to do the works of their father. *“They [the Jews] answered and said to Him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham’” (John 8:39).*

“Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain” (Philippians 2:14-16).

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called **sons** of God” (Matthew 5:9).*

“By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10).

“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:44-45).

“Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:7-10).

Proverbs gives children good direction: *“Give me your heart, my son, And let your eyes delight in my ways” (Proverbs 23:26).*

LEARNING OBEDIENCE AS SONS

“In the days of His flesh, He [Jesus] offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (Hebrews 5:7-9).

“Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY’” (1 Peter 1:13-16).

GOD DISCIPLINES—CORRECTS, INSTRUCTS, EDUCATES—HIS CHILDREN

Under the Holy Spirit’s guardianship, we are being sanctified (cleansed, set apart) for God: *“Now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in **sanctification**, and the outcome, eternal life” (Romans 6:22).*

God sanctifies His children by raising them to be educated and disciplined in His ways so that they will be useful and fruitful in His Kingdom. *“You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.’ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His*

holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:4-11).

“For whom the Lord loves He reproveth, Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights” (Proverbs 3:12).

“A wise son accepts his father’s discipline, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke” (Proverbs 13:1).

WE ARE BEING RAISED—NURTURED, EDUCATED, INSTRUCTED—TO BE LIKE JESUS

The Holy Spirit’s purpose in managing the children of God in sanctification is to raise them to be like the “first-born” Jesus Who was perfectly sanctified for God.

Jesus is the “first born” and is set over God’s household: *“Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end” (Hebrews 3:5-6).*

We must be in God’s Word, for it nourishes us and sustains us to grow in Christ: *“Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord” (1 Peter 2:1-3).*

We should apply ourselves to the Holy Spirit’s leadership and instruction in the Word. In this way, we will mature so that we will be useful and fruitful to our Heavenly Father both in this life and in the inheritance He has for us in the eternal Kingdom of His Son: *“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you” (2 Peter 1:2-11).*

“See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God;

and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:1-3).

God desires His children to grow in maturity to be like His Son—**for this reason, God has instituted the Church:** *“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:11-14).*

Faithful parents make their children do things that are uncomfortable for them, but which are necessary for them to grow in maturity. God is a faithful parent and everything He does and allows in our lives is for our good (even if it feels hard to us): *“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us” (Romans 8:28-34).*

GOD PROTECTS AND KEEPS HIS CHILDREN

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.’ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).

“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

“But Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He

always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:24-25).

“For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (2 Timothy 1:12).

“That in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:5-8).

THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE ADOPTED WON'T LAST FOREVER

The “Church age” (from Christ’s ascension to the present day) is a time of God’s mercy and grace – it is a time of reconciliation in which anyone who receives God’s Son can be adopted into God’s household. But this open time of adoption will not last forever: *“While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.’ These things Jesus spoke, and He went away and hid Himself from them” (John 12:36).*

Destruction of the world’s kingdom and judgment of all the wicked is coming. But the adopted child has nothing to fear: *“Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6).*

COMING INTO OUR INHERITANCE

“But those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20:35-36).

“Then He said to me, ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death’” (Revelation 21:6-8).