

Son's of God

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[0 : 00] Our study in the Sunday School class is The Christian Life, A Doctrinal Introduction, Sinclair Ferguson.! That's the book that we're going through, and again, much of what we're sharing is just what Sinclair has said in his book.

Last week, we considered the doctrine of justification, and we saw that the Bible teaches a justification by works.

Christ works, not ours, right? That's the only way we sinners could be justified, is by Christ's works. And we saw that justification in the Bible does not mean to change a person's character from wicked to righteous, but it means to what?

To declare him to be righteous, to declare him to be in a right standing with God and his law. And it's the verdict that God makes.

How, then, can God be a just judge and still justify wicked sinners, declaring them not guilty but right in the eyes of God and his law? What's the ground of our justification?

[1 : 15] The ground, the cause. Christ's work. It's what Jesus did. His obedience. His death on the cross.

His taking the penalty we deserve. So, that's the ground. That's why we go from guilty to not guilty, because he took our guilt and our shame and our sin and bore it himself and obeyed the law for us.

Upon a life I did not live, a death I did not die, another's life, another's death, I trust my whole eternity. So, that's the ground. That's why any of us have been justified before God.

What's the instrument by which God justifies us? Faith. It's justification by faith. Faith has no merit.

It earns nothing. It receives Christ and his righteousness as a free gift. Can you become more justified than you were the day you first put faith in Jesus?

[2 : 16] No. Why not? Because you got the righteousness of Jesus put to your account. You can't improve on that. It's the perfect righteousness of God that was credited to your account.

What's the source of justification? What's the fountain? Where does it come from? The love of God. It was God who, out of love, sent his son to obey the law for us, to die on the cross for us, that we might be justified.

And so, we have Christ to thank. We have his Father to thank. And the Spirit who opens our eyes to our need of Christ.

We saw it was a finished work. So, it can't be improved upon. It can't be diminished. It never wears out. And that gives the Christian great confidence and assurance.

The judge's verdict in the final judgment will be no different than his verdict in justification. It's just that verdict brought forward and announced to us as we trust in Christ.

[3 : 25] Ferguson ended the chapter this way. Can there be anything more amazing than this? In fact, there is. The God who justifies us as our judge now invites us as a father into his family.

And so, that brings us into chapter 10. Sons of God. Adoption. And as precious of a truth as justification is, and it is precious, there is more.

There is much more to salvation than just being in a justified legal status with God. And sadly, many Christians are only concerned about being justified.

As long as I'm saved from hell. As long as I've got acceptance in heaven. My ticket punched. That's really all I care about. They have little to no interest in living a holy life.

In walking in fellowship with Christ through his word and prayer. No desire to know the Lord Jesus better.

[4 : 39] I'm saved. I'm going to heaven. I settled that matter 30, 40, 50 years ago. And that's the limit of my interest in things divine.

Well, remember when man fell into sin. What he lost was not just a right legal status before God.

He didn't go from innocent to guilty and that's all. He lost something else, didn't he? He lost a relationship with God. He lost that communion with God. As God came to him and spoke with him.

And Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden. That was lost. By sin. Not just his legal standing with God.

But to know God. Which, according to Jesus, is what eternal life is. In John 17, 3. This is eternal life. To know thee, the only true God in Jesus Christ.

[5 : 38] Whom you sent. We lost that. The very essence of eternal life. Sweet fellowship that man had with his maker in the garden.

Was now lost. Separated now from God. Cut off from him by sin. Unable to reconcile ourselves to God. So, God's so great salvation not only involves justification.

Changing our status. Our legal status in heaven. But it includes a restored relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Reconciliation. Where the two are brought back together in fellowship.

In warm communion. Adoption into his family. Sanctification of heart and life. Obedience to his commands. Love for his law.

Serving a new master. Mortifying sin. Persevering in holiness. Glorification. I say God's great salvation includes all of that. Not just justification.

[6 : 45] So, salvation is a package. Not a smorgasbord. And you know the difference. At a smorgasbord you take what you want and you leave the rest. But when you receive a package.

You receive everything in the package. And salvation is a package. It's a person. It's Christ. And we receive Christ. And with Christ.

We get the whole deal. We get the whole full salvation. Regeneration. Justification. Reconciliation.

Adoption. Sanctification. Glorification. So, Christ is no smorgasbord. He is Savior and Lord. He is prophet, priest, and king. And we take him as he's offered to us in the gospel.

So, at some point there is reason to be concerned. If a person's only interest in Christ is to be justified. There's real question as to whether the root of the matter is in him.

[7 : 45] If that's all he has interest in. If that's all he wants. That means that maybe they would be satisfied to go to heaven.

A heaven without Christ. Remember Moses. And that whole matter of. If you don't go with us. We don't want to go on from here.

We don't want your stuff in the promised land. We want you. And that's the true godly heart. But if all of our interest is just, well, I'm going to heaven.

That's all I care about. C.S. Lewis wrote *The Great Divorce*. And it's about lost people who took a bus trip to heaven. And they walk around. And check things out.

And they didn't find anything to satisfy them. And they quickly went back on the bus. We were ready to leave and go back to earth. You see, their heart hadn't been changed.

[8 : 47] Their heart was not rejoicing in the great spiritual blessings of heaven that center on Christ. And the holy atmosphere of heaven was stifling to their tastes and desires.

So they wanted to go back to earth. And that's why I say that salvation is more than just taking us to heaven. It's renewing that fellowship with God, which is the very heart and essence of eternal life.

Well, that's my own long introduction into Ferguson's chapter then. That there is more to salvation than justification. There is adoption whereby we are welcomed as sons into the family of God.

Given the full status and privileges of sons. And our sonship is just the other side of the coin of God's fatherhood. Right? If I'm a son of God, then the other side of that coin is that he's the father.

And the fatherhood of God. Ferguson's contention is that the fatherhood of God has been little appreciated in Christian circles. Due to a serious misunderstanding of it that has happened in the past.

[10 : 03] Liberal theology took up the idea of the fatherhood of God. And twisted it into a form of universalism. It's expressed in the song, *Let There Be Peace on Earth and Let It Begin With Me*.

See if you can finish the phrase, complete the line of the song. With God as our father, brothers all are we. Alright?

So there you have it. And in the liberal theology, that was interpreted to say that we're all children of God. Every one of us born into this world are children of God.

God is our father. We are all brothers. Now there is a sense in which that's true. We're all brothers in the human family. Right? But it, that was twisted to negate the fact that there is a spiritual family of God.

And that's not the only family there is. There's a family of the devil. Remember what Jesus said in John 8, You are of your father, the devil.

[11 : 07] So some people have the devil as their father. And they show it because they want to do the deeds that their father does. And John says in 1 John chapter 3, This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are.

Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God, nor is anyone who does not love his brother. So the Bible clearly teaches that there are two families.

And not just one big happy family of God. There's God's family and the devil's family. And now it takes a new birth to get from one to the other.

Now it takes justification to get from one family to the other. Now it takes adoption to be brought into the family of God. But this was denied by liberal theology that just said, No, we're all children of God.

Be we Jew, Muslim, Christian, atheist. And of course that's heresy and many rejected it. But Ferguson claims invariably when a great doctrine is misused, there's a tendency for it to be devalued.

[12 : 18] You understand what he's saying? So if that's the way this doctrine was handled, then people kind of shy away from terminology of the fatherhood of God and sonship and so on.

Perhaps the evangelical church drew back from the doctrine of God's fatherhood, lest it be construed as universalism. Whatever the cause, Ferguson would maintain, that not enough has been made of our sonship to God as our father.

It hasn't been that long since we considered our identity as children of God. So I'm going to be very selective on what we consider from Ferguson's chapter.

He starts with a clarification of two points. He first says adoption is not justification. And what he means is just because a judge declares the accused man not guilty, it does not commit the judge to take the man into his home and to give him all the privileges that he gives to his other sons.

That's not included in justification. Ferguson said if it was, well, we wouldn't have many people seeking to be judges. Look, dear, what I brought home today.

[13 : 32] So it's not justification. It's another blessing of salvation, but distinct from, always with justification, never one found without the other.

But we shouldn't just kind of meld it into justification and not appreciate it for the wonderful blessing that it is in itself. Adoption emphasizes an aspect in our relationship with God that is not present in the doctrine of justification.

It's an additional blessing in the package of salvation in Christ. And then secondly, he says adoption is not regeneration. Regeneration gives us the nature of our father.

We're born again. We're given a new nature, the nature of our father, a divine nature like his, a new heart that is then increasingly to reflect the father's likeness.

So whereas regeneration gives us the nature of our father, adoption gives us the title and the privileges and the relationship of sons of the heavenly father.

[14 : 45] Now turn to Galatians chapter four. I want us to consider the role, and Ferguson does much work on this idea, the role of the Holy Spirit in our adoption.

You know, so vital is his work in this matter that he's even called the spirit of adoption, the spirit of sonship. And in Galatians chapter four, we see how the Holy Spirit functions in this work of adoption.

Galatians four and verses four to seven. I want you to notice as we read the involvement of all members of the Trinity, father, son, and Holy Spirit in adoption.

Galatians four for, but when the time had fully come, God sent his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those under law that we might receive the full rights of sons.

Because you are sons, God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, the spirit who calls out Abba father. So you're no longer a slave, but a son. And since you're a son, God has made you also an heir.

[16 : 08] We first notice the son's involvement in our adoption and becoming sons of God. Verse five tells us that the very purpose for which the son redeemed us was that he might, that we might receive the adoption, the full rights of sons.

What about the father? Well, well, he's the one who sent his son as verses four and five point out, who sent his son to redeem us so that we might receive the adoption as sons.

And then because you are sons, it was the father's gift to send the spirit of his son into your heart and so on.

So we see the father's involvement and then we see the Holy Spirit. He's the one who comes to live in our hearts forever, that we might know in a totally new way our relationship to God is that of Abba father.

And we'll look more carefully at that. But the spirit is in us to make real our sonship to the father. That when we pray, we know in our hearts that this God who made everything and who reigns over all is my father and Jesus Christ.

- [17 : 29] So the father, the son, the spirit, all involved in our becoming sons of God. But it's the spirit of God who's especially designated the spirit of adoption, the spirit of sonship because of his unique role in our adoption.

So turn over to Romans 8. We'll see where we are given this title for the spirit being the spirit of sonship.

Romans 8, some of the richest teaching on life in the spirit, the Holy Spirit's involvement with us. And we're not going to look at the whole sphere of his work in us, but more particularly his work as the spirit of adoption.

What is he doing as the spirit of adoption in the lives of those that he inhabits? Ferguson gives us four marks of the presence of the spirit of adoption in God's children.

Let me just read Romans 8, 12 to 17, and then we'll look for those four marks. Maybe you'll notice them as I read. Uh, what is the spirit of adoption doing in the sons of God?

- [18 : 47] Therefore, brothers Romans 8, 12, we have an obligation, but it's not to the sinful nature of the flesh to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die.

But if by the spirit you put to death, the misdeeds of the body, you will live because those who are led by the spirit of God, are sons of God.

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you receive the spirit of sonship or the spirit of adoption. And by him, we cry, Abba, father, the spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Now, now, if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. If indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

So we see he's called the spirit of adoption. What is the spirit of adoption do in every son of God? Well, four marks of his presence.

- [19 : 58] First, they are led by the spirit of God. You see that in verse 14, because those who are led by the spirit of God are sons of God.

They're led. And this leading of the spirit here is not referring to help that he gives us in decisions of guidance in matters of who we should marry, where we should live, where we should work, what course of study we should take in college, and so on.

The spirit is involved in those matters, but that's not the leading that is spoken of here. The spirit of adoptions leading here is of a different character.

You can see it even in the opening word of verse 14. It's not the beginning of a new sentence. It's a carry on. It's a conclusion drawn from the spirit's work in verse 13.

So what is it precisely that the spirit of adoption leads the sons of God to do? To kill sin. You see that.

- [21 : 08] If through the spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you shall live. Because those who are led by the spirit to be putting sin to death, they are the sons of God.

That's the leading that he does in the sons of God. He leads us to mortify sin. And that is an evidence of his presence in the sons of God.

So he leads and enables the sons of God to fight against sin. You think the battle with sin is hard? Think what it would be without the spirit of adoption within you, enabling you to put sins to death.

What a gift to have him living in us, right there in our heart, affecting our minds and desires and will, our choices, to carry on this to the death battle with sin.

Ferguson says, To claim to experience the ministry of the spirit of adoption, and yet to dally with sin is to be gravely deceived, because the spirit of adoption is the spirit of holiness, as he's called earlier in the letter of Romans.

[22 : 27] So that's the first mark of the presence of the spirit of adoption in the sons of God. They're led by the spirit to put sins to death.

Secondly, they cry, Abba, Father. Verse 15, For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, as they had when they were lost, and they were convicted of their sin and guilt, and it led to bondage and fear and dread.

No, you've not received a spirit like that, but you've received the spirit of adoption. The spirit of sonship. It's different spirit.

And by him we cry, Abba, Father. So by him we put to death the misdeeds of the body, and by him we cry, Abba, Father.

That's the second mark of the sons of God who have the spirit of adoption in them. They cry, by the spirit they cry, Abba, Father.

[23 : 35] That's the way Jesus spoke to God. Abba, Father. And the spirit of God, the spirit of adoption, makes so real to the sons of God, that this God is our Father, that we too enter into that intimate communion with God, as Abba, Father.

in the same way that the son relates to Father as Abba, Father, we are able to have that same intimacy, a breathtaking intimacy with God.

But there's something else here, and Ferguson wants us to see it, and it centers on the word cry. By the spirit, we cry, Abba, Father. Ferguson points out that this little word is a strong word.

In the New Testament, it denotes a loud cry, often a shriek of anguish. It's used of our Lord's cry on the cross.

It's used of a woman's cry in childbirth. Have any of you heard that shriek? It's not just a light thing that is being spoken of.

[24 : 54] It's a cry. It's a troubled cry. And the picture then is of a child who's been hurt, who's harmed, and in his hurt, he's crying out in pain, Daddy, Daddy, help me.

Help me. And Ferguson said, that cry is the mark of the presence of the spirit of adoption, not least because it shows that in time of need, it is toward our Father in Heaven that we look.

What do you do when you're in trouble? What do you do when you're hurting and in pain? Who do you cry out to? Well, the spirit of adoption so works in the hearts of the sons of God that they cry, Father, Daddy.

They look to him for help. And that's another mark of the sons of God and of the presence of the spirit of adoption. A child of God by the spirit knows that his father cares.

And so his cry is turned heavenward to his father in heaven. Those are the first two marks. Any comments or questions as to those first two marks of a son of God and the effect of the spirit of adoption inside of them that shows that they are sons of God?

[26 : 22] Any comments or questions? Yes. What does Abba mean? Abba is just the Aramaic of the word Father. Father. So, that's why it's in the italics.

So, it's a, most of the New Testament was Greek. This is not a Greek word but an Aramaic word. Both meaning Father.

Intimate term for Father. All right. Any other questions, comments? Yeah, Dale? The double father, then, would that indicate the cry, the intensity?

Excellent. You do see that, don't you? The, the emphasis is made by the double cry. I mean, if you hear a, a, a, a shout from the other room, moms, uh, mom, uh, that's one thing.

But if you, mom, mom, a double cry, that's what Dale is pointing out. There's an intensity to the cry which would, uh, line up with what Ferguson is pointing out with regard to this word for cry, that it is an intense cry.

[27 : 38] It's a, it's a, it's a desperate cry. And, uh, I, I think it's a, a worthy application that he's saying that the children of God, uh, are taught by the spirit of adoption, uh, to turn their desperate cries to their father in heaven.

Just in the same way that, uh, a, a child would do instinctively toward a loving father in the home. Uh, knowing that that father cared, daddy, daddy, help.

We're enabled by the spirit of adoption to cry. Good. Good point. All right. Two more, two more marks of the spirit of adoption.

The third one, uh, is the witness of the spirit. You see it in verse 16. and I like that, uh, when we're done, I trust you can just go back to this passage and you see them all right there.

This isn't just trying to import some, uh, some thought of Ferguson into the text. Here's the next mark of the presence of the spirit of sonship.

[28 : 41] It is the witness of the spirit. Verse 16, the spirit himself testifies or bears witness with our spirit that we are God's children.

So this is the inner assurance given that, that God is our father, this creator and maker, this God of providence, over all things. He's my dad.

He's my father. And I am truly one of his children. So that's an inner assurance given by God's spirit, the spirit of adoption.

Uh, it's not some inner voice that's heard, but nonetheless, it is the spirit actively confirming our sense of sonship.

Now it's a co witness. It's, it's, it's not the only witness. It's not the only testimony being given. He's testifying along with our spirit. So our spirit is testifying to our sonship.

[29 : 40] And how do we know that we're sons of God? Well, well, we see that the spirit of God is enabling me to be putting sin to death. And he's enabling me to, to, to look to, to my father in heaven when I'm in trouble.

And, and I see by these evidences that that's what the spirit of adoption does in those who are adopted sons. So I, I can conclude that these are evidences that I am a son of God, but that's not the only testimony, my own testimony given to my sonship.

There is the spirit himself testifying along with our spirit that we indeed are the children of God. And, uh, that's the, another aspect of the spirit's work in those that have been adopted into the family of God.

A wonderful confidence that he accepts me as his son. And then a fourth mark is our inward groaning.

This is a rather strange one, um, but I trust that we'll understand it as we see it in the scriptures. Uh, the, one of the, the marks of the spirit of adoptions presence in the children of God is he makes them groan.

[31 : 02] They're, they're a groaning group. And, uh, notice how he puts it in verses 18 through 23. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God. I want you to notice the sons of God is still the theme here. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

Remember John saying that the world doesn't know us. We're an amazing group. We children of God are. We're, we're supernaturally born and, and God indwelt people.

We're rich. We're rich beyond the, the richest man on earth. And yet the world doesn't say, wow, there goes a Christian. The sons of God have not yet been revealed. Well, when will they be revealed? John, remember says in John, first John three, that when Christ is revealed, then we will be revealed with him.

And, and so Paul here is saying the creation is waiting for that day. When the sons of God will be revealed, when the cover will be pulled off and, and the true worth of being a son of God will be seen.

[32 : 13] And creation's longing for that day. Now, why would creation be so expectant and longing for the sons of God to be revealed? Well, for the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

So that's why they're, they're longing for the revelation of the children of God, because when the children are revealed, then they're going to be brought into this glorious liberty.

They're going to share in the glorious liberty of the children of God. No longer will the creation be in bondage to decay and frustration, but it will enjoy a freedom like that of the children of God.

Verse 22, we know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit groan inwardly as we await eagerly for the adoption, our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

So creation is longing. And what do you do when you're long? Don't you sometimes just groan? You're just, you can't even express how much you want that to happen.

[33 : 41] You just groan inside, whether outwardly or inward. You groan. You're longing for that so badly. And Paul is saying that it's not just creation groaning. He says in verse 23, not only them, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

There may be many things for which the Christian groans, but this groaning is a forward looking groan. It's looking for what's coming.

And it's produced by the influence of the spirit of adoption. Do you notice there's more to our adoption than what we're experiencing here and now in this life?

He says that we're groaning as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons. Haven't we been adopted? Yes, we have, but there's more to it.

There is the redemption of our bodies. There is much more. That will happen when Christ returns. The full adoption, the full privileges of sonship will be full blown in their final and completed estate.

[35 : 02] But what makes us groan is that already we have the first fruits of the spirit. We already have the spirit of adoption in us.

And life with the spirit is so precious that we say, if this is the first fruits, what will the fulfillment be? Oh, oh, that's what I want.

The streams on earth I've tasted, more sweet I'll drink above. There to an ocean fullness, his mercy, his mercy doth expand and glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's life.

We have a taste of it with the first fruits of the spirit. Just the beginning, just the first sheaves off of the harvest. That's what we're enjoying of the spirit's help and putting sin to death and, and turning our hearts God word when we're in trouble as our father in heaven who cares for us and bearing witness that it's true.

We really are children of God. Amazing that we should be called the children of God. And that's what we are. The spirit's telling us that. And, and this life in the spirit is so grand.

[36 : 11] We just can't wait for the full harvest. And that's what makes us grown for our full adoption, which you notice is, is very practical.

Paul said the redemption of our bodies. Our bodies are important. It's part of who I am. Jesus didn't just save my soul. He saved me body and soul. And one day this body, yes, will be returned to the dust, but, but one day it will, it will rise in immortality and in power and in glory.

And I will share a resurrection body like that of my Lord Jesus Christ forever. And in that resurrection body, enjoy the fullness of joy at his right hand and the eternal pleasures that are found in him.

You see, that's what the, that's the evidence of the spirit of adoption in the children of God. We groan. We're not happy just with the present level of sonship.

We're longing for that which God has prepared for us. Any comments or questions then on the last two of the, the evidences that the spirit of adoption has come and what he does in the hearts of the children of God?

[37 : 29] Yeah, Raj. I was just reading one of the old Puritans this week about, once we have our new body in heaven, that perfect body, it will absolutely increase our capacity for joy and happiness in the Lord that we've never, that we can never know here.

And that's what we're longing for, that complete happiness for our, for everything that needs to be whole. Amen. Like what we were when we first were created. Amen. And to have that relationship that we can't begin to imagine what's going to be like.

Do you ever find your bodies being a hindrance to your relationship and enjoyment of God? You come to, to read the Bible or pray and you're suddenly so tired.

And, and yeah, you, you spend some time with, but, but it's the weariness of the body. Do you ever have that problem of the spirit is willing, but the flesh is, the body is weak?

I see my brother Joe back there. Welcome, brother. You said you might visit us today. You're looking forward to a new body, aren't you? Well, that body is sometimes a hindrance to you, isn't it?

[38 : 43] In your spiritual walk with Christ. and that's what Roger is saying. No, no more of that, but rather this, this, this fullness of health will, will contribute to our enjoyment of God, not be a hindrance to it, as we often find it in this world.

Yes, Jesus. We went into an Ethiopian courthouse in January of 2012, and we had a little interview and all this stuff, and then the judge announced and said, then basically, he's yours.

And the adoption of that went on was a drug deal. And so, he even received a new name. He became, he got a new name.

He had a new status. He started to have, he had a totally legal, different legal standing with Ethiopia, with the United States. And yet, because of all the different situations, we weren't allowed to take that home.

So, we had to go to the United States, and our adopted son is still in Ethiopia. Now, he got some of the poor taste of being our fully adopted son, because we were able to send them care packages.

[39 : 59] And we were sending them care packages. We weren't sending packages to all the kids, and the transmission home. But we were paying attention, and praying, and loving, and praying to them. But it wasn't until, two months later, that we were able to go and get them, and bring them back.

And then, what everything, all the first fruits, came into fruition. And so, I think, honestly, we're looking forward to the completion of our adoption, and I think God, on the other side, is looking forward to the completion of our adoption, when all the distance is closed.

Amen. Amen. Let me just close with three verses from 1 John 3, and think not only of the privileges of being a child of God, with the spirit of adoption in us, but also the responsibilities that are then ours.

Behold, what kind of love is this, that the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us, is that it did not know Him.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be, has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

[41 : 30] Everyone, who has this hope in Him, purifies Himself, even as He is pure. As sons of God, let's allow our privileges to cause us to carry out our responsibility to imitate our Heavenly Father, to be more like Him, in purity, in love.

Well, we're dismissed. Amen. Amen. Amen.