

Sons of God

Benjamin Fry

In John 10:31, the Jews are preparing to stone Jesus. Their reasoning is that he made himself equal to God. So, in verse 36, Jesus asks them what is wrong with him calling himself the Son of God since he is able to do good works, and he also has a quote from Psalm 82. In the quote, he references that God himself refers to others as gods. These are those to whom the word of God came. They could not answer him, and so, our Lord was able to prevent them from stoning him.

The interesting part of this is that Jesus uses inclusive language to show that there is a sense in which his being the Son of God is not unique. There are several times throughout the Old Testament where the phrase "sons of God" is used. The majority of these are clearly a reference to angelic beings. Most of these are in Job, though it is not limited to that book (see Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:4-7). There are also a couple of places where God refers to something as his son.

In Psalm 2:7, the Lord declares that he has a son. There are a lot of obvious messianic concepts in this Psalm. You have the king on his hill, and he is given the nations as his inheritance. He will rule over them all with a rod of iron (Psalm 2:9). All of this imagery obviously pertains to the king who would come, Jesus himself.

In Exodus 4:22-23, God says that Moses is to tell Pharaoh that Israel is his firstborn son and is to be released to worship God. This concept is reinforced when the Lord destroys the firstborn of Egypt and again when the Israelites are required to consecrate every firstborn. This idea of Israel being the son of God permeates the whole of their story from Genesis to Malachi. Hosea reminds us of this in Hosea 11:1, and Matthew applies this to Jesus in Matthew 2:15.

This is appropriate. For most of history, the inheritance has gone first to the firstborn son, then there has been a distribution amongst the other sons. Daughters were left with a dowry and whatever their husbands could provide. So seeing Jesus as the Son of God is a reminder that he is the one who will inherit his father's kingdom. As Psalm 2 reminds us, the nations are his inheritance.

But there is a remaining idea. Hosea also says that there will be a time when those who are not God's children will be called children of God (Hosea 1:10). God desires to have many children, and Jesus alluded to this in John 10. If Jesus is not the only son of God, who are the other inheritors?

Jesus, in talking about the resurrection in Luke 20:34-38, says that when we are raised from the dead we will be equal to the angels of God and will be sons of God. Paul, in the book of Galatians, tells us that we are all sons of God (Galatians 3:26). He goes on to say that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Note that Paul uses this language to indicate that we all have an inheritance in God. Jesus will receive the double portion as the firstborn, and the only begotten, but we too have a share in God.

Elsewhere, the New Testament does refer to females as being the daughters of God and also the generic word for children is used. But in this place, here in Galatians, this is specific to inheritance, and Paul wants us to know that the inheritance is available to all: men, women, slaves, freemen, etc. Neither our status nor gender matters when it comes to the inheritance.

Galatians 4:6-7 tells us how we can be certain that we have that inheritance: he gave us his Spirit. And what does that Spirit cry? "Abba, Father." Not the cry of an impersonal being, but the cry of a child to the father whom they love. By his Spirit we become sons of God, and we receive a promise of the future glory to come. This is further reinforced in Romans 8:12-17 where Paul tells us that those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God.

We are reminded of this once again in Revelation 2:26-29:

The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

We, who receive the word of God, will, through new birth, be declared the sons of God, and we will receive the nations. God will say to us, "You are my son" (Psalm 2:7).