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## EPH 3:14-21 : AN APOSTOLIC PRAYER [2]

*No. EE8*

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would like to focus once again on Eph 3:14, and specifically on the relationship we enjoy with the Son.

Last time I emphasised that the best part of our redemption is the fact that we are children of the Father. This, in the nature of things, has far-reaching implications for our lives as Christians. This is especially true of our relationship with the Father and the Son - and, of course, our prayers.

I would like to touch on two Biblical truths that might seem to contradict each other, but which are both true. In fact, both of them need to be considered in order to master that sensitive balance which pleases God. On the one hand I want to show that *our* status as God's children is of a lower nature than that of the Son, the Lord Jesus. On the other hand I would like to draw attention to the truth that we who are in Christ are cherished by the Father with an inexpressible love, and as such, we may live and pray before Him with absolute confidence.

### CHRIST'S UNIQUE SONSHIP

□ There is, in the absolute sense of the word, only one who can call God His Father: God the Son. The Bible is clear about this.

- Firstly, there are two concepts in Scripture that highlight His unique sonship.

- ~ Jesus Christ is the "one and only" (Gr. *monogenes*; Jh 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1Jh 4:9).

The translation, "only begotten", of the KJV and NKJV is misleading. Christ was not born; He has been in existence for all eternity.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus Christ is therefore the only one in His class. Whereas many others may be children of God, *His* sonship is unique and different.

- ~ Jesus Christ is the "firstborn" (Gr. *prototokos*; Rm 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Hb 1:6; Rev 1:5). In the Bible this concept does not primarily point to order of birth. This is why Esau could sell it to Jacob, and Ruben could forfeit it in favour of his brothers. No, it had to do with status and rank in a household.

- Secondly, John uses another technique to underscore this distinction. He consistently refers to the Lord Jesus as the "Son" (Gr. *huios*), and to the Lord's disciples as God's "children" (Gr. *tekna*).

- Thirdly, while John says that Christians have been "born of God", Paul consistently reminds us of the distinction between Christ and ourselves by referring to us as *adopted children* (Rm 8:15, 23; Gal 4:4-6; Eph 1:5).

- Fourthly, the Lord Jesus never talks about "our Father" (grouping Himself with His disciples as children of God)<sup>2</sup>, but rather of "My Father" and "the Father" - and even of "my Father and your Father" (Jh 20:17).

□ It is therefore priority in Scripture to keep reminding us that Jesus Christ's sonship was and is unique. After all, although completely man, Christ is completely God as well. He remains the Creator; all other children of God mere created beings. The Lord

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1. Earlier it was believed that the Greek word derived from *gennaō* (bring forth), but today it is generally accepted that the concept originated in *genos* (type or sort).

2. Of course, in the model prayer, the term "Our Father" refers to the Father as the Father of the disciples as a group.

Jesus is the most excellent, the greatest, the highest, the foremost amongst His brothers and sisters - and completely unique.

### OUR UNITY WITH THE SON

□ What was stated thus far should not give the impression that the Father accepts us half-heartedly - or even reluctantly - as His children.

To appreciate the completeness and richness of being God's children, we have to remember that we have been adopted *in Christ*.

- Our unity with Christ is the fundamental principle of our eternal salvation. Usually the New Testament uses the words "in Christ" to refer to this unity - an expression occurring many, many times.

It is a theme too profound to do justice here. But in short it means that everything, everything given to us by our heavenly Father - for all eternity - is given for the sake of the Son, and on the basis of what He has done. In fact, He gives to us as if giving to the Son Himself. So intimate is our bond with the Son, that Scripture not only says that we are in Christ, but also that Christ is in us. To a certain extent it can even be said, admittedly with caution, that whatever applies to the Son, applies to us.

- Paul struggles to express this mystery. One of the ways he uses, is to add the Greek prefix that means "together with" (Gr. *sun*) to words which are used for Christ. For example, Rom 8:17 says literally: since we are sufferers *together with Christ*, we are heirs *together with Him*, and will be glorified *together with Him*. And Eph 2:5-6 says that we have been made alive *together with*, resurrected *together with*, and seated *together with* Christ in heaven.

□ It is now clear that I will appreciate the Father's love for, and acceptance of those who are in Christ, to the degree to which I comprehend the delight He takes in His Son. To that degree I will grasp why having God as Father is by far my greatest privilege.

And to that degree I will understand that it is on the basis of the mediatory work of Christ that the Father welcomes me before His throne of grace. And that is of course the key to bold prayer.

It is therefore wonderfully helpful to understand something of the Father's love for His Son.

## THE FATHER'S DELIGHT IN THE SON

□ When the Lord Jesus is baptised, the Father speaks from heaven, saying: "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17).

Once again, during the transfiguration, the disciples hear the Father's declaration of love: "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!" (Mt 17:5). Years later it would still remain etched in Peter's mind (2Pt 1:16-18).

What we have to realize, is that the Father only speaks twice from heaven during Jesus' life here on earth - and on both occasions it is a declaration of pleasure in and love for His Son.

□ This parental love has existed since all eternity. In His High Priestly prayer Jesus states that the Father loved Him before the creation of the world (Jh 17:24).

During His time on earth the Lord Jesus refers repeatedly to this love. In Mt 11:27 He says: "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (also compare Jh 1:18; 5:20; 10:17-18; 17:5).

And, of course, following the crucifixion the Father "... exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name ..." (Phil 2:9).

Indeed, Paul is right to call the Lord Jesus in Col 1:13: "the Son he (the Father) loves".

## WHAT DOES ALL OF THIS TELL US?

### 1. Modesty before the Lord is fitting.

Let us never forget who we are and how we came into the Father's household. It was, and remains, grace upon grace. And by no means dare we forget this when we appear before Him in prayer.

Therefore caution, humility, reverence and profound gratitude before the Lord are always proper - in fact, it is absolutely necessary.

Of course, it is not wrong to think of the Lord Jesus as our oldest brother - but then within Biblical limits. More important is the controlling fact that our status as God's children is subordinate to His. What we have received, speaks of grace upon grace.

### 2. It is essential that we often ponder the love and the grace of the Father.

Consider that He already had a Son - more worthy than the angels - when He adopted us. We needed a Father; He did not need children.

Consider what we were when He adopted us - spiritually dead, addicted to sin, under His wrath (Eph 2:1-3).

Furthermore, consider at what cost He adopted us. Truly, the contract of adoption was signed in blood - that of His First and Only!

And consider that we were not only filthy, but antagonistic towards Him. To forgive enemies speaks of astonishing love. What, then, must we say of the fact that He adopted us as His children?

Finally, consider how many of us He adopted and still adopts. Not one or two, but millions - from all generations and all nations.

### 3. Nevertheless, let us not miss the Scriptural emphasis on God's call to live boldly before Him.

Whereas deep humility before God should rule in our hearts, it is likewise true that the Lord calls us again and again in His Word to live confidently before Him.

Take for instance what the apostle writes just before this prayer: "we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him" (Eph 3:12; NASB). It is a remarkable statement!

The word "access" (Gr. *prosagoge*) is used only three times in the New Testament (also Rm 5:2; Eph

2:18), and on each occasion it talks about the same thing. It is a word indicating someone's privilege to enter into the presence of a very important person. Let's put it this way: we have an open door to enter into God's holy presence as often as we like.

The word "boldness" (Gr. *parresia*) implies two ideas: the absence of fear, and freedom of speech. Let us therefore pour out our hearts without hesitation before our Father's throne of grace.

The word "confident" (Gr. *pepoithesis*) indicates conviction, assurance, determination and expectation. It is to know that you are not simply speaking into the wind. No! You are speaking to your heavenly Father, who gives full attention to your prayers. He bound Himself absolutely - by way of a covenant - to use our prayers in the outworking of His eternal council.

Last but not least, did you notice what the apostle says in Eph 3:11-12? It is "in him" - in "Christ Jesus our Lord" - that we have this awesome privilege and calling! It is because the Father loves the Son so much that we can appear before Him! It is on the basis of the Son's mediatory work that we may pray confidently and boldly.

And the Father is not reluctant to answer our prayers! A thousand times, no! He does so as a parent who embraces his son's beloved bride as his daughter-in-law - or even more accurately, who takes her into his home as his own daughter.

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