

## CHAPTER II.

### *The distinction between Natural and Spiritual Sonship.*

“ Beloved, now are we the sons of God,” 1 John iii. 2.

MUCH has been said by blind guides concerning the duty of the creature to his Creator, and the privileges of “ the children of Zion.” But these infinitely distinct things are often blended, so that error is more easily propagated, and the unwary more easily deceived by a speciousness of truth. It will, therefore, be my province in this place, to call the reader’s attention to the difference between natural and spiritual sonship.

Christ is called “ a Son,” he is so pre-eminently and officially. Thus pre-eminently it is said of him “ This is my beloved Son, Matt. iii. 17. being “ the first-born,” or chief, “ among many brethren,” Rom. viii. 29. It is said of him officially, “ Christ as a son over his own house,” Heb. iii. 6. I say Christ is the Son of God pre-eminently, being “ Head over all things to his church,” every member of which is a son of God; and are thus, as a body, the brethren of Christ. I say Christ is the Son of God officially: for I humbly conceive each person of the Trinity bears a distinct name, the one from the other, not because one is derived from another, for this would be taking away the Godhead of two persons in the Trinity, but because of the different relation each bears to the church in the

economy of grace, which relationship is founded upon covenant engagements. It being the covenant office of the Father to appoint and ordain, to give and demand, to accept and acknowledge; and it being the covenant office of the Holy Ghost to quicken and convince, to call and renew, to guide and keep; so it is the covenant office of Christ to purchase and secure, to deliver and exalt, to intercede and govern. Therefore I consider Christ is "a Son" officially and pre-eminently. Angels are called "Sons of God," Job xxxviii. 7. they are so by creation, and in this sense God is the Father of all things, from the seraph near his throne to the smallest atom in the universe; and all shall, because all must, bow in some way or other to his authority. And angels are "sons of God" by office, for says the apostle, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Heb. i. 14.

Men generally are set forth as sons of God, Matt. xxi. 28. Luke xv. 11. They are so naturally, being created by God, and descending from Adam by natural generation; or they are so spiritually, being "created in Christ Jesus," Eph. ii. 10. and deriving from him spiritual existence. Adam, as he stood in Eden, was a *naturally* upright son, blessed with a *natural* paradise, in which he was to continue as long as there was no breach in his *natural* obedience to his Maker; but when he unnaturally rebelled, he lost his *natural* inheritance. When he stood in pristine purity, he could contemplate with *natural* pleasure upon all the works of God as seen in creation, admire his skill who made the

whole, adore his hand who was preserving him and the creatures around him, and own the God of the whole earth as his *natural* Lord and moral Governor; but here Adam's religion ended. He knew nothing of Christ while in Eden, neither could he need Christ, because he had all the purity, perfection, and happiness, his *natural* mind could crave; and when he eat of the forbidden fruit he tarnished every faculty of his soul: therefore darkness filled his understanding, enmity his affections, and vanity his thoughts. Adam beget a son in his own natural and sinful likeness, so that Cain brings to the Lord a natural offering, which was good as far it went, because it was owning the Creator as his moral Lord; but it was not a spiritual offering, for he never was and never could be a spiritual son. His brother Abel was a spiritual son, and he brings an offering of a spiritual character. Why was it spiritual? The Holy Ghost gives the answer, "by faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." By faith in what? "In the lamb slain from the foundation of the world: but could not Cain have offered in the same way if he had made proper use of God's reproof, "Why art thou wrath, and why is thy countenance fallen?" I answer no; for, first, he had no spiritual understanding, and so could not enter into God's reproof. Secondly, he had no spiritual power, therefore could not act in a spiritual way. Thirdly, God had not given him faith, and he could not exercise it if he had not got it, neither could he put it in himself, for "faith is the gift of God." And, lastly, God never designed to give Cain faith, since, had that been his determination he

would have done it, for "he is of one mind and who can turn him? And what his soul desireth even that he doeth," Job xxiii. 17. But God says to Cain, "If thou doest well shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well sin lieth at the door." Does not this imply that Cain had a chance of being like Abel? By no means: God did not purpose, by thus speaking to Cain, to give him an opportunity of being saved, or of offering him a day of grace, as some would think; but of more fully showing Cain the vast superiority of Abel's religion to his. To "do well," and to "do right," are things infinitely distinct: it was "*right*" for Cain to bring his cultivated fruits, and so acknowledge God as his Creator, Preserver, and moral Governor. It was "*well*" when Abel came before God as a naked sinner, pleading Christ's righteousness and rejecting his own; as a vile sinner, pleading Jesus' blood, and renouncing every other refuge; and as an unworthy, imperfect, and helpless sinner, pleading a given Christ, a finished work, a mighty Redeemer. God says, "say ye to the righteous it shall be *well* with him;" mark, not "*right*;" for some to be in hell is "*right*," or God would not have ordered it, for "just and *right* is he;" but it is "*well*" for some to be in heaven. And as Jesus delivers his sheep from hell by his blood, and exalts them to heaven by his righteousness, it may be with justice said, "he hath done all things *well*." But why did not God give Cain faith in Christ? Because faith in Christ is not a natural but a spiritual gift, and Cain was only a natural son; having no grace union to God in Christ; therefore, to give him

that which in all its acts and exercises apprehends this union, would be giving it to no purpose, for the design of God in giving faith is not to make a sinner one of his, but that the sinner who possesses faith may know that he belongs to God by a special relationship, founded in Christ. Thus the apostle speaks, "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." Why did Christ apprehend Paul? Because he was one, God the Father chose in him, and so had an election union to Christ: he was a member of that church which Jesus had betrothed unto himself from everlasting; he was one of those brethren over whom Jesus was the first-born or pre-eminent Son; therefore Christ apprehended Paul in effectual calling, and faith being given to Paul, he was, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, "reaching forth," or "following after," a knowledge of interest in God the Father's adopting love, and God the Son's betrothing grace. Thus it was he was apprehending that for which also he was apprehended of Christ Jesus. To be a spiritual son is to have a being in Christ; and it must be obvious to every discerning mind, that whoever is quickened into spiritual life by the Holy Ghost, must have had this life before the quickening, inasmuch as the Holy Ghost does not quicken with a different life from what the Father gives, and the Father gives no other life than what is in the Son. "This is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is *in his Son*." Not a natural life, for this Adam could have and did have, without Christ; but a life of spiritual sonship,

for "this life is in his Son," therefore must be a Son's life: but not a natural sonship; for a natural sonship we have by the first Adam, "who is of the earth, *earthy*," and his transgression in Eden did not deprive us of this "*earthy*" relationship. But the second Adam is the Lord from heaven, and "as is the earthy, such are they also as are earthy," so "as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." It is because of relationship to Adam we all die, and in consequence of relationship to Christ that any are made alive: for thus it reads, "as in Adam all (his natural seed) die," so "in Christ shall all (his spiritual seed) be made alive." On the ground of natural sonship, the law was given, and obedience required from the creature to the Creator; but on the ground of spiritual sonship, the gospel was given, and the promise made, "the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." On the foundation of natural sonship the law cries death, and on the foundation of spiritual sonship the gospel shouts life. Christ said to his disciples, "my Father shall give you another comforter;" but if the Spirit worked in the hearts of men as a comforter, on the footing of natural sonship, then the promise was unnecessary, because every man would have a right to it, and could claim it at God's hands. Yea, God would be unjust in withholding it; but because God's people are sons by a grace union subsisting before the fall, they are under the fall made sons by a grace communion; or, to speak as the scriptures do, "because they are sons, God sends forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father." That is to say, because

they are sons adopted in the "beloved Son" of God; the Spirit, whose covenant office is to glorify Christ by taking of the things of Christ, and shewing them unto all who have a covenant interest therein, makes known in their hearts their eternal sonship in Christ, by which knowledge they have liberty to cry, Abba, Father.

The creatures of God have various duties to perform as creatures, according to the varied situations and circumstances in which they may be placed; but these duties must not be blended with the rights and privileges of the Lord's believing people. Thus the address taught by Christ, "Our Father," does not belong to men as creatures, nor is it any *man's duty* to make use of this language; it is the exclusive privilege of a quickened soul brought to hang wholly upon Jesus, and thus can say, "God is my Jesus' Father, and through Jesus, my Father, *therefore, Our Father.*" So that every believer can, with holy confidence, adopt Christ's words, "Our Father;" and very blessed is it for the dear children of God, amidst all the dark paths through which they may have to pass, to remember Christ's consolation is theirs, "yet I am not alone because the Father is with me." How do you know he is with you? Because you are hanging all your hopes upon his dear Son, which shows you have made the same choice as God the Father made, for Christ is his resting place: yes, "this is the rest wherewith he causeth the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing." Here his law rests, here his justice rests, here his salvation rests, and here his glory rests. And as you have chosen the

same resting place, it is an evidence God has chosen you in his Son, and having chosen you, he "will not cast you away." Therefore you can say, if friends forsake and comforts are lost, "yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me," and the Father being with you Christ is with you, so you can cry, "Our Father."

The creature's duty and the saint's privilege are so much blended, that we often hear universal exhortations given to the performance of such acts, as, after all, are exclusively the privileges of Zion's citizens. To set forth the difference between natural duties and spiritual privileges, I would observe, it was the duty of the Ninevites to fast; but this was only a natural work, and they for it had a natural blessing; Nineveh was not then destroyed. It was Abimelech's duty to restore Sarah to Abraham, and for Abraham to pray for Abimelech; but all was natural, and Abimelech had a natural blessing. It was Abraham's natural duty to cry, "O that Ishmael might live before thee," and he had a natural answer; said the Lord, unto him "Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly." It was Jehu's natural duty to destroy Baal out of Israel, and he had for it a natural blessing, "The Lord said unto Jehu, because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel," 2 Kings x. 30. When the Moabites and the Ammonites went against Jehosaphat king of Judah, it was his duty "to proclaim a fast



throughout all Judah," and Judah's duty to "gather themselves together to ask help of the Lord;" and the Lord gave them a natural answer, as the natural and moral Preserver and Governor of Israel, "Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's; ye shall not need to fight in this battle, set yourselves, stand ye still and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem." And the result was according to the promise, 2 Chron. xix. It was Nabal's duty to have kindly treated David, and for his breach on this point the Lord smote him, 1 Sam. xxv. 38. And in all cases the Lord has connected some natural blessing with natural duties. Thus, Moses said to the children of Israel, "It shall come to pass if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: and all these blessings shall come on thee, blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field; blessed shall be the fruit of thy body; blessed shall be thy basket and thy store," &c. &c. Deut. xxviii. But what has all this to do with the privileges of spiritual sonship? No more than Belial has to do with Christ, or the devil has to do with heavenly enjoyments. The duty of the creature to depend upon the providence of God, to walk morally among men, and to be an useful member of society at large; and the privileges of a saint, by which he enters his heavenly Father's presence with humble boldness, lays hold of his promises, pours out his soul

before him, receives his smile, has given to him an earnest of heaven, feels an oneness with God, and has fellowship with the mystery, are as different as light and darkness, heaven and hell. The religion of the former consists in a natural, moral, and earthly knowledge of God, as the Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor of the universe, and is, in this dependance upon providence, but a few shades above the brute creation, concerning whom the psalmist says, "these wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season," Psalm civ. 27. But the latter possesses an heavenly, an incorruptible, and spiritual knowledge of God as his friend, his portion, his delight, and his everlasting all, in whom he dwells, and with whom he walks in paths of righteousness; after whom he breathes as the glory of his soul and his eternal rest; knowing that by virtue of interest in his adopting love he possesses an inheritance far superior to angels, being a "partaker of the divine nature." To be a spiritual son, then, is to be adopted by God the Father in Christ: and remember "all the promises of God are in him Yea, and in him Amen." All the honour and majesty God ever will communicate is to be found in him, as we read, "honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him." Psalm xxi. 5. All the church's blessings are in him, as we read, "who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." All the church's glory is in him, as we read, "thy God thy glory." All perfection is in him, as we read, "ye are complete in him." All salvation, delight, and excellency is in him, for "it hath pleased the Father that in him should

all fulness dwell." And thus no blessing can be obtained, no promise known, no mercy rejoiced in, out of Christ. Therefore they who have no interest in Christ, will never have any strength to ask for mercy at God's hand, neither can God grant any to them. For he can communicate no holiness to man but the holiness of Christ, no perfection but the perfection of Christ, no blessedness but the blessedness of Christ, who is "made most blessed for ever." And all whom God the Father chose and adopted in Christ, are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." So that salvation, perfection, redemption, sanctification, wisdom, righteousness, blessedness, excellency and glory, must, sooner or later, be personally known and personally sung of by the election of grace. All mercy is in Christ, and all who have been and all who ever will be saved, are where mercy is—in Christ.

" Sons we are thro' God's election,  
 Who in Jesus Christ believe ;  
 By eternal destination,  
 Saving grace we here receive ;  
Our Redeemer  
 Does both grace and glory give."\*

And now, reader, what is to be learnt from the consideration of the difference between natural and spiritual sonship. First, that God will not condemn the ungodly at the great day of judgment for not believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, because faith was never given them. And it was not given them because they were not "sons of God" by electing and adopting love, by which all who have faith given to them were so con-

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\* I do not know the author.

stituted. Thus Christ said to the pharisees, "ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you;" and again, "if God were your Father, ye would love me." Now God was their Father by creation, therefore Christ could not mean if God were their natural Father; he must have meant, "if God were their Father by a grace union in himself," they would love him in a grace communion. Therefore all who are condemned at the last great day will be condemned not for rejecting Christ, but for their breaches of the covenant of works, under which all who will then be condemned lived and died.

Secondly, we learn there can be no chance for them to be saved whom God never chose in Christ; for all out of Christ must be lost, seeing there is no other name given under heaven whereby men can be saved. And "God is of one mind;" if, therefore, he did not put you and me, reader, in Christ before time, no act of ours can make him do so in time. Yet God does not condemn, as I have before hinted, because men have no being in Christ: for this, properly speaking, is neither wrong in God nor wrong in man. It is not wrong in God, because he is not bound to give eternal life to any; it is not wrong in man, because he could not put himself in Christ. But let it not be thought in my saying this, that I suppose men may seek God and yet be lost. No man ever sought God spiritually but found him, and the reason is because God chose him in Christ long before. When God chose his own, he, in sovereignty, passed the finally impenitent by; and, in justice, condemns them for their sins at the "great day of his wrath."

And lastly, we learn the dignity of a saint: no meaner character than a son of God;—no lower state than an heir of heaven;—no other home than the heart of Christ;—no less an interest than the whole revenue of Jehovah's fulness.

If then, reader, thou knowest what it is to be brought before the Great High Priest of God's Israel, as the leper of old was, with thy "clothes rent," thy heart opened up to view, so that it appears to thee like "a cage of unclean birds," thy "head bare," brought to the end of all thy empty forms and notional religion, with "a covering upon the upper lip" of thy own righteousness and creature-worth, while the cry has been issuing from thy inmost soul "unclean, unclean!!" then rest assured that God is in thee of a truth, and that he has brought thee thus far "to reveal his Son" in thee, and to make him to thee "more precious than gold." Therefore be not discouraged though the accursed Ishmael's mock, thou knowest that with thee, as with Isaac of old, God will establish his covenant of grace. While the world is eagerly pursuing the things which perish in the using, thy treasure is in heaven. While time is rapidly launching thousands into an eternal world, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, thou art heir to eternal bliss and blessedness at God's right hand. And when "the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the works that are therein shall be burned up," thou wilt have an hiding place in the heart of thy dear Redeemer, who will then come to be "glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."

## CHAPTER III.

### *On offering the Gospel, or an offered Gospel shewn to be contrary to God's Word and Will.*

“Go ye into all the world and preach (not offer) the gospel to every creature,” Mark xvi. 15.

It would be well if the Lord's people would bear in mind the apostle's words, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” For such is the “philosophy” and “vain deceit” of men, that they are continually “making the commandments of God of none effect by their traditions.” Thus “fleshly wisdom” too often takes the place of “simplicity and Godly sincerity” among religious teachers: so that, in order to make the gospel of Christ palatable to human nature, and congenial to man's depraved reason, many dare to interlope earthly principles into the heavenly religion of the Son of God. Thus either to suit man's pride, or to explain the mystery of divine sovereignty, men have so far departed from the faith in these “latter times,” 1 Tim. iv. 1. as to advocate an “offered gospel,” which neither prophets wrote of nor apostles knew. And what does an “offered gospel” consist of? Not of what Jehovah has determined upon, whom he loves, and how he loves: not of the sovereignty of his will, the power of his

arm, and the immutability of his counsels: not of the provisions of his mercy, in their sufficiency, efficiency, and glory: not of the great Redeemer's worth, dignity, and deathless fame: not of covenant settlements in all their fulness, extent, and certainty: not of salvation in its gracious origin, perfect accomplishment, powerful application, and glorious consummation; but full of creature dignity, creature power, and creature independence; full of contingencies, conditions, and discord; while discriminating mercy, sovereign grace, and everlasting love, are hid behind the veil of proud Free Will.

*An offered gospel* supposes every man to have some grace in his heart, or why should its advocates exhort unregenerate men to receive it? But that every man has not grace in his heart must be evident, because grace is said to "reign," Rom. v. 21. So that all who have it are interested in those words, "sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Now if grace reigns where it exists, all who possess grace must leave the world, hate sin, groan on account of its workings, struggle with the powers of darkness, resist the devil, seek God, have a broken heart, loathe the lusts and corruptions of the flesh, know something of the Lord's words, "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," feel the deep leprosy of sin as having tainted him throughout, mourn the hidings of God's face, long after the righteousness of Christ, pour out the soul before him, value nothing so much as the light of God's countenance, while fellowship with the Father, and with his Son

Jesus Christ, is esteemed the highest privilege. Are these the feelings, desires, and exercises of every man? Are these fruits of grace brought forth by every man? Decidedly not. But why are they not? Because grace is not given to every man, since where it exists it "reigns." Here it may be objected that grace may be given to every man but does not reign because man does not make use of it. To this I would reply, grace is not given, only for us to make use of, but to make use of us too, by qualifying us for communion with God, and forming us as vessels fit for the master's use, that we might be to the praise of his glory. When the apostle "had a thorn in the flesh," he besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from him; but the Lord told him, "my grace is sufficient for thee:" and lest we should misunderstand these words, and think it meant that God's grace was sufficient, if Paul would make proper use of it, the apostle tells us a little more the Lord said, as explanatory, "my strength is made perfect in weakness:" not made perfect by human cultivation, human wisdom, or human watchfulness; but "made perfect in weakness." If then, grace is God's strength "made perfect in weakness," it cannot be because man does not make use of it that it does not reign in every man: it must be because grace is not given to every man. Further still, if grace is not in every man, then every man is not capable of performing a gracious act. Now to offer the gospel to every man is offering Christ to every man, because Christ is the substance of the gospel; but to receive Christ's salvation, to love



Christ's word, and to prize Christ's truth, are gracious acts. Then every man cannot receive Christ's salvation, love Christ's word, and prize Christ's truth, because they are gracious acts, and every man has not grace. Not only so; but God never requires anything of the creature, which he has not first given to the creature, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required," Luke xii. 48. Much was given to Adam, and in Adam to his posterity. God gave him an upright soul and a sinless body; perfect earthly happiness, and a reasonable law; a capacious intellect, and a knowledge of the effects of his breach of the law before it was broken; and much is required: perfect unsinning obedience, or death temporal, spiritual, and eternal. God gave him to be the federal head and representative of all his posterity; much is required, their death in him. Much was given to Christ, even the whole election of grace; and much is required, that he should pay their debts, blot out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against them, remove their guilt, bring in for them everlasting righteousness, and exalt them to heaven.

Much is given to the Father, precious blood, glorious righteousness, a sweet smelling sacrifice: much is required, pardon for sin, acceptance of their persons for whom the price was paid, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, whereby it may be known. Much is given to the Holy Ghost, a people to quicken, a Christ to glorify, and adopting love to reveal; much is required,—a living family, obedient subjects, and loving children.

Much is given to the church,—Christ in all his offices, characters, and relations—the Holy Ghost in all his offices, faithfulness, and preserving power—salvation in all its fulness, certainty, and glory: much is required, an acknowledgment of wretchedness, poverty, and imperfection; a laying low at the Redeemer's feet, a rejoicing in electing love, a resting upon the Holy Ghost's covenant engagements, a rejection of every creature confidence, a glorying in nothing but the Mediator's worth and work, and an everlasting song before the throne, when time's adverse scenes are all for ever passed. But no grace is given to some men, and for that reason no act of grace is required from some men. To this point the Saviour speaks when he says, "No man can come to me except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him."

If then every man has not got grace in his heart; if every man is incapable of doing a gracious act without grace; if grace reigns where it exists without human aid; and if God does not require gracious acts from men to whom he has given no grace; then that gospel which holds a contrary view must be fallacious, and *an offered gospel* does so; therefore, *an offered gospel* is contrary to God's Word and Will.

*An offered gospel* supposes God dependant upon man, for its advocates represent God desiring to save, but not able to do it till the sinner is willing. Now a will to be saved by the grace of God, through Christ, cannot be in man by nature, because man is represented as being "born like a wild ass's colt," Job xi. 12. So perverse that he makes choice of any way but the right way.