

The Son of God (Part I)

“The Son of God” is a very common and frequently-used title. When reading the Bible, we must understand that the same vocabulary or phrase has both a broad as well as a specific meaning. In a broad sense, “the son of God” can be used to refer to Christians, the Israelites or even the angels. Of course, when it is used to refer to Jesus, it certainly is not in the general sense of the meaning. Rather, it has a special and specific definition and that is what we need to try to understand today.

There is an interesting phenomenon in the Bible and that is, Jesus did not like to be addressed as ‘the son of God’ and his most preferred term is to be addressed as ‘the son of man’. Why was Jesus not willing to be called the ‘son of God’, and yet the Bible had been addressing him as such time and again?

If you turn to the concordance, you will discover that in the synoptic gospels (ie, Matthew, Mark and Luke as these three gospels are very similar in their contents, so they can be cross-referenced), Jesus did not even address himself as ‘the Son of God’ a single time. In the Gospel of John there were three occasions where Jesus addressed himself as the Son of God, and it was generally due to the special circumstances.

For example, according to some Greek manuscripts, **Jn 9:35-37** says, *‘Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have both seen him, and he is the one who is talking with you.”’*

In this dialogue, Jesus was the one who initiated to ask that man who was previously blind and had his eyes opened at that time, saying, ‘Do you believe the Son of God?’ That man replied, ‘I want to believe but who is the Son of God?’ Jesus told him that he was the one. Jesus confessed that he was the Son of God. Such a situation was very rare and this was one of them. In the Gospel of John, there were only three occasions while there was none in any of the synoptic gospels. Obviously, Jesus did not like to call himself as such.

Whenever the Bible mentioned about Jesus being the Son of God, it was often mentioned by someone else. For example, in **Mt 16:16-17**, *‘Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.’* Jesus did not refute Peter’s words but they were from Peter.

Let’s read **Mt 27:54** - *‘Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”’* This was by the Centurion.

There was also **Mt 14:33**- *The men in the boat fell down before him and exclaimed, “You really are God's son!” (CJB Version)* This was also spoken by other people.

Let’s look at **Lk 4:41** - *‘Demons also were coming out of many, shouting, “You are the Son of God!” But rebuking them, He would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ.’* This verse is quite special. Who said that Jesus was the son of God? It was the demons. Jesus did not like the demons addressing him as such, later he scolded them, ‘Forbid them to speak’.

Another noteworthy point is that Satan loved to use this title ‘the son of God’ to tempt Jesus. We can refer to **Mt 4: 3** and **Mt 4:6**.

Mt 4: 3 - And the tempter came and said to Him, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

Mt 4:6.- and *said to Him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning you’.

From these words, we can see that Satan did not see Jesus as God, or he could not have tempted him. However, why did he have to emphasize, ‘If you were the ‘Son of God’? This phrase had become the temptation of Jesus, as if Satan saw something that he knew could be used to tempt Jesus.

Mt 27:40 - “and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

You see, this temptation was never ending. Even at the last moment, Satan was still tempting Jesus through people, ‘If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’ This is a point worthy of our attention.

Why would ‘the Son of God’ become a way to tempt Jesus? Perhaps, it is too early to raise this question because we need to find out the meaning of ‘the Son of God’. The ‘Son of God’ was really a big problem. Why? It was because it gave Jesus many troubles.

For instance, **Jn 19:7 - ‘The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and by that law he ought to die because he made himself out to be the Son of God.”**

This title of ‘the Son of God’ had become Jesus’ alleged crime. What was the problem? There was a law which forbade anyone from calling themselves the Son of God and the consequence of it was a death sentence. This title had become Jesus’ death sentence. I hope you look at it clearly that the Jews had never regarded Jesus as God and they also did not accuse him for calling himself as God. Perhaps, in the Gospel of John, there were words of Jesus that seemed to suggest that Jesus was proclaiming himself as God. However, from the beginning to the end, his alleged crime was that he called himself as the Son of God.

Hence, the key question here is that we must understand clearly the meaning of the Son of God. Christians do not have a clear understanding, neither do the Muslims, so this had become a reason for attacking Jesus or the Bible. Of course, it was understandable that the Muslims could not understand since we, Christians, have not understood it either.

What is ‘the Son of God’? When we evangelise, we urge people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. We have to ask what that means. Christians are also sons of God, Jesus is also the Son of God, why do we have to believe that he is the Son of God? We have to believe many things. We need to believe that Jesus is Lord, he is Christ and he is the Son of God.

Who is Jesus? What is the Son of God? Let’s return to **Lk 4:41**.

‘Demons also were coming out of many, shouting, “You are the Son of God!” But rebuking them, he would not allow them to speak, because they knew him to be the Christ.’

Notice that even demons confessed that Jesus was the Son of God. What is the Son of God? This verse has already told us that the Son of God is Christ, the two are synonyms. In fact, it is not difficult to find the answer, and it is very easy to find it using the concordance.

For example, **Jn 20:31** says, '*but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*'

There is an interesting phenomenon that 'Christ' and 'the Son of God' are always positioned together and mentioned hand in hand. Another point worth noting is that this sentence is the conclusion of the Gospel of John, telling us why John had to write the Gospel of John. If the entire intention of the Gospel of John was to have us believe that Jesus was God, that would be the best opportunity, yet John seemed to have missed the chance. If we were to write, how would it have been written? 'but these things have been written so that you believe that Jesus is God'? Nevertheless, John did not say that. Here, 'Christ' and 'Son of God' are mentioned together and they are actually synonyms.

Let's look at **Jn 11:27** - '*She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, even he who comes into the world."*'

Both are mentioned hand in hand. To believe that he is Christ is to believe that he is the Son of God. Believing that he is the Son of God is to believe that he is Christ. Therefore, both are not different things and we should not get this wrong.

Let's see **Mt 26:63** - '*But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God."*'

This has linked the Son of God and Christ together more obviously. Jesus is the Son of God, which implies that Jesus is Christ.

This is the interpretation of the Jews but the Gentiles could not understand. Whenever the son of God is mentioned, we would wonder 'how did God get this son born to the world?' It is no wonder that the Muslims thought that Christians were blaspheming God, as they thought that such a saying implied that God and Mary had a sexual relationship in order that this son was born! That is because they did not understand that this teaching was originated from the Old Testament - that the Son of God was Christ while Christ is God's son. We must be very clear on this point. We have already read Chapter 16 of the Gospel of Matthew. Let's look through it one more time. (**Mt 16:16**) Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

In the same way, both terms are mentioned hand in hand, as if they were the same title. You can make a comparison on your own if you have the time and look at other parallel passages. For example, **Mt 8:29** - '*And they cried out, saying, "What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"*' Notice that it did not mention about the Son of God. In fact, this is not an issue because both terms are the same. In the hearts of the Jews, if you were to address him as Christ, you are saying that he was the Son of God; if you said he was the Son of God, you were acknowledging that he was the Christ.

Returning to **Jn 19:7**, let us see which law it was referring to. '*The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die because he made himself out to be the Son of God."*' The Jews seemed to know that there was a law which said that common people cannot call themselves as the Son of God, what was that law?

Let's see Deut 18:18-20 - *'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'*

What is the relationship between verses 18 to 19 and verse 20? Verses 18-19 mentioned that God would raise up a prophet like Moses (that is Christ). Then, he instructed that the people had to listen to him or God would take the people to task. But what is the relationship with verse 20? According to the context in front, God would raise a prophet like Moses, that is Christ. Verse 20 said that someone would come presumptuously with God's name and you will need to punish him to death. The context is about Christ, so it is not talking about the general kind of false prophet but those who pretended to be Christ.

The Jews understood this law very well and they did not recognize Jesus being Christ. The high priest and the Pharisees would not acknowledge that Jesus was the One, so they tried all means to get this word out of Jesus. As soon as Jesus admitting that he was the Christ, they could send Jesus to death in accordance to this law. Therefore, you understand now why Jesus was always very careful because he knew that these people wanted to get such words from him so that they could find the excuse to send him to death.

However, it was different when it came to dealing with the blind man. For the sake of helping him, Jesus admitted that he was Christ. Otherwise, the blind did not know who had healed him in the end. However, when it was in public, Jesus would try to avoid this question because he knew that as soon as he admitted that he was Christ, he would not be able to continue preaching the Gospels.

Jn 5:18 - *"For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making himself equal with God."*

This is the passage used to proof that Jesus is God by the Trinitarians because it says here that he was "making himself equal with God". Those who read the Bible must read carefully and ponder thoroughly and not just following the crowd. What does it mean by "making himself equal with God"? Why were the Jews not accusing Jesus of proclaiming himself as God directly? It seems that they did not accuse him with such an allegation. Since there was no such allegation, we can see that "making himself equal with God" is not proclaiming himself as God. At least, that was not the understanding of the Jews because the phrase before it has already said that Jesus "called God as his father".

Then, what has gone wrong? Jesus called God as his father, why did the Jews find it so detesting? He called God as his father, then who was he? He was the Son of God! This point can be proved by **Jn 10:33** and **Jn 10:36**.

Jn 10:33 - *'The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy; and because you, being a man, make yourself out to be God."*

Jn 10:36 - *do you say of him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?*

Jesus said in v30, ‘I and the Father are one’. It was based on this phrase that the Jews reprimanded Jesus for ‘making himself as God’. We have interpreted this phrase as: Jesus proclaiming himself as God. Was it the Jews’ understanding? Jesus explained in v36 that he called himself as the ‘Son of God’ because it was the Father who sent him. Jesus was the representative of God, he spoke and did things in the world on behalf of God. The Jews, out of jealousy, were not willing to obey him, regarding him as being pompous and considered himself as God. The Jews were not accusing Jesus of proclaiming himself as God, but that he was pompous to call himself as the Son of God (Christ).

Notice that Jesus did not address himself as the Son of God directly, but he also could not deny this fact, so he would often say in his words that ‘I do what my father asks me to do because it was the father who sent me’. He could only use this indirect way to show that he was the Son of God, the Christ. Yet, the Jews could all understand, and that was why the High Priest would ask him, ‘Are you the Son of God, the Christ?’ Jesus replied saying, ‘From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ In fact, he had already admitted it; just that he did not say clearly that he was the Son of God, the Christ.

The behaviour of the Jews is a commonplace in Church. You would realise that some people, because they are against you, would try to find faults from your words and use them to accuse you. In face of such people, you must be as shrewd as the snake because you know that they have ill intentions. They would pretend to ask you some questions, in the hope that they would get some words from you so as to accuse you. Just as how the Jews had asked Jesus, ‘Should we pay tax to Caesar?’ This is a question with very ill intent and Jesus had answered this question skilfully.

The Jews knew very well the meaning behind Jesus’ words, just that they could not get a very clear answer from Jesus’ mouth. Therefore, they had to ask him, ‘Could you tell us directly, are you the Christ?’ We, as Gentiles, cannot understand why Jesus did not tell them directly since the Jews wanted to know it so much. Would it not help them believe? Yet, Jesus knew that these people had other agendas.

Why would Jesus offend the Jews by calling God, Father? It was because it was emphasising that he had a very special relation with God and that he was the Christ. This could say that he was truly ‘equal’ with God. Being ‘equal’ was like the relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh, in that Jesus was a complete representative of God, what he said represented what God said, what he did represented what God did. With this key now, when you read the Gospel of John, I hope you would see it more clearly and understand those conversations between Jesus and the Jews.

Why was Jesus not willing to openly admit that he was the Son of God? There is at least one conclusion now and that is, he did not want it to become a hindrance to the ministry of the Gospel because Jesus’ time was running out. Of course, there were other reasons behind. If you remember Jesus asking Peter whom he thought Jesus was and Jesus’ saying that it was a revelation from the heavenly father when Peter answered correctly. Jesus admitted indirectly before the disciples that he was the Christ but he did not want to say clearly because whether the disciples could recognise that he was the Christ was not by rational analysis but the revelation from the heavenly father.

Things that are rationalised would change. I can convince you with my eloquence and you believe. Someone else who is more eloquent than me tell you another version of the same thing, you can then change your mind very quickly. We will not be shaken only if we can see

it from the heart. Jesus purposely hid himself so that the heavenly Father could decide to whom he would reveal this. How then did the heavenly Father decide? Obviously, it also depends on the heart of the individual. That's why Jesus told the parable of a child, and that we need to be like a little child who had a pure and humble heart. Hence, this was not only decided by the heavenly Father, but also depends on your attitude towards the heavenly Father and the truth.

Let's look at how Paul preached about Jesus. Who was Jesus in the heart of Paul? **Ac 9:20 - ‘and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, [h]saying, “He is the Son of God.”’**

How did Paul introduce Jesus to people? He preached to people that Jesus was the ‘Son of God’, what did that mean?

Let's continue to read **Ac 9:22 - ‘But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.’**

We are Gentiles and do not understand the biblical view of the Jews, thinking that preaching the Gospel is to prove two things: First, that Jesus is the Son of God; Second, to prove that he is the Christ. In fact, these two are synonyms which can be used interchangeably as well as concurrently. The Book of Acts would sometimes use them interchangeably. When preaching to the Jews about Jesus, whenever it mentions that Jesus is the ‘Son of God’, they would understand that the apostles were saying that Jesus was the Christ. To the Gentiles, including those of us who have believed in the lord for such a long time, it could be more difficult to understand this clearly. Hope that after you understand the words of the Bible, you could also spread the Gospel more accurately and clearly.

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