

## **PAUL'S *HUIOTHESIA*—LSM's 'COMING-OF-AGE' SONSHIP OR ADOPTION AS SONS?**

*"How could we...become the sons of God? We do not become His sons by adoption."*—W. Lee

*"We are not God's adopted sons. Rather, we are the children begotten by God's life."*—W. Lee

**SUMMARY:** The Apostle Paul's unique term *huiothesia* is generally viewed as a metaphor based on Roman adoption practices. It is usually translated "adoption as sons" and interpreted as the judicial aspect of entry into God's family, matching regeneration, the organic aspect. LSM rejects this view as foreign to the Bible, denigrating the "conflicted theological construct of adoption."\* "*We are not God's adopted sons,*" W. Lee asserts. LSM argues *huiothesia* means "sonship" by natural birth, not "adoption," that it denotes an organic process not a judicial act, and that it marks the consummation not the start of the Christian life. They maintain that believers are not adopted into God's family, nor do they enter it *as sons*; they enter as God's *children* by regeneration. Via growth through successive stages to maturity, Christians attain sonship with all its rights and privileges. Thus, LSM views sonship/adoption, not as the initial entrance into God's family, but as the final status attained by growth. It is a "coming-of-age," whereby God "adopts" as sons His own children previously regenerated by Him. This implies that, while all Christians are God's children, not all are His sons. This doctrine has detrimental implications. It is elitist; the status, rights and privileges of God's sons exceed those of God's children. Thus it provides a biblical basis for a hierarchy among believers. It implies that new believers can't experience the Spirit's leading; that prerogative belongs to mature sons. We recognize that Christians need to grow and mature in the divine life, but, is this the significance of *huiothesia*? We ask—does Paul's *huiothesia* mean LSM's 'coming-of-age' sonship or adoption as sons?

Most English Bibles use the term "adoption" (or related words) in Paul's epistles.<sup>1</sup> Yet the word "adoption" never appears in LSM's Recovery Version Bible. "Adoption into God's family" is an important topic in evangelical Bible teaching<sup>2</sup> and theology, yet it is rarely mentioned in LSM publications or preaching. When it is, it is disparaged; LSM denounces adoption as an "erroneous theological construct" which is "foreign to the Bible."<sup>3</sup> Within LSM's Local Church the phrase "adopted as God's sons" evokes strong reactions. "We're not adopted; we're born again! We're regenerated with God's life and nature!" are typical responses. Clearly LSM's position on this subject contrasts with most evangelical believers. Here we examine the causes and consequences of this discrepancy.

### **Paul's Use of *Huiothesia***

In Scripture the Greek term, *huiothesia* is unique to Paul. He employs it five times in key passages (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4, Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). A compound word,<sup>4</sup> "from *huios*, a son, and *thesis*, a placing...[it] signifies the place and condition given to one to whom it does not naturally belong." This definition—"placing as a son"—suggests the translation "adoption as a son." Indeed some translations state<sup>5</sup> "this word is a technical term for the adoption of a male heir into a Roman home." Professor James Dunn comments,<sup>6</sup> "the metaphor of adoption is worth noting. Adoption was not a characteristically Jewish practice...[but] Paul found that Greco-Roman law and custom provided a more immediately applicable image." In first century Greek-Roman society, Paul's readers would have understood *huiothesia* as "adoption" in this sense. James Hope states,<sup>7</sup> "Paul uses the metaphor of adoption with reference to Roman legal principles." Hope views this as a deliberate literary strategy, saying,<sup>8</sup> "Paul knew that the Christians in Rome would get a clearer picture of their relationship with God if he used Roman law principles of adoption to explain their relationship with God...Paul wants his readers, addressees, who are Roman citizens and therefore familiar with the Roman law principles of adoption, to understand the theological concept of adoption." In that era, an affluent but childless family-head seeking an heir could adopt a post-adolescent male as his son to inherit and maintain the family's estate.<sup>9</sup> Successive Roman emperors used adoption to transfer their leadership to capable men (unrelated by blood). Claudius Caesar adopted Nero just four years before Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans. Scholars conclude<sup>10</sup> "adoption was an accepted and high-profile method of perpetuating a lineage [and] Paul would have been keenly aware of the role of adoption...[H]e used this widely understood process to illustrate the formation of a spiritual family." Bible expositors maintain that Paul used the legal metaphor of Roman adoption to illustrate the believer's transfer into God's household (Rom. 8; Gal. 4; Eph. 1).

More than the word itself suggests the rendering “adoption.” The context in which Paul uses this term is also significant. James Hope states that in<sup>11</sup> “Romans 8:15-17, Paul uses the metaphor of adoption with reference to Roman legal principles,” nesting *huiiothesia* among a cluster of forensic terms associated with Roman adoption practices. James Walters concurs that Paul’s use of *huiiothesia*, in conjunction with inheritance (e.g. Gal. 4:1-7, Rom. 8:14-17), matches Roman adoption practice. He concludes,<sup>12</sup> “The points of contact between Paul’s use of adoption/ inheritance language and Greco-Roman conventions are unambiguous.” Professor James Dunn deduces that,<sup>13</sup> “almost certainly Paul had in mind the legal act of adoption, by which a Roman...entered another family and came under...its head.” Thus there is considerable historical-grammatical evidence that *huiiothesia* should be translated “adoption as sons,” as it is in most English Bible translations. Indeed an exhaustive study by James M. Scott concludes that this term ought always to be translated as “adoption” and never as, “sonship.”<sup>14</sup>

### **The Lexical Significance of *Huiiothesia* --W. Lee vs. W. E. Vine**

The respected Brethren scholar, W. E. Vine’s *Exposition of New Testament Words*, says *huiiothesia* “signifies the place and condition given to one to whom it **does not naturally belong**.”<sup>15</sup> Contradicting this, Witness Lee’s own *Exposition of New Testament Words* states,<sup>16</sup> “the place of a son **by natural birth**, not ‘adoption,’ sonship.” W. Lee illustrates using an example of natural birth, saying,<sup>17</sup> “Sonship refers to both the life of the son and the position of a son...A boy who is the son of a certain man has the sonship of that man because he has obtained that man’s life and has the position of that man’s son.” Hence, at the most basic level of lexical significance, W. Lee contradicts other scholars by asserting *huiiothesia* means “**the place of a son by natural birth**.” Hence, he claims, it does not mean “adoption,” but “sonship.” In this stance W. Lee stands virtually alone among Bible expositors. Yet, by his own admission, W. Lee was not a trained scholar<sup>18</sup> in biblical languages; “We did not study Greek,” he confessed.<sup>19</sup>

### **LSM Disregards the Secular Meaning of *Huiiothesia***

LSM’s Roger Good acknowledges that<sup>20</sup> “When *huiiothesia* occurs in the literature prior to the New Testament, mostly in inscriptions, *it does have the meaning of adoption*...It refers to the judicial procedure of making someone a son who...[was] the son of someone else.” Nevertheless Good argues that, since it<sup>21</sup> “was not used much before the writing of the New Testament,” its scriptural meaning is independent of its secular significance—“it appears to be a word that had meaning primarily for the early church.” Via this tactic LSM disregards the secular meaning of this term. They reject the idea that Paul is using a legal metaphor, alleging<sup>22</sup> “**adoption is not found in the Scriptures and is contrary to the Bible’s revelation**.” Roger Good asserts that, for the early church, *huiiothesia* did not mean the legal procedure of “adoption;” rather it “refers to a process,” designated as “sonship.”<sup>23</sup>

LSM’s Recovery Version Bible always translates *huiiothesia* as “sonship,” never as “adoption.”<sup>24</sup> The noun, “sonship” is defined as “the state, fact, or relation of being a son.” As such, “sonship” does not convey the thought of transfer or entry into a new family. In contrast, the English verb, “to adopt”<sup>25</sup> has the idea of a transfer. The Greek word, *huiiothesia* combines the noun, “son” with the verb, “to place.” Hence, it literally means,<sup>26</sup> “setting as a son or putting in the place of a son.” Since the Greek word *huiiothesia* contains a verb, it seems “adoption,” with its implied action, is a better rendering than “sonship.” LSM is in a minority preferring the latter over the former.

LSM’s stance on this issue contradicts the majority of scholars. Most scholars conclude that, when writing to churches in the Roman Empire, Paul deliberately employed the term, *huiiothesia* because of its familiar secular meaning—“adoption as sons.” Francis Lyall,<sup>27</sup> Professor of Law at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, argues that “many [believers] in the early church would have understood the legal imagery in the epistles by Roman law.” A prime example of this is Paul’s<sup>28</sup> “adoption metaphor [which] points to the selection of believers as members of God’s family and under the guidance and authority of the Father.” These scholars argue that recipients of Paul’s letters would have understood *huiiothesia* as an adoption metaphor. This matches Paul’s revelation that the Gentiles are no longer strangers and aliens, but, due to Christ’s salvation, are now members of God’s family.<sup>30</sup>

Contradicting most scholars, LSM argues this notion of adoption is an “erroneous theological construct” which is “foreign to the Bible.” They assert that<sup>31</sup> “the concept that God brings sinners into His family by means of a legal transaction parallel to the human practice of **adoption is not found in the Scriptures and is contrary to the Bible’s revelation.**” LSM argues that Paul used this term, despite its “unfortunate” secular significance, and invested it with a different meaning in his epistles. Hence LSM’s Nathan Vigil dogmatically asserts that<sup>32</sup> “translating *huiiothesia* as adoption can give the incorrect impression that Paul utilizes *huiiothesia* to refer to a legal procedure that occurs at the time of our believing in Christ. ***This, however, is not Paul’s meaning.***” This begs the question—why would Paul employ a “misleading term” with its embedded secular significance, in order to invest it with a new meaning, when other terms were available? This literary strategy is certainly possible; however, to be convincing, LSM’s argument requires a credible explanation. LSM offers none.<sup>33</sup>

### **Judicial Adoption & Organic Regeneration—Contradictory or Complementary?**

Most Bible scholars render *huiiothesia* as adoption and interpret it as a legal (judicial) action of placing justified sinners into God’s family. Reformed theologian, John Murray says,<sup>35</sup> “Adoption is, like justification, a judicial act...It is the bestowal of a status, or standing, not the generating within us of a new nature or character. It concerns a relationship and not the attitude or disposition...Adoption...is an act of transfer from an alien family into the family of God himself.” Martin Lloyd-Jones states<sup>36</sup> “It is a purely forensic or legal term...that emphasizes relationship and standing, it also emphasizes rank and distinction...It is a legal term which defines standing and status, rank, privilege, and position.” Expositors agree that adoption is a judicial (positional) matter. That fact, however, does not diminish its importance. Justification is also judicial; nevertheless it is vital for salvation.

Some Reformed theologians emphasize adoption at the expense of regeneration; they deny the reality of the new birth, making everything judicial. LSM’s Ron Kangas correctly points out they<sup>37</sup> “deny the reality of regeneration as a divine birth producing divine children by appealing to their understanding of adoption and then proceed to insist that instead of being born of God, the believers have been adopted by Him.” However, this is only a small minority. They are a convenient foil for LSM; yet most Bible commentators recognize that God’s salvation includes both organic and judicial aspects. They emphasize that judicial adoption is matched by organic regeneration which imparts God’s nature and life. “Regeneration is organic and determines our nature, while adoption is legal and determines our status. In regeneration, God deals with a spiritually dead sinner; in adoption, with a child of the devil. Regeneration is creative—God gives us life; adoption is declarative—He gives us the names of sons,”<sup>38</sup> Angus Stewart explains. Martin Lloyd-Jones concurs saying,<sup>39</sup> “The nature of the Christian as a new man in Christ ...is determined...by regeneration. We become children of God because we are born again, because we have become ‘partakers of the divine nature,’ because the Holy Spirit enters into us, because we are born from above... But that is not conveyed by the term adoption which does not place the emphasis on the common nature which we have, but entirely on the legal standing, upon the rank, upon the position; and upon the privileges that have come from that position.” Hence adoption and regeneration are not usually viewed as contradictory, or mutually exclusive, but, rather, as complimentary.<sup>40</sup> Regeneration is emphasized by the Apostle John, adoption by the Apostle Paul in his use of *huiiothesia*.

### **“We are not God’s adopted sons”—Witness Lee Rejects Adoption**

Witness Lee disagrees with most Bible expositors; he concurs that God’s salvation has both judicial and organic aspects,<sup>41</sup> yet he rejects “adoption,” preferring “sonship,” because<sup>42</sup> “the divine way...is by God dispensing Himself into us.” Expounding Ephesians 1:5, W. Lee says,<sup>43</sup> “For God to predestinate us unto sonship means that He begets us and dispenses His life into us.” Hence,<sup>44</sup> “in order for us to become His sons and have the sonship, He gave us His life. **We are not God’s adopted sons.** Rather, we are the children begotten by God’s life.” Elsewhere he asserts<sup>45</sup> “How could we...become the sons of God? **We do not become His sons by adoption** but by His begetting. God begot us. In order for a person to beget a child, his life must be imparted into that child. This impartation is what we call *dispensing*.” Moreover, in his “high peak truths,”<sup>46</sup> W. Lee says, “We do not become [God’s] sons by

adoption,” rather<sup>47</sup> “God begot us to make us the sons of God...to make us ‘baby gods’...we become God in life and in nature, but not in the Godhead. This is what the sonship means.” Hence, despite the strong basis for rendering *huiiothesia* as “adoption as sons,” W. Lee rejects “adoption” as inconsistent with God’s economy of dispensing, producing “baby gods;” for him *huiiothesia* means sonship implying deification.

LSM’s Ron Kangas criticizes theologians who,<sup>48</sup> “deny the reality of regeneration...[and] insist that instead of being born of God, the believers have been adopted by Him.” Yet, his own mentor, Witness Lee, went to the other extreme—insisting upon regeneration, while denying adoption. In W. Lee’s words--“*We are not God’s adopted sons. Rather, we are the children begotten by God’s life.*” Both these extremes create a false dichotomy—insisting that believers are either regenerated or adopted;<sup>49</sup> why not both? Ironically, LSM’s Ron Kangas distances himself from W. Lee’s extreme position by stating,<sup>50</sup> “We admit that in biblical usage adoption (*sonship*...) ‘means to be placed as an adult son in God’s family’...” Thus LSM’s Ron Kangas reluctantly concedes a valid “biblical usage” for the term “adoption.” Nevertheless, LSM’s doctrine of adoption (sonship) is significantly different from others’. LSM remains antagonistic, denouncing evangelical scholars’ expositions of adoption as “foreign to the Bible”; they castigate their “incomplete [view of] sonship” and their “conflicted theological construct of adoption.”

### **LSM’s Aversion to Adoption**

***“The Scriptures do not teach that sinners enter into the family of God...through adoption” —LSM***  
***“Adoption is not found in the Scriptures and is contrary to the Bible’s revelation” —LSM***

LSM’s antipathy is manifest in their response to expositions of adoption. “Adoption” is considered misleading because, in LSM’s view,<sup>51</sup> “Paul’s concept of sonship involves much more than just an objective recognition of the believers as sons...The Greek word literally means to place in the position of a son.” But, LSM’s John Pester says,<sup>51</sup> “In order to be placed in the position of a privileged son, there is the need for growth and advancement in the divine life. Sonship involves regeneration...and it also involves the mature expression of life which issues from the growth of the divine life.” From this perspective, LSM’s Nathan Vigil denounces the “Conflicted Theological Construct of Adoption.” He opposes the view that<sup>52</sup> “Adoption and regeneration are two ways of describing how we enter the family of God” This, he alleges, produces a<sup>53</sup> “conflicted theological system in which God brings His chosen people into His family as adults through adoption and, at the same time, as children through divine birth. This injects confusion into the revelation of the Scriptures. The Scriptures do not teach that sinners enter into the family of God as children and as adults, both through divine birth and through adoption. The writings of Paul and of John do not contain such a contradiction. God’s unique way to bring redeemed sinners into His family is through divine birth.” Here is a dogmatic rejection of adoption in favor of regeneration—“The Scriptures do not teach that sinners enter into the family of God...through adoption...God’s unique way...is through divine birth.”<sup>54</sup>

On closer examination the alleged conflict between John’s “children” and Paul’s (adult) “sons” is more apparent than real. Paul’s *huiiothesia* is rendered “adoption as sons,” while John refers to the reborn as God’s “children.” W. Nee emphasized that each writer of Scripture has his own terminology and emphasis.<sup>55</sup> John never calls believers “God’s sons;” they are always God’s “children” regardless of spiritual maturity.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, Paul uses a variety of designations—“infant, child, son, heir,” etc. Since John never calls believers God’s “sons,” the terms “child,” and “son” don’t coincide in the writings of Paul and John; they can’t be exactly equated. Moreover they use different literary devices. Adoption is a metaphor; regeneration is a reality, not a metaphor. Therefore we can’t insist on a strict correspondence; we should let John be John, and let Paul be Paul, each with his own vocabulary.<sup>57</sup> Forcing both apostles’ writings into a single mold creates apparent contradictions where none exists. This is one such case.

### **Israel’s “Sonship” in the Old Testament**

W. Lee rejected “adoption,” arguing Paul’s *huiiothesia* means “sonship” via divine dispensing. LSM’s teachers follow their mentor. One writes,<sup>58</sup> “sonship is a process in which the divine life...grows and matures in us, bringing us into the full status of sons with all its attendant rights and privileges.” LSM’s Roger Good states,<sup>59</sup> “The fact that

sonship...is an organic process can be seen....The five occurrences of *huiiothesia*, when viewed together, clearly indicate that *huiiothesia* refers to a process.” Yet one of the five occurrences of this Greek word in Scripture attributes “sonship” to Israel, God’s Old Testament people. Paul refers to the “Israelites, *whose are the sonship and the glory...*” (Rom. 9:4, RcV.). Hence, among Israel’s blessings, sonship (adoption as God’s son) is reckoned as the first.<sup>60</sup> Paul’s statement is consistent with key Old Testament passages, such as Moses’ word to Pharaoh, “Thus says Jehovah, Israel is My son, My firstborn...Let My son go that he may serve Me” (Exo. 4:22-23). This verse contradicts LSM’s assertions that<sup>61</sup> “The use of *huiiothesia*...clearly indicate[s] that sonship is an organic process rather than a judicial procedure.” Israel’s Old Testament sonship was surely not an “organic process” via the dispensing of God’s life! That is God’s *New Testament* economy! Before Christ came, Israel enjoyed a privileged position above other nations—they were God’s son. Israel’s “sonship” was judicial, not organic; it was positional, not dispositional. This counter-example contradicts LSM’s assertion that sonship must be an organic process.

Romans 9:4 poses a serious problem for LSM’s organic version of sonship, since,<sup>62</sup> “according to this text and to Paul’s way of thinking, Israel is clearly God’s son by adoption.” LSM glosses over these difficulties saying,<sup>63</sup> “These Old Testament passages are best taken not as indicators of divine adoption, but rather as a reflection of God as the source of Israel in creation and a reflection of His aspiration to have many sons sharing in His life and nature.” Yet “in creation” God is the source of all humanity, every nation, not merely the nation of Israel. Moreover, in the Old Testament, Israel’s “sonship” was a present reality, not a mere “reflection of [God’s] aspiration to have many sons sharing in His life,” in the future.<sup>64</sup> Thus R. Scroggs concludes that “Here [in Rom. 9:4] the meaning of Israel already being sons of God would seem to dominate.”<sup>65</sup> Romans 9:4 fails to fit LSM’s doctrine of organic sonship. Hence we must reject LSM’s position—that “the five occurrences of *huiiothesia*, when viewed together, clearly indicate that *huiiothesia* refers to [an organic] process,”<sup>66</sup>—as inconsistent with Scripture.

### **LSM’s Stages of Growth—“We may be a child of God without the growth of a son of God, or a son of God without the qualification for an heir.” —W. Lee**

LSM’s doctrine of sonship relies upon a particular interpretation of Paul. The apostle’s use of the terms, “child”, “son”, and “heir” are taken as indicative of stages of growth. W. Lee declares,<sup>67</sup> “children, sons, and heirs. These three words correspond to the three stages of sonship.” LSM’s John Pester writes,<sup>68</sup> “Paul’s thought concerning sonship...shows the progression in life from children to sons to heirs in [Romans] chapter eight.” Concerning Romans 8, Witness Lee says,<sup>69</sup>

Sonship is stressed in this chapter (vv. 15, 23). *Sons* here indicates a more advanced stage of growth in the divine life than does *children* in v. 16, yet not as advanced as *heirs* in v. 17. *Children* refers to the initial stage of sonship, the stage of regeneration in the human spirit. Sons are the children of God who are in the stage of the transformation of their souls. They not only have been regenerated in their spirit and are growing in the divine life, but they also are living and walking by being led by the Spirit. Heirs are the sons of God who, through the transfiguration of their body in the stage of glorification, will be fully matured in every part of their being. Hence, they will be qualified as the legal heirs to claim the divine inheritance (vv. 17, 23).

W. Lee alleges “*sons*...indicates a more advanced stage...than does *children*...yet not as advanced as *heirs*.” These designations define three successive “stages of sonship,” delineated as [1] “The initial stage...of regeneration”—“children” (Rom. 8:16); [2] “the stage of transformation”, “a more advanced stage of growth”—“sons” (8:14); [3] “the stage of glorification”—“fully matured...legal heirs” (8:17). We note that the three stages of child, son and heir correspond to man’s 3 parts—spirit, soul & body.<sup>70</sup> Hence this interpretation matches LSM’s system of theology. W. Lee made these distinctions in the context of Romans 8; however, LSM’s commentators generalize them.

W. Lee makes a clear distinction between being God’s child, His son and His heir. He asserts,<sup>71</sup> “We may be a child of God without the growth of a son of God, or a son of God without the qualification for an heir.” This child-son distinction is then juxtaposed with John’s declaration that, by receiving Christ, we become children of God (John 1:12-13). Being “born again” ushers a believer into the “initial stage” as God’s “child;” he/she is not yet a “son,”

further growth is needed to attain that status. In W. Lee's words,<sup>72</sup> "All real Christians are children of God, having the witness of the Spirit with their spirit, **but not all** have the mark that they **are the sons of God.**" Not all Christians are God's sons. Paul's term, *huiiothesia* (sonship/adoption) means to place a son; it follows, in LSM's view, that a new believer who is merely God's "child" doesn't yet have the "sonship/adoption." This explains LSM's opposition to the idea that new believers are immediately adopted into God's family. One LSM reviewer castigates an author who "*wrongly states* that being born into the family of God immediately gives believers the standing of sons of God." He retorts<sup>73</sup> "The Bible nowhere says that we believers are viewed by God as fully mature *sons* at regeneration; we are told unequivocally that we are but *children* at regeneration and that the Spirit witnesses with our spirit to this initial stage of our union with Christ. As we grow in the divine life, we progress from being children in the initial stage to being sons who are led by the Spirit in the mature stage." The same commentator dogmatically asserts,<sup>74</sup> "Paul's use of *huiiothesia* does not refer to the believer's entrance into the family of God at the beginning of his Christian life; this entrance is achieved by regeneration. Paul's use of *huiiothesia* is in reference to the consummate stage of sonship achieved through the growth of the divine life, whereby matured believers become heirs of God and joint-heirs of Christ (Rom. 8:17). In short, we are born into the family of God, and *only later* are we placed in the position of a son, having matured in the divine life."

### **LSM's Doctrine of Delayed Adoption**

LSM has developed an elaborate theology of "sonship"—their preferred term for "adoption." LSM's expositors assert,<sup>75</sup> "*Huiiothesia* does not refer to the means by which we are brought into the family of God at the beginning of our Christian life but rather to our position and status as a result of growing and maturing in the divine life over the course of our Christian life." This doctrine means adoption/sonship is not an initial blessing at the start of the believer's Christian life. It comes only later as a result of further growth unto maturity. As one LSM writer says,<sup>76</sup> "we are born into the family of God, and *only later* are we placed in the position of a son, having matured in the divine life." Another LSM author states,<sup>77</sup> "After genuinely begetting children, God continually imparts His divine life into them. This *ultimately results in the believers' attainment of sonship*—the full right, as mature sons of God, to inherit all that God is and has." Expressed in adoptive terms, in LSM's view, a new believer is not immediately adopted into God's family; this occurs later. It is not immediate adoption; it is delayed adoption.

LSM's Ron Kangas endorses "delayed adoption." He says,<sup>78</sup> "We admit that in biblical usage adoption (*sonship...*) 'means to be placed as an adult son in God's family with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of sonship' (Lightner, 203). Understood in this way, adoption does not conflict with regeneration but is predicated upon it. Before we can become adult sons, we must be born as children. The Bible nowhere says that we are children of God by adoption,<sup>[79]</sup> rather, the Word consistently tells us that the believers in Christ are children of God, born of Him." Thus, in R. Kangas' view, believers are born of God as His children; this is not adoption, but regeneration. Adoption relates to *adult sons* being placed in God's family. This further step depends on growth by which "we can become adult sons." It is only on attaining maturity that believers can claim all their rights and privileges as God's sons; this is delayed adoption. An LSM writer calls this<sup>80</sup> "The momentous truth that in the stage of maturity believers are both organically and legally, dispositionally and positionally, sons of God...they have an abiding status as sons." Evidently, prior to maturity, believers are not qualified for "an abiding status as sons."

### **LSM's "Coming-of-Age" Sonship**

LSM's publications and preaching avoid the term, "adoption," with its connotation of a transfer into a new family. LSM prefers "sonship," meaning the state or condition of being a son. In their view, the Christian life begins with regeneration as God's child. By growth unto maturity a believer progresses from the initial stage of God's child to being an "adult son in God's family with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of sonship." Hence, LSM's sonship/adoption is the believer's "coming-of-age." It is like the Jewish *bar mitzvah*<sup>81</sup> the ceremony by which every Jewish boy becomes a responsible male at age thirteen. Don Walker claims ancient "adoption" had this "coming-of-age" function. He says,<sup>82</sup> "the Greek or Roman father *adopted as a son his own child*. Birth made him

a child (*teknon*); adoption made him a son (*huios*). Between the period of birth and adoption, there were stages of growth, education and discipline, until the maturity was reached for adoption into sonship.” No historical evidence is presented to substantiate the claim that a “father *adopted as a son his own child.*” As support Walker quotes R. B. Jones, viz.,<sup>83</sup> “To be a son is infinitely more than to be a child....Every ‘born again’ child of God has in him the nature of His Father, and is a beloved member of His Father’s family. Adoption cannot make the child any nearer or dearer, yet it gives the child a status he did not enjoy before, a position he did not occupy. It is his recognition as an adult son...the seal upon his growth to maturity.” This view, espoused by a few Bible expositors, matches LSM’s sonship doctrine. LSM admits that “in biblical usage adoption (*sonship*...) means to be placed as an adult son in God’s family.” Their doctrine of “adoption” also involves God “adopting” as a son His own child, previously regenerated as His child. This is adoption predicated upon regeneration.<sup>84</sup> Clearly this differs from the usual notion of adoption. Rather than a transfer into a new family, LSM’s “adoption” is a “coming-of-age,” the Father’s recognition that His child has attained maturity; he is no longer God’s child, he is now God’s mature son.

LSM’s teaching has serious implications. It implies that, upon believing, a Christian doesn’t receive “all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of sonship.” He/she is merely a child, not yet a son. At regeneration only initial blessings are received. A further “second blessing” awaits when, by growth in the divine life, the stage of maturity is attained. At that point (and not before) the believer is adopted as an adult son, with “all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of sonship.” In LSM’s view, in “the Bible...we are told unequivocally that we are but *children* at regeneration and that the Spirit witnesses with our spirit to this initial stage of our union with Christ. As we grow in the divine life, we progress from being children in the initial stage to being sons who are led by the Spirit in the mature stage (Rom. 8:14).”<sup>85</sup> Notice that being “led by the Spirit” belongs, not to “the initial stage,” but to “the mature stage,” Hence, W. Lee says,<sup>86</sup> “When we are capable of being led of the Spirit, it means...we have grown from children into sons who are able to take the leading of the Spirit...we are in the second stage.” In LSM’s view, new believers can’t know the Spirit’s leading since they are in “the initial stage” as children; that prerogative belongs to “sons who are able to take the leading of the Spirit.” New believers, as mere “children,” are deficient.<sup>87</sup>

### **A Biblical Basis for Hierarchy**

***“All real Christians are children of God...but not all...are the sons of God” –W. Lee<sup>91</sup>***

***“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” –Apostle Paul***

Evangelicals teach that by faith Christians are simultaneously born again and adopted into God’s family. Hence they are concurrently God’s children and God’s sons. This dual status is not considered contradictory, it simply reflects different perspectives. Saving faith ushers believers as adopted sons into their full rights, blessings and privileges within God’s household. Although they are endowed with diverse gifts, nevertheless all believers enjoy equal status and benefits as sons within God’s family. So the Apostle Paul told the believers, “*you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:26). In marked contrast, LSM teaches that only some believers (not all) are sons of God. Thus W. Lee states,<sup>92</sup> “All real Christians are children of God...but not all have the mark that they are the sons of God.” Their “stages of growth” doctrine implies that, at any given time, some believers (recently-saved or due to delayed development) will be God’s children (not yet His sons.) Other believers, by growth in the divine life, will have attained to “the stage of maturity [in which] believers are both organically and legally, dispositionally and positionally, sons of God.”<sup>93</sup> Hence some believers are merely God’s children, lacking the full rights and privileges of sonship. Others will have achieved the status of God’s sons, enjoying greater rights, privileges and blessings during their lifetime in the present age.

LSM’s doctrine of sonship sows the seeds of hierarchy among believers. Distinctions are made between various categories of believers—children, sons and heirs. LSM’s “stages of growth” teaching links these distinctions with explicit developmental stages—the “initial stage,” “more advanced stage,” and the “consummate stage.” This provides a biblical basis for a gradation of status among believers.<sup>94</sup> Inevitably some Local Church members will categorize themselves (and other believers) in terms of LSM’s paradigm, creating an implicit hierarchy. Some will

be regarded as “sons” with greater rights and privileges than others, who are merely God’s “children.” Predictably LSM’s “blended brothers” will retort that W. Lee denounced hierarchy in the Local Church. Indeed he did; W. Lee made statements like,<sup>95</sup> “The concept of rank is altogether a natural concept, a concept foreign to the Scriptures ...In the Body...there is a difference of function, there is no difference of rank.” and “in the church there is no such thing as rank.” Nevertheless, W. Lee’s ministry contained numerous strands, often with countervailing currents. Here is a particular example. On one hand he denounced rank and hierarchy. On the other hand, W. Lee’s gradation of believers according to various stages provides a purported “biblical basis” for hierarchy among various classes of believer—“child, son or heir.” Perhaps this explains the attitude of LSM’s “senior coworkers” towards “young men [who] have no realization that...these senior co-workers...have advanced far beyond them.”<sup>96</sup>

W. Lee was not the first to develop a doctrinal distinction between God’s sons and His children. Martin Lloyd-Jones, speaking in the 1940s, warned against<sup>97</sup> “a teaching to the effect that...all Christians are the ‘children’ of God, but that only certain special Christians become ‘sons’ of God...[Some] claimed for themselves an unusual degree of sanctity, a peculiar depth of teaching. They claimed that they had advanced beyond others, and were therefore entitled to be separate from others because of the depth of their teaching. Their teaching was that whereas all Christians are children, not all Christians are sons...It was a teaching that separated Christians into ‘children’ and ‘sons’.” No such basis for hierarchy exists in the conventional teaching on adoption. Lloyd-Jones makes this explicit, saying<sup>98</sup> “All Christians are sons of God; they share the same privileges...There are none of these artificial gradations. We are all...the sons of God and in the same privileged position.”

**“Paul...does not distinguish between child and son”—Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**  
**“Paul is using the two terms interchangeably...Nowhere in the New Testament can a valid distinction be made between ‘children of God’ and ‘sons of God’.”—Professor F. F. Bruce**

LSM’s doctrine of sonship is built upon the distinction between “child,” “son,” and “heir.” Their denunciation of adoption—“The Scriptures do not teach that sinners enter into the family of God...through adoption...God’s unique way...is through divine birth”<sup>99</sup>—likewise rests upon the distinction between “son” and “child.” These terms also form the basis of the stages of growth elaborated by W. Lee. LSM’s Roger Good declares that these various designations, “clearly indicate that sonship is an organic process rather than a judicial procedure.”<sup>100</sup>

Bible scholars question whether a meaningful distinction exists in Paul’s use of the Greek words for “child” and “son,” especially in terms of maturity. Vine discriminates between these terms, but not based on maturity. He says ‘child’ [*teknon*] “gives prominence to the fact of birth, whereas *huios* [son] stresses the dignity and character of the relationship.”<sup>101</sup> Other Greek words distinguish between a baby, infant, child aged 7 to 14 etc. Contemporary scholars conclude that “Paul...does not distinguish between child and son.”<sup>102</sup> This conclusion is based, in part, upon parallel statements. For example, in Galatians, Paul writes “you are...a son; and if a son, an heir also through God.” (Gal. 4:7). But Romans says, “if children, heirs also; on the one hand, heirs of God...” (Rom. 8:17a). The two phrases, “If a son, then an heir” and “if children, then heirs,” are equivalent. “Child” and “son” are used in analogous statements. As a further example, Romans 8 tells us “creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the *sons of God*.” (8:19). This event is also called “the freedom of the glory of the *children of God*.” (8:21). Again “sons of God” and “children of God” are used interchangeably. Concerning the use of “child” and “son” in Romans 8, Professor F. F. Bruce says,<sup>103</sup> “The course of the argument shows that Paul is using the two terms interchangeably ...*Nowhere in the New Testament can a valid distinction be made between ‘children (tekna) of God’ and ‘sons (huioi) of God’.*” M. Lloyd-Jones concurs,<sup>104</sup> “In the Scriptures and in the Epistles particularly, *the terms ‘children’ and ‘sons’ are always used interchangeably.* There is no more perfect example of this than...Romans [8:14-16] where the Apostle is dealing with the whole question of sonship...In the same paragraph, as part of one argument, [Paul] uses the terms ‘sons’ and ‘children’ interchangeably.” As A. T. Robertson states,<sup>105</sup> “no great distinction can be drawn between *huios* [sons] and *teknon* [children].” These scholars conclude that, in the context of *huios* (sonship/adoption), the terms “child” and “son” do not reflect definite stages of growth. Their use simply reflects



literary variety.<sup>106</sup> We agree that Scripture exhorts believers to grow in grace and knowledge (e.g. 2 Pet. 3:18); it does *not* teach LSM's distinct stages of growth based upon distinctions between children, sons and heirs.

Bible scholars do distinguish between “child” and “son,” related to Christ. The New Testament never calls Christ, “the child of God;” He is always “the Son of God” Hence Jesus’ “own sonship differs from ours.”<sup>107</sup> Also, the word, *huiiothesia* never<sup>108</sup> refers to Christ, always to believers. Christians are God’s adopted sons; Christ was not adopted, He is the eternal Son.<sup>109</sup> Hence Scripture differentiates between Christ’s sonship and the believers’. LSM’s sonship doctrine blurs this distinction; having rendered *huiiothesia* as “sonship” (rather than “adoption”) W. Lee talks about Christ’s sonship being given to believers.<sup>110</sup> Yet the Bible never says this about *huiiothesia*, nor is the term *huiiothesia* (sonship/adoption) ever applied to Christ. Moreover, W. Lee says,<sup>111</sup> “God begot us to make us the sons of God...to make us ‘baby gods’...Thus, we become God in life and in nature, but not in the Godhead. This is what the sonship means.” However, Paul never drew the implication of deification from *huiiothesia*; nor would Paul’s first readers have drawn that inference. To them *huiiothesia* meant adoption as sons, not deification.

### ***Huiiothesia* in Galatians—“you are all sons of God through faith” (3:26)**

LSM’s doctrine of 3-stage sonship—child, son & heirs—is built on Romans 8 and generalized to all Paul’s writings. Galatians also refers to *huiiothesia*. It is the “stumbling stone” on which this doctrine falls. Gal. 3:24-27 says,

**24** So then the law has become our child-conductor unto Christ that we might be justified out of faith.

**25** But since faith has come, we are no longer under a child-conductor.

**26** For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

**27** For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

This Scripture says through the coming of faith in Christ, we are justified. Consequently all the believers are sons of God—i.e. “sons of full age” (RcV, note 1<sup>112</sup>). Here all the justified, baptized believers (vv. 24, 27) are called “sons of God” (v. 26). This verse contradicts LSM’s assertion “The Bible nowhere says that we believers are viewed by God as fully mature *sons* at regeneration.”<sup>113</sup> On the contrary, Gal. 3:26 (RcV.) says “you are all sons of God [i.e. sons of full age] through faith in Christ Jesus.” The Recovery Version says, “Under the Old Testament, God’s chosen people were considered infants. Now, under the New Testament, they are considered sons of full age” (Gal. 3:26<sup>1</sup>). All Christians are God’s “sons of full age” in Galatians.<sup>114</sup> Notice Paul’s metaphor of child-conductor, infant and son would seem to imply growth. Yet, it is not the believer’s growth in the divine life which brings about sonship; it is not the product of LSM’s growth unto sonship. It is due to the change in status from Old Covenant “infant” to New Covenant “son,” from the change in dispensations. The next section (4:1-7) strengthens this point.

Now let us briefly consider Galatians 4:1-7, (RcV) which refers to *huiiothesia* (4:5)

**1** But I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave, though he is lord of all;

**2** But he is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.

**3** So also we, when we were children, were kept in slavery under the elements of the world;

**4** But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law,

**5** That He might redeem those under law that we might receive the sonship [*huiiothesia*, adoption].

**6** And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father!

**7** So then you are no longer a slave but a son; and if a son, an heir also through God.

Here the status of a “child” [Lit. “infant”] does not describe a new believer; it characterizes God’s people, prior to Christ. Christ’s coming inaugurated a new dispensation; His redemption enabled us to receive the sonship (adoption v. 5). Here “sonship” is not conditional upon growth unto maturity; it’s conditional on Christ’s coming. In a sense there is a “coming-of-age” here—the change from “child” to “son.” However, it is not LSM’s “coming-of-age,” due to the believer’s growth in life.<sup>115</sup> “The significant event that brings this period of supervision to an end is not the maturation of the ‘heir-in-waiting,’ but the sovereign act on the part of the Father.” The “coming-of-age,” transition from “child” (vv. 1, 3) to “son” (vv. 6, 7) is due to the dispensational change at the “fullness of the time.”

Hence, Paul says, “you (plural, you all) are sons.” (v. 6) and “because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit...into our hearts” (v. 6). The Spirit is the experiential confirmation of sonship/adoption. All these events transpired when we were saved—we “received the sonship,” “became sons,” and “God sent forth the Spirit...into our hearts.” This is not “delayed adoption;” it is not<sup>116</sup> “the consummate stage...achieved through the growth of the divine life.” Here in Galatians, we “receive the sonship” (*huiiothesia*, 4:5), become sons, and receive “the Spirit...into our hearts” (4: 6) *at the time of our believing in Christ*. Yet LSM’s writers contend it is an “incorrect impression that Paul utilizes *huiiothesia* to refer to a legal procedure that occurs at the time of our believing in Christ.”<sup>117</sup> “This...is not Paul’s meaning,” they assert. Rather than being an “incorrect impression,” this understanding—that sonship/adoption occurs at the time we believed—“fits the biblical data” in Galatians, better than LSM’s delayed adoption. Paul concludes by telling the believers, “So then you are...a son; and if a son, an heir also through God.” (4:7). In Galatians every New Testament believer is God’s son, with the sonship (adoption). Moreover, every believer is an heir; there is no progression from son to heir.<sup>118</sup> In Galatians 3:24-4:7 we do not have three stages, nor do we see three categories of Christians, according to LSM’s “child, son, heir—trichotomy.” Rather, Paul asserts “you are all<sup>119</sup> sons of God through faith” (3:26), “you (all) are sons” & “you are...a son; and if a son, [then] an heir” (4:6-7).

W. Lee distinguishes an “heir” from both God’s child and His son, based on Romans 8:17—“if children, heirs also ...heirs of God...joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*.” W. Lee says,<sup>120</sup> “This shows that there is a condition for us to be heirs. It is not that we are heirs simply because we are children of God. Rather, after being born as children, we must grow in life to become sons, and then we must pass through suffering that we may be glorified to become legal heirs.” However, Greek scholars indicate that here<sup>121</sup> “the conditional particle [‘if’]... assumes the fact. If so be, *as is really the case*.” Paul expected *all* believers, even new converts, to suffer for Christ; it is not just for those in an advanced stage. All the child/sons are also heirs of God. Hence the Amplified Version says, “if we are children, then we are heirs also...*only we must* share His suffering...” (Rom. 8:17).

The problem of reconciling Galatians 4 with Romans 8 is easily resolved once the artificial distinctions between “child, son and heir” are abandoned. If Paul does not distinguish between child and son, but uses these terms interchangeably,<sup>122</sup> his statement “if a son, an heir also through God.” (Gal. 4:7) equals “If children, heirs also ...heirs of God” (Rom. 8:17). However, if “child, son and heir” denote distinct phases of Christian growth, these statements are contradictory. Respected Bible scholars conclude these terms are essentially synonymous.

### **Conclusion—“wrongly dividing the Word of truth”**

The majority of English Bibles translate *huiiothesia* as “adoption as sons,” based on substantial evidence that Paul used the legal metaphor of Roman adoption to illustrate the believer’s transfer from an alien status into God’s household (Eph. 1:5; 2:19; 3:6). Expositors regard adoption as the judicial aspect of God’s salvation, matching the organic aspect of regeneration. Thus regeneration and adoption are not mutually exclusive; they describe different aspects of entry into God’s household—one emphasized by the Apostle John, the other by the Apostle Paul.

LSM rejects the historical evidence. W. Lee defines *huiiothesia* as “the place of a son *by natural birth*,”<sup>123</sup> Adoption and regeneration are viewed as mutually exclusive, setting up a false dichotomy. Thus, W. Lee declares, “*We are not God’s adopted sons... we are the children begotten by God’s life*.” Based on their presupposition of God’s economy via dispensing, LSM argues that *huiiothesia* means “sonship” not “adoption,” that it denotes an organic process not a legal (judicial) act, and that it marks the consummation not the commencement of the Christian life. LSM’s “sonship” is an organic growth process via distinct stages from being God’s child to His son and finally, His adopted heir. This “adoption” is a “coming-of-age,” when God “adopts” as sons His own children previously regenerated by Him, because they have finally attained the required level of maturity. Yet the New Testament distinction between believers who are God’s “children” and those who are His “sons” is tenuous, at best. We recognize that believers are exhorted to grow in the divine life; yet this is not the meaning of Paul’s *huiiothesia*.

The correct interpretation of *huiiothesia* is not merely an academic question; it has important consequences. LSM's doctrine of sonship has detrimental implications. It is elitist,<sup>124</sup> laying a biblical basis for hierarchy because the rights and privileges of God's "sons" exceed those of His "children." Moreover, it implies Christians do not receive "all things related to life and godliness" when they believe (2 Pet. 1:3). According to LSM's doctrine, upon salvation, people receive only the initial blessings related to being God's child. Greater blessings are withheld, pending their further development. The status, privileges and rights of God's sons require the believers' further growth and advancement until they attain a more advanced stage. Only then, as a kind of "second blessing," conditional on their "coming-of-age," can believers enjoy the full rights and privileges of sonship. Hence, experiencing the Spirit's leading is a privilege reserved for God's sons; it is not available to God's children. These disturbing implications, inimical to a healthy Christian life and church-life, result from LSM's sonship doctrine.

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April, 2010

#### NOTES:

The author thanks those who commented on earlier drafts of this piece. As usual the author accepts full responsibility for the contents. The views expressed here are solely the author's and should *not* be attributed to any believers, elders, co-workers or churches he is associated with. We apologize for afflicting the reader with 100+ footnotes. However, the accusation has been made that previous articles contain quotes taken out of context, misrepresenting their meaning. Therefore this article's footnotes present quotes within their wider context, so the reader can decide for him/herself whether this article's quotes accurately reflect the author's meaning when read in their wider context.

- Nathan Vigil, "The Conflicted Theological Construct of Adoption," [Book review of *Adopted by God*, by Robert A. Peterson,] in LSM's *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (October, 2002)
- 1. A survey of 15 English NT translations of the 5 NT occurrences of *huiiothesia* (75 cases) indicates that the vast majority--close to 90%--render this Greek word as "adoption" or "adopted as sons." Less than 10% (8% to be exact) use the term "sonship." Some translations paraphrase this word as "have rights as sons of God" [e.g. Gal. 4:5 in the Worldwide English version]. The popular NIV translation renders Rom. 8:15 as "Spirit of sonship;" in Gal. 4:5 it is translated as "have full rights as sons." But in Rom. 8:23; 9:4 and Eph. 1:5 *huiiothesia* is rendered as "adopted as sons." Thus the NIV is somewhat inconsistent with its translation. J. N. Darby's "new translation" has "sonship" in Gal. 4:5, but "adoption" in the other 4 references.
- 2. For e.g., a quick search of [www.thegospelcoalition.org](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org) turned up over 60 messages on the topic of "Adoption."
- 3. See Nathan Vigil, "The Conflicted Theological Construct of Adoption," [Book review of *Adopted by God*, by Robert A. Peterson,] in LSM's *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (October, 2002) p. 124. Vigil attacks the view that God adopts sinners into His family saying, "the concept that God brings sinners into His family by means of a legal transaction parallel to the human practice of adoption is not found in the Scriptures and is contrary to the Bible's revelation concerning our divine sonship. By imposing this **erroneous theological construct** upon the Scriptures..." Immediately prior to this, Vigil refers to "a notion concerning the way in which God brings sinners into His family that is **foreign to the Bible**." [Nathan Vigil, "The Conflicted Theological Construct of Adoption," in LSM's *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (October, 2002) p. 124. Emphasis indicates quote in main text.] *Affirmation & Critique* is published by Living Stream Ministry (LSM). The "Editor-in-chief" is Ron Kangas, one of LSM's "blended brothers"—the group which assumed the leadership of the Local Church movement upon Witness Lee's passing in 1997. LSM's journal *Affirmation & Critique* [A&C] is not an independent, academic journal; it reflects LSM's stance—it *affirms* the teachings of W. Lee and *critiques* all other Christian teachings. All A&C contributors have links with LSM.
- 4. W. E. Vine, *Exposition of New Testament Words*, vol. 1, pp. 31-2.
- 5. E.g. TNIV quoted by Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology*, p. 212, note 16. The role of sons as distinct from daughters in ancient society ought to be noted. Norm Mundhenk quotes Sandra Hack Polaski saying "the decision of many modern translations to understand *huiioi* [sons] inclusively, as applying to all Christians, and thus to translate it "children," obscures the historical realities of adoption and inheritance. To be adopted as a son in Paul's day meant to be granted a share in the inheritance. Adoption as a daughter would not carry the same import." Further, "being a "son" also meant that one would become, eventually, a legally responsible adult. The status of "daughter" did not have

- the same legal ramifications, since women were legally “minors”—under the legal control of another—all their lives.” [Norm Mundhenk, “Adoption: Being Recognized as a Son,” *THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR*, Vol. 59, No. 4, (Oct. 2008) pp. 170-1]
6. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 436
  7. James J. L. Hope, “*EXEGETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF PAULINE CONTEXTUALISATION OF THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS WITH SELECTED JURIDICAL IMAGERY IN ROMANS AND ITS CONTEXTUAL APPLICATION*” THESIS in BIBLICAL STUDIES (NEW TESTAMENT) UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG, South Africa, May, 2007, p. 187
  8. James J. L. Hope, “*EXEGETICAL PERSPECTIVES...*” p. 188. Along the same lines he says, “Paul, knowing his addressees had knowledge of the Roman legal adoption procedure, contextualized the entrance into the family of God with this procedure (Rom 8:15; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5).” James J. L. Hope, “*EXEGETICAL PERSPECTIVES...*” p. 192. Francis Lyall, Prof. of Law at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, says, “In Rom. 8:15, Eph. 1:5 and Gal. 4:5 the adoption metaphor points to the selection of believers as members of God’s family and under the guidance and authority of the Father...In terms of Paul’s audience, those in Rome would certainly have known Roman law. It was the law ruling in their community. There is reason also to believe that...Ephesus, a major city in Asia Minor, though not itself a Roman colony, would have sufficient knowledge to decode the imagery. The churches in Galatia, if they were Derbe and Lystra, would also have known the idea...” [F. Lyall, “Adoption Metaphor and the Security of the Believer,” *Testamentum Imperium*, Vol. 1, 2005-7, p. 3]
  9. See Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*. (Ed. Ralph P. Martin. Word Books: Dallas, 1990) vol. 42, p. 25, & Francis Lyall, “Roman Law in the Writings of Paul—Adoption.” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 88, p. 459. 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman adoption differed from today’s practice. Modern adoption, typically involving fostering a needy infant, is motivated by parental altruism. The Roman form involved adopting a grown male to inherit and maintain the family’s estate. Also, as noted above (note 5) to be adopted as a son & heir in Paul’s day meant to be granted a share in the inheritance. Adoption as a daughter would not carry the same import. Being a “son” meant that one would become, eventually, a legally responsible adult. The status of “daughter” did not have the same legal ramifications, since women were legally “minors”—under the legal control of another—all their lives.” Note that Paul applies his teaching of being God’s son & heir to both male and female believers, “brothers & sisters.” E.g. Gal. 3:26 “You are all [both brothers & sisters] sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”
  10. J. Stevenson-Moessner, *The Spirit of Adoption*, p. 111 quoted by Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, p. 61
  11. James Hope, “*EXEGETICAL PERSPECTIVES...*” p. 187. Hope indicates that in Romans 8:15-17 Paul “uses concepts such as *φειλέται* (Rom 8:12), from the concept *φείλω*, which means forensically “to be under obligation in terms of a law” (Rom 8:12; 15:27; Gal 5:3); he uses the concept of *υ\_οθεσίας* (Rom 8:15) meaning “sonship”; the concept of *συμμαρτυρε\_* (Rom 8:16) which means “witness” and the concept of *κληρονόμοι* (Rom 8:17) meaning ‘heirs’.” Also Trevor J. Burke points out that in Gal. 4:5 “Paul employs the compound verb *apolabomen* ‘receives back’ in juxtaposition with *huiiothesia*. Paul...uses the compound form...which is interesting and consonant with the Roman procedure of adoption...’All of this’ [James D. G.] Dunn has recently concluded...underscores the fact that ‘Paul had in mind the legal act of adoption by which a Roman citizen entered another family and came under the *patria potestas* [parental authority] of its head’. (Dunn, *Galatians*, 1993, p. 217).” [Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, p. 89]
  12. James C. Walters, “Paul, Adoption & Inheritance,” chapter. 2 in J. Paul Sampley, *Paul in the Greco-Roman World-A Handbook*, p. 58 Walters also states that “Paul’s employment of legal-adoption terminology...suggests the influence of Greco-Roman social and legal conventions.” p. 42. Don Garlington comments on Walters, saying, “James C. Walters provides a useful overview of adoption and inheritance in the Greco-Roman world...Walters’ data are impressive enough to lead us to believe that **an allusion to Roman adoptive practices may lurk in the background of Paul’s use of *huiiothesia*.**” [Don Garlington, *An Exposition of Galatians--A Reading from the “New Perspective”* p. 150, emphasis added]
  13. James D. G. Dunn, *Galatians* (1993) p. 217 quoted by Burke, p. 89. Don Garlington states this conclusion in a more tentative fashion, saying, “an allusion to Roman adoptive practices may lurk in the background of Paul’s use of *huiiothesia*.” (Don Garlington, *An Exposition of Galatians--A Reading from the “New Perspective”* p. 150)
  14. J. M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of HUIIOTHESIA in the Pauline Corpus*, chap. 1 (WUNT 2.48; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1992). A reviewer writes, “Scott first demonstrates through a computer-assisted word study that *huiiothesia* unequivocally means ‘adoption as sons’ and never ‘sonship’.” The English noun “sonship” is defined as “the state, fact, or relation of being a son” [Dictionary.com]. As such, “sonship” does not convey the thought of transfer or entry into another family. In contrast, the English verb, “to

- adopt” means “to take into one's family through legal means and raise as one's own child.” [Dictionary.com] Hence “adopt” has the idea of transfer/entry. “Adoption” is “a noun of action from Lat. *adoptionem* (nom. *adoptio*), from *adoptare* "chose for oneself." [Dictionary.com] The English words “adopt” (verb) and “adoption” (noun) more closely correspond to the Greek word, *huiiothesia* used in Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4, Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5. *Huiiothesia* is a compound word, from the noun, *huios*, meaning a son, and *thesia*, derived from the verb, *tithemi*, meaning to set, put or place. Notice that the verb implies an action—“placing as a son.” It suggests the English translation, “adoption as a son.”
15. W. E. Vine, *An Exposition of New Testament Words*, vol. 1, pp. 31-2.
  16. Witness Lee, *An Exposition of New Testament Words*, (edited by Philip Comfort, Paul Onica et. al.) Living Stream Ministry, 1981, p. 259. The lexical definition of *huiiothesia* is given in W. Lee's *Exposition* as: “*huios* (son) and *tithemi* (to place); the place of a son by natural birth, not ‘adoption,’ sonship.” The editors (Philip Comfort, Paul Onica et. al.) assert that “This Lexicon has obtained all its definitions from the many books, booklets, *Stream* magazines, and Life-study messages given by our Lord's servant, Witness Lee, and published by Living Stream Ministry.” [W. Lee, *An Exposition of New Testament Words*, (edited by Paul Onica et. al.) Living Stream Ministry, 1981, editors' *Foreword*, emphasis added] Hence, we assume, this definition--“the place of a son by natural birth, not ‘adoption,’ sonship”--is quoted from a primary source by W. Lee. W. Lee's *Exposition* is clearly modeled upon W. E. Vine's volume with the same title. [Note: Paul Onica serves in connection with LSM's Full-Time Training in Anaheim, CA., the FTTA]
  17. W. Lee, *An Exposition of New Testament Words*, (edited by Paul Onica et. al.) LSM, 1981, p. 259. The quote is reproduced from W. Lee, *The Spirit & the Body*, chap. 6, p. 63. Note that W. Lee's example describes a natural-born son—“A boy who is the son of a certain man has the sonship of that man because he has obtained that man's life and has the position of that man's son.” This is not adoption, but normal reproduction. Hence W. Lee's illustration matches his definition, “the place of a son by natural birth.”
  18. W. Lee declared, “I did not study in a Bible institute or a theological school.” [W. Lee, *Elders' Training*, Book 4, p. 10]
  19. W. Lee, *Elders' Training* Book 4, p. 129. The quote, in context, reads: “In expounding any verse, we would go back directly to the Greek text. We did not study Greek, yet we had dictionaries, lexicons, and concordances to help us in our study.” [W. Lee, *Elders' Training* Book 4, p. 129, emphasis indicates quote in main text] Perhaps it is worthwhile to contrast W. Lee with John N. Darby, who produced a “new translation” of the New Testament (1888). John N. Darby (in contrast to W. Lee) could declare, “I know Greek and have studied the Greek New Testament.” [Max S. Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby—A Biography* (1992) p. 189] In 1819 Darby graduated from Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland with “the highest honors in classics: the classical gold medal.” [Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby*, p. 31] “The classics” include the Greek and Latin texts from ancient Greece and Rome.
  20. Roger Good, *Glossa: Sonship or Adoption as Sons? Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 4 (Oct. 2000) p. 39, emphasis added. Trevor J. Burke points out that “the first known literary appearances [of *huiiothesia*] are found in the writings of the two Hellenistic historians Diodorus Siculus [1<sup>st</sup> century BC] and Nicolaus Damascenus [also 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, born circa. 64 BC].” [Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, p. 22.] This early literary evidence confirms the meaning of “adoption.”
  21. Roger Good, *Glossa: Sonship or Adoption as Sons? Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 4 (Oct. 2000) p. 39
  22. Nathan Vigil, “The Conflicted Theological Construct of Adoption,” [Book review of *Adopted by God*, by Robert A. Peterson,] in LSM's *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (October, 2002) p. 124. Vigil attacks the view that God adopts sinners into His family saying, “the concept that God brings sinners into His family by means of a legal transaction parallel to the human practice of adoption is not found in the Scriptures and is contrary to the Bible's revelation concerning our divine sonship. By imposing this erroneous theological construct upon the Scriptures...” Immediately prior to this, Vigil refers to “a notion concerning the way in which God brings sinners into His family that is foreign to the Bible.” [Nathan Vigil, “The Conflicted Theological Construct of Adoption,” *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (October, 2002) p. 124. Emphasis indicates quote in main text] The book reviews of Nathan Vigil and Tony Espinosa (published in *Affirmation & Critique*) are useful in that they enunciate LSM's teachings on sonship/adoption. We do not evaluate the validity of their critiques of the particular books reviewed. Rather we focus on these writers' presentation of LSM's own teachings regarding adoption /sonship.
  23. Norm Mundhenk also discusses the meaning of *huiiothesia* in isolation from its historical, secular context. Mundhenk concedes, “the Greek word *huiiothesia*...is often understood to mean “adoption.” Apparently this word is used in the ancient Greek papyri in places where the English word “adoption” would seem to fit, and as a result the lexicons often say that the word means “adoption” (see the entry in BAGD). I am not in a position to study the papyri and other places where this word may appear outside of the New Testament, so I do not want to discuss the meaning of the word in those places. But in the New Testament itself, this word is used only by Paul, three times in Romans and once in Galatians. (It is also found in Eph 1.5, a passage which may not have been written by Paul.) Therefore, it seems reasonable to ask a very specific question: “When Paul used this word, what did he mean by it?” [Norm Mundhenk,

- “Adoption: Being Recognized as a Son,” THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR, VOL. 59, NO. 4, (Oct. 2008) p. 170] Mundhenk’s preferred rendering of “receive *huiiothesia*” (Gal. 4:5) is “be recognized as God’s sons.”
24. LSM’s Recovery Version (RcV) New Testament translates all five occurrences of *huiiothesia* as “sonship.” Moreover the RcV footnotes use the term “sonship” thirty times in footnotes to twenty-five New Testament verses—John 17:22; Rom. 1:4; 8:4, 14, 15, 23, 26, 28; 9:4; 13:11; 16:1. Gal. 3:26; 4:5, 6, 7, 19, 24; 5:6, 6:15. Eph. 1:5, 6, 14. Titus 1:2; 2:13. 1 Pet. 1:4. In contrast the terms, “adopt” and “adoption” never appear in the RcV. New Testament text or footnotes.
  25. The verb, “to adopt” is defined as “to take and rear (the child of other parents) as one’s own child, specifically by a formal legal act.” [Dictionary.com] “Adoption” is the related “noun of action.” Hence “adopt” implies a transfer, entering into a new family. Notice that adoption in the ancient Roman Empire typically involved adopting a post-adolescent male to be a son and heir. In contrast, adoption in modern western society typically involves adopting a needy infant or child (either male or female). The definition of “sonship” as “the state, fact, or relation of being a son” is from the same source--Dictionary.com.
  26. T. Espinosa, “An Incomplete Sonship,” *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, No. 1 (April 2007) p. 91
  27. F. Lyall, “Legal Metaphors in the Epistles,” *Tyndale Bulletin*, vol. 32 (1981) pp. 81-96, p. 95
  28. F. Lyall, “Adoption Metaphor and the Security of the Believer,” *Testamentum Imperium*, Vol. 1, 2005-7, p. 3. Professor Dunn concurs saying, “almost certainly Paul had in mind the legal act of adoption, by which a Roman...entered another family and came under ...its head.” [James D. G. Dunn, *Galatians* (1993) p. 217 quoted by T. J. Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, p. 89 ]
  29. [Blank]
  30. A central point in Ephesians is that God predestined people unto sonship/adoption (Eph. 1:5). Because of God’s salvation, the Gentile believers are no longer strangers and sojourners (aliens), but are members of God’s household (family) (Eph. 2:19). Paul refers to this as the “mystery of Christ...that in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members...” (Eph. 3:4-6). This fits the adoption metaphor—that Gentile “aliens,” have been “adopted” into God’s family to be sons in God’s family and joint-heirs with believing Jews.
  31. Nathan Vigil, “*The Conflicted Theological Construct of Adoption*,” *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct. 2002) p. 124. Vigil attacks the view that God adopts sinners into His family saying, “the concept that God brings sinners into His family by means of a legal transaction parallel to the human practice of adoption is not found in the Scriptures and is contrary to the Bible’s revelation concerning our divine sonship. By imposing this erroneous theological construct upon the Scriptures...” Immediately prior to this, Vigil refers to “a notion concerning the way in which God brings sinners into His family that is foreign to the Bible.” [Nathan Vigil, “*The Conflicted Theological Construct of Adoption*,” *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct. 2002) p. 124. Emphasis indicates quotes in the main text]
  32. Nathan Vigil, “*The Conflicted...*,” *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct. 2002) p. 124, emphasis added
  33. LSM’s position is paradoxical. They stress the term *oikonomia*, emphasizing its original meaning in first-century Greco-Roman society. LSM’s Recovery Version Bible says “The Greek word means *household law*, implying distribution...hence it is also a household economy.” W. Lee, 1 Tim. 1:4 note 3, RcV. The note says, “The Greek word means *household law*, implying distribution (the base of this word is of the same origin as that for *pasture* in John 10:9, implying a distribution of the pasture to the flock). It denotes a household management, a household administration, a household government, and, derivatively, a dispensation, a plan, or an economy for administration (distribution); hence, it is also a household economy.” (W. Lee, 1 Tim. 1:4, note 3, RcV.) See also W. Lee, Eph. 1:10, note 1, RcV. for a similar definition. Some might argue that “adoption” is a misleading translation of *huiiothesia*, since modern adoption typically involves sponsoring and supporting needy infants (male or female), while Roman adoption involved post-adolescent males. However, a similar argument applies when *oikonomia* is rendered as “economy.” When first confronted with the term, “God’s economy,” people often ask, “Is God in business? What product/ service does God produce?” Such queries demonstrate that the modern meaning connoted by “economy” differs from the root meaning of *oikonomia*. This is the historical-grammatical basis for “God’s economy,” the centerpiece of LSM’s theology. In LSM’s messages and publications *oikonomia* is rendered “economy,” based on its historical meaning (Eph. 1:10; 1 Tim. 1:4). The Greek term *huiiothesia* appears in the same sentence as *oikonomia* (Eph. 1:3-14). Significantly LSM’s Recovery Version of the Bible has no footnote on *huiiothesia*. In contrast the term “economy” receives extensive treatment. However, *huiiothesia* is rendered as “sonship,” not “adoption,” (Eph. 1:5) despite its lexical significance. Thus LSM denies the historical meaning of *huiiothesia*, while accepting that of *oikonomia*. It appears LSM “cherry-picks” the lexical significance of Greek terms based on their preconceived doctrinal position.
  34. [Blank]

35. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1955), pp. 132-3
36. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: an Exposition of Ephesians 1*, p. 110
37. Ron Kangas, "Creation, Satanification, Regeneration, Deification—Part 3, Regeneration for Deification, Regeneration as Deification," *Affirmation & Critique*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct. 2002) p. 78
38. Rev. Angus Stewart, "Adoption: A Biblical and Theological Exposition of a Neglected Doctrine" (Slightly modified from an article first published in the *British Reformed Journal*).
39. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: an Exposition of Ephesians 1*, p. 110
40. Take, for example, Unger's Bible Dictionary, a standard reference tool, which says, "Adoption and regeneration...are two phases of the same fact, regeneration meaning the reproduction of the filial character, and adoption the restoration of the filial privilege." *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Moody Press, 1957), p. 23.
41. See for example, W. Lee, *The Organic Aspect of God's Salvation*. In this book W. Lee states that "The central burden of the messages may be expressed by the following statements: (1) The complete salvation of God has two aspects—the judicial aspect and the organic aspect. (2) The judicial aspect is the procedure of God's salvation through the redemption of Christ for God's salvation to fully meet the righteous requirement of His law. (3) The organic aspect is the fulfillment of God's salvation through the life of Christ for the believers to be transformed and to grow and mature in the life of God. (4)..." [W. Lee, *The Organic Aspect of God's Salvation*, chap. 1] The only occurrence of "sonship" in this book is under "glorification"—"When the Lord comes back, they will enter into glory to enjoy the highest portion of the divine sonship (Rom. 8:23)." [W. Lee, *The Organic Aspect of God's Salvation*, chap. 5]
42. "The divine way for us to be made holy and to receive the sonship is by God dispensing Himself into us." [W. Lee, *The Divine Dispensing for the Divine Economy*, chp.1, emphasis added.] The quote, in context, reads: "The Father's predestinating through Christ is so that the predestinated ones may have His life for their sonship through the dispensing of the Father's divine life into us (Eph. 1:5). To have the sonship implies that we must have God's life. The divine life generates us to be God's sons. As God's sons we have God's life, so we have God's sonship. God the Father imparts Himself into our being as our holy nature to make us holy and as our divine life to make us His sons so that we may have sonship. To be made holy and to receive the sonship are [is] a matter of receiving the divine dispensing. The divine way for us to be made holy and to receive the sonship is by God dispensing Himself into us." [W. Lee, *The Divine Dispensing for the Divine Economy*, chp.1, emphasis indicates quote in main text.]
43. W. Lee, *A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing*, (1990) chap. 11
44. W. Lee, *A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing*, (1990) chap. 11. These quotes, in context, read, "After God the Father chose us, He marked us out and predestinated us unto sonship. Hence, in order for God to make us holy, He gave us His holy nature, and in order for us to become His sons and have the sonship, He gave us His life. **We are not God's adopted sons.** Rather, we are the children begotten by God's life. John 1:12 says, "As many as received Him, to them He gave authority to become children of God." These are not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. For God to predestinate us unto sonship means that He begets us and dispenses His life into us. Hence, God has not only put His nature into us to make us holy, but has imparted His life into us to make us His sons. Both of these involve God's dispensing. [W. Lee, *A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing*, (1990) chp. 11, emphasis indicates quotes in main text.] Note these statements are made in the context of Eph. 1:3-6, where God predestinated us unto sonship [huiotesia]
45. W. Lee, *The Issue of the Dispensing of the Processed Trinity and the Transmitting of the Transcending Christ*, p. 10
46. The "high peak" truths refer to W. Lee's ministry (1991 to 1997) LSM reports that, "Beginning from the 1991 Winter Training on the Life-study of Jeremiah, Brother Lee's remaining years of ministry focused on what he called the high peak of the divine revelation: *that God became man in order that man might become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead.*" W. Lee's *Life-study* is more balanced, based on this, LSM's Recovery Version Bible notes that "God's marking us out beforehand was to destine us unto sonship. We were predestinated to be sons of God even before we were created. Hence, as God's creatures we need to be regenerated by Him that we may participate in His life to be His sons. Sonship implies having not only the life but also the position of a son. God's marked-out ones have the life to be His sons and the position to inherit Him." [W. Lee, Eph. 1:5, note 2] Notice that here W. Lee points out that "sonship" implies both "life" and "position," i.e., it is both positional and dispositional (judicial and organic). W. Lee's *Life-study of Ephesians* elaborates on this point.
47. W. Lee, *The Issue of the Dispensing of the Processed Trinity and the Transmitting of the Transcending Christ*, p. 25. This quote, and the previous one—"We do not become [God's] sons by adoption,"--appear in the same publication. This quote, in context, reads: "If a cat begets kittens, those kittens are baby cats. In the same way, God begot us to make us the sons of God. To make us the sons of God is to make us 'baby gods,' having God's life

and nature but not His Godhead. In life, in nature, and in expression we are the same as He is, because we are born of Him. Thus, we are not only the children of God, we are not only the sons of God, we are not only the heirs of God, but **we are also the 'baby gods.'** The kittens, the baby cats, are surely cats because they are according to the cats' kind. God created everything according to its kind. Man, however, was created according to God's kind because he was created in God's image (Gen. 1:26). Later, we men were born of God, not only bearing God's image but also having God's life and nature. Thus, **we become God in life and in nature, but not in the Godhead. This is what the sonship means.**" [W. Lee, *The Issue of the Dispensing of the Processed Trinity and the Transmitting of the Transcending Christ*, p. 25, emphasis indicates quote in the main text.] Note also the repeated assertion that "To make us the sons of God is **to make us 'baby gods.'**"

48. Of course, humanly speaking a child is either born (from his/her biological parents) or adopted, but not both. However, in Scripture, we are dealing with divine birth (regeneration) and divine adoption as sons of God. Hence, in this case, the possibility that believers are *both* regenerated and adopted, as different aspects of our relationship with God the Father, ought to be considered, and not ruled out *a priori*. W. Lee's statements—like, "We are not God's adopted sons. Rather, we are the children begotten by God's life. John 1:12..."—assume that adoption and regeneration are mutually exclusive possibilities (an either/or choice). In the divine realm this is a false dichotomy.
49. Ron Kangas, "Creation, Satanification, Regeneration, Deification—Part 3, Regeneration for Deification, Regeneration as Deification," *Affirmation & Critique*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct. 2002) p. 78
50. Ron Kangas, "Creation, Satanification, ...," *Affirmation & Critique*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct. 2002) p. 78
51. John Pester, "Making known the Mystery in Ephesians," in LSM's *Affirmation & Critique*, (July 2000) p. 19
52. Nathan Vigil, "*The Conflicted ...*," *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct. 2002) quoting Peterson, p. 109
53. Nathan Vigil, "*The Conflicted Theological...*," *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct., 2002) p. 126
54. Nathan Vigil, "The Conflicted Theological Construct of Adoption," *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (October, 2002) p. 126. This abbreviated quote is given in context above.
55. For example, Watchman Nee says, "The character which the Holy Spirit constitutes within man is different from person to person. Paul's preaching carried his distinctive features. Peter's message carried his distinctive flavor. His epistles were very different in style from Paul's Epistles. John's writings are also different from others' writings. Everyone has his own style." [Watchman Nee, *Ministry of the Word*, p. 57] A basic flaw in LSM's teaching on adoption/sonship, contained in issues of *Affirmation & Critique*, is the implicit assumption that "child" and "son" have identical meanings in the writings of Paul and John. W. Nee's quote (above) calls that assumption into question.
56. Consider, for example, the following quotes from the "Little Kittel," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT): "In John only Christ is *huios* [Son]; believers are *tekna* [children of God]" [G. W. Bromiley, TDNT, p.763] Jesus' "own sonship differs from ours, and he is never called the *teknon theou* [child of God]" [G. W. Bromiley, TDNT, p.763] In John's writings the believers are never called, "sons of God;" they are God's "children." Other designations—"fathers, young men, children"—are used by John to describe differences in maturity, but not "sons." The KJV rendering of 1 John 3:1—"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called *the sons of God*"—is a mistranslation. Other versions (NIV, Rcv. etc) render it as "children of God."
57. Tim T. J. Trumper echoes these sentiments, saying, "To be clear about Paul's teaching we need, first, to cease the well-worn (Puritan) practice of confusing Paul's language of adoption with John's references to the new birth (notably John 1:12-13; 3:1-21; 1 John 2:28-3:3). The terms they use construct two distinctive filial or familial models (robust metaphors), which convey differing yet supplementary concepts of our salvation. Whereas John's model speaks of the birth of the children of God (*tekna tou theou*) into the kingdom...Paul's refers to the adoption of God's (mature) sons into his family, and indicates the new status they have in Christ, and all that goes with it: acceptance, assurance, liberty, prayer, obedience and hope (the inheritance)... systematicians...have mistakenly assumed that to express the unity of these concepts requires the conflation of their models. This is not so. We only have the right to mix biblical models when the Scripture itself does so," [Tim J. R. Trumper, "From Slaves to Sons!" reprinted from *Foundations* [U.K.] vol. 55 (2006), pp. 17-18]
58. Nathan Vigil, "The Conflicted Theological Construct of Adoption," book review of *Adopted by God*, by Robert A. Peterson, in LSM's *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (October, 2002) p. 125. Recall, also, John Pester's statement that "Paul's concept of sonship involves much more than just an objective, recognition of the believers as sons...The Greek word literally means to place in the position of a son. In order to be placed in the position of a privileged son, **there is the need for growth and advancement in the divine life.** Sonship involves regeneration...and **it also involves the mature expression of life which issues from the growth of the divine life.**" [John Pester, "Making the Mystery known in Ephesians," *Affirmation & Critique*, (July 2000) p. 19, emphasis added]
59. Roger Good, "Glossa: Sonship or Adoption as Sons?" *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 4 (Oct. 2000) p. 40



60. Brendan Byrne points out that sonship/adoption is listed first among Israel's blessings in Rom. 9:4. He says, "heading the list is the motif of 'divine filiation' (*huiiothesia*)...the fact that it forms the starting point for the whole discussion about to begin [in Rom 9] suggests that here we have the central privilege as far as Paul was concerned." [Brendan Byrne & Daniel J. Harrington, *Romans*, p. 285]
61. Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted...*, p. 70. Burke also quotes Cranfield, who in turn quotes F. F. Bruce, saying "when Paul used the word *huiiothesia* in Romans 9:4 he had Old Testament material in mind, because the notion of adoption is implied in Yahweh's relation to Israel, his 'son' (Bruce, *Galatians*, 1982, p. 197)." [T. J. Burke, *Adopted* p. 49]
62. Roger Good, "Glossa: Sonship or Adoption as Sons?" *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 4 (Oct. 2000) p. 40. R. Good also addresses 2 Sam. 7:12-14 (RcV) where Jehovah promised King David, "**12 I will raise up your seed after you**, which will come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. **13 It is he who will build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be his Father, and he will be My son.** If he commits iniquity, I will strike him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the sons of men." LSM's Roger Good says, "writers such as James Scott consider that these Old Testament references, especially Exo. 4:22 and 2 Sam. 7:14, are cases of divine adoption. However, when 2 Sam. 7:14 is considered with Psalm 2:7, "You are My Son; today I have begotten You," this clearly must be viewed as a promise of divine *begetting* rather than divine *adoption*...the New Testament writers understood this as a reference to Christ...The verses in which Israel or David's offspring are to be considered as God's son are best interpreted as promises of divine sonship which are fulfilled in the New Testament ...not as indicators of divine adoption...This could only be fulfilled after the incarnation.." [R. Good, "Glossa: Sonship or Adoption as Sons?" *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 4 (Oct. 2000) pp. 39-40. Emphasis added] Hence, R. Good argues that God's promise to David—"I will raise up your seed after you... I will be his Father, and he will be My son"—is "a reference to Christ" which "could only be fulfilled after the incarnation." He also asserts God's promise to David is "best interpreted as promises of divine sonship...not as indicators of divine adoption," and "a promise of divine *begetting* rather than divine *adoption*." This is a patently biased exposition. God's promise to David is fulfilled *both* through Solomon and through Christ. The clause, "he who will build a house for My name" (v. 13) surely applies (in the first instance) to Solomon. Also, the clause, "If he commits iniquity, I will strike him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the sons of men," (v. 14b) surely applies only to Solomon (and his descendents) and *not to Christ!* Indeed W. Lee's footnote 14<sup>2</sup> says, "The word from this point to the end of v. 15 refers only to Solomon, David's son, and not to Christ." Hence, the fact that this prophecy was fulfilled in its fullest sense by Christ, does not negate the fact that it was (partially) fulfilled by Solomon. Roger Good errs in presenting this Old Testament promise as a false dichotomy—fulfilled by either Christ or Solomon (but not both). But Christ and Solomon as fulfillments are not mutually exclusive options. Moreover, R. Good's statement that the fulfillment of 2 Sam. 7:14 is "best interpreted as promises of divine sonship...not as indicators of divine adoption," also presents another (related) false dichotomy--of "divine sonship (*begetting*)" or "divine adoption"(but not both). However, 2 Sam. 7:14 can be fulfilled through both Christ's "divine sonship" and Solomon's "divine adoption," as numerous Bible expositors recognize. It seems Roger Good's exposition is designed to support a preconceived position--that there was no sonship/adoption in the Old Testament. All Old Testament references are taken as prophetic of a future New Testament fulfillment by Christ and/or the New Testament believers. Any Old Testament (partial) fulfillment, which would imply "divine adoption/sonship" is denied and/or ignored. This is *eisgesis* not *exegesis*. However, the Scriptures clearly testify (e.g. Exo. 4:22 and 2 Sam. 7:14,) that Israel and David's son (Solomon & descendents) were, in a real sense, "God's son"—they had the sonship/adoption (Rom. 9:4)
63. R. Good, "Glossa: Sonship or Adoption as Sons?" *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 4, p. 40 Good also says, "The passages where Israel is called God's son are better considered as indicators of God's paternity in His creation (cf. Acts 17:28-29) and selection of Israel." (p. 40). But "God's paternity in His creation" makes Him the father of all mankind (and therefore all nations) Eph. 3:14-15. This does not give Israel a distinct position (sonship).
64. No doubt the New Testament believers' "sonship" is higher than that of Israel. Nevertheless that does not negate the reality of Israel's "sonship" in the Old Testament dispensation. When Paul says, "the "Israelites, whose are the sonship..." (Rom. 9:4), he refers to a present possession, not a promised future blessing. An LSM Recovery Version footnote quotes Alford, saying the New Testament believers' "inheritance, as much higher than that which fell to the children of Israel in the possession of Canaan, as the sonship of the regenerate, who have already received the promise of the Spirit through faith as a pledge of their inheritance, is higher than the sonship of Israel..." (1 Peter 1:4, note 2, RcV.)
65. R. Scroggs, Review of B. Byrne in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1981, p. 662
66. Roger Good, "Glossa: Sonship or Adoption as Sons?" *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 4 (Oct. 2000) p. 40

67. W. Lee, *Life-study of Romans*, Message 19, p. 233 The quote, in context, reads: “In this portion of the Word three significant terms are used—**children, sons, and heirs**. **These three words correspond to the three stages of sonship**. The life of God works in three stages to make us sons of God. The life of God regenerates us in our spirit, transforms us in our soul, and transfigures our body. Hence, we have regeneration, transformation, and transfiguration. These together give us full sonship. As the result of these three steps the sons are fully matured.” [W. Lee, *Life-study of Romans*, Message 19, p. 233, emphasis indicates quote in the main text]
68. John Pester, “Making Known the Mystery in Ephesians,” in *Affirmation & Critique*, (July 2000) p. 20
69. W. Lee, Romans 8:14, note 3, Rcv.
70. For example, Rom. 8:14, note 3 says, “**Children** refers to the initial stage of sonship, the stage of regeneration **in the human spirit**. Sons are the children of God who are in the stage of the transformation of **their souls**. They not only have been regenerated in their spirit and are growing in the divine life, but they also are living and walking by being led by the Spirit. Heirs are the sons of God who, through the transfiguration of **their body** in the stage of glorification, will be fully matured in every part of their being.” [W. Lee, Rom. 8:14, Rcv., note 3, emphasis added]
71. W. Lee, *Life-study of Romans*, Message 18, p. 215. Later, W. Lee repeats and elaborates, saying, “As I have already mentioned, we may be children without the growth of a son and we may be sons without the qualification of an heir. For the Holy Spirit to witness that we are all heirs of God would be premature. Most of us are not mature enough for such a witness. Thus, the Spirit witnesses to the most basic and elementary relationship—that of being the children of God. He witnesses with our spirit that we are God’s children. Therefore, the witnessing of the Holy Spirit starts with the youngest age, even from our spiritual birth. Regardless of how young or new you may be, if you are a child of God, the Spirit of God witnesses with your spirit.” [W. Lee, *Life-study of Romans*, Message 18, p. 218] According to this scheme, child, son & heir indicate successive stages of growth unto maturity. According to W. Lee’s evaluation, most believers have not attained the status of “heirs.” Therefore he says, “Most of us are not mature enough for such a witness,” i.e. “For the Holy Spirit to witness that we are all heirs of God.” Hence “the Spirit witnesses to the most basic...relationship—that of being the children of God.”
72. W. Lee, *Life-study of Romans*, Message 18, p. 224. The quote, in context, reads: “**All real Christians are children of God**, having the witness of the Spirit with their spirit, **but not all** have the mark that they **are the sons of God** who are growing in the divine life and living and walking according to the leading of the Spirit. Therefore, we all must move forward in the growth in life from the initial stage of being the children of God to the more advanced stage, showing that we are the sons of God by bearing the distinct mark of the leading of the Spirit in life.” [W. Lee, *Life-study of Romans*, Message 18, p. 224, emphasis added.] W. Lee also says, “If we do not live and walk according to this leading of the Spirit, **we may be the children of God** concerning which the Spirit witnesses with our spirit in crying, “Abba, Father,” **but we do not have the mark that designates us as the sons of God**. **We may be God’s children, but we do not have the growth** which comes by living and walking according to the leading of the Spirit in life. The leading of the Spirit marks us out as being the sons of God in the growth of life.” [W. Lee, *Romans*, # 18, p. 224, emphasis added]
73. Tony Espinosa, “An Incomplete Sonship,” in LSM’s *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, No. 1 (April 2007) p. 91
74. Tony Espinosa, “An Incomplete Sonship,” *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, No. 1 (April 2007) p. 91, emphasis added
75. Quote in text box, Nathan Vigil, “The Conflicted...,” *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (October, 2002) p. 125
76. Tony Espinosa, “An Incomplete Sonship,” in LSM’s *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, No. 1 (April 2007) p. 91
77. Nathan Vigil, “The Conflicted Theological...,” *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct., 2002) p. 12 emphasis added
78. Ron Kangas, *Affirmation & Critique*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct. 2002) p. 78, emphasis added.
79. Ron Kangas states, “The Bible nowhere says that we are children of God by adoption.” The Greek word, *huiiothesia*, translated as “adoption” literally means “to place as a son.” Hence this statement by Ron Kangas is true *by definition*. The issue is whether this point has significance beyond mere definition. Based on the literal meaning of *huiiothesia*, W. E. Vine points out that the KJV rendering of Eph. 1:5 as “adoption of children” is “a mistranslation and misleading. God does not adopt believers *as children*; they are begotten as such by His Holy Spirit through faith. Adoption is a term involving the dignity of the relationship of believers as sons.” [W. E. Vine, *Exposition of NT Words*, Vol. 1, p. 32, emphasis added]
80. Tony Espinosa, “An Incomplete Sonship,” in LSM’s *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, No. 1 (April 2007) p. 92
81. “Bar Mitzvah literally translates to ‘son of commandment’ and implies ‘responsible male.’ According to Jewish Law, every Jewish boy becomes a bar mitzvah at age 13. As a bar mitzvah, he becomes obligated by God’s commandments - as prescribed in the Torah and as interpreted by Moses, the Prophets, etc. The bar mitzvah boy also becomes eligible to count in a prayer quorum (minyan), lead prayer services.... A Jewish boy becomes a bar mitzvah automatically

upon turning 13 years old. No ceremony is needed. However, in the 15th century, it became customary to mark the occasion of a boy becoming a bar mitzvah. Over the centuries this custom has evolved.” [From About.com]

82. Don Walker, “Understanding ‘Sonship’ by Don Walker, “Lifehouse International Ministries”  
<http://www.lifehouseinc.net/tp42/page.asp?id=197503>
83. No citation is given for “R. B. Jones, Bible commentator” quotation from Don Walker, “Understanding ‘Sonship’ by Don Walker, “Lifehouse International Ministries” <http://www.lifehouseinc.net/tp42/page.asp?id=197503>
84. Our statement—“This is adoption predicated upon regeneration”—is consistent with Ron Kangas’ writing—“adoption does not conflict with regeneration **but is predicated upon it**. Before we can become adult sons, we must be born as children.” Ron Kangas, *Affirmation & Critique*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct. 2002) p. 78, emphasis added.
85. Tony Espinosa, “An Incomplete Sonship,” in LSM’s *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, No. 1 (April 2007) p. 91
86. W. Lee, *Life-study of Romans*, Message 18, pp. 233-4 The quote, in context, reads: Romans 8 “verse 14 says that ‘as many as are led by the Spirit of God these are the sons of God.’ In verse 14 we are no longer babes or children, but sons. **When we are capable of being led of the Spirit, it means** that we have attained a certain [p. 233 ends / p. 234 begins] growth in life. **We have grown from children into sons who are able to take the leading of the Spirit**. This means that **we are in the second stage**, the stage of transformation.” [W. Lee, *Life-study of Romans*, Message 18, pp. 233-4, emphasis indicates quote in main text] W. Lee also says, “we may be the *children* of God concerning which the Spirit witnesses with our spirit in crying, “Abba, Father,” but we do not have the mark that designates us as the *sons* of God. We may be God’s children, but we do not have the growth which comes by living and walking according to the leading of the Spirit in life. The leading of the Spirit marks us out as being the sons of God in the growth of life.” [W. Lee, *Life-study of Romans*, Message 18, p. 224]
87. LSM’s Unorthodox *Ordo Salutis*. Theologians use the Latin term *Ordo Salutis*—“order of salvation”—to describe the typical steps of a Christian’s salvation. [It has been defined as “a technical term of Protestant dogmatics to designate the consecutive steps in the work of the Holy Spirit in the appropriation of salvation.” For simplicity, we have omitted the 2 steps of “Perseverance” & “Mortification,” since these are not our focus. (This reduces 12 steps to the 10 enumerated in the main text). Here we avoid discussing the historical variations between Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist & Arminian schemes. LSM’s scheme is based in part of material designed for young people, “*God’s Full Salvation*” compendium. “Adoption” is inserted based upon LSM’s doctrine.]

The generally accepted order of salvation is indicated below;

- |                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Foreknowledge  | 6. Justification  |
| 2. Predestination | 7. Regeneration   |
| 3. Calling        | 8. Adoption       |
| 4. Faith          | 9. Sanctification |
| 5. Repentance     | 10. Glorification |

In the orthodox *ordo salutis* regeneration follows justification, since justification is “unto life” (Rom. 5:18). We also note that “adoption” does not replace regeneration, but accompanies it; the believer enters God’s household by being “born again” organically and by being adopted judicially in terms of position. This is followed by progressive sanctification throughout the Christian life, until he/she is glorified at Christ’s coming.

In contrast LSM’s *ordo salutis* separates adoption from regeneration, placing it much later in the Christian life:

- |                   |                                   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Foreknowledge  | 7. Regeneration—as God’s child    |
| 2. Predestination | 8. Sanctification                 |
| 3. Calling        | 9. Transformation                 |
| 4. Faith          | 10. Conformation                  |
| 5. Repentance     | 11. Sonship/Adoption—as God’s son |
| 6. Justification  | 12. Glorification                 |

In LSM’s scheme sonship-adoption belongs to the final stage. [“Adoption” here within LSM’s *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) does not refer merely the final step of adoption, the redemption (transfiguration) of the believer’s physical body (Rom. 8:23) at the resurrection/rapture. Within LSM’s systematic theology “Adoption” means “the stage of maturity [when] believers are both organically and legally, dispositionally and positionally, sons of God...they have an abiding status as sons.” “Huiiothesia...refers...to our attaining to our status as mature sons of God at the consummation of our Christian life.” It is a “reference to the consummate stage of sonship achieved through the growth of the divine life, whereby matured believers become heirs of God and joint-heirs of Christ (Rom. 8:17). In short, we are born into the family of God, and *only later* are we placed in the position of a son, having matured in the divine life.” LSM’s “adoption” is this later event, when “we [are] placed in the position of a son, having matured in the divine life.”] In LSM’s scheme sonship-adoption belongs to the final stage.

Hence an LSM writer states, “Huiiothesia...refers not to a legal procedure that takes place at the beginning of our Christian life but to our attaining to our status as mature sons of God at the consummation of our Christian life.” [Nathan Vigil, “The Conflicted Theological...,” in LSM’s *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (October, 2002) p. 125] LSM’s adoption is a “coming-of-age;” it is the Father’s recognition His child has attained maturity; God “adopts” His own child to be His son. W. Lee rejected the concept of adoption, saying, “We are not God’s adopted sons. Rather, we are the children begotten by God’s life.” However, LSM’s “blended brothers,” have rehabilitated “adoption” into God’s salvation. Ron Kangas, concedes “We admit that in biblical usage adoption (*sonship*...) ‘means to be placed as an adult son in God’s family’.” [Ron Kangas, “Creation, Satanification, Regeneration...” *Affirmation & Critique*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct. 2002) p. 78] Nevertheless LSM’s resulting *ordo salutis* deviates significantly from that accepted by most evangelicals.

88 to 90 [Blank]

91 W. Lee, *Life-study of Romans*, Message 18, p. 224 The quote, in context reads: “We need to realize the difference between the children of God in [Rom. 8] verse 16 and the sons of God in verse 14. The children of God are in the initial stage of the divine life, the stage which mainly concerns the birth, while the sons of God are in a more advanced stage...All real Christians are children of God, having the witness of the Spirit with their spirit, but not all have the mark that they are the sons of God who are growing in the divine life and living and walking according to the leading of the Spirit. Therefore, we all must move forward in the growth in life from the initial stage of being the children of God to the more advanced stage, showing that we are the sons of God by bearing the distinct mark of the leading of the Spirit in life.” [W. Lee, *Life-study of Romans*, Message 18, p. 224, emphasis indicates quote in the main text.] Note also the statements, “The children of God are in the initial stage...while the sons of God are in a more advanced stage” and “we all must move forward in the growth in life from the initial stage of being the children of God to the more advanced stage, showing that we are the sons of God,” also imply “All real Christians are children of God... but not all... are the sons of God.” Hence W. Lee’s statement “All real Christians are children of God,” means all Christians have, at least, attained the “initial stage of being the children of God.” However, not all Christians have attained the “more advanced stage” of being “sons of God.”

92 W. Lee, *Life-study of Romans*, Message 18, p. 224 For this quote, in context, see previous note.

93 Tony Espinosa, “An Incomplete Sonship,” in LSM’s *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, No. 1 (April 2007) p. 92

94 In the history of the Local Church movement it seems W. Lee had a penchant for teachings concerning “stages.” In the 1950s in Taiwan, W. Lee’s teaching regarding “The Experience of Life” involved “four stages”—“The First Stage—In Christ,” “The Second Stage—Abiding in Christ,” “The Third Stage—Christ Living in Me,” & “The Fourth Stage—Christ’s Full Growth in Us” [W. Lee, *The Experience of Life*, Taiwan Gospel Bookroom, 1956; *The Stream*, 1973] The issue is not whether these phrases—“In Christ,” “Abiding in Christ,” etc.—are in the Bible. The point is the New Testament never presents definite “stages” of Christian growth. Anecdotal reports about the Local Church movement in Taiwan during the 1950s/60s suggest signs of an incipient hierarchy. Some Local Church members evaluated themselves and others according to these “stages”—e.g. “I’m in the third stage, what stage are you in?”

95 W. Lee, *Life-study of Ephesians*, Message 42. These quotes, in context, read, “To consider the matter of rank with respect to the Body of Christ is to be under the influence of the fallen human concept. Many troubles and problems have been caused by this very concept. As we consider the apostles, prophets, and elders spoken of in the New Testament, we need to drop the natural concept. If we hold to our natural concept, we shall automatically think that the apostles, prophets, and elders have a higher rank. The concept of rank is altogether a natural concept, a concept foreign to the Scriptures. The apostles, prophets, and elders carry out certain functions, but fulfilling these functions does not place them on a level above the other saints. In the Body there are many members, and these members have different functions. Although there is a difference of function, there is no difference of rank.” [Emphasis indicates the quote in main text above]

96 Perhaps this doctrine explains the condescending attitude of LSM’s “senior blended coworkers” towards “young men [who] have no realization that...these senior co-workers ...have advanced far beyond them.” In the Fall of 2005, LSM’s Ron Kangas reported that “Recently some young men signed a document attacking the senior blended coworkers in the Lord’s recovery. These young men have no realization that although these senior co-workers do not match Brother Lee they have advanced far beyond them. The soulish man does not know where he is or where others are.” (RK, *The Ministry*, vol. 11, No. 5, (June 2007) p. 41 emphasis indicates the portion quoted above)

97 D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Ultimate Purpose: an Exposition of Ephesians 1*, pp. 123-4

98 D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Ultimate Purpose: an Exposition of Ephesians 1*, p. 125

99. Nathan Vigil, “The Conflicted Theological...” *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct., 2002) p. 126

100 Roger Good, *Glossa: Sonship or Adoption as Sons?*, *Affirmation & Critique*, (October, 2000) p. 40

101 W. E. Vine, *Exposition of New Testament Words*, Vol. 1, p. 187. The discussion here relates to Christians, believers in Christ as “children of God” and “sons of God.” Below we briefly address these terms as they relate to Christ, *the* Son of God. Concerning the Greek words for “child” and “son,” Vine says, “*teknon*, a child (akin to *tikto*, to beget, bear). In contrast to *huios*, son, it gives prominence to the fact of birth, whereas *huios* stresses the dignity and character of the relationship.” [W. E. Vine, *Exposition of NT Words*, Vol. 1, p. 187 ] Vine also says, “The difference between believers as ‘children of God’ and as ‘sons of God’ is brought out in Rom. 8:14-21. The Spirit bears witness with their spirit that they are ‘children of God,’ and as such they are His heirs and joint-heirs with Christ. **This stresses the fact of their spiritual birth** (vv. 16, 17). On the other hand, ‘as many as are led by the Spirit of God these are sons of God’... Their conduct gives evidence of **the dignity of their relationship and their likeness to His character.**” (W. E. Vine, *Exposition of NT Words*, vol. 4, p. 48 emphasis added)] Note that Vine makes no reference to a difference in maturity. Other terms are used to distinguish between a baby, infant, child aged 7 to 14 etc. *Teknon* means child as the offspring of his parents and forefathers. With respect to age, a distinction is made between *paidion*, a baby or little child and *pais*, the child between 7 and 14 years old [*pais* can also mean servant]...*nepios*, infant, minor, carries the overtones of helplessness, inexperience and simplicity...[These] can refer to either boy or girl, the son (*huios*) is distinguished from daughter...” [Colin Brown (ed.) DNTT, vol. 1, pp. 280-1]

102 Colin Brown (ed.) *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, p. 286

103 F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (rev. ed.) IVP, p. 158, emphasis added.

104 D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Ultimate Purpose: an Exposition of Ephesians 1*, pp. 124-5, emphasis added

105 A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV, *Epistles of Paul*, p. 374

106 Consider the following quotes from the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*: Jesus’ “own sonship differs from ours, and he is never called the *teknon theou* [child of God]” [G. W. Bromiley, TDNT, p.763] “**In John only Christ is *huios* [Son]**; believers are *tekna* [children of God]” [G. W. Bromiley, TDNT, p.763, emphasis added] “For Paul...*tekna theou* [children of God] is used as well as *huioi* [sons], but **Christ is never *teknon* [child].**” [G. W. Bromiley, TDNT, p.763, emphasis added] The important point is that New Testament writers (John, Paul, etc.) employ the terms “child,” “son” & “sonship/adoption” in a way which distinguishes between Christ and the believers. In John’s gospel believers become “children of God,” born of God. God is their Father and also Christ’s Father (John 20:22); the believers are His many brothers (John 20:22). Nevertheless, a distinction remains--“**In John only Christ is *huios* [Son]**; believers are *tekna* [children of God]” [G. W. Bromiley, TDNT, p.763, emphasis added]. We contend that it is significant that Paul only applies the term, *huiiothesia* (sonship/adoption) to believers, and not to Christ.

107 In Romans, Paul uses the term “designated” [*horizo* ] related to Christ, the Son (Rom. 1:4) and *huiiothesia* related to the believers (Rom. 8: 15, 23 ). The term, *huiiothesia* (sonship/adoption) is applied to believers, and not to Christ. Burke quotes T. Smail saying, “It is he [Christ] who in the uniqueness of his resurrection is designated the Son of God in power (Rom. 1:4) while we are sons through an act of *huiiothesia* (adoption, son-making) which Paul always relates to the...finished work of Christ...**Thus the distinction between Jesus and us needs to be carefully observed. The language of incarnation belongs to him, and the language of adoption to us...and if we try to reverse them confusion will result.**” [Trevor J. Burke, quoting T. Smail (1980, p. 144) *Adopted into God’s Family*, p. 107 italics: Burke’s emphasis; red: my emphasis]

108 The claim Jesus was “adopted” as God’s son is an early heresy, “Adoptionism,” is the heretical teaching that Jesus was born of Joseph and Mary in the normal way, and subsequently, adopted as God’s son (Son of God) at his baptism. This denies the eternal pre-existence of Christ and the miracle of His incarnation. This doctrine was declared heresy at the Council of Nicaea, which affirmed the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity and identifies Jesus as eternally begotten of God. [Wikipedia] Against this background it is significant that Paul did not apply the term, *huiiothesia* (sonship/adoption) to Christ.

109 W. Lee, *The Issue of the Dispensing of the Processed Trinity and the Transmitting of the Transcending Christ*, pp. 25-26. The quote, in context, reads: “If a cat begets kittens, those kittens are baby cats. In the same way, **God begot us to make us the sons of God.** To make us the sons of God is to make us ‘**baby gods,**’ having God’s life and nature but not His Godhead. In life, in nature, and in expression we are the same as He is, because we are born of Him. Thus, we are not only the children of God, we are not only the sons of God, we are not only the heirs of God, but we are also the ‘baby gods.’ The kittens, the baby cats, are surely cats because they are according to the cats’ kind. God created everything according to its kind. Man, however, was created according to God’s kind because he was created in God’s image (Gen. 1:26). Later, we men were born of God, not only bearing God’s image but also having God’s life and nature. Thus, **we become God in life and in nature, but not in the Godhead. This is what the sonship means.**” [W. Lee, *The Issue of the Dispensing...*, pp. 25-26.

Emphasis indicates quote in main text] W. Lee also writes, “Now we can see the intrinsic significance of Ephesians 1:4-5. God chose us to be holy, predestinating us unto sonship. God dispensed Himself into His chosen people so that His chosen people could be holy as He is. Our being made holy results in our being made sons of God, **making us God in life and in nature**, but not in the Godhead. The carrying out of God's eternal economy is hinged on the divine sanctification unto (for) sonship.” [W. Lee, *The Issue ...*, pp. 25-26, emphasis added]

110 LSM's Recovery Version always translates *huiiothesia* as “sonship,” never as “adoption.” *Huiiothesia* in its five New Testament occurrences (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4, Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5) always applies to believers, never to Christ. However, the term, “sonship” is applied by W. Lee to Christ in his Bible expositions. For example, expounding John 17:22—“And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one” — W. Lee says, “The glory that the Father gave to the Son is the sonship with the Father's life and divine nature.” [W. Lee, *John 17:22*, RCV. note 1] So, according to W. Lee, glory equals “sonship” plus “the Father's life and divine nature.” He continues, saying, “**The sonship was given so that the Son** could express the Father in His fullness. **The Son has given this glory to His believers that they too may have the sonship** with the Father's life and divine nature to express the Father in the Son in the Son's fullness.” [W. Lee, *John 17:22*, RCV., note 1, emphasis added] Here then is an assertion that, “The sonship was given [by the Father, to the Son]...” Moreover, “The Son has given this glory [i.e. “the sonship with the Father's life and divine nature”] to His believers that they too may have the sonship...” Clearly, the term, “sonship” is being used in relation to both Christ and the believers and the assertion is made that Christ's sonship is (in some sense) transmitted (or shared) with the believers. However, this same term, “sonship” is LSM's translation of Paul's *huiiothesia*, which term Paul applies **only to the believers and never to Christ**. The vast majority of Bible translations render *huiiothesia* as “adoption.” Orthodox Bible scholars would never apply the term “adoption” to Christ, since to assert Christ was God's adopted son is heretical. Hence LSM's application of “sonship” to Christ, as well as the believers blurs the distinction between Christ's sonship and the believers' sonship. Moreover, W. Lee takes the term, *horizo*—“designated”—which is applied to Christ in Rom. 1:4 and applies it to all believers. For example, he says, “As the designated Son of God, Christ still has two natures, both that of divinity and that of humanity...**He has been designated the Son of God** with both divinity and humanity. As such a marvelous Person, He has become the model, the pattern, of **all those who are being designated sons of God**. A son of God must have both the divine nature and the resurrected, glorified, uplifted human nature.” (W. Lee, *Life-study of Romans* #52). In contrast, the Apostle Paul only applies this term, *horizo*, **to Christ and never to the believers**. Hence we assert that, “LSM's sonship doctrine blurs this distinction--between Christ's sonship and the believers' sonship.”

111. Norm Mundhenk suggests that Paul switches from “sons” to “children” because of gender considerations. He writes, “In spite of... the importance of being a son in Roman law, and the unimportance of being a daughter, in this passage [Rom. 8] Paul himself changes from talking about “sons” (*huiioi*, v. 14) to talking about “children” (*tekna*, v. 16). The metaphor based on Roman law may be helpful in leading people to grasp the point. But in fact **Paul is talking about all Christians, both men and women**, as being “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” **So in the last part of the passage he drops the reference to “sons” and speaks of Christians as “children of God.”** [Norm Mundhenk, “Adoption: Being Recognized as a Son,” *THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR*, Vol. 59, No. 4, (Oct. 2008) p. 172] Personally, I think this suggestion lacks credibility.

112 The RCV footnote reads: “**Sons of full age**, who have outgrown the custody of the slave guardian. Under the old testament, God's chosen people were considered infants. Now, under the new testament, they are considered **sons of full age, who will inherit the promised blessing** — the all-inclusive Spirit of Christ.” [W. Lee, Gal. 3:26, RCV. note 1]

113 Tony Espinosa, “An Incomplete Sonship,” *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, No. 1 (April 2007) p. 91

114 Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, p. 86. Burke is quoting from Martyn, 1997. Note that, with reference to the Galatian believers' maturity, later in Galatians, Paul refers to the believers as “my children” [Lit. ‘little children’] (4:19) and “children of promise,” like Isaac (4:28).

115 Paul's use of “child” [infant] and “son” do not represent stages in the New Testament believer's growth in the divine life. By referring to God's chosen people as “child” [infant] Paul is *not* implying that, prior to Christ, God's chosen people were His regenerated children! No! This scripture (when compared to the Apostle John's writings) illustrates the principle that different New Testament writers may use the same term, but with a different meaning. Here “child” [infant] refers to the status of God's chosen people under law [the child conductor] prior to Christ. After Christ's redemption, under the New Testament, God's people have the new status of “sons.” It is unwarranted to infer that, because Paul uses the term “child,” therefore (before Christ) God's chosen people were regenerated with God's divine life. However, this is the unjustified result of forcing John's meaning of “children of God” upon Paul's writing. We cannot force LSM's “stages of growth” doctrine or their “sonship through the growth of the divine life” teaching upon this section of Galatians—an important case where Paul employs the term, *huiiothesia*.

116 T. Espinosa, “An Incomplete Sonship,” *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, No. 1 (April 2007) p. 91. The quote, in context, reads: “Paul's use of *huiiothesia* does not refer to the believer's entrance into the family of God at the

beginning of his Christian life; this entrance is achieved by regeneration. Paul's use of *huiiothesia* is in reference to the consummate stage of sonship achieved through the growth of the divine life, whereby matured believers become heirs of God and joint-heirs of Christ (v. 17). In short, we are born into the family of God, and only later are we placed in the position of a son, having matured in the divine life." [Emphasis shows quote in main text]

117 Nathan Vigil, "The Conflicted..." in LSM's *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct., 2002) pp. 124-5

118 In footnote 2 on Gal. 4:5, W. Lee says, "God's eternal purpose is to have many sons for His corporate expression. Hence, He predestinated us unto sonship (Eph. 1:5) and *regenerated us to be His sons* (John 1:12-13)." (Emphasis added). Notice that, here in Galatians, W. Lee acknowledges believers are "sons" (not children) by regeneration.

119 LSM attributes Hebrews to the Apostle Paul. In Hebrews 12, Paul addresses all the Hebrew believers as sons (vv. 5-8), saying, "5...you have completely forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as with sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when reproved by Him; 6 For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.' 7 It is for discipline *that* you endure; God deals with you as with sons. For what son is there whom the father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all *sons* have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons." [Hebrews 12:5-8] Paul tells the Hebrews, "God deals with you as with sons." He is not addressing a subset of Hebrew believers; he addresses them all as sons of God. They are either legitimate sons, or illegitimate (if they don't undergo discipline through suffering persecution). This raises the issue of "heirs." Paul says the believers are "heirs of God...joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*" (Rom. 8:17). Yet, it is clear Paul expected suffering & persecution to be the common lot of all believers; hence all are heirs.

120 W. Lee, Rom. 8:17, RcV., note 1. Along the same lines, W. Lee also says, "There is a condition involved in being an heir. We should not say that simply because we are children we are heirs. This is too hasty. There is no condition imposed for us to be the children of God. As long as the Spirit witnesses with our spirit, we are the children of God. However, *for us to progress from children to heirs there is a condition*. This condition is mentioned in the latter part of the verse [Rom. 8:17]. The condition for being heirs of God and joint-heirs of Christ is *that 'we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified with Him'*." [W. Lee, *Life-study of Romans*, Message 19, p. 225, emphasis added] Notice that W. Lee expresses this "condition" for being God's heir in terms of his three-stage paradigm--. Yet Gal. 4:7 says, "So then *you are* no longer a slave but *a son; and if a son, an heir* also through God." Here in Galatians Paul connects 'son' and 'heir'--"*you are...a son; and if a son, an heir;*" every 'son' is God's 'heir' (without conditions). This contradicts W. Lee's three-stage sonship doctrine that "after being born as children, we must grow in life to become sons, and then we must pass through suffering that we may be glorified to become legal heirs." [W. Lee, Rom. 8:17, RcV., note 1]

121 Vincent says, concerning 'If' in Rom. 8:17 "The conditional particle with the indicative mood *assumes the fact. If so be, as is really the case.*" [M. R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament*, Vol. 3, p. 92, emphasis shows quote in main text] Concerning this same particle, Reinecker says, "Used of a thing which is *assumed to be [true]*." [Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, p. 357, emphasis added]

122 "Paul...does not distinguish between child and son," [Colin Brown (ed.) *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, p. 286] "Paul is using the two terms interchangeably...Nowhere in the New Testament can a valid distinction be made between 'children of God' and 'sons of God'." Professor F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (rev. ed.) IVP, p. 158. M. Lloyd-Jones concurs, "In the Scriptures and in the Epistles particularly, *the terms 'children' and 'sons' are always used interchangeably*. There is no more perfect example of this than...Romans [8:14-16] where the Apostle is dealing with the whole question of sonship...In the same paragraph, as part of one argument, [Paul] uses the terms 'sons' and 'children' interchangeably." [D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose...* pp. 124-5, emphasis added.]

123 W. Lee, *An Exposition of New Testament Words*, (edited by P. Comfort, P. Onica et. al.) LSM, 1981, p. 259. The definition of *huiiothesia* is given as: "the place of a son *by natural birth*, not 'adoption,' sonship."

124 The incipient elitism in LSM's sonship doctrine is exemplified by statements like: "The Body of Christ is composed of all of the redeemed, regenerated, transformed, conformed, and glorified sons of God..." [T. Espinosa, "An Incomplete Sonship," *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, No. 1 (April 2007) p. 94] This statement would appear to exclude from Christ's Body all believers who are not yet "transformed, conformed, and glorified." Moreover, given LSM's doctrine, articulated in this same article, that all believers are "God's children," but not all are "God's sons," the above statement excludes from Christ's Body those who are "God's children," but not yet "God's sons." Likewise the (seemingly innocuous) statement that "This Body...can only be constituted with *sons of God*," [T. Espinosa, "An Incomplete Sonship," *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, No. 1 (April 2007) p. 94] is elitist, given LSM's doctrine that all believers are "God's children," but not all are "God's sons."