

The Divine Sonship of Christ

"The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" — Luke 1:35

By **BROTHER ROBERT ROBERTS**

OUR title is a phrase which, notwithstanding its unscripturalness as a matter of words, represents a scriptural idea, namely, that Christ was the Son of God. Some say that he was the son of God by his anointing and resurrection from the dead, but the son of Joseph by natural procreation.

The terrible error of this view is apparent in a variety of ways. There is first the fact that the sonship of Christ was proclaimed **while he was yet in the flesh** (Matt. 3:17; Luke 9:35; John 1:49; 3:16; 5:19-23; 6:69; 10:36). He was the Son of God BEFORE he suffered (Heb. 5:8).

Therefore in determining the sense in which he sustained this character, we must exclude his resurrection from consideration.

His sonship was a fact before he died and rose again. This being so, we must confine our attention to "the days of his flesh" (Heb. 3) in seeking to know what constituted his sonship. Hedged, in this inquiry, within the four walls, as it were, of Christ's mortal life, in what does the Josephite view allege Christ's sonship to have consisted?

It replies: "His anointing."

It does not indicate the authority upon which the anointing of the Spirit is to be considered synonymous with sonship. Saul was the "Lord's anointed" (1 Sam. 24:1); but not a son. David also had been anointed both with oil and Spirit; but he is nowhere styled the son of God.

Jesus was anointed; but he was the Son of God **in addition to this**. That Jesus is the Christ (Anointed), and that Christ is the Son of God, are two separate propositions (1 John 2:22; 5:5).

The prophets were moved by the same Spirit that dwelt superabundantly in Jesus; but he was a Son, while they were not. Witness the distinction observed in Heb. 1:1, that—

"God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, hath spoken unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by A SON."

God spoke in both cases, and by the same Spirit, but the channel of utterance was different. In the one case it was the mouth of the selected sons of Adam, in the other it was a begotten Son of God.

What made him Son of God?

Josephites say: "The possession of the Spirit."

But this cannot be; for the prophets had the spirit as well as he—

"The Spirit of Christ was in them" (1 Pet. 1:11).

According to the Josephite theory, all the prophets were all sons of God, for all had the same spirit. If so, where was the distinction indicated in the words of Paul, and emphasized in Christ's parable of the vineyard?—

"And when the time of the fruit drew near he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruit of the vineyard . . .

"Last of all he sent unto them HIS SON, saying, They will reverence MY SON"

(Matt. 21:34-37).

Let this be read in view of the fact that the prophets were men selected, and inspired by the Spirit, while Jesus was preternaturally begotten of a virgin, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the distinction is highly intelligible and immensely interesting.

Introduce the Josephite theory, and it is without meaning.

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THAT the Jews regarded Jesus as the natural son of Joseph is rather against the Josephite theory than for it, for Jesus repudiated the views entertained of him by the Jews, and stigmatized them as fleshly. His words are,

"I know whence I came and whither I go, but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go.

"YE JUDGE AFTER THE FLESH . . . Ye are from beneath. I am from above. Ye are of this world. I am not of this world" (John 8:14, 15, 23).

If Christ was the natural son of Joseph, no signification can be attached to these words that would not also apply to all the prophets and apostles; and then Jesus sinks to a level with them instead of occupying that prominence indicated in the words—

"To him give all the prophets witness" (Acts 10:43).

"Christ the end of the law for righteousness" (Rom. 10:4).

Not only so, but the language addressed to the Pharisees would be strained, unnatural, unsuitable, and extravagant in the last degree, if it merely meant that his teaching (by the Spirit upon him) was superior to theirs. He says—

"I **proceeded forth and came from God**, neither came I of myself, but He sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech?" (John 8:43).

This appeal to the meaning of his words plainly intimates that they had reference to his **individual** origin. They could by no law of language have any other significance.

Of course the Pharisees could not understand them; because judging after the flesh, they believed Jesus to be a mere man—a natural son of Joseph; but in view of the fact that his paternity was direct from heaven, without the intervention of man, we are enabled to see great point in them.

They mean—that is, he **meant** them to mean—that he was the Son of God as distinct from men whose paternity was of the flesh. They accused him of blasphemy in this—

"For a good work we stone thee not: but for blasphemy, and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God" (John 10:33).

Compare John 5:18—

"The Jews sought the more to kill him because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but SAID ALSO THAT GOD WAS HIS FATHER, making himself equal with God."

He answered them (Jn. 10:36)—

"Say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am THE SON OF GOD."

What a weak and scarcely detectable element of meaning there would be in these statements on the Josephite theory. In fact, it may well be asked if they could have any meaning whatever.

And to this question there could be but one answer, namely, **if the Josephite theory is to be received, John's gospel must be rejected.** The two are utterly irreconcilable.

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THE divine sonship view involves no violence of this kind. Take the New Testament account as it stands, and John's statements fall into the category of intelligible utterances. We have then a rational explanation of the reason why Jesus, in the days of his flesh, assumed the title of the Son of God, which on the other theory is entirely wanting.

According to Luke, the angel Gabriel said to Mary, the mother of Jesus, before his conception (in answer to her question, "How shall this be seeing I know not a man?")—

"The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; THEREFORE also the holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

This is a very satisfactory explanation of the whole matter.

The fact that the gospel occasionally speaks of Jesus as the son of Joseph is no countenance to the idea that he was in reality the son of Joseph. Such descriptions where they occur merely reflect in an historical way the impression that prevailed among the unbelieving Jews.

It is true the evangelists did not correct it; but then it must be remembered that it was not their province, as narrators of Christ's life, to do so. They never step aside from the narrative to discuss the errors of the people. They simply record facts, and in doing this they were bound to make known that in the surprise created by the wisdom and the works of Christ, the people who rejected him, exclaimed, "Is not this the carpenter's son?"

If we are to say that because they did this without contradicting the view therein expressed, they endorsed it, we must conclude they believed Jesus to be a demonologist, operating under the auspices of Beelzebub; for they record that the Jews said—

"He hath a devil and is mad . . .
"He casteth out demons by Beelzebub the prince of the demons."

And they added nothing to confute the declaration!

But in truth, it was their duty to put these things on record without comment. We have to judge from other sources whether the popular impressions (always loose and inaccurate) were the truth. Against these impressions we have to put Christ's declaration that the Jews judged after the flesh, and did not believe; and the fact that the confession of **enlightened believers** was—

"Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel" (John 1:49).

Josephism draws its conclusions from the impressions of the mob: it is wiser to seek light at the mouth of Christ himself and at the hands of Christ's actual adherents and companions.

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THOSE who marvel that the evangelists should have suffered the popular imputation to pass without contradiction must remember that the evangelists were not writers of controversial works, standing on a level with the opponents of their doctrines.

Ordinary writers extract truth by argument; and argument **for** admits of argument **against**; and procures for an adverse conclusion the same recognition and attention which we bestow upon that we believe to be the truth. There is no umpire but that of reason. Hence all are on a level and take each other's views into account.

But it was different with the New Testament writers. They had AUTHORITY on their side. Theirs was not a system elucidated by reason as against rival systems standing on the same foundation. *It was TRUTH INFALLIBLE divinely revealed.*

Hence they did not stoop to the discussion of popular errors, as we do, who have no authority but the testimony of the written Word to fall back upon.

They stood in dignity and strength upon certain, unquestionable truth. They recorded the impressions of the people on certain points without saying anything about the truth or untruth of them, for the simple reason that the truth of the matter they elsewhere, in the words of Christ and the narrative of his birth, laid down in clear and positive form.

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AS to Christ being styled "The Son of Man," we see in that title an intimation of the fact that he was not of the nature of angels (Heb. 2:16) but of real human stock—Son of Man, though Son of God. This is explained by the fact that though the inception of his being was due to divine impulse, his nature was elaborated from the substance of Mary, as much so as any child is from its mother.

But if the meaning of it be that Joseph was his father, how is he the Son of God? This point has already been brought out.

Josephites ask: "Could Adam have been styled 'Son of Man'?"

Certainly not, because there was no antecedent man-nature from which to evolve him. But what is he called? "SON OF GOD" (Luke 3:38).

This point tells destructively against Josephism. Adam is styled Son of God **because he was the direct product of the Creative Power as distinct from human procreation.**

With this fact in view, we have scriptural light shed on Christ's title as Son of God. His being called Son of Man as well is due to the intervention of human instrumentality by Mary his mother.

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THE genealogies of Luke and Matthew, while apparently giving the descent of Jesus through the line of Joseph, are two separate lines. They coincide from Abraham to David, but here there is a complete divergence.

One line (that of Joseph) proceeds through Solomon and the kings of Judah his successors; and the other (that of Mary) through Nathan the prophet, into a collateral branch of the royal family.

The two lines once more unite in the family of Salathiel, in the days of the Babylonish captivity; but in the days of his grandson they again separate, and do not again approximate until the espousal of Mary and Joseph, with whom all genealogical traces of the line of David terminate.

These facts will be apparent to any one who will take the trouble to write out and compare the two genealogies.

The difficulty with some is that Joseph **appears** to be the terminus of both lines. He is introduced at the end of both lines, but an inspection of the genealogies will show a difference.

As regards Matthew's genealogy, there is no obscurity. It brings the line from Abraham to Jacob, father of Joseph (an interval of 42 generations), and concludes with the words—

"And JACOB BEGAT JOSEPH, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."

This, then, is the line of Joseph beyond doubt. But even this does not favor the view that Joseph was the father of Jesus. The very opposite. It does not say, "And Joseph begat Jesus." It ought to have done so if it was so.

But as soon as it reaches Joseph, it breaks away from the style of phraseology by which the descent of the line is previously traced, and introduces Joseph, not as the father of Jesus, but as "the husband of Mary."

It isolates Joseph from all connection with Christ's paternity, by declaring that of Mary was Jesus born, and that Joseph was merely her husband.

This shows the object of this genealogy, and suggests an answer to the question—

"Why was this line given if Joseph were not the father of Jesus?"

As the husband of Mary, Joseph was legally one with Mary. The two were made "one flesh" by marriage. Hence, in a legal point of view, Jesus was the son of Joseph by being the son of Mary, and through Mary inherited the lineage and rights and titles of Joseph.

Had any other than a son of David been the husband of Mary, it would have interfered with the legal and blood relationship of Jesus to David.

Jesus would not in ALL respects have been the son of David. His relationship would have been obstructed by the legal power of the husband over the wife.

It was necessary that the husband of Mary should be the son of David as it was that Mary should be a descendant of David; for if it had not been so, Christ's legal rights under the covenant made with David would have been destroyed.

But by both father and mother being "of the house and lineage of David," the natural and legal proprieties and necessities of the case were preserved, in spite of the marvel of Christ's supernatural begetting. Hence, the genealogy of Matthew is of the utmost value in showing that Joseph is descended from David.