

Something to think about in response to those who say the terms "father" and "son" apply metaphorically to God and His Son.

The metaphor confirms the sonship

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I received this message from one sincere brother. I have nothing against him, but I want to interrogate the thought process he is using. I quote him.

“The father-son image of mankind cannot be literally applied to the Divine Father-Son relationship. The term "Son" is used metaphorically it conveys the ideas of distinction of persons and the equality of nature in the context of an eternal, loving relationship.”

Basically, the brother was saying the term Son of God has nothing with being the Son of God as what a son of a man is to a man. The term son simply means there are two distinct persons and that these two distinct persons are equal and are in an everlasting loving relationship.

The problem is, it seems to me the brother is describing friendship or partnership or brotherhood not sonship. Two friends or two partners or brothers are more accurately described as two distinct equal persons in an everlasting loving relationship. The term son has much more than just being distinct, equal, and loving. One wonders why God would allow the use of the term son of God when all he meant was “two equal loving friends/partners/brothers”.

This brother is not the only one who says this. Many professed Christians say the same, including SDAs. Here is another quote.

“The term “Son” is used metaphorically when applied to the Godhead” (Angel Rodriguez, “A Question of Sonship” Biblical Research Institute (of the SDA Church) article)

With this argument, they say that Christ is actually not a Son of God. They say there is no actual father-son relationship between God and His Son. Instead, they say, God and His Son are just two equal persons with no father-son relationship. They say what seems to us as a father-son relationship is just a role-play, for the sake of our salvation.

There are so many things to discuss on this speculative conclusion but we will focus on one thing in this writing. In this writing, we want to look at what is a metaphor and how is a metaphor used in day to day communication among people.

This article is under development

Let us consider this example of a metaphor.

“It snowed so heavily in the night that by morning, a WHITE BLANKET COVERED THE GROUND.”

The words ‘white blanket covered the ground’ is a metaphor for ‘snow covering the ground’. But why is it a metaphor? Because it is comparing the literal covering of blanket over a bed or person with the literal covering of snow over the ground.

In other words, if snow did not literally cover the ground, the metaphor would not be possible. Again in other words, the relationship between the bed and blanket is exactly as the relationship between the ground and the snow in terms of the effect of covering and being covered.

Just to emphasise this point. A metaphor can only be possible if comparison between two literal things or situations is possible. A metaphor would not make sense where there are no literal things to compare. For example, it would not be a metaphor if I said this:

“It snowed so heavily in the night that by morning a STRING COVERED THE GROUND.”

There is no obvious comparison between a literal string and literal snow in terms of literally covering something. A string does not cover but it ties. So there is no way a string can apply metaphorically to snow.

So what we can ascertain is that a metaphor is used where two literal situations are literally comparable. It is necessary to have observable literal characteristics between two things or situations before the metaphor can be derived from the comparison. The term metaphor is an observation that what is literally happening in one situation, is comparable to what is literally happening in another. The similarity of the two literal situations is what makes a metaphor possible.

With that in mind, if the father-son relationship between God the Father and his son is a metaphor of the literal relationship between a human father and a son, then the relationship between the God the Father and the Son of God must have literal aspects that reflect the literal father-son relationship of men. That means both relationships must be literal before we can compare them to make a metaphor. That’s the only way we can call it a metaphor. If the relationship between the God the Father and the Son of God is not literal, then the terms ‘father and son’ do not apply even in a metaphorical sense.

Therefore, to say the relationship between God the Father and His Son (the Son of God) is metaphorical means one of two things. Those who say this either do not notice their veiled admission that the relationship between the God the Father and the Son is literal sonship, or they do not see that they misuse the term metaphor.

If that which happens literally between a human father and son is not found happening literally between the divine Father and His Son, then the words 'father and son' are not the correct metaphors in this case. In other words, if after studying the relationship between God the Father and the Son of God we see that it is all about being two distinct, equal, eternally loving persons, then we have to come to human relationships to find words that represents such a relationship. One thing is sure. Those words would not be 'father and son'. They should try friends, partners, or brotherhood.

But if that which happens literally between a human father and son happens literally between the divine Father and His Son, then, yes, the Father-Son relationship between God the Father and the Son of God is literal.

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So what is it that is in a literal father-son human relationship that is also there in the literal Father-Son relationship in divinity?

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| Born of the father | | |
| Literal human father-son relationship | <p>Genesis 4:25 And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.</p> | <p>Comment: But some have said, “where is God’s wife that He could bare a son like a man?” This question betrays an understanding of symbolism. Symbolism has a specific focus and does not encompass everything about the entities being compared. For example, if we say the lamb is a symbol of Christ, would say “where is Christ wool that he could be considered a lamb?” Or could you say Christ does not eat grass so the lamb is not a good symbol for him. The point is that symbolism is for a specific aspects or function. In this case it is specific to the lamb being a sacrifice for sins yet without murmuring or complaining. Similarly. That the Son of God was born of God is enough for the sonship. How that happened is not a part of what we were given to know about the sonship. Hence, we do not try to peep in that part for we have no brains enough to do so. That is not given to man to know.</p> |
| Literal divine Father-Son relationship – biblical evidence | <p>John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Hebrews 1:3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;</p> | |
| Literal divine Father-Son relationship – SOP evidence | <p>“A complete offering has been made; for 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son,'—not a son by creation, as were the angels, nor a son by adoption, as is the forgiven sinner, but a Son begotten in the express image of the Father’s person, and in all the brightness of his majesty and glory, one equal with God in authority, dignity, and divine perfection. In him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” (Ellen White, The Signs of the Times, May 30, 1895) Compare this with the following: “Before Christ came in the likeness of men, he existed in the</p> | |

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| | <p>express image of his Father.” (Ellen White, The Youth’s Instructor, December 20, 1900)</p> <p>“The dedication of the first-born had its origin in the earliest times. God had promised to give the First-born of heaven to save the sinner.” (Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, p. 51)</p> <p>“The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten</p> | |
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Work in progress

The primary essence of literal sonship is that the son comes from the seed of the father. This is the defining aspect of literal sonship. Without this aspect, sonship cannot be literal.

- Of the same blood (nature) as the father

Because of this literal sonship, the son has the following characteristics.

- Depends on the father for life
- With the traits of the father
- Obeys the father's commandments
- Given the name of the father
- Inherit the assets of the father

Therefore, we would expect the relationship between Christ and the Father to be of the same literal characteristics. Is there evidence for that? Yes.

- Christ came from the Father

John 5:26 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;

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Therefore, when one says the sonship of Christ is metaphorical, he is actually confirming that the relationship between God and His Son is as literal as between a human father and his son. Only then can the term metaphorical apply.

You may have noticed that the Bible is very particular and strict about sonship. Was God trying to teach us something? For example, an adopted son could not inherit the wealth of his adopted father. An adopted son is a metaphorical son not a literal son. Not even the son of a concubine could

But what is a good example of a metaphorical or symbolic son?

Exodus 4:22 And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: 23 And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn.

God's seed, i.e. God's word brought about the establishment of Israel with the intention that Israel would reflect the same characteristics among men as God himself. Therefore, whilst Israel was not literally born of God as a son is born of the father, yet, Israel was literally spiritually born of God when God planted his seed which were the promise to Abraham and when he bore Israel from Egypt. Interestingly, in being born from Egypt, Israel was baptised and baptism is a symbol of being born again. Just as interesting also is that on accepting the promises of God, Abraham also had to go through a transformation which was symbolised by circumcision.

Another case of metaphorical/symbolic sonship is adoption. An adopted son is one who calls father to someone who is not his biological father, i.e. someone who had not part in bringing the son to existence by his seed.