

Bringing Many Sons to Glory: The Theological Intersection of Sonship and Resurrection in Redemption and Christology—Part 2

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This article set out in its first part to investigate in what sense resurrection imparts sonship (Lk 20:36; Rom 8:23), especially for Christ (Acts 13:33; Col 1:18; Rv 1:5). Previous authors such as David Garner have differentiated Christ’s preincarnate sonship from a messianic sonship that was imparted by resurrection. The distinction, however, has been maintained by viewing only the preincarnate sonship as ontological and speaking of Christ’s resurrection acquisition as a “functional” sonship, entering a new “relationship,” taking on a “role,” or being “appointed” to or “adopted” into sonship.

This forensic, functional view can be traced to the almost universally held traditional idea that *υιοθεσία* speaks of a legal, forensic “adoption” (i.e., alluding to a first-century cultural practice of adoption) in contradistinction to natural begetting into ontological sonship. Upon that forensic view of *υιοθεσία* is built a faulty theological methodology posing as biblical theology—specifically the notion that Paul is by *υιοθεσία* establishing a model of legal entrance into God’s family that is distinct from the birth model in other NT authors, principally John. Theology of sonship has consequently been bifurcated. A theology of a legal, forensic “adoption” sonship is built from Paul’s four *υιοθεσία* passages (Rom 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5), and it is held distinct from Scripture’s “broader concept of sonship.”

Because Paul closely connects *υιοθεσία* to resurrection in Romans 8:23, most literature that addresses our research question—the theological intersection of sonship and resurrection—are studies of the meaning and theological significance of *υιοθεσία*. And because our resurrection is dependent upon Christ’s (Rom 6:4–5; 1 Cor 15:21–22; Col 3:1), any NT statements about the impartation of sonship to Christ by resurrection (such as Rom 1:4) are explained as being his “adoption” into “functional sonship.”

In other words, previous studies of the intersection of sonship and resurrection have started in the NT with this bifurcation of sonship into legal and ontological and then have gone back to the OT to find the background of Paul’s alleged adoption-by-resurrection theology. Although this methodology is called biblical theology, this bifurcation is essentially a systematic-theological

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conclusion about the sonship motif in Scripture in that it drives the interpretation of both the OT and Paul's *υιοθεσία* passages.

On both points, the results yielded by the methodology are questionable. Regarding the OT, there is only one OT sonship motif, not one for the adoption theology and one for the broader theology of sonship. Further, the first part of this article found that this single OT sonship motif stresses the image of God as the theological link between sonship and bodily life, revealing that sonship is a matter of ontology and nature, not merely of legal status. Regarding Paul's *υιοθεσία* passages, the first part of this article found that Romans 8 uses *υιοθεσία* to speak not of a legal adoption practice but of a two-stage ontological transformation into the image of God, the nature of God's sons.

Thus, part 1 of the article found that emphasis on the legal, forensic aspects of sonship has displaced attention on the image of God as the ontological nature of God's sons, the restoration of which is completed by resurrection. However, returning attention to the image of God as the theological link between sonship and resurrection allows us to account for the ontological birth-by-resurrection Christology in the NT (Acts 13:33; Col 1:18; Rv 1:5). Further, because the image of God is a Scripture-wide concept, it becomes the theological link that integrates *υιοθεσία* into the Scripture-wide motif of sonship. It thereby allows for a study of the intersection of resurrection with that entire Scripture-wide motif of sonship, not just with the four *υιοθεσία* passages in Paul (and their connections to the OT).

In short, returning focus to the ontological nature of sonship both necessitates and allows for an improved biblical-theological methodology. We no longer start with *υιοθεσία* as designating a legal adoptive sense of sonship, go outside of Scripture in search of the cultural practice of *υιοθεσία* from which to derive this theology of legal adoption into God's family, and then read that legal theology back into the NT *υιοθεσία* passages and hold it distinct from the broader theology of sonship in Scripture. Instead, we can start in the OT and trace the single motif of sonship through Scripture without imposing a systematic-theological bifurcation into the motifs of "adoption" and the "broader theology of sonship." This article employs this improved biblical-theological method, tracing from the OT through the NT the intersection of that single motif of sonship with resurrection, and thus in tandem with the progressive revelation of Scripture, progressively synthesizing a systematic theology of the intersection. The result is not merely an alleged Pauline theology of resurrection's forensic intersection with sonship (or even Paul's alleged forensic theology plus an OT background) but rather a Scripture-wide understanding of the intersection.

Employing this new methodology in the first part of the article revealed the ontological nature of sonship and thus made possible a full understanding of its intersection with resurrection, which can be summarized in five points:

- (1) The image of God is the nature that God gives to his sons: a father gives his nature to his children, and God gave the communicable attributes of his nature to his son Adam.
- (2) Because the image of God is holistic, the body is a part of that filial nature.

- (3) The linchpin of the image of God is the possession of life, the union of the two parts—material and immaterial—of the holistic image animated by the Spirit of God.
- (4) Restoring the filial nature, therefore, is a two-stage process, the two stages of life in the Spirit: regeneration/sanctification restores the immaterial part of the filial nature (culminating at entrance into God’s presence following death), and resurrection restores its material part. In Romans 8 *υιοθεσία* is a comprehensive term that subsumes this two-event process of ontological restoration.
- (5) Because he was fully human, Christ’s human nature included the material part of the image of God, which was restored to undying human filial nature by resurrection as the prototype for our restoration. This prototypical-begetting-by-resurrection Christology is encapsulated in the NT term *πρωτότοκος* (“firstborn”)—Christ was the first human being to be begotten into God’s family by resurrection.

Further, this methodology actually freed the *υιοθεσία* passages to say what they say against the backdrop of the OT, rather than constraining them within a theology derived from a first-century adoption practice. Thus freed, Romans 8 uses *υιοθεσία* not for a model of entrance into God’s family that is distinct from the models of non-Pauline scriptural authors. Rather, Paul was found to use the term for its bare lexical meaning—“to make a son”—and is retooling it to encompass all of Scripture’s single sonship motif, comprising the events of regeneration and resurrection.

As the next step in testing this new methodology, this second part of the article will now examine the remainder of the *υιοθεσία* passages (Rom 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5) and will find that they completely agree with our understanding of *υιοθεσία* in Romans 8. Further, this second part of the article will look at other Pauline passages (Rom 1:3–4; Col 1:15–20) from which objections to its thesis are often raised. It will be apparent that the Christology explicit in Acts 13, Romans 8, and 1 Corinthians 15—(1) Christ’s resurrection was a literal begetting into ontological Adamic sonship, and (2) Paul encapsulates that resurrection-begetting Christology in the literal meaning (“firstborn”) of the *πρωτότοκος* title—actually underlies Paul’s teaching in these two controverted passages. The third part of this article (slated to appear in the spring 2022 issue of *JBTW*) will carry the investigation of the research question and the testing of this new methodology into the other NT authors and find that they advance the same begetting-by-resurrection Christology that has been found in Paul.

Galatians 4

To a church under the siege of an alternative gospel of salvation by observance of the Mosaic law (1:6–9; 2:5), Paul lays out two options in Galatians 3—receiving the curse of the law by the works of the law or receiving the blessing of Abraham by faith in the promise. In 3:26–29 Paul argues that (1) this blessing of Abraham is shared by all who have faith in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, and that (2) for both groups, the blessing comprises a filial relationship to God, which comes with possession of the Spirit of God (v. 14; cf. 4:6).

In 4:1–11 Paul further explains how Jews and Gentiles both come into this sonship, using the illustration of characters in an ancient household.² Paul has just argued that the mature son represents those who by faith in Christ have received sonship of God (3:26) and so are heirs of the promise (3:29; cf. 4:7). On the one hand, Paul contrasts this mature son with an immature son (4:1–5) who is no different from a slave in that he yet has no inheritance and is under the custody of guardians. Several considerations indicate that the immature son is OT Israel under the Mosaic law. First, OT Israel's bondage to the tutorship of the law (3:23–25) is the same bondage as that of the immature son “under guardians and managers” (4:2), “under the elemental things of the world” (4:3), and “under the Law” (4:5).³ Second, those under OT Israel's law were freed from that bondage (3:23) by coming to faith in Christ (3:25), the exercise of which brings sonship (3:26). Accordingly, “but” in 4:4 introduces the incarnation and earthly work of Christ as the watershed event that brought an end to this era of immature sonship under the law (4:5).

On the other hand, in 4:7–8 when Paul describes the group/situation being contrasted with mature sonship, he uses descriptions that cannot refer to OT Israel under the law but that do speak of the pre-conversion pagan state of the Gentile Galatians: “did not know God” and “slaves to those which by nature are no gods” (4:8).⁴ The solution is to recognize that Paul is contrasting mature sonship with both groups. Before Christ, OT Israel under the law (the “we” in 4:1–3) were *νήπιοι*, the immature sons, and the Gentiles (the “you” in 4:7–8) were *δοῦλοι*, the slaves.⁵ For both groups (thus “our” used for the first time in 4:6b), it is Christ who brings mature sonship (4:4–5).⁶

The coming of Christ is the watershed between the OT era of Israel's national filial status stymied under the Mosaic law and the NT era of the full sonship of *υἰοθεσία* for individual Jews and

² *Λέγω* (“I say,” 4:1) amounts to the meaning “in other words” and shows that Paul regarded 4:1–11 to be another explanation of the same truth he has been laying out in Galatians 3.

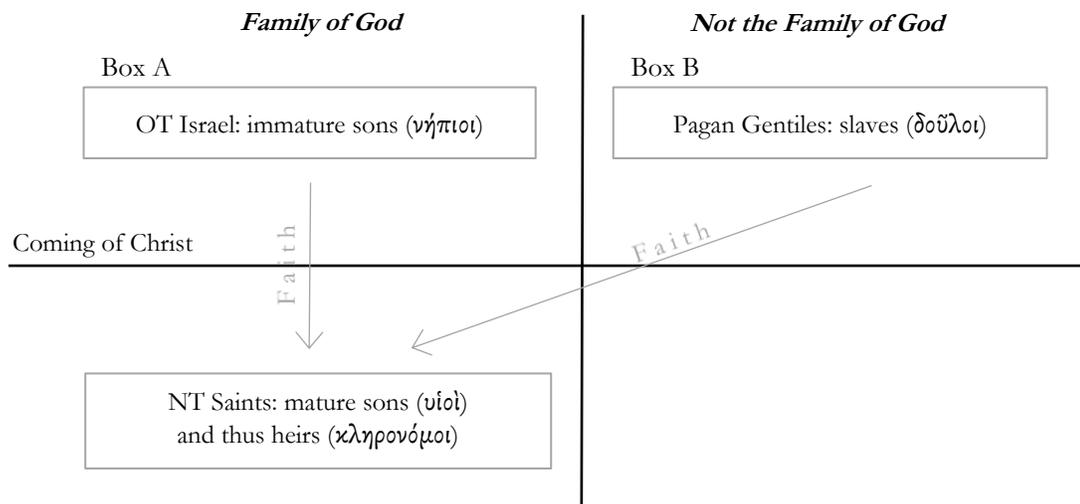
³ “So also we” (Gal. 4:3) directly links these three designations to the immature son (4:1–2), and the three are linked to one another by the repeated preposition “under.” The explicit designation “the Law” in v. 5 shows that these three designations are referring to the Mosaic law, which OT Israel was “under.” That *τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου* refers to the law is further confirmed by Paul's use of the identical phrase in Colossians 2:8, 20 for a seducing philosophy that at the very least included the Judaizers' teaching (e.g., circumcision in v. 11 and OT law regulations in v. 16). Mark Minnick explains Paul's meaning in *τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου*: “The law was the elemental part of God's instruction.” “In Bondage Until the Fullness of Time” (Sermon, Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Greenville, SC, June 8, 2003). Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

⁴ “Here [v. 8] Paul addresses his Gentile converts more particularly.” F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 201.

⁵ Although Paul's distinction through v. 11 between Jews represented by the immature son and “we” and the Gentiles represented by the slaves and “you” is not widely attested to in the literature, John Barclay appears to recognize it, though not as strictly as observed here. “Paul, the Gift and the Battle Over Gentile Circumcision: Revisiting the Logic of Galatians,” *Australian Biblical Review* 58 (2010): 36–56. The distinction and the explanation below of how a Gentile could “turn back” to the Mosaic law is the position of Mark Minnick, “Turning Back from Knowing God” (Sermon, Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Greenville, SC, July 20, 2003).

⁶ Note the same distinction of “you” and “we” in 3:23–29, where Paul's point is that both groups come to true sonship of God. This sonship grows from Israel's OT experience and is Israel's true sonship of Abraham (realized in Christ), but both Gentiles and Jews share in it by faith.

Gentiles on the basis of personal faith in Christ.⁷ The following diagram summarizes the discussion thus far.



On the basis of the Gentile believers’ sonship as evidenced by possession of the Spirit (4:6), Paul warns them in 4:7–11 not to heed the Judaizers and “turn” (v. 9) to Box A in the diagram. The ground upon which he makes this warning is found in 4:1—the immature child (Box A) is no better off than the slave (Box B). Gentiles who turn to the Mosaic law are no better off than those who return to their pre-Christ pagan state, for both are turning back from *υἰοθεσία* in Christ.⁸

Tracing Paul’s argument reveals that his use of *υἰοθεσία* is completely consistent with the discoveries made previously in this study. Israel’s national relationship to God in the OT era was filial, albeit immature sonship under the Mosaic law. However, *υἰοθεσία* speaks of the full sonship that came in Christ by redemption and thus is a reality of the age of the Spirit (4:4–5). Three considerations argue that as in Romans 8 Paul is not importing a secular cultural practice of adoption to teach a new event of *how* God makes us sons. Rather, Paul chose to use *υἰοθεσία* for its bare lexical meaning—“to make

⁷ It is critical to note that the “coming of age” in this passage is the transition from the OT to the NT era, not something that happens in the *ordo salutis* of individual conversion, as is held by Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976), 3:242–43, and Frank Elbe Jr., “The Christian’s Filial Relationship to God” (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1957), 47–54.

⁸ It is in this sense that Paul can speak of Gentiles being “enslaved *all over again*” (4:9, emphasis added) by observance of Jewish festivals (4:10) and “turning *back*” (4:9a, emphasis added) to τὰ στοιχεῖα (4:9b, argued above to be a reference to the Mosaic law). If they turn from Christ to the Mosaic law, they are returning to the pre-Christ era, which for a Gentile is as damning as turning back to their pre-Christ pagan state. Paul addresses this warning to Gentiles because of the helpful distinction between Jews and Gentiles pointed out by Mark Minnick based on Acts 21:20 and Paul’s subsequent actions in v. 26. During the “transition period” of Acts (during which time Paul wrote Galatians), a Jew could observe the Mosaic law (cf. 1 Cor. 9:20), provided he did it not to “enhance his standing before God,” but to show “his ongoing devotion to God” or “not to be any stumbling block to his other Jewish people.” In Galatians 4, however, Paul is condemning a Gentile beginning to observe the law for the purpose of “improving his relationship to God.” “Turning Back from Knowing God.”

a son”—but he retools it from designating the event of a legal adoption to instead speak of the ontological reality of entrance into God’s family.⁹

In the first place, the cultural practice—coming-of-age ceremony—which Paul *does* employ as a metaphor is not the secular referent of the *υιοθεσία* term. A coming-of-age ceremony did exist in first-century cultures.¹⁰ But Scott showed that *υιοθεσία* was used in secular society for the act of bringing a son into the family.¹¹ Second, with regard to the cultural practice which *υιοθεσία* *did* designate in Paul’s day—adopting a son into the family from the outside—Paul is not importing that practice as a monolithic metaphor of legal adoption into God’s family, for in the same use *υιοθεσία* (v. 5) comprises both immature OT Israelites coming into mature sonship by faith in Christ (4:1–5) and also Gentiles’ entering the family of God from the outside for the first time (vv. 6–8). Evidently Paul is using *υιοθεσία* for the basic meaning it denoted—“to make a son,” not for the cultural practice that it designated—legal adoption. In the case of the Gentiles, the basic meaning of *υιοθεσία* is sufficient—entering into sonship from outside the family. In the case of the Jews, the meaning is slightly morphed to include the idea of coming into that sonship from a state of immature sonship, and here the cultural practice of coming of age is imported. *Υιοθεσία* does not import this cultural practice, but rather Paul must morph the meaning of *υιοθεσία* to accommodate it. It is evident that in the only *υιοθεσία* passage that utilizes the details of a cultural practice as a metaphor, Paul is not using the term *υιοθεσία* to import a cultural practice to teach his (as distinct from John’s) conception of *how* believers enter the family of God at conversion.

In fact, third, as in Romans 8 the passage simply does not give any details about the *event* by which the Galatians *entered* the family of God, the event designated by *υιοθεσία*. The only cultural practice overtly alluded to in Galatians 4, the coming-of-age ceremony, pictures the transition from the OT to the NT eras, not the personal event of coming into sonship at conversion. And nothing else in the passage teaches *how* we enter the family at conversion. Rather, completely parallel to

⁹ Failure to recognize that Paul is retooling the term has led to a profusion in the literature of suggestions of exact laws and secular practices to which Paul is allegedly alluding here. Timothy George admits, “It is difficult to reconstruct the precise legal background of the scenario Paul had in mind [in Galatians 4:1–2].” *Galatians*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 293. Douglas Moo observes that no legal background exactly matches what Paul does in Galatians 4:1–2. Rather, Paul “has allowed his statement of the illustration to be affected by his intended application.” *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 259. This recognition frees the passage to say what it says rather than being forced into the strictures of a first-century cultural practice.

¹⁰ For example, John MacArthur speaks of the Roman *toga virilis*, the Jewish *bar mitzva*, and the Greek *apaturia*. *Galatians*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 104.

¹¹ James Scott found interchangeable use of *υιοθεσία* with synonyms denoting the adoption process, and so it is the “means by which believers enter into divine sonship.” *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of ΥΙΟΘΕΣΙΑ in the Pauline Corpus*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992), xiii–xiv, 55. In all his research for the dissertation, the author of this article does not recall encountering a single work that understands *υιοθεσία* to be speaking of the coming of age of a child already in the family rather than the act of bringing someone into the family from the outside. Thus, commentaries that speak of a secular coming-of-age ceremony when discussing Galatians 4:1–2 switch to speaking of bringing a son into the family when discussing v. 5. For example, MacArthur, 104, 109; George, 293, 305; and Bruce, 192, 197–98.

Romans 8, Paul talks about the resultant state of sonship and assumes that the readers know the theology of the event of entrance into that sonship that he designates with the term *υιοθεσία*.¹²

First, this resultant state of sonship brought by *υιοθεσία* is present (“you are sons,” v. 6; cf. Rom 8:15) and is the basis (*ὅτι*) for God sending the Spirit to testify that we now are *υιοί* (the neuter gender of *κρᾶζον* shows it is the Spirit crying). Second, this possession of sonship (Gal. 4:7) is therefore guaranteed by possession of the Spirit (v. 6; cf. 3:14; Rom 8:15). Third, *υιοθεσία* comes to those who have entered into Christ by faith (Gal 3:23–29; cf. Rom 8:1). Fourth, coming to possess the Spirit touches off within the believer the battle of sanctification between the Spirit and the flesh (Gal 5:16–26; cf. Rom 8:12–13). Fifth, present *υιοθεσία* gives the rights/guarantee of future inheritance (Gal 4:7; cf. Rom 8:17), which is specified in Romans 8 to be the resurrection of the outer man as the full installment of *υιοθεσία* (vv. 18–23). Sixth, *υιοθεσία* is contrasted with slavery as the sons’ pre-*υιοθεσία* state (Gal 4:8; Rom 8:15).

In conclusion, in Galatians 4:5–7 as in Romans 8:15, *υιοθεσία* is designating the Spirit’s imparting of life and sonship in the inner man in the event of regeneration (cf. Tit 3:15).¹³ Present *υιοθεσία* is an ontological transformation wrought by the Spirit, not a mere legal declaration. Paul is using *υιοθεσία* for its lexical meaning “to bring into the family and make a son,” not for its reference to a cultural event to thereby teach *how* God makes us sons and add an event of “adoption” to our theology of entrance into his family. Paul instead assumes that the readers know how God makes those with faith in Christ to be sons, and he uses *υιοθεσία* as a general term by which to call that knowledge to mind.

Romans 9

Romans 8 was found to make *υιοθεσία* the encapsulating designation for our filial salvation in Christ in the age of the Spirit (elucidated in Rom 1–8), but then in Romans 9:4 Paul says that *υιοθεσία* was a national possession of Israel. On the one hand, the proximity of the two uses indicates continuity between their respective theological designations, which fits with Galatians 4’s teaching that our NT sonship in Christ grows out of Israel’s OT immature sonship.¹⁴ On the other hand, however, there is

¹² Scott makes this point, though he still uses the “adoption” terminology: “[Paul] never explains what he means by the term [*υιοθεσία*]. The apostle evidently assumes that his readers would know what was meant by *the* adoption as sons of God.” James Scott, “Adoption, Sonship,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 16, original emphasis. Scott goes on to argue that the concept of sonship in *υιοθεσία* springs from the OT, particularly the Davidic promise of 2 Samuel 7:14.

¹³ “Here in Gal 4:5 (cf. also Rom 8:15) adoption [*υιοθεσία*] refers to the present status of sonship accorded to all believers who through the new birth have become heirs with Christ of the Abrahamic promise.” George, 305.

¹⁴ Actually, if our *υιοθεσία* and Israel’s *υιοθεσία* are entirely unrelated, pointing out that complete absence of continuity would have sufficed to answer the question of Romans 9–10—will God perform his promised salvation for us (Rom 1–8) since he apparently failed to perform his promised salvation for Israel in the OT (see 9:6)?

discontinuity between *υιοθεσία* in Romans 8 and 9 because Israelites need “salvation” (10:1), which would include the *υιοθεσία* of Romans 8.¹⁵

Further, Paul’s point in Galatians 3–4 was that *υιοθεσία* came to Israel through the incarnation and work of Christ, and individual Jews can enter into *υιοθεσία* by personal faith in Christ, not by national identity. Yet in Romans 9 Paul regards *υιοθεσία* to be one of the national possessions of Israel.

These observations confirm that Paul uses *υιοθεσία* much more broadly than as a technical term for an event in the *ordo salutis*. He utilizes the term because it means “to make a son,” for that general idea is the common ground between the specific theological referents of *υιοθεσία* in Romans 8 and 9 and Galatians 4. The specifics of that sonship and the way in which God gives the sonship are determined by the context. Thus, use of the term in Romans 9 reinforces that Paul does not use the term to import a cultural practice and thereby teach a theology of legal entrance into God’s family as distinct from ontological birth.

Romans 1:3–4

The themes discovered to this point in the study of the intersection of sonship and resurrection in the OT and in Paul are readily apparent from even a surface reading of Romans 1:1–4—royal Davidic lineage, sonship, life by resurrection, and the life-giving ministry of the Spirit. There is, however, still much debate about what “declared the Son of God with power” is teaching happened to Christ by resurrection. Some see merely an impartation of power that vindicated Christ’s pre-resurrection claim to be the Son of God.¹⁶ Proponents of this position advance three exegetical arguments. First, some say that *ὁρίζω* means merely “declared” (as translated in the KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV, etc.). Second, “with power” modifies “Son” adjectivally rather than *ὁρίζω* adverbially, and so the resurrection was the appointment of the Son to a position of power, not a powerful appointment to sonship.¹⁷ Third, “according to the flesh” (v. 3) designates the incarnation as a period of weakness and hidden sonship that necessitated this vindication/declaration of his sonship by restoration/appointment to power.¹⁸

This position and its three arguments, however, address Romans 1:3–4 in isolation from the context of the book of Romans and more broadly from Paul’s Christology, which itself must be

¹⁵ David Garner helpfully points out that there is a covenantal development from Romans 8 to Romans 9. “Adoption in Christ” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2002), 80–87. He sees “continuity” and “progression” between sonship in the two chapters, but not absolute “identity” (84).

¹⁶ Trevor Burke lays out this contrast of positions. *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, NSBT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 104–07, and *The Message of Sonship: At Home in God’s Household*, BST: Bible Themes Series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011), 114–18.

¹⁷ For example, Murray Harris, *From Grave to Glory: Resurrection in the New Testament Including a Response to Norman L. Geisler* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 168. See also Murray Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 74, and F. F. Bruce, “Christ and Spirit in Paul,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 59 (1977): 265.

¹⁸ For example, Francis Durrwell, *The Resurrection: A Biblical Study*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1960), 125–26, and Eldon Woodcock, “The Significance of the Resurrection of Christ in the Writings of Paul” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1967), chapter 2.

understood against the full backdrop of the OT messianic expectation. The “gospel” (v. 1) that 1:1–4 is introducing in seed form is the gospel that Paul will then unpack over the next eight chapters, culminating in Romans 8 in the work of the Spirit to restore our body by conforming it to Christ’s by resurrection, thus begetting us into Adamic sonship (Rom 8:17–23, 29–30; see discussion in the first part of this article). That resurrection work is the pinnacle of our salvation, for it is the end goal of predestination (vv. 29–30). And it is because Christ is the *πρωτότοκος* in v. 29—the first to be begotten by resurrection into full Adamic sonship—that Paul in Romans 1:1–4 grounds his summary statement of the gospel in Christ’s resurrection, specifically in his reception of sonship by resurrection.¹⁹ Further, Paul twice explicitly sets this broader OT messianic expectation of restored Adamic sonship as the backdrop for his discussion of the gospel in 1:1–4. First, the “gospel” (v. 1) “concerning His Son” (v. 3) was “promised beforehand through His prophets” (v. 2). And second, Christ’s Davidic lineage in v. 3 is the foundation of the controversial statement in v. 4.

But beyond contextual arguments, exegesis of the passage itself corroborates the sonship-by-resurrection Christology found in Romans 8. Paul makes the grammatical parallel of v. 3 with v. 4 so overt that it is the logical starting point of exegesis:

³ περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ
 τοῦ γενομένου
 ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ
 κατὰ σάρκα,
⁴ τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ
 ἐν δυνάμει
 κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιοσύνης
 ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν

It is because of this overt parallel that verse 4 is typically interpreted by way of contrast with v. 3: “according to the flesh” (v. 3) is alleged to be speaking of his pre-resurrection state as being weak, apparently only a man from David’s line, as the counterpoint to “in power” (v. 4) speaking of the resurrection restoring power to Christ and thereby unveiling that he had been the Son of God all along.²⁰

Κατὰ Σάρκα (“According to the Flesh”)

Because it is Christ who is under discussion, “flesh” cannot refer to the unredeemable part of man that rebels against God (e.g., 8:4–5). However, in 2:28 Paul uses the term of the human body, and then he three times in Romans (4:1; 9:3, 5) uses the exact phrase (*κατὰ σάρκα*) derivatively for the

¹⁹ Scott argues for a connection between Christ becoming the Son of God here and our *υιοθεσία* in Romans 8 and traces a history of this interpretation back to the church fathers. *Adoption as Sons of God*, 221–23. Allen Mawhinney connects *ὀρίζω* in Romans 1:4 with *προορίζω* in Romans 8:29 and concludes, “Our sonship is dependent upon his Sonship.” “*Υιοθεσία* in the Pauline Epistles: Its Background, Use and Implications” (PhD diss., Baylor University, 1982), 152–53.

²⁰ For example, Richard Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987), 100–13; Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 103–04; Durrwell, 125; Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 48–49; Harris, *Raised Immortal*, 74.

general concept of human ancestry. In 1:3 Paul is saying, “Pertaining to his human ancestry, he was from the descendants of David.”²¹ Frank Matera summarizes that v. 3 presents Christ as “the promised royal Messiah of David’s line.”²² Far from emphasizing the weakness of the incarnation, in v. 3 Paul is turning the reader’s attention to the eschatological power and dominion of the Davidic line.²³

Further, based on the prepositions, *κατὰ σάρκα* is parallel not to “in power” (*ἐν δυνάμει*) in v. 4 but to “according to the Spirit of holiness” (*κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης*). Although *πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης* occurs only here in the NT, Robert Pyne points out that it is an “exact rendering of the Hebrew phrase *שְׁדֵה הַקֹּדֶשׁ*, which came to be understood as a designation of the Holy Spirit.”²⁴ As demonstrated in the first part of this article, for Paul the age of resurrection, the age of the OT messianic expectation, is the age of the life-giving Spirit. In conclusion, Paul is saying that Christ’s being of the royal line of David was owing to his human ancestry (“according to the flesh”), and his resurrection was owing to the work of God’s Spirit (“according to the Spirit”).

Περὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ Αὐτοῦ (“Concerning His Son”)

Although verse 3 was true before Christ’s resurrection while verse 4 speaks of things not true of Christ until his resurrection, it is becoming evident that emphasis upon a contrast (between not having sonship and having sonship or between not having power and having power) is misplaced. Further pointing in that direction, “His Son” (v. 3) is the main topic under discussion throughout the single unit comprising verses 3 and 4, and the two participles (*τοῦ γενομένου*, “who was born”; and *τοῦ ὀρισθέντος*, “who was declared”) are both attributive to *υἱοῦ* (v. 3) and so unfold two parallel halves of the explanation of what it means for Christ to be the Son of God.²⁵

Verse 3 is not cataloging a pre-resurrection deficiency in Christ that is the clue to understanding what Christ received by resurrection in verse 4. Rather, against the backdrop of the OT and Romans 8, these participles are giving two necessary elements of Christ’s coming to be “His Son” (v. 3): because Israel’s kings (specifically the Davidic dynasty) were the attempt to reclaim Adamic sonship, his sonship was (1) “according to the flesh”—his human ancestry was Davidic, which qualified him to reclaim Adamic sonship—and his sonship was (2) “according to the Spirit”—on the

²¹ Scott notes authors who connect “according to the flesh” to later occurrences in Romans, specifically to Romans 9:5. He also notes authors who connect “descendant of David” in Romans 1:3 to 2 Samuel 7:12. He writes, “*Κατὰ σάρκα* is used here simply as part of a genealogical description of the Son who has the messianic qualification of 2 Sam. 7:12.” *Adoption as Sons of God*, 238–39.

²² *God’s Saving Grace: A Pauline Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 54.

²³ B. B. Warfield recognizes that the “majesty” of the Davidic lineage precludes interpreting the passage as a contrast between power in verse 4 and weakness in verse 3. *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1950), 81.

²⁴ “The Resurrection as Restoration: A Thematic Study in Paul’s Theology” (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990), 42–43. Pyne lists occurrences of the phrase referring to the Holy Spirit in the OT (Ps 51:11; Is 63:10–11) and intertestamental literature. Pyne’s observation fits with Paul’s explicit grounding of the Christology of this passage in the OT. Gaffin (103–04) agrees with Pyne.

²⁵ Someone could object that “Son” is merely one of Paul’s typical designations for Christ and thus carries no special significance here. However, Paul speaks of sonship of God only two other times before Romans 8 (1:9; 5:10). The dual usage of *υἱός* in both 1:3 and 1:4 is therefore a significant emphasis upon the filial relationship. Again, this filial focus is the seed form of the Christology he will develop in Romans 8.

basis of that human ancestry, the Spirit did effect his resurrection and beget him into Adamic sonship.²⁶

Ὀρίζω (“Declared”)

Each of the other four times the verb ὀρίζω is used of Christ in the NT, it speaks of appointment to an event or role in his redemptive career: to betrayal and capture (Lk 22:22), to capture and crucifixion (Acts 2:23), to be Judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42), and to be Judge of the world (Acts 17:31). The remaining three NT occurrences speak likewise of other things being determined or appointed: determination to send a contribution to the brethren in Judea (Acts 11:29), appointment of mankind’s times and boundaries of habitation (Acts 17:26), and appointment of a day for repentance (Heb 4:7).

Consequently, the view that ὀρίζω means “declared” is largely obsolete, found for example in Charles Hodge’s commentary on Romans.²⁷ Even Macleod and Burke, two of the staunchest modern antagonists of the idea of Christ’s resurrection imparting sonship, argue for “appointed” rather than “declared.”²⁸

Ἐν Δυνάμει (“with Power”)

With both sides basically agreeing on the meaning of ὀρίζω, the watershed of the debate has moved to the question of whether ἐν δυνάμει modifies υἱοῦ adjectivally (i.e., the Son was appointed to power) or ὀρίζω adverbially (i.e., Christ was powerfully appointed to be the Son).²⁹ Other occurrences of ἐν δύναμις in the NT are sometimes adverbial (Col 1:29) and sometimes adjectival (Mk

²⁶ Durrwell is a classic example of misplaced emphasis on contrast between verses 3 and 4 (125). But Scott observes, “The second attributive participial clause does not, as most scholars assume, stand in antithetical parallelism to the first, but rather in climactic parallelism. For the second clause echoes the first in terms of formal structure, but adds to it an element which carries forward the sense to its culmination: the son of David was ‘appointed Son of God in power.’” *Adoption as Sons of God*, 239–40.

²⁷ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Alfred Martien, 1873), 26–27. Although Hodge admits that ὀρίζω lexically denotes more than mere declaration (he lists three meanings, all of which denote more), he nevertheless proceeds to explain that theological ramifications force him to understand the term in Romans 1:4 “declaratively, or in reference to the knowledge of men.”

²⁸ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 104–05; Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, 117; Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 92. Macleod points out that Christ had already been “declared” to be the Son of God many times before his resurrection, such as at his baptism and transfiguration (92). Though not as part of the discussion of the meaning of ὀρίζω, he also points out that resurrection would not have been viewed as a “proof of divine sonship or even of messiahship” in Paul’s day, and it would not have been sufficient to have “removed the scandal of the cross” (91). See also Gaffin, 65–66; cf. 104–05, 117–19. Recognizing that the word means “appointed,” Pyne writes, “The idea is not that Jesus was shown to be the Son of God through the resurrection, but that He was made the Son of God at that time” (38).

²⁹ Burke sees this question and the meaning of ὀρίζω as the “two key exegetical issues that take us to the heart of the matter concerning Jesus’ sonship.” *Adopted into God’s Family*, 104. Macleod likewise takes up these two issues as the keys to interpreting Romans 1:4 (92). See Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 92, Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 104, and Pyne, 41–42, for statements espousing the adjectival function to avoid the idea that the resurrection was an appointment to sonship.

9:1; cf. Mt 24:30; 26:64; Mk 13:26; Lk 21:26; 22:69). Further, the word itself (*δύναμις*) is connected to resurrection in both ways: it was a powerful act of God (Mt 22:29; Mk 12:24; 1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 13:4; Eph 1:19–20) and an impartation of power (Mt 26:64; 28:18).

Actually, however, the question of the function of “with power” is not commensurate with the question of impartation of sonship. To say that the adjectival function precludes impartation of sonship is a false dichotomy because sonship is a powerful position.³⁰ For the same reason, requiring that only one concept—sonship or power—be affected by the verb (*ὀρίζω*) is likewise a false dichotomy. And actually, in addition to the above contextual considerations—Paul’s overt citation of the OT messianic expectation (vv. 2–3) and the connection to Romans 8—and textual considerations, additional elements of the passage teach that both are affected by the verb.

On the one hand, he was appointed to sonship. First, mere appointment to power would have been communicated more effectively by the simpler construction: “concerning His Son [v. 3] . . . who was given power [v. 4].” *Υἱοῦ θεοῦ* (v. 4) is redundant with *τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ* (v. 3) and thus superfluous, unless of course it is integral to what Paul is communicating. Second, *ὀρισθέντος* (“appointed”) takes an object of a position or an office (i.e., “Son”). A verb with the force of “give” or “bestow” would have fit better with an object of a possession (i.e., “power”). Third, while the grammatical construction does not preclude “with power” being affected by the verb (*ὀρίζω*), the primary effect does fall on “Son” as the object complement of the predicate of *ὀρίζω*.³¹ This case is made inadvertently by interpreters who deny appointment to sonship: they speak of “appointment” *to power*, but when they attempt to flesh out the Christology of the passage, they cannot avoid *ὀρίζω*’s speaking in some sense of an effect of the resurrection *upon Christ’s sonship*, and so they lapse into the untenable position of defining *ὀρίζω* as “declared” or “vindicated.”³² In short, interpretation of the passage is not a question of appointment to sonship or appointment to power but is rather a question of appointment to sonship only or to sonship with power.

On the other hand, however, several considerations do support an appointment to power. First, the adverbial use of “with power” would be tangential to Paul’s Christological statement and would not warrant the prominent place given by its awkward insertion into Paul’s otherwise neat chiasm, for what else could the resurrection have been but a powerful act? Second, however, tracing the connection between resurrection and *δύναμις* through the NT reveals Christology worthy of this prominent place in Paul’s statement. Every NT reference (except the somewhat cryptic reference to the power of resurrection in Phil 3:10) to the impartation of *δύναμις* by resurrection speaks of one of two specific kinds of power. First, resurrection imparts the power of messianic filial rule (Mt 26:64, alluding to Ps 110 and Dn 7). Significantly, it was to a question of his role as the messianic Son of

³⁰ Though the sentence in Mark 9:1 is not constructed identically to the sentence here, Mark’s use of *ἐν δυνάμει* with a noun (“kingdom”) that inherently is a thing of power would parallel Paul’s use here (i.e., “Son of God” is a position that is inherently powerful).

³¹ The object complement construction assumes a pronominal object of the verb and an infinitive linking verb: “appointed [him to be] Son of God with power.”

³² For example, Brendan Byrne, *Sons of God—Seed of Abraham: A Study of the Idea of the Sonship of God of All Christians in Paul Against the Jewish Background*, *Analecta Biblica: Investigations Scientifcae in Res Biblicas* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 205–06.

God that Christ was responding (Mt 26:63; cf. Mt 24:30; 13:26; Lk 21:26; 22:69; Acts 2:29–36). Second, resurrection imparts the power of immortal life in the body (1 Cor 15:43; Heb 7:16). Sons of God enjoy the filial power of Adamic rule and of immortal life in their bodies by conformity to Christ by the work of the Spirit (Rom 8:17–30). Thus, in order to be their prototype (vv. 29–30), Christ came from the line of David (v. 3) that he might receive sonship and both senses of its accompanying power from the Holy Spirit by resurrection (v. 4).³³

Garner’s explanation of Romans 1:3–4—that Christ’s resurrection was an “adoption” into “functional” sonship—does not exhaust the full import of Romans 1:1–4 within its context.³⁴ Paul’s Christology here is completely in keeping with that found in Romans 8: resurrection was a literal begetting that imparted the ontology/nature of Adamic sonship to Christ, which is the material part of the Adamic image of God, and the epitome of which is the “power” of life in the body.

Colossians 1:15–20

Paul’s hymn (Col 1:15–20) introduces the major Christological themes that form the backbone of the epistle’s response to a heretical infiltration into the Colossian church (2:4; 2:8). Richard Melick summarizes the heresy: “The soteriological heresy failed to appreciate the central place of Jesus. Rather, its advocates accepted a supernatural hierarchy other than the Trinity and gave themselves to scrupulous and legalistic requirements which they assumed commended them to God.”³⁵ Against this heresy, Paul mobilizes rich Christology in two main sections of the book, 1:15–19 and 2:8–15. It will be evident in the study of the hymn that reclamation of Adamic sonship by resurrection is the theological framework within which Paul’s mind formulated its Christology.

Several considerations show that “Son” (v. 13) was not a random choice from Paul’s repertoire of possible designations for Christ but rather is establishing Christ’s sonship as the theme of the hymn. Following Paul’s opening prayer, “his beloved Son” (v. 13) launches the Christological emphasis of the book, and the attributive *ἀγάπης* (“beloved”) together with the possessive *αὐτοῦ* (“his”) show the intentionality of the filial reference. Every one of the fourteen pronouns in the hymn point back to *υἱοῦ* (v. 13) as their antecedent. Further, sonship is an emphasis in vv. 1–20 for there are no other filial designations elsewhere in Colossians. Against the supernatural authorities of the Colossian heresy, the central concept of the hymn’s Son-of-God Christology is his filial reign: “the kingdom of His beloved Son” (v. 13).

The hymn’s structure can be laid out as follows, with colored text and highlighting to show patterns in terminology and structure, especially the parallels between the two stanzas of the hymn.

³³ Scott sees this prototype idea in the plural *νεκρῶν* (also used of Christ in Acts 13:30; Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:12, 20; Eph 1:20; Col 2:12; cf. Rv 1:5): “Rom. 1:4 implies that the Son’s resurrection is prototypical of the future resurrection of the dead (*ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν*).” *Adoption as Sons of God*, 244. See also David Garner, *Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2016), 279–80.

³⁴ *Sons in the Son*, 194–96.

³⁵ *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 181.

¹⁵ ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου,
 πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως,
¹⁶ ὅτι (1) ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα
 ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
 τὰ ὀρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα,
 εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες
 εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι·
 τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἐκτίσται·
¹⁷ (2) καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων
 (3) καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν,
¹⁸ (4) καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας·

ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή,
 πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,
 ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρῶτεῦον,

¹⁹ ὅτι (1) ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι
²⁰ (2) καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν,
 εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ,
 [δι' αὐτοῦ] εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
 εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

Because each stanza contains *πρωτότοκος*, each is said to catalog his “preeminence” (the alleged meaning of the title) in a specific realm—preeminent in creation by virtue of his creative act (vv. 15–17) and preeminent in the new creation by virtue of his resurrection (vv. 18–20).³⁶ Attributing the *πρωτότοκος* status to his creation in the first stanza appears to discredit the thesis of this study—that *πρωτότοκος* encapsulates a birth-by-resurrection Christology.³⁷

In support of this understanding, because the first line of v. 18 speaks of the Church (new creation), it is typically treated as the first line of the second stanza.³⁸ The structure of the hymn above, however, makes evident that this line is actually the last line of the first stanza, the last of the four clauses subordinated under *ὅτι* (v. 16), and that the next line in v. 18 parallels v. 15 and so begins the second stanza.³⁹ Recognizing that the Church is in the first stanza removes the emphasis upon creation

³⁶ Robert Reymond divides the hymn into Jesus’ lordship over the “Natural Creation” in vv. 15–17 and over the “Spiritual Creation” in vv. 18–20. *Jesus, Divine Messiah: The New Testament Witness* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1990), 244. See also Robert Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 132–33, 147–49; G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 314–16, 443–49; N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 239.

³⁷ For example, Wilhelm Michaelis, “Πρωτότοκος, Πρωτοτοκεῖα,” *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:879. Pyne sees in *πρωτότοκος* in v. 15 merely the function of preeminence possessed before the incarnation and restored by resurrection in v. 18, not the ontology of human sonship imparted for the first time in the incarnation and culminated by resurrection (8, 46–48).

³⁸ For example, see Beale, 315, 443.

³⁹ This understanding was proposed as early as 1913 by Eduard Norden. *Agnostos Theos, Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte Religiöser Rede* (Berlin: Verlag B. G. Teubner, 1913), 252. Ernst Käsemann agrees. “A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy,” *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM, 1964), 150.

versus new creation as the organizing principle of the hymn, relegating discussion of these concepts to their grammatically appointed subsidiary place, i.e., subordinated under *ὅτι* (vv. 16, 19).

Instead, the *πρωτότοκος* clauses stand forth as the hymn’s organizing principle. Accordingly, of the fourteen pronoun references back to “Son” (v. 13) noted above, the relative pronouns *ὅς* (vv. 15, 18) are the tightest reference, and the *πρωτότοκος* clauses emerge as the major branches of Paul’s Christology of the “Son” (v. 13).⁴⁰ Further, *πρωτότοκος* is the only theological term common to both relative pronoun clauses and the only Christological title or term common to both stanzas. And the title’s theme of preeminence (*πρω-*) coalesces in the common purpose clause for both stanzas: *ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων* (v. 18c, “so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”).

The prominence of *υἱοῦ* (v. 13) together with the *πρωτότοκος* title as the hymn’s central theme would seem to suggest that Paul is here using the title with the same literal meaning as in Romans 8: that Jesus was made *υἱοῦ* (v. 13) by being the first to be begotten into God’s family (*πρωτότοκος*, vv. 15, 18). Our thesis here is therefore that the title is encapsulating Paul’s Christology discovered in Acts 13, Romans 1, Romans 8, and 1 Corinthians 15—the impartation of ontological Adamic sonship to Christ by the literal, biological begetting of his resurrection as the prototype for the culmination of our sonship by resurrection. The outermost/main clauses of the hymn (yellow highlighting above) lay out the major themes of the hymn’s *πρωτότοκος* Christology by setting the title in conjunction with four concepts—from the dead, Image of the invisible God, *ἀρχή*, and of All Creation—examination of which confirms our thesis.

Πρωτότοκος from the Dead

Πρωτότοκος here designates someone first in rank because he was the first to enter the group, or more precisely, to leave the group designated by the plural *νεκρῶν* (“the dead ones”). It was by resurrection, therefore, that Jesus became *πρωτότοκος*. Because Paul uses the term *πρωτότοκος* only three times in two passages (here and Romans 8), and because in both passages it was resurrection that made Jesus *πρωτότοκος*, it is implausible that Paul would use the term literally in Romans 8:29 to encapsulate the rich Christology of begetting into Adamic sonship and then use it here metaphorically merely to designate only preeminence.

Further, to say that the meaning of the *πρωτότοκος* title is merely “preeminence” is to say that the *πρωτο-* (“first”) part of the noun is literal while the *-τοκος* (“born”) part is not: i.e., the group is non-familial. That meaning, however, is sufficient to teach no greater relationship of our resurrection to that of Christ’s than that we are both coincidentally in the group of the resurrected ones (Christ being first and thus preeminent in the group). In other words, in a non-familial group temporal preeminence is non-organic: entrance of the first member does not ensure additional entrances of additional members. In Colossians, however, Paul is teaching that our resurrection is organically

⁴⁰ Relative pronouns are so named because, of all the types of pronouns, they relate two clauses most closely.

dependent upon that of Christ.⁴¹ This teaching can be captured only by a literal, familial meaning of *πρωτότοκος*, for Paul has been found to teach that in God’s family we are made sons by union with Christ, thereby sharing in his sonship.⁴²

Πρωτότοκος, Image of the Invisible God

It is highly unlikely that Paul would use a theologically technical term such as *πρωτότοκος* as the central theme of a hymn but give it two disparate meanings—the technical meaning, encapsulating so much Christology in verse 18, and less than the technical meaning (i.e., merely preeminence), communicating none of that Christology in verse 15. It is therefore of little surprise that Paul opens the hymn in verse 15 with the image-of-God concept as the theological framework within which the remainder of the hymn is to be read and the *πρωτότοκος* concept is to be understood.

Three observations advance the study. First, because it is the “*ἀοράτου* [invisible] God” of which Christ is said to be the image, this image of God concept pertains at least in part to Christ’s body (cf. 1:18b–20, 22; 2:9) and it pertains therefore to the era of the incarnation and the human nature of Christ (cf. Jn 1:18; 12:45; 14:8–9; 2 Cor 4:4). Second, the only other reference to the image of God in the epistle (3:10) is the Adamic image of God.⁴³ Third, in v. 15 *πρωτότοκος* stands in apposition to “image,” equating the two. Thus, for Christ to be materially the Adamic image of God is to be the *πρωτότοκος* (v. 15), which he became by the material transformation of resurrection (v. 18).⁴⁴ It is evident that Paul’s teaching in Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 15 is the theological framework within which he formulated this Christological hymn: by resurrection Christ entered into Adamic sonship and thus the material part of the restored filial nature of the Adamic image of God.

Πρωτότοκος, the Ἀρχή

The first part of this article found that in the OT the image of God and sonship coalesce in a common purpose—dominion over the creation—and the topic of Paul’s hymn (to which *πρωτότοκος* connects back via the *ὅς* relative pronouns in vv. 15, 18) is the Son’s rule over his kingdom (v. 13). It

⁴¹ For example, Paul teaches that we were “raised up with Christ” (3:1), and so our “life is hidden with Christ in God” (3:3) until the time when “Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory” (3:4; cf. 1:27). Robert Saucy points out that one of the aspects of the head-body analogy (1:18; 2:19) is Christ’s being the source of resurrection life for the church. *The Church in God’s Program* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 29–32. See also Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 2:5 and 1 Corinthians 15:20–21.

⁴² Note that in 1:12, Paul says that the Father “qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints.” The event that qualifies someone to share in an inheritance is their entrance into the family of the parent who owns the inheritance. Note that the inheritance is “in Light” (v. 12), making the transfer from “the domain of darkness” into “the kingdom of His beloved Son” (v. 13) the means by which we entered the family and thus share in the inheritance (v. 12). Romans 8:17 and Galatians 4:1–7 also speak of our sharing in Christ’s sonship and therefore in his inheritance.

⁴³ Beale notes authors in early Judaism who speak of Adam as the image of the invisible God, and he also points to *εἰκὼν θεοῦ* in 1 Corinthians 11:7, which is a clear reference to the Adamic image of God (444).

⁴⁴ Durrwell correctly recognizes that the image of God was something borne more fully by Christ after the resurrection, but he incorrectly concludes that Paul is talking about the “conclusion” of the “divinization” (rather than about the reclamation of Adamic humanity) of Christ. He sees in the resurrection a restoration of Christ’s “divine traits” that had been “blurred by the humiliation he had chosen to undergo” (128).

is in this vein that in verse 18 Paul makes ἀρχή appositive to πρωτότοκος: to be πρωτότοκος is to be the ἀρχή, a term that speaks of either a “beginning” or of a “ruler.” Both meanings have been found already in the hymn: the πρωτότοκος is the preeminent one because he was the first to rise.⁴⁵ As with εικῶν in verse 15, the apposition of πρωτότοκος to ἀρχή shows that it was by resurrection that he became ἀρχή. Given the emphasis on the Adamic image of God and Adamic sonship noted above, it would seem that the dominion given to the πρωτότοκος by resurrection is the dominion which Adam lost (Gn 3:17–19).

The passage confirms this hypothesis by arguing that the reconciliation of all things (v. 20a) came by Christ’s resurrection. “For all the fullness to dwell in Him” (v. 19) and “to reconcile all things” (v. 20) are speaking of the resurrection (v. 18b), for they are exegetical to “was pleased” (v. 19a), which was the reason (ὅτι, v. 19a) that the Father wanted him to be preeminent in all things (v. 18b), which was the purpose (ἵνα, v. 18b) of his resurrection (v. 18a).⁴⁶ Although believers are the party most expressly reconciled to God by the resurrection (vv. 21–22; v. 22 is the only other occurrence of ἀποκαταλλάσσω [“reconciled”] in Colossians; cf. 2 Cor 5:19–20), in v. 20 Paul further defines the “all things” that are reconciled by resurrection as including the creation (cf. v. 16). Paul is referencing creation’s rebellion against Adam’s rule as God’s representative in Genesis 3:17–19, culminating in Adam’s death (v. 19b), which was found to be his ultimate failure to rule. Resurrection has therefore been found to be the ultimate restoration of that Adamic rule (cf. Rom 8:20–23).⁴⁷ Further, the “peace” that comes through Christ’s cross work (Col 1:20) reflects the OT word **שָׁלוֹם**, which became a summary cosmic term for everything being made right in the eschatological age that would be ushered in by the eternally ruling messianic Son from David’s line reclaiming Adamic dominion (Is 9:6–7; 54:13; Jer 33:9).⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Note the use of ἀρχή in the sense of “ruler” in verse 16 and in 2:10, 15. Also, one of Saucy’s aspects of Christ’s relationship to the church portrayed in the head-body analogy in 1:18a is the “sovereign leadership” of the head (28–29). Fredrick Danker recognizes that the two meanings of “beginning” and “ruler” are not totally disparate because he defines the “ruler” as “an authority figure who initiates activity or process.” “*Ἀρχή*,” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 138. Gaffin sees both meanings in ἀρχή here (38–39), as does W. R. G. Loader “The Apocalyptic Model of Sonship: Its Origin and Development in New Testament Tradition,” *JBL* 97/4 (1978): 548.

⁴⁶ Three additional points of exegesis confirm this understanding. First, note the emphasis on Christ’s body in the parallel statement in 2:9 and the emphasis on resurrection realities in 2:10 and following. Second, the aorist tense of εἰρηνοποιήσας (“having made peace”) makes the cross antecedent to “to reconcile” (v. 20). Third, the theme of the universal sphere of his being first (ἐν πᾶσιν, “in all things,” v. 18c) as a result of resurrection (v. 18b) flows through the passage to the universal sphere of the reconciliation (τὰ πάντα, “all things,” v. 20).

⁴⁷ Note that throughout the epistle, dominion is something that he received by resurrection and subsequent ascension (2:9–10, 12–15; 3:1).

⁴⁸ Note that reconciliation coming δι’ αὐτοῦ (“through Him”) renders εἰς αὐτόν (“to Himself”) apparently superfluous (v. 20a). It would seem that the former is Christ while the latter is the Father, speaking of Adamic viceregency under God as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28.

Πρωτότοκος of All Creation

Christ's reclaimed Adamic sonship and the Adamic image of God qualify him to be the *ἀρχή*, the preeminent Adamic ruler of the reconciled creation, another blessing in which we too share. Now the phrase “*πρωτότοκος* of all creation” (v. 15b) takes us deeper into the *πρωτότοκος*'s relationship to the creation. The question of Christ's relationship to the creation in this phrase is the question of the genitive use of *πάσης κτίσεως* (“of all creation,” v. 15).⁴⁹ In its original, literal meaning (“firstborn”), *πρωτότοκος* would have assumed the subsequent phrase “of the children [in the family],” a partitive genitive. Most interpreters reject the idea of a partitive genitive here because Paul would be saying that Christ is a part of the creation.⁵⁰ However, the last line of v. 18 gives the purpose of the two *πρωτότοκος* clauses (vv. 15 and 18b), and the “all things” would seem to be the same “all things” as in v. 20a, which is the creation (v. 20b). Also, the teaching of the immediately preceding clause in v. 15 is that Jesus is the *εἰκὼν* of the invisible God, discovered above to be speaking of his incarnate reclamation of the Adamic image of God, specifically its material part. Thus, “*πρωτότοκος* of all creation” is indeed a partitive genitive. To be sure, the second Person of the Trinity is eternal, infinitely predating the temporal creation. In the incarnation, however, he became part of the creation (Jn 1:14), and the resurrection raised Christ to be the pinnacle of the creation, the ruling human Son of God possessing the human image of God, the position vacated by Adam at the fall.⁵¹ Christ's being begotten first in the family of God by resurrection is what makes him the first in rank of the creation, for the NT family of God is a reclamation of Adam's original rank of filial ruler over the rest of the creation. Further, all aspects of the new creation (including cosmic restoration of the material creation) flow from his begetting by resurrection.⁵²

Most interpreters object to the thesis of this article (begetting-by-resurrection Christology) because *ὅτι* makes the creative act of the Son of God (v. 16) the cause of his status as *πρωτότοκος* (v. 15). They conclude that (1) the creation in v. 15 is the creation of Genesis 1; (2) thus, *πρωτότοκος* is a status that Jesus held from before the incarnation; (3) *πρωτότοκος* is bifurcated from the resurrection and so does not carry its literal meaning but rather means merely “preeminence” over creation; and (4) the genitive “of all creation” is not partitive but rather communicates subordination *under* Christ.⁵³

⁴⁹ The other seven occurrences of *πρωτότοκος* in Scripture are of no help here, for of the two genitives of which *πρωτότοκος* is the head noun, the use of neither would fit here since in neither is the genitive a group of which the *πρωτότοκος* is a member (in Lk 2:7, “firstborn of her” (literally translated) would be a subjective genitive; and in Rv 1:5, “firstborn of the dead [ones]” would be a genitive of separation).

⁵⁰ Macleod, 57; cf. Philip Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 36–40.

⁵¹ Beale notes that the similar construction speaking of Christ as *ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως* (“the Beginning[/ruler] of the creation,” Rev. 3:14) is a genitive of the whole (343).

⁵² Peterson, 143–50.

⁵³ David Garner states the first three and implies the last. “The First and Last Son: Christology and Sonship in Pauline Soteriology,” *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin Jr.*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008), 258–59. See also “Adoption in Christ,” 164; Gaffin, 36–39. Beale recognizes that “image of the invisible God” is the Adamic image of God reclaimed in the incarnation (444–45), but he also holds that the image pertains to his pre-incarnate status “because the remainder of Col. 1:15–17 indicates that Christ's existence at the beginning of the first creation is in mind” (446; cf. 338–39). Throughout the discussion (444–

As noted above, they often divide the hymn up into two stanzas: the first creation in vv. 15–17 and the new creation in vv. 18–20.

Several considerations, however, show that the following clauses subordinated under *ὅτι* (vv. 16–18a) are actually unfolding the rich Christology of the *new* creation discovered above and the *πρωτότοκος*'s resurrection role as its pinnacle and source. In other words, both stanzas of the hymn are about the *new* creation. First, it has been found that every other element of v. 15 is speaking of realities that Christ received by resurrection. Second, all four clauses of verses 16–18a are subordinated in parallel under the *ὅτι*, and the last clause speaks of the *πρωτότοκος* as the head of the church (v. 18a), which was not born until Pentecost.⁵⁴ Third, although Paul uses *κτίζω* (“created,” v. 16) of the Genesis 1 creation (Rom 1:25; 1 Cor 11:9; 1 Tm 4:3), three times in Ephesians (the sister epistle to Colossians) he uses it of the new creation of the Church (Eph 2:10, 15; 4:24; thus, 3:9 is probably also the new creation) that comes by resurrection with Christ (Eph 2:1–6). Likewise, Paul uses *κτίσις* (“creation,” v. 15) not only of the first creation (Rom 1:20, 25; 8:19–22, 39) but also of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). Fourth, the remainder of Colossians does not sustain any emphasis on the first creation (the only mention outside the hymn, 1:23, is devoid of relevance to this discussion); instead, Paul bases the book’s argument to remain faithful to Christ on aspects and implications of resurrection and the new creation (2:9–15; 3:1–4).

In conclusion, Paul regarded Christ’s resurrection and subsequent forming of the church to be a “new creation,” and both stanzas are speaking about this new creation. Christ is the *πρωτότοκος* because he is the pinnacle of the new creation, for that new creation comes through his resurrection.⁵⁵ First, he restores the race of reigning image-bearing sons by union with himself, and second, this restoration will one day spill over from the church to become a cosmic restoration of the creation itself (cf. Rom 8:18–23).⁵⁶

Ephesians 1

The Christology discovered in the Colossian hymn also underlies Paul’s teaching in his sister epistle of Ephesians. Christ’s rule (1:20c–23) restored following his resurrection (v. 20) is Adamic, for verse 22a quotes Psalm 8:6. Further, this rule is over the new creation (“the one to come,” Eph 1:21),

49), he toggles back and forth between seeing incarnation or pre-incarnation in verse 15, depending on whether he is taking verse 15 in isolation from or in connection with verse 16.

⁵⁴ Note that verse 16 is all one unit, for it is bound together by the *inclusio* reference to the creation of all things (beginning and end of v. 16). The four lines under *ὅτι* are therefore parallel, the final three joined to the preceding one by *καί*. Several considerations argue that the church did not exist until Pentecost: the tense of Matthew 16:18 is future; Ephesians 2:15 calls the church a “new man”; Ephesians 2 speaks of Gentiles and Jews being brought together into a third, new entity rather than one group joining the other; 1 Corinthians 10:32 speaks of three distinct groups; and in Colossians 1:18, the church is Christ’s body, and 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that Spirit baptism is the means by which believers are placed into the body, yet Spirit baptism was still future in Acts 1:5.

⁵⁵ This status makes him the one before and over all the new creation (v. 17a), the unifying and sustaining force of the new creation (v. 17b), and the head of the body (v. 18a).

⁵⁶ See Beale, 343, 44; John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 181; Mark Johnston, *Child of a King: What Joining God’s Family Really Means* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1997), 75–76.

is from the Father’s right hand (v. 20; cf. Col 3:1), and is over “rule and authority and power and dominion” (v. 21; all these terms except “power” are found in Col 1:16). His rule includes headship over his body the Church as “the fullness” (vv. 22b–23)—all concepts in the Colossian hymn—indicating that he gives life to the race of reigning sons, which means they share in his reclaimed Adamic sonship and dominion. Further, it was discovered in the first part of this article from 1 Corinthians 15:28b that the Father being “all in all” (Eph 1:23) comes by the resurrected Adamic Son reigning in viceregency under the Father as Adam was intended (1 Cor 15:21–28a).

The purpose of Paul’s rehearsing this resurrection Christology is assurance that what the Father gave to Christ in verses 20–23 is “in accordance with” (v. 19b) the three descriptions of the eschatological salvation that he will give to believers (vv. 18–19a).⁵⁷ The first two—“the hope of His calling” (v. 18b) and “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (v. 18c)—are summary statements of the theme of predestination/calling to sonship that has run through the doxology to the Trinity in verses 3–14.⁵⁸ In the section on the Father (vv. 3–6a), he “predestined” us to *υιοθεσία* which is “through Jesus Christ” (vv. 4–5). Accordingly, both the section on the Son (vv. 6b–12) and the section on the Spirit (vv. 13–14) culminate with this filial theme of predestination to “inheritance”: in verses 10–11, it is “in [Christ]” that we have the “inheritance” to which we were “predestinated according to His [the Father’s] purpose”; and in verses 13–14 the “Holy Spirit of promise” “sealed” us in that he is the “pledge” of the “inheritance.”⁵⁹ Accordingly, in the summary statement in verse 18, “glory,” a term discovered previously to be used by Paul to speak of the resurrection’s restoration of life and dominion, is the “inheritance,” for it is the “hope of His calling” to sonship.

The third description of our eschatological salvation—“the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe” (v. 19a)—is the event of resurrection by which the sons will inherit the glory, for Paul is speaking of the power of resurrection (vv. 19b–20a), and which gave their prototype restored Adamic dominion (vv. 20c–23) over the current and new creation (v. 21). Because Christ is our head (v. 23), we his body will share in his resurrection, and thereby we will receive everything to which we have been predestined—sonship and all that the sons of God subsequently inherit, including participation in Christ’s reclaimed Adamic dominion.

Conclusion

The consideration of these passages has confirmed the conclusions made in the first part of this article concerning Paul’s understanding of the Christological intersection of sonship and resurrection. The other *υιοθεσία* passages (Rom 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5) have been found to corroborate our understanding of *υιοθεσία* in Romans 8. Romans 1:3–4 does no damage to and actually confirms

⁵⁷ *Ἐκ νεκρῶν* (v. 20) also communicates this prototypical idea.

⁵⁸ Note the overt structure of the doxology: each section ends with the refrain “to the praise of His glory” or “to the praise of the glory of His grace” and focuses on a member of the Trinity: Father (vv. 3–6a), Son (vv. 6b–12), and Spirit (vv. 13–14).

⁵⁹ The Spirit’s promissory role was noted above in Romans 8: our present possession of the Spirit and of the sonship and inner life that he brings (vv. 10, 14–16) guarantees that one day he will also give us full sonship and bodily life (vv. 11, 17–23), to which we have been predestined (vv. 29–30).

Paul's teaching elsewhere that the resurrection was a literal begetting into ontological Adamic sonship. Colossians 1:15–20 directly corroborates the ontological nature of that sonship. Πρωτότοκος was found to encapsulate that begetting-by-resurrection Christology, even in the controversial statements of Colossians 1:15–16. Further, the discovery from 1 Corinthians 15 in the first part of this article was confirmed—that Christ's Adamic sonship pertains to his incarnation and thus to his human nature, including its material part. And finally, a new discovery was made—that the renewal of all things that flows from the resurrection of the πρωτότοκος is a new creation. The third part of this article (slated to appear in the spring 2022 issue of *JBTW*) will carry the investigation of the intersection of sonship and resurrection into the other NT authors and find that they advance the same begetting-by-resurrection Christology that has been found in Paul.