**Christians are referred to as “sons” *only in sections of Scripture where adoption is in view*. Both sonship and adoption place matters within a regal setting; and Christians, in all three passages where adoption is dealt with, are seen actively moving toward the goal set before them — *the adoption of sons and being brought into a realization of the rights of the firstborn.***

**Children, Sons, Adoption**

**By Arlen Chitwood of** [**Lamp Broadcast**](http://lampbroadcast.org/)

Within the family relationship, Christians are referred to as both children and sons. And the two are closely related but are not really the same.

All Christians are referred to as “children” (Greek: *teknon*), but Scripture does not use “sons” (Greek: *huios*) in the same all-encompassing manner. Though all Christians are “sons” because of *creation*, the New Testament use of the Greek word *huios*, referring to Christians through this means, appears only within contexts which are both regal and *where Christians are seen actively progressing toward the goal set before them*. In this respect, the word is used relative to Christians in complete keeping with that which “sonship” portends — with *rulership*.

In the New Testament epistles (both the Pauline and the general epistles), Christians are referred to as “children [*teknon*] *of* God” and “sons [*huios*] of God” about an equal number of times. They are referred to as “*children of God*” in [Romans 8:16-17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+8.16-17&t=NKJV), [21](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+8.21&t=NKJV); [Philippians 2:15](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Philippians+2.15&t=NKJV); [1 John 3:1-2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1John+3.1-2&t=NKJV), [10](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1John+3.10&t=NKJV); [5:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1John+5.2&t=NKJV). And they are referred to as “sons of God” in [Romans 8:14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+8.14&t=NKJV); [Galatians 3:26](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Galatians+3.26&t=NKJV); [4:6-7](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Galatians+4.6-7&t=NKJV); [Hebrews 12:5-8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+12.5-8&t=NKJV) (the word “sons” alone, rather than “sons of God,” is used in the latter reference; but a Father-son relationship is in view throughout, showing God dealing with Christians as *His sons*).

In all three sections of Scripture where Christians are presently referred to as “sons,” adoption is also in view. In both Romans and Galatians, in the Greek text, the word *huiothesia* (the word for “adoption [son-placing]”) appears in the context of the verses where Christians are referred to as “sons” ([Romans 8:15](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+8.15&t=NKJV), [23](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+8.23&t=NKJV); [Galatians 4:5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Galatians+4.5&t=NKJV)).

And in Hebrews, adoption is seen in the context as well, though from a different perspective. It is seen following the verses referring to Christians as “sons” (in [Hebrews 12:16-17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+12.16-17&t=NKJV)— verses forming the heart of the fifth and final major warning in the book, dealing with Esau [the firstborn] forfeiting his birthright).

In the antitype of the account pertaining to Esau forfeiting his birthright, the thought of *adoption* would have to be brought into the picture, for Christians must not only be sons but they must be *firstborn sons* to realize *the rights of the firstborn* that Esau in the type forfeited. And the only way Christians can be brought into this position is through *adoption*.

(Aside from [Romans 8:15](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+8.15&t=NKJV), [23](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+8.23&t=NKJV); [Galatians 4:5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Galatians+4.5&t=NKJV), the only other place in the New Testament where the Greek word *huiothesia* is used relative to Christians is in [Ephesians 1:5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+1.5&t=NKJV). And the use of this word early in the book of Ephesians is in complete keeping with how the subject matter of the book is introduced in this first chapter — a future “*redemption*” and “*inheritance*,” in connection with the “*mystery*” revealed to Paul [[Ephesians 1:7](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+1.7&t=NKJV), [9](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+1.9&t=NKJV), [11](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+1.11&t=NKJV), [14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+1.14&t=NKJV), *cf.* [Ephesians 3:1-6](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+3.1-6&t=NKJV); [4:30](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+4.30&t=NKJV)], to be realized “*in the dispensation of the fullness of times*” [[Ephesians 3:10](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+3.10&t=NKJV)]. These interrelated things *are presently being made known*, “by [‘through’] *the Church*,” to “*the principalities and powers in heavenly places*” [Satan and his angels], which accounts for the warning and instructions concerning the spiritual warfare at the close of the book [[Ephesians 3:9-11](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+3.9-11&t=NKJV); [6:10ff](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+6.10ff&t=NKJV)].

As in any New Testament epistle, the central subject seen in *Ephesians* is *not* salvation by grace, though that subject is dealt with in the book. Rather, the central subject has to do with the things seen in the opening chapter, which introduce the things about to be developed in the book — things *pertaining to Christians in relation to the coming kingdom of Christ.* And if this epistle, or any New Testament epistle, is not studied after the manner in which the epistle is introduced, the central message of the epistle will be lost to the reader.)

Thus, Christians are referred to as “sons” *only in sections of Scripture where adoption is in view*. Both sonship and adoption place matters within a regal setting; and Christians, in all three passages where adoption is dealt with, are seen actively moving toward the goal set before them — *the adoption of sons and being brought into a realization of the rights of the firstborn.*

On the other hand, Scripture refers to Christians as “children” within a *regal* *setting* as well, *but not with respect to adoption*. This is the main difference concerning how the two words are used in the New Testament epistles. It is *sons* who are adopted, not children.

(In [Romans 8:16-17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+8.16-17&t=NKJV), [21](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+8.21&t=NKJV), the Greek word for “children” [*teknon*] is used in a context with the Greek word for “sons” [*huios*]. And an inheritance, an adoption, and a manifestation of sons are seen in the passage [with *huios* alone used relative to the latter two ([Romans 8:16-17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+8.16-17&t=NKJV), [21](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+8.21&t=NKJV), *teknon* appears in connection with present Christian activity, with a view to the coming day of Christ [[Romans 8:16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+8.16&t=NKJV)]. And in [1 John 3:1-2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1John+3.1-2&t=NKJV), [10](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1John+3.10&t=NKJV); [5:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1John+5.2&t=NKJV) the context shows the same thing as seen in [Philippians 2:15-16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Philippians+2.15-16&t=NKJV).

*Teknon* is used in these verses to depict present Christian activity, with a view to the hope set before Christians, *Christ’s future appearance*, and being shown as *an overcomer* in that coming day.)

Thus, there is the central distinction between the way in which “children” and “sons” are used in the New Testament. Both are used in *regal settings*, with the latter used more specifically in connection with *the rights of the firstborn*. Both can be used of Christians today; but, *only* “sons” is used when *adoption* is in view.