

Sunday, December 21, 2014—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 156  
 Sonship Edification: Precursors to Sonship, Part 2

## **Introduction**

- Last week, in Lesson 155, we finished up our five part mini-series on the Distinguishing Characteristics of Sonship Edification (SE) by looking at the teaching of Newbold and McDaniel on the New Covenant.
- In the second half of Lesson 155 we began discussing the following historical precursors to Sonship Edification (SE).
  - 1884—*The Theocratic Kingdom* by George N.H. Peters—3 Volumes
  - 1935—*The Berean Expositor, Volume XXV* by Charles Welch
  - 1936—*Firstborn Sons: Their Rights and Risks* by G.H. Lang
  - 1972—*Edification Complex of the Soul* by R. B. Thieme, Jr.
  - 1981—*The Gospel Under Siege: Faith and Works in Tension* by Zane Hodges
- Last week we only had time to look at the comments of N.H. Peters. While the writings of Peters were something of a mixed bag, we did observe the following: Peters appears to be arguing that only those who are properly “qualified” are “fit” for the honor of rulership, kingship, and priesthood. In short, one must qualify himself or herself for the honor of co-reigning with Christ; it is not automatically bestowed as a result of salvation but is “superadded” to it. While this is not the exact same argument being offered by SE, the premise is the same. The believer must in some way, shape, manner, or form attain unto this “special honor.”
- This week we want to continue our investigation into the precursors of SE by focusing our attention on the teachings of Charles H. Welch and G.H. Lang.

## **Precursors to Sonship Continued**

### *Charles H. Welch*

- Charles H. Welch is a precursor to SE in that he taught two separate and distinct inheritances in Romans 8:17. Students of the Grace History Project should recall from Lessons 80 and 81 that Welch was the great champion for the Acts 28 dispensational position in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Welch was the editor of the monthly Bible study periodical *The Berean Expositor* as well as the author of numerous books on a host of theological subjects. In addition, Welch was the Principal of the Chapel of the Open Book in London, England until his death in 1967. Upon his death he was succeeded by his understudy Stuart Allen.
- In 1948, Welch published his commentary on Romans titled *Just, and the Justifier* in which he teaches that there is a difference between being an “heir of God” and a “joint-heir with Christ” in

Romans 8:17. The section of Charles H. Welch's *Just, and the Justifier* that contains his comments on Romans 8:17 originally appeared in [Volume XXV](#) of *The Berean Expositor* which was published in 1935. This was not an uncommon practice for Welch, many of his book length works were originally written in serial form for *The Berean Expositor*. Welch begins his exposition of Romans 8:17 as follows:

- (2) Heirs and Joint-Heirs (viii. 17-21).

The epistle to the Ephesians reveals the “hope of our calling,” while the epistle to the Philippians reveals the “prize of the high calling.” Hope is associated with grace; the Prize with reward. Hope is ours because we are in Christ; the Prize will be ours, “if so be we suffer with Him.” **From this it follows that an heir of God is not necessarily also a joint-heir with Christ.** It was “to him that overcometh” that the promise was made that he should sit with Me upon the throne (Rev. 3:21). “If we suffer,” said apostle Paul, “we shall also reign with Him” (II Tim. ii:12). The doctrine has changed from “in Christ Jesus” to “with Christ.” We do not meet the preposition *sun*, “with,” in Romans viii until verse 16, where it occurs in the word *summartureo*, “bear witness together.” After that we have *sugkleronomos*, “joint-heirs;” *sumpashco*, “jointly suffer;” *sundoxazomai*, “jointly glorified.” The next occurrences are in verse 22, *sustenazo* “groan together” and *sunodini*, “travail together,” and in the latter half of the chapter, there are two or three more compounds of *sun*.

This use of the words “heir,” and “joint-heir,” the one standing in pure grace, the other associated with faithfulness and possible suffering, is found in the epistle to the Colossians:

“Giving thanks unto the Father, which has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance (*kleros*, the allotment) of the saints in the light” (Col i:12).

“Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance (*kleronomia*, the allotted portion): for ye serve the Lord Christ” (Col. iii:24).

In the first instance the child of God has been “made meet,” in the second there is introduced “reward,” “service,” and even “receiving wrong,” showing that the two subjects are on different grounds, the one being followed by reference to the forgiveness of sins, the other by a reference to what the servant has done. So in Romans viii “If children, then heirs, heirs of God” is parallel with Colossians i:12, “Joint-heirs with Christ, if so be we suffer with him,” is parallel with Colossians iii.24, or as the Apostle wrote to Timothy: “If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him, If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim. ii.11-12).” (Welch, 213-214)

- That Welch taught a distinction between an “heir of God” and a “joint-heir with Christ” in *Just, and the Justifier* is beyond doubt. Like the modern purveyors of this notion, Welch also connected Romans 8:17 with II Timothy 2:12. However, a careful reading reveals that Welch connects those who are “joint-heirs with Christ” via suffering with Christ to the “overcomers” of Revelation 3:21. This connection between the saints at Rome with the overcoming saints of Israel’s prophetic program is mandated by Welch’s dispensational position that the church did not

begin until Acts 28. Since Romans was written during the Acts period, and the body of Christ had not yet been formed according to Welch, joint-heirship with Christ through suffering **must be** associated with Israel in order for Welch to remain consistent.

- Next, Welch proceeds to list the other occurrences of the Greek word *sugkleronomos* (joint-heirs) in the New Testament. Immediately after noting that the next occurrence of *sugkleronomos* is found in Ephesians 3:6 (fellowheirs) Welch anticipates the difficulty this reality causes for this exposition of Romans 8:17 and states the following:
  - “**We can imagine the criticism that this reference nullifies the idea expressed above on Romans viii.17. To this we reply that the truth revealed in Eph. iii.6 was unknown at the time the Apostle wrote to the Romans;** that it reveals the constitution of the mystery, making known the glorious equality that exists between all members of the One Body, whereas, Romans viii.17 is a revelation concerning “fellow-heirs” of Christ in connection with suffering. No such qualification is to be found in Ephesians iii. The next reference (to *sugkleronomos*), Hebrews xi.9-10, is more in line with Romans viii.17:” (Welch, 215)
- Careful readers will note the real reason why Welch teaches a distinction between “heirs” and “joint-heirs” in Romans 8:17, is because his dispensational system demands it. Welch does not believe that Romans is written to the church since it was written during the Acts period and that the mystery had not yet been revealed. Consequently, knowing that the exact same Greek word (*sugkleronomos*) is used in connection with the revelation of the mystery and formation of the body of Christ in Ephesians 3, Welch must teach a difference between “heirs” and “joint-heirs” otherwise he would be left with the awkward and inconsistent notion that believers are “joint-heirs with Christ” before the “fellowheirs” status that Jews and Gentiles enjoy in the body of Christ had been inaugurated and revealed in Ephesians. This is made plain by Welch’s statement that one “can image the criticism that this reference (Eph. 3:6) nullifies the ideas expressed above on Romans viii.17.”
- This reality is proven by Welch’s attempts to “balance” Romans 8:17 by connecting it with Hebrews 11:9-10 and I Peter 3:7 rather than with Ephesians 3:6. After using the example of how Abraham, Isaac and Jacob “lived as pilgrims in the land of promise, and looked for something beyond and above, even the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city,” Welch states that Hebrews 11 is dealing with overcoming faith or faith that endures. According to Welch, it is this faith which “avoids Esau’s bartering of the birthright for the present mess of pottage” that causes the teaching of Romans 8:17 to “fall into line.” That Welch viewed the hope of the saints in Rome as “millennial” is beyond dispute.
  - “The hope of the church as expressed in the epistle to the Romans was millennial (Rom. xv. 12-13); consequently the joint-heirs with Christ who are in any sense overcomers will find much that illuminated their position in Revelations ii. iii. There, addressing Himself to the seven churches of Asia, the Lord makes certain promises “to him that overcomes”: “the tree of life” (Rev. ii.7), “The crown of life,” and “The second death” (Rev. ii.10-11): “The hidden manna,” “white stone,” and “new name” (Rev. ii.17): “Power over the nations . . . even as I received of my Father” (Rev. ii.26-28): “White raiment,” “book of

life,” and “name confessed” (Rev. iii.5): “A Pillar.” “A new name,” the name of the “New Jerusalem” (Rev. iii. 12): and finally, “a grant to set with Christ in His throne, even as he overcame, and sat with His Father in His throne” (Rev. iii.21). To sit down with Christ in his throne as an overcomer, to reign with Him, because one has endured to be a joint-heir of Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, are all expositions of the same truth, though it operates in different spheres, whether the dispensation of the mystery or the Acts period.” (Welch, 216)

- Maintaining a difference between “heirs of God” and “joint-heirs with Christ” in Romans 8:17 has been a hallmark of the Acts 28 position for decades. After the death of C.H. Welch in 1967, his understudy and successor Stuart Allen advanced the same understanding of Romans 8:17 in his book [The Galatian & Roman Epistles of Paul](#) in 1987 (see pages 122-123).
- The argumentation of Welch on these matters is much more clear than what we observed in Lesson 155 from the pen of N.H. Peters. Not all believers are joint-heirs with Christ. Joint-heirship is viewed as synonymous with reigning with Christ. Thus joint-heirship/reigning is conditioned upon suffering. Romans 8:17 is connected to non-Pauline texts in Hebrews and Revelation to close the argument.

#### *G.H. Lang*

- G.H. Lang was born November 20, 1874 (the same year as Winston Churchill) in London, England. Saved at the age of seven and half, his writings include fourteen major books and innumerable smaller booklets and pamphlets. All but nine of his books were published after he was fifty years old. Writing a Tribute to Lang upon his death for *The Witness* in December 1958, Douglas W. Brealey described Lang as “the most controversial figure in brethren circles since J.N. Darby.” Brealey goes on to state the following regarding Lang, “Though completely convinced of the eternal security of the believer, many of his views on prophecy led him into avenues of thought and teaching where a great number of us felt unable to follow.” (From the dust jacket of the 1984 Schoettle Publishing Co., Inc. reprint of *Firstborn Sons: Their Rights & Risks*)
- G.H. Lang’s 1936 publication *Firstborn Sons: Their Rights and Risks* stands out as one of the clearest precursors to SE in terms of its teaching regarding the conditional and progressive nature of sanctification and its impact upon joint-heirship and reigning with Christ. Students should be aware that there are more precursory statements to SE made in Lang’s publication than time and space will allow us to cover as part of the GHP. Consequently, in this lesson, we limited our comments to the most controversial/consequential statements made in the following three categories:
  - Statements regarding the necessity of qualifying one’s self to serve in the government of God as an additional issue to justification.
  - Statements connecting one’s level of sanctification with their portion of future glory.
  - Statements that sound like they are straight from the SE lexicon.

*Statements regarding the necessity of qualifying one's self to serve in the government of God as an additional issue to justification.*

- “So when it is stated that Christ gave Himself a ransom for all (I Tim. 2:6), it means all, not some only. And, on the other hand, when God tells us of His electing grace and foreordination He connects these with the high destiny for which He has selected some from amongst the vast total of those who will accept his mercy. It were much that the sovereign should freely pardon rebels. If clemency prompted this did not demand that any of them should be exalted to share in the government which they had fought. And not being bound thus to favor any of them, it is perfectly legitimate for the king to give these honors to such individuals as it pleases him to choose. The condition upon which they must qualify for these dignities we shall consider later.” (Lang, 50)
- “Upon the return of the noblemen he rightly rewarded those servants who had been diligent and successful during his absence. And the special reward indicated in that “authority over cities” was given in proportion to their fidelity; that is, they were appointed to high places in the kingdom of their lord. And thus both the governmental authority and personal glory of our Lord He will most graciously and royally share with such as are accounted worthy of these dignities. And the degree of our faithfulness now will be the measure of our worthiness then.” (Lang, 58-59)
- “Two truths unite in the exaltation of God’s Son. First, on God’s side, it was of old true that the Father had appointed His Son to be heir of all things (Heb. 1:2). But then, on the outward side of things, Christ must vindicate this appointment by showing Himself as a man worthy of it by victoriously suffering: (quotes Heb. 2:10) . . .

And it is upon precisely the same double condition that Christ’s people will share with Him His honors. In the first, place it is the choice of God, and the call of God, that creates every possibility thereof, and it is the effectual working of God, by His Spirit, that alone can make actual this purpose of God. Thus it is wholly of grace, and by the power that grace supplies, that any will be glorified. . . Yet, on the other hand, it is plainly set forth in Scripture that these honors must be reached through fidelity and suffering during our earthly course. Forgiveness of sins, and the possession of eternal life and salvation, are indeed free gifts (Rom. 3:24, 6:23), but inheriting the kingdom requires that we prove our fitness and worthiness by sharing our Leader’s toils whilst pressing after Him along His path of life. . . But it is as gracious as wise, and as wise as gracious, that the kingdom and its honors are presented to us as a goal to be reached by strenuous endeavor, as a prize to be gained by earnest toil, a reward to be earned by faithful service, as a crown to be won by keen fighting. . . Thus authority in the kingdom, and the honor of sitting at His own, the chief, table in the day of His royal feasting, are plainly promised as superior rewards for superior devotion. . . (Quotes Rev. 12:4-5) . . . And this opposition is wisely permitted of God so that those whom he has chosen for His kingdom may become thoroughly qualified for their duties in that age. The sons of royal and noble houses are by their birth entitled to expect riches to use, honors to bear, and high offices to fill. But though their birth is their title to such great things, the training, educating and discipline of such must be as thorough as their farther is exalted.” (Lang, 63-65)

- “But that same Revealer has very solemnly intimated that these heavenly glories are forfeitable on certain conditions.” (Lang, 97)

- “Whenever the matter is that of the pardon of sin, the justifying of the guilty, the gift of eternal life, Scripture ever speaks positively and unconditionally. The sinner is “justified freely by God’s grace,” and the “free gift of God is eternal life (Rom. 3:24; 6:23),” in which places the word “free” means free of conditions, not only of payment. Eternal life therefore is what is called in law an absolute gift, in contrast to a conditional gift. The later may be forfeited if the condition be not fulfilled; the former is irrevocable. But as soon as the sinner has by faith entered into this standing before God, then the Word begins at once to speak to him with “Ifs.” From this point and forward every privilege is conditional.” (Lang, 163)
- “We have here sought to show that God most positively and repeatedly forewarns His firstborn sons that their heavenly privileges may be lost and the share in the inheritance in the kingdom be forfeited. To be less to Christ than one might have been, and to be further from Him in His kingdom than one need have been, this will be sad enough to any to whom He is even now the altogether lovely one. But to have lost entirely the gladness of sharing with Him in that kingdom, and to have forfeited eternally the sweetness and glory of reigning with Him and His bride—what heart that loves Him will risk such penalty merely to enjoy the world’s poor and fleeting indulgences?” (Lang, 221-222)

*Statements connecting one’s level of sanctification with their portion of future glory.*

- “The ignition condition upon which man may aspire to this beatific vision is the atoning work of the Redeemer. “Christ also suffered for sins once for all that He might conduct us to God (I Peter 3:18).” But the final condition for realizing in fact that which the atonement has made possible, is set before us in the clause under consideration; “pursues the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord.” . . . A heart that has no desire but for the glory of God, whose affections all center in Him, whose delight is in his good and well-pleasing and perfect will, such an one, but the power of the Spirit of grace, will make due progress in holiness—though perhaps unconsciously to himself—and will reach the sanctification which will warrant the bestowing of the fullest and highest bliss possible through the precious blood of Jesus, even the supernal vision of the face and presence of Him who before was personally inaccessible to man.” (Lang, 100)
- “Reconciliation by the blood of the cross is part of the work designed to usher in this glorious end. The reconciliation is past and complete—“yet now hath He reconciled you;” the presentation is future and is conditional requiring continuance in the faith and hope of the gospel; for apart from this continuance moral state will not advance to the high standard by which God will determine future reward—they will not arrive at “the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord, (Heb. 12:14).” (Lang, 119)
- “The place thus given to the Word of God, and to sanctification as produced by that Word, as the necessary preparation for the heavenly glory, is set forth with remarkable distinction in the Lord’s commission to the chiefest of his apostles (Acts 26:17-18). Indicating to Paul the sphere and nature of his life-work an including both Jews and Gentiles . . . (quotes the verses) . . . Thus Paul had two vast benefits to offer to mankind: 1) the remission of sins, and 2) an inheritance. These two favors are similarly distinguished in Heb. 9:15, where we are reminded of 1) the “redemption of transgression” with the object 2) that those who are called may receive the promise of eternal

inheritance” . . . Now it is to be observed that the risen Lord most definitely connects the receiving of the inheritance, not with the remission of sins, but with being sanctified. Many in the different ages will receive the former who are not among the called who will receive the eternal inheritance of the saints in the heavens. . . But our arriving there is contingent upon our being sanctified, as well as justified. Nor is this an unreasonable or impossible condition. For it is by faith in Christ that we are to be sanctified, just as it is by faith that we have been justified. And he who has trusted Christ for pardon for sin, can as readily trust Him for power over sin, and is without excuse if he does not do so.” (Lang, 143)

- “. . . sanctification is also required with a view to the glorified state being reached. . . And in this connection it is proper to add that the word justified is sometimes used by the Holy Spirit to include sanctification. . . Similarly, the two are blended in the words (I Cor. 6:11), “but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God.” At this late place in the apostle’s exposition, after he has labored the question of holy living as well as that of justification, we judge him thus to combine the two aspects in one, and to mean the term justified to cover the sanctity of life that it makes possible and therefore demands, but which the justified may largely fail to produce, or cease to produce after having long brought it forth by the Spirit. . . Our passage must therefore, 1) be read in the light of its context; and 2) of its late place in a consecutive exposition which has included a heavenly emphasis upon practical holiness and 3) of the fact that the word “justified” may include the practice of holiness; and 4) of the overwhelming consensus of the rest of Scripture; and we conclude that it cannot be made the basis of teaching that every justified person is unconditionally guaranteed a share in the heavenly glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . IN his purpose God did glorify all in question; but equally in His purpose does He see every justified one as already seated “with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6), and equally true is that the Holy Spirit is ready to make this an operative reality to faith; yet very many by carnality or ignorance are forfeiting this elevated experience, in spite of it being part of God’s plan for them.” (Lang, 203-206)

*Statements that sound like they are straight from the SE lexicon.*

- “In the administration of His mighty kingdom, and in the adjusting and rewarding of the affairs of the ages of human and angelic history, the glorified saints will be associated with the King of glory. Doubtless a large part of our training on earth is directed by our Father to capacitating us for such responsible and honorable office. If then a self-willed child refuses and nullifies the training, how shall he be found fit for the high but delicate position that he might have gained?” (Lang, 89)
- “But real believers, being born of God and being called to His kingdom and glory, fulfill the facts of Esau’s case. Such persons are 1) really children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; and 2) they are firstborn of His family, and hold the rights of primogeniture. These rights they do not have to earn, or buy, or win: they are wholly a birthright by the sovereign grace of God. But they do have to value and to keep them, and are warned against forfeiting these privileges. Their sonship is inalienable, and their eternal life unforfeitable, not being deposited in them and held by them at their own risk, but being “hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3);” but these higher personal dignities and glories are forfeitable, and by as much as they are worth retaining by so much is found in this teaching a salutary and sanctifying power. Let the believer be assure that all, all is secure, and

great is the danger of inducing a subtle carelessness of heart; but with the retention of the highest privileges left conditional upon our walk, strong is the inducement to press on unto perfection.” (Lang, 104)

- “Once it is seen that receiving salvation from wrath is one thing, and that rising to the glory of rule in the kingdom is another thing, and is an attainment that follows, the Gordian knot is untied; for it at once becomes a possibility to forfeit the kingdom by personal misconduct; while yet retaining eternal life by the pure grace of God, exercised on the grounds of the merit of Christ alone.” (Lang, 113)
- “The whole picture is, in truth, very arresting. He views them as “babes.” Now a “babe” in Christ has a title to a share of the family inheritance; but if one die a “babe,” or if though life be prolonged, there be “arrested development” and its consequent immaturity, how shall that one be competent for receiving and using the inheritance?” (Lang, 179)

### **Concluding Remarks**

- Conceptually, many of these statements are in line with SE’s teaching regarding the nature of conditional progressive sanctification and its role in reigning with Christ. Moreover, according to both Lang and SE, believers must attain unto positions of reigning their own training and education in the present.
- In the next lesson we will prove beyond doubt that SE got its definition of Biblical Adoption from Lang as well as explore Lang’s teaching regarding joint-heirship and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

### **Works Cited**

Lang, G.H. *Firstborn Sons: Their Rights and Risks*. Samuel Roberts Publishers: London, England, 1936.

Welch Charles H. [Just, and the Justifier](#). Berean Publishing Trust, 1948.