

## Six Locations in Our Relationship with God

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I woke up in the wee hours of the morning on February 9, 2012, with a profound awareness of six possible “locations” that people can have in their relationship with God. I summarize them below:

### **Pagan**

The pagan has no relationship with God, and does not even profess to have one. The pagan may be an atheist or not, but there is no pretense of having any sort of relationship with God. The pagan is the stereotypical “sinner” that is the object of many people’s witnessing and is often described as the skid row alcoholic, drug addict, atheist, etc. These are *stereotypes*, and it is not necessarily the case that any of these categories of people are pagans (except the atheist).

### **Cultural Christian**

The “cultural Christian” is a Christian in name only. He/she goes to church at least on occasion because this is the culturally expected thing to do. There is really no relationship with Christ, and the cultural Christian differs from the pagan only in that they make a profession of being a Christian. In this respect, the pagan is actually more honest than the cultural Christian and, in fact, closer to the Kingdom. The cultural Christian only names the name of Christ when it is convenient to do so and when it serves their interest. Often it is the case that the cultural Christian is involved in the affairs of the church only because it is “good for business,” in which case it is important to them which church they are seen going to. These are also often people who have a motivation to take leadership positions in the church because it gives them an even more visible presence in the community. Many people filling the pews in churches today are cultural Christians. This is more common as we are moving to seeker friendly churches where nothing is demanded of congregants. The Cultural Christian is really no closer to the Kingdom of God than is the Pagan.

### **“Fire Insurance” Christian**

The “fire insurance” Christian has, in fact, entered into a relationship with Christ—said the sinner’s prayer, “accepted Christ into his/her heart”, etc.—but it is motivated purely out of self-interest. The fire insurance Christian shares with the cultural Christian the self-centered motivation; however the fire insurance Christian’s motive derives from spiritual concern rather than a concern merely to be accepted by the community. They really believe that they must have a relationship with Christ in order to avoid eternal punishment. Nevertheless, it is all about them. A variation of the fire insurance Christian is the “Santa Claus Christian.” This version would probably be found in more liberal churches (though conservative as well). The Santa Claus Christian has also entered into a relationship with God, but it is purely motivated out of what God can do for them. The Santa Claus Christian differs from the cultural Christian in that the cultural Christian does not really believe that God will do anything for them because they have not entered into any sort of relationship with God. The Santa Claus Christian, by contrast, has had some sort of spiritual experience with God, but it is all motivated out of what God can do for them. In this way, they are motivated by self-love. They may not have a paradigm for eternal damnation as does the fire insurance Christian, but in both cases whatever relationship with God that they have is

motivated by self-love. They may be willing to be obedient to Christ, but only if it does not inconvenience them, and they usually do it for how it will reward them—either by giving them more status in their church or even the “good feelings” that it gives them. This is a category of Christians in the New Testament account who told Jesus that they would follow him, but first they must go home and bury their parents, and to whom Jesus replied “Let the dead bury the dead.” The church of our day is full of Christians who operate at this level.

### **Committed “Church Age” Christian**

The committed “church age” Christian has entered into a truly genuine relationship with God. They have a true love for God. Their desire is to please God. They understand sacrificial love, and it is not all about self-love for these Christians. The problem with the committed church-age Christian is not one of motivation, but one of experience and vision. They have a church-age paradigm, and in fact, most Christians in this category truly believe that we are living in the church age. This means for them, that we are in that age which began with Pentecost and we are now awaiting the second coming of Christ, and looking for Him to break through the cumulus clouds some day. There are, of course, many variations of the timing of, and just what this end time scenario will look like. There are many other ideas and beliefs which usually accompany this church-age paradigm. Almost always, these Christians believe that we are saddled with a sin nature that will always be a besetting force in our lives until we die. For the most part, God is an external spirit located somewhere in the external universe, that we call upon to “help us” overcome our sin nature. These Christians almost always operate out of a law-based paradigm, even though many of them insist that they do not. They desperately seek to please God, but it is in their own strength. They have recognized that their salvation is totally dependent upon God’s grace, but they operate out of a paradigm that requires them to keep their good standing with God through good works. What those works are will depend upon the church tradition of which they are part. If they are in a very conservative church, it will mean that they do not smoke, drink or cuss, fornicate or commit any other sins of the flesh, and that they will read their Bibles and pray faithfully. If they are from a liberal tradition, it will mean that they give to the poor, become involved in all sorts of social outreach, etc. The motive in all of this is not to please people, as is the case with the cultural Christian (though that could be a hidden motive), but truly to please God. But it is law based. These are obligations that they have heaped upon themselves (and have had heaped upon them). The church in our day does this to its truly committed believers. The committed church-age Christian almost always (though not necessarily) operates out of a conventional institutional church environment and is committed to the institutional church paradigm.

### **The Spirit-Led Christian**

The Spirit-led Christian may or may not operate out of an institutional church paradigm, but if they are in that context, they will find themselves more and more at odds with their church. This category of Christian has been truly freed from the demands of the law, and the obligations that churches and others place upon them. They have sold out to the Lord. They have taken up their crosses to be obedient only to the Lord. They are guided and directed solely by the Holy Spirit. They are totally free from the law as an external constraint on their behavior. The only way that they can be free in this way is that they have allowed the cross to be applied to their lives and to render ineffective their old Adamic nature. You may find the truly Spirit-led Christian engaged in all manner of activity that the institutional

church deems as wrong. These individuals may frequent bars, smoke cigars or do all manner of “sin” as defined by the “law.” But they do this, not out of a desire to indulge the carnal nature. They do it, either out of direct obedience to the Holy Spirit, or because they have been released by the Holy Spirit, and have a perfect freedom to engage in these actions by faith. Contrary to what the institutional church or other well-meaning Christians may say, they are not doing this in rebellion to the Lord. And in the doing of this, they always operate out of a principle of love. If, in the doing of it they know it will cause another brother or sister to stumble in their faith, for example, they have the perfect freedom to refrain from doing it—not driven by their carnal nature because that nature has been surrendered to Christ. The truly Spirit-led Christian is often misunderstood. The reason that they are misunderstood goes far deeper than simply the fact that they have a freedom to engage in certain behaviors that law-based “church-age” Christians do not have the freedom to do. No, the reason that they are misunderstood is that they have entered into another age, the “Kingdom Age.” Kingdom-age people walk and talk differently. They have a very intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit that can only come about through a total surrender and a voluntary taking up of the cross. This allows them to walk with a power and authority that church-age Christians simply do not have.

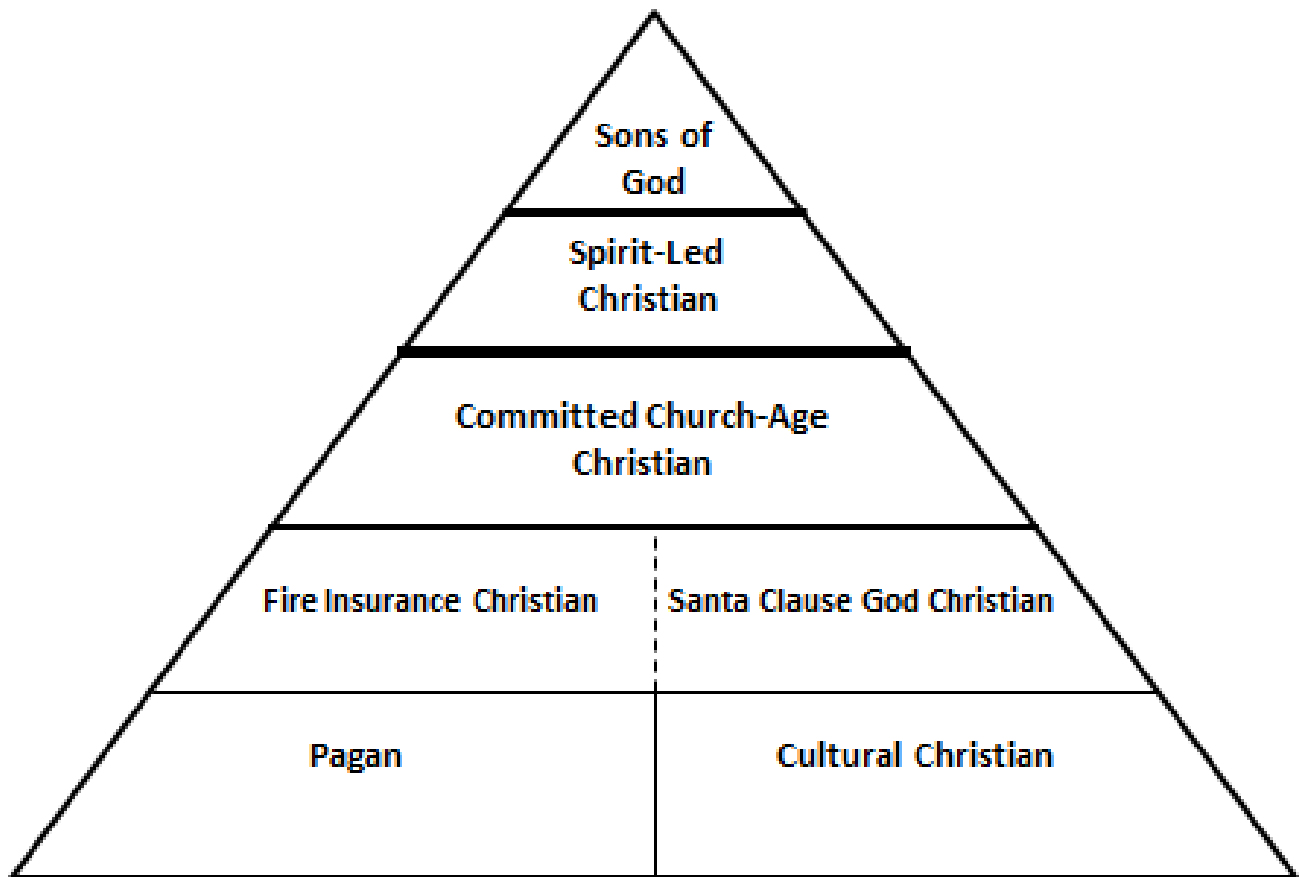
### **Sons of God**

Sons of God represent the coming to maturity of the Spirit-led Christian. To enter into this level, is to move from being a *child* of God to a *son*. And this requires a major paradigm shift in terms of how they understand themselves in relationship to Christ. Sons of God recognize who they truly are in Christ. They understand that they share co-equally in the inheritance given to Christ. This is a spiritual inheritance of authority and sharing in the governance of God. They recognize, along with the Spirit-led Christian, that the Kingdom of God is not for some future time after we die, but that it is NOW. The Sons of God, however, also recognize that they are instrumental in bringing forth this Kingdom in the world in which they live. They speak it forth with the authority of God because they know that they have been given this authority. While everyone else is awaiting the coming of the Kingdom, the Sons are speaking it into existence. This involves, among other things, speaking forth the judgments of God upon that which God regards as an abomination. They recognize that the Kingdom is established first by the judgment of God on all of that which is *not* part of His Kingdom. And this begins first in their own lives, the temple of God. The Sons will speak forth God’s judgment, first here, and then in their families and in other relationships, and ultimately in other areas of social life. Because of this, they will be misunderstood, scandalized and isolated. They remain firm, however, because they know that their authority comes from God, and their security is in Him alone.

### **Postscript**

It should be pointed out that our journey with Christ is a progressive one. As the Lord moves us through these stations, or places of relationship with Him, He is forever forming us into His image. We may find ourselves at one of these locations in most areas of our lives, but other areas of our life are staggering behind, perhaps not yet fully yielded to Christ. He is working on that. We must be careful not to define ourselves by that one area of our lives. Rather we must press forward to the goal that has been set before us. If we see the vision of ruling and reigning with Christ as Sons of God, we must stand on that vision of who we are, even though we are chafing at the work of the cross that is being applied to our self-life in a particular area.

## Six Locations in Our Relationship with God



1. Each of these “levels” of the triangle represent our level of maturity in Christ
2. The size of each level approximates the number of people that we find at each level.
3. Each line separating the levels represents a threshold that we must cross to enter into the next level. The thickness of the line represents the degree of surrender/sacrifice that we must make to enter the next level. It also represents the level of baggage that we must let go of in order to enter in to that level.

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