

# The Partnership of the Sons of God

***“That which we  
have seen and  
heard declare we  
unto you, that ye  
also may have  
fellowship with us:  
and truly our  
fellowship is with  
the Father, and  
with his Son  
Jesus Christ.”  
—I John 1:3***

**THE INESTIMABLE PRIVILEGE** of becoming sons of God on the divine plane, and therefore members of the Creator’s immediate family, captured the special attention of the Apostle John. It inspired him, both in his Gospel account of Jesus’ life and in his epistles, to emphasize especially this theme in his ministry

to the church. To claim sonship in God’s family at the time John was laying down his life with the Master was a much-honored point of view to the apostle.

Of all the Jews living at that time, only Jesus could truly claim to be the Son of God, yet for this reason he was put to death. It required understanding, faith and courage for any Jew to acknowledge his belief in Jesus as the Son of God and claim to be his follower. Jesus was condemned to death as a blasphemer, and to the Jewish mind all those who

professed to be his followers would necessarily partake with him in this so-called blasphemy.

The immediate disciples of Jesus, however, as well as those who learned of the Master's virtues through them, would have abundant reason to believe that their Lord was indeed the Son of God. They knew of his purity. They knew that he fulfilled perfectly the prophetic description that had been given concerning the Lamb of God, that he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." (Heb. 7:26) They knew of, and had been blessed by, the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. They had recognized that "never [a] man spake like this man." (John 7:46) They had witnessed his miracles and knew that he ascribed to God the glory for the wonderful works which he performed, acknowledging that they were the works of his Father and wrought by his divine power.

Knowing these facts concerning their Master, there was no other conclusion that could satisfy their minds and hearts, except that such a one was all that he claimed to be—the Son of God—the Messiah of promise. While to confess him as such and become his followers subjected them to scorn and persecution, the strength which came from that knowledge sustained them. It enabled them to affirm boldly the belief which he had established in their hearts, and to proclaim the glad tidings of the kingdom.

John wrote, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." (I John 3:1) By these words he gave expression to a truth of the Gospel which, from some standpoints, imposed a greater test of

faith upon the believer than to confess that Jesus was the Son of God. Who are we that we should be called the sons of God? We are defiled and sinful, members of a condemned and dying race, and estranged from the Creator through the fall of our first parents. Upon what basis can we claim to be sons of God? John reminds us that it is upon the authority of God's love. Such "manner of love" is revealed on God's part in the provision he has made whereby we may, together with our beloved Master, also be called the sons of God.

## **PARTNERSHIP**

To John, sonship in the divine family meant partnership with the Father and with his Son. In our opening text, the word "fellowship" is translated from a Greek word denoting "partnership." Thus, the apostle says that we have a partnership with the Father and with his Son. The combined thoughts of sonship and partnership are required in order to convey the full depth of meaning implied in the privilege that is extended to the footstep followers of the Master. One might conceivably be a son of a noble father, and yet not be taken into partnership in his father's business. John, however, would have us understand that the true followers of Jesus are not only made sons of God through the begetting of the Holy Spirit, but also that God takes them into a wondrous partnership with himself and with his Son in the outworking of his plan for the reconciliation and salvation of a lost race.

In the first chapter of his Gospel, John tells of the "Word" [Greek: *Logos*], the only begotten of the Father. He explains that Jesus, in his pre-human

relationship to the Creator as a Son, was even then a coworker with his Father. That was in the original work of Creation. "Without him," writes John, "was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:1-3) What a high privilege and honor was thus bestowed upon God's only begotten Son, the *Logos*.

Yet, John recognized that in the work of bringing the human race back to perfection, the church—as well as Jesus—would participate. He learned from the Master, and through the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, that the "manner of love" which caused the Heavenly Father to beget us as sons had also purposed that we become partners with him, and with Jesus, in the restoration of the world of mankind.

This exalted position of divine sonship in the plan of God was, in the Apostle John's mind, such a priceless gem of truth, that when writing his Gospel account of Jesus' ministry he laid special emphasis upon it. The Jewish nation, as the natural descendants of Abraham, were the first in line to have such high favor bestowed upon them. However, nearly all in Israel to whom Jesus went at his First Advent rejected him. The apostle tells us, though, that while he came to his own, and as a nation they "received him not," yet as many as did receive him, "he gave authority to become children of God, to those believing into his name."—John 1:11,12, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*

We thus see that John lays down this foundation fact early in his Gospel account of the Master's life. He then selects from the day-by-day experiences and sayings of Jesus many things which are calculated to enhance the reader's appreciation of the marvelous

love of God displayed in extending to true believers such a High Calling. It is not that John's Gospel deals exclusively with this subject, but in many instances, we discover that the points which have been omitted by the writers of other Gospels and mentioned by John, have to do particularly with Jesus' and our sonship and partnership in God's family.

It is John who records the conversation that took place between Jesus and Nicodemus. In this dialogue Jesus brings to light the necessity for a rebirth on the part of those who enter the kingdom of heaven as joint-heirs with him. In this lesson it is made plain that becoming sons of God, as Jesus was his Son, involves much more than merely thinking of the Creator as a divine caretaker. The sonship which John saw and spoke of required not merely a reformation of character as human beings. Rather, it called for a new life, begotten now, developed and perfected in a glorious new birth in the first resurrection, when we shall be like our Lord and see him as he is. You must be "born again," Jesus said to Nicodemus. (John 3:3,7) From this John gained the understanding of actually becoming sons of God on the divine plane.

## **A WELL OF WATER**

It was John who recorded the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus asked her for a drink of water. She was surprised that a Jew asked a favor of a Samaritan, and so expressed herself. Jesus finally explained to her that those drinking the water which he gave would find it to be in them as "a well of water springing up unto everlasting life."—John 4:7-14

John knew, as do all true followers of Jesus, that those who believe on him will have everlasting life. (John 3:16) In this particular conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well, however, John saw an additional ray of light. He understood that not only do believers of this age receive life through the Master, but because they are begotten and will be born into God's heavenly family and become partners with him, they will also share in the magnificent privilege of dispensing life to the fallen race. In them, indeed, there will be "wells of water" springing up to give everlasting life to all who seek it in God's due time. In this dialogue, therefore, John found further confirmation of that love which "the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."

John records that on another occasion Jesus, again using the symbolism of water, explained the great privilege of all true believers in this age, saying, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (John 7:38) Here again we have a far more important thought than merely that of receiving life as believers. Unmistakably, the Master is explaining that his disciples were to be partners with him in giving the water of life to others.

John observes on his own part that the Master was referring to the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. (vs. 39) The apostle knew that to be a disciple of Christ involved much more than that which we receive from him. Precious indeed is the gift of life that all believers receive for themselves, but we should not overlook the glorious reality of our partnership with him in the blessing of others.

The Holy Spirit of God and of his Son Christ Jesus has motivated their every action concerning the divine purpose. If the same spirit is the controlling influence in our lives, there will be no adequate way in which we can express appreciation for what has been done for us except by daily laying down our lives in sacrifice for the blessing of others. If faithful in this, even unto death, the partnership with the Father and the Son which begins now will be perfected and enlarged on the divine plane. Then, from Jesus and the church, through the kingdom arrangements of the new age, will flow the river of water of life to all mankind, cleansing and healing all.—Rev. 22:1-3

## **GOD APPRECIATES SACRIFICE**

In all that Jesus said and did, John saw God's love revealed. Our Heavenly Father loved the world and gave his Son that the people might have life. God likewise loved his Son, and Jesus loved his Father. In the parable of the sheepfold Jesus explains why the Father loved him. He says, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life." (John 10:17) Doubtless it was this, and other similar expressions by Jesus, that helped the Apostle John to understand how truly important it is that love should be such an overwhelming force in our lives that we, like Jesus, will sacrifice all that we have and are in the divine service.

How consistent this is seen to be when we analyze the thought. Back of every partnership there is a motive. In the ordinary business partnerships among men the motive is more or less a selfish one. It is to make money, or to provide a living for oneself and family. However, in the partnership in which the

Father, the Son and his disciples work together in a common cause, the motive is love.

Those engaged in such a brotherhood are unselfishly interested in the well-being of each one participating in this united work. Even more important than this, however, is the motive of love that energizes this partnership in its service for others. The love of God for a fallen race is the motive that brought Jesus to earth from his heavenly home. It is this same love that caused the Son to willingly lay down his life. This same love also prompts all of his faithful disciples similarly to lay down their lives in service to this great eternal cause.

Love begets love, and the love of Jesus manifested in his supreme sacrifice for humanity called forth toward him the boundless love of his Father. It is the same with us, his followers. God loved us while we were yet sinners and gave his Son to die for us. (Rom. 5:8) If we desire to be loved by him as a father loves his children, the only basis upon which we may be assured that this is indeed so, is that like Jesus, we, too, lay down our lives.—John 15:13; I John 3:16

## **PARTNERSHIP IN WORK**

Jesus said, and John recorded it, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” (John 5:17) Having been invited to share in this glorious partnership of work with the Father and the Son, it is now our privilege also to work. We work for God and with God; we work for Christ and with Christ. We also work for each other and with each other in this blessed fellowship of love.

One of the evidences of Jesus’ sonship which his disciples could comprehend, though they were not



yet spirit-begotten, was the miraculous works which he performed. Jesus always accredited God's power for the performance of these miracles. The Master disclaimed that the message he delivered was his own, rather that it, too, came from his Father. He was desirous that his disciples comprehend this thought in order that they give glory where it properly belonged. Jesus said, for example, "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake."—John 14:10,11

In emphasizing this mutual partnership of the Father and the Son, Jesus did not fail to tell his disciples that they, too, as believers in him, were to become associated as coworkers therein. He said, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father."—vs. 12

Were it not for our understanding of God's eternal purposes, it would be difficult to imagine the possibility of performing greater works than the outstanding miracles wrought by Jesus. Not only did he heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, and drive out demons from the afflicted, but he also raised the dead. However, there are greater works of God than these yet to be performed on behalf of mankind—works that are greater from the standpoint of volume, and greater also because of their enduring qualities.

The entire length of Jesus' earthly ministry was only three and one-half years. His days during this

time were filled with many events. While he gave generously of his time and strength for the healing of the sick, yet when we consider the number of the afflicted in the world, those who were healed by him were extremely few. Of all the billions who have died, the record indicates that Jesus awakened from death only three. Even the comparatively few who were restored to health by him had no assurance that they would not again become ill. Indeed, they all finally were struck down by death, man's great enemy. Likewise, those whom Jesus awakened from death again went the way of all the condemned race into the tomb.

Contrast these limited good and miraculous works by Jesus with those which are to be accomplished during the thousand years of his Messianic kingdom, which will bring about a "restitution of all things." (Acts 3:20,21) All the sick will be healed. All the dead will be awakened. Every individual then, who believes and obeys, will be restored to absolute perfection, and have the privilege of living in peace and happiness forever on the earth.

Truly full of meaning, therefore, is the statement by the Master that "greater works" than those at his First Advent shall be done in due time by Christ and his church. In recording these words, John evidently saw in them further confirmation of the condescending love of the Father which provided that a few members of a fallen and condemned race are to be taken into a divine partnership and share in the work of restoring their fellowmen to that which was lost.

## **HUSBANDMAN, VINE, BRANCHES**

What a precious lesson of the Master his whole church would have failed to learn had John not recorded his parable of the vine and the branches. In this parable we have presented to us, from yet another standpoint, the precious truth of our partnership in God's family. "I am the vine," Jesus said, "ye are the branches." "My Father is the husbandman." (John 15:5,1) In this parable is represented the unity of the divine partnership. It is a unity made possible, not because of our worthiness of the position to which we are called, but by the grace of God exemplified through Christ. Here, the Father himself is represented in this partnership, as he is in the position of obtaining fruit from the vine through the branches.

The branches bear fruit by abiding in the vine, and the vine provides the needed nourishment to the branches for the fruit bearing to take place. The husbandman has supreme oversight in this illustration, in that he exercises the privilege of cutting off the branches that bear no fruit and pruning those whose fruitage can be increased. Thus, the Father and the Son and his church together constitute a glorious partnership arrangement whereby the divine purpose of blessing all mankind buds, blossoms, and bears much fruit to the glory of God.—vss. 1-8

As a climax to all the other remarkable teachings of the Master pertaining to our partnership in God's family, John records the prayer of Jesus that was uttered near the close of his ministry. (John 17:1-26) In this prayer, Jesus first of all conveys to the Father that he has finished the work of his earthly

ministry. No small part of that work was the selection and instruction of those who were to carry on the ministry after he returned to the heavenly courts. Fundamentally, this instruction consisted of manifesting his Father's name and glory to his disciples. This was essential because they, like Jesus, were to reflect God's glory in their ministry, and later to partake of that glory themselves.

The means by which Jesus instructed his disciples was largely through the words of his Father. He had received these words himself and was guided by them. If the disciples were to become truly one in the divine partnership, they, too, would need the words of God that they might be inspired and guided thereby. Jesus explains in this prayer that he was sanctified by God's truth, and prayed that his disciples might, likewise, be sanctified by the same truth. (vss. 17,19) From this we see that the oneness of God's family is based upon a common understanding of the divine will, and a dedication on the part of Jesus and his disciples to do that will.

Jesus had said, "I and my Father are one." (John 10:30) They were one, not because both had agreed to forego certain of their plans in order to find a common ground for cooperation, but because Jesus, the Son, was fully consecrated to do the whole will of the Father. There is no other way by which we may hope to share in this partnership except that of being one with the Father and with the Son, even as they are one. It is, simply stated, oneness in the plans and purposes of the Father. What a blessed unity of purpose this is! Jesus explains it, saying, "As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe

that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”—John 17:21-24

### **“THERE YE MAY BE ALSO”**

Previous to this, Jesus had promised his disciples that when he returned at his Second Advent he would receive them unto himself, that where he was there they might be also. (John 14:3) Knowing his Father’s plan, that his followers were also to become sons of God on the divine plane, and partake of the heavenly glory, Jesus knew that this promise was in keeping with the Father’s will. Hence, in his prayer, he asked on behalf of his disciples that they might indeed be rewarded with the privilege of being with him and sharing in his glory.

In order that we might comprehend to some slight extent the transcendent height of glory to be occupied by God’s heavenly family, Jesus said to his disciples, “In my Father’s house are many mansions.” (vs. 2) This is a reference, undoubtedly, to the many planes of existence already created by God through the *Logos*. Jesus would know of these, because “without him was not any thing made that was made.”—John 1:3

Jesus did not, however, promise one or more of these many existing “mansions” to his disciples. He

merely alluded to them in connection with the promise that he was about to make in order that they might appreciate more fully the surpassing love of God manifested in calling them into the divine partnership. In this promise, it is as though Jesus was saying to his disciples that although there were many mansions in his Father's house, none of them was sufficiently exalted or glorious to be suitable for the position that they, as his bride, were to occupy with him and with the Father.

So Jesus promised, "I go to prepare a place for you," a place on the divine plane, and a position that none other than the Creator himself had ever previously occupied. (vs. 2) Indeed, Jesus, upon his resurrection and ascension, went to the Father. He appeared in God's presence with the blood of his sacrifice, which makes the members of his church acceptable for this high position if, like their Master, they too lay down their lives in sacrifice.—Heb. 9:24; Rom. 8:16,17; 12:1

Jesus did not attempt to explain the details of the glory to which his followers were invited. He knew that men and women with finite minds could not possibly comprehend any description that he might give of heavenly glory. New Creatures in Christ Jesus may, and do, understand spiritual things up to a point, but these prospective members of the church are unable to peer beyond the present life to glimpse the realities of future glory. Only through the "precious promises" of God are they presently able to gain a glimpse of what it will mean to be "partakers of the divine nature."—II Pet. 1:4

John himself was unable to visualize the grandeur of our home beyond the veil, and the limitless powers

of those who become partakers of the divine nature. “It doth not yet appear,” John said, “what we shall be: but we know that ... we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (I John 3:2) In this wondrous assurance John was content to rest and work and wait. He already knew more about God than he ever thought possible for mortal man to know. Most importantly, he had learned of God’s love, a love so boundless that it defied description. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” ■