# Sons of God

***"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."***
***—I John 3:2***

**IN OUR FEATURED SCRIP-**ture the Apostle John tells us that we are now 'sons of God.' The true meaning and reality of this most wonderful relationship with our loving and eternal God, to become his sons on the plane of glory, seems almost beyond our ability to grasp. The faithful church have been invited to become members of our Heavenly Father's closest spiritual family. We are thus encouraged to lay down our lives in sacrifice with our dear Lord Jesus as sons of the most high God.—Rom. 12:1

The immediate disciples of Jesus, as well as others who learned of the Master's virtues and teachings through them, would have abundant reason to believe that he was the Son of God. They had been firsthand witnesses to his human perfection, purity of character, and complete devotion to his Father. They knew, also, that he had fulfilled the prophetic description that had been given of him. When John first saw the Master, he said, "Behold the Lamb of

God, which taketh away the sin of the world."—John 1:29

Speaking of Jesus' purity, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." (Heb. 7:26) Our Lord's disciples had been blessed by the "gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth" (Luke 4:22), as evidenced by the proclamation, "Never man spake like this man." (John 7: 46) They had witnessed his miracles, and knew that he ascribed to God the glory for all the wonderful works that he performed, acknowledging that they were the works of God and wrought by the power of God.

There was no other conclusion that could satisfy their minds and hearts, except that Jesus was all that he claimed to be—the Son of God and the long-promised Messiah. To confess him as such and to become his followers subjected his people to scorn and persecution. However, the strength that comes from our Lord Jesus sustained them, and enabled them to affirm boldly their belief in him, and to proclaim the glad tidings of the kingdom that he had ministered to their hearts.

In the context of our featured text, John also wrote, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." (I John 3:1) The apostle spoke to the truth of the Gospel which imposed a greater test of faith upon the believer than to merely confess that Jesus—the undefiled one—was the Son of God. Who are we that 'we should be called the sons of God'—we who are defiled and

sinful, and who are members of the condemned and dying human family? Upon what authority can we claim to be sons of the most high God? John has reminded us that it is upon the authority of God's Word that we may thus claim this unspeakable blessing.

**PARTNERSHIP**

We perceive that sonship in God's family also means partnership with the Father and with the Son. John writes, "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) It requires the combined thoughts of sonship and partnership to convey the full depth of meaning that is implied in the glorious hope of being sons of God, and that it has been extended to the footstep followers of the Master. One might be a son of a noble father, and yet not be taken into partnership in his father's business. But John would have us understand that the true followers of Jesus are not only made sons of God through Spirit begettal, but also that God takes them into a wondrous partnership with himself and with his Son in the outworking of his Divine plan for the ultimate reconciliation and salvation of the sin-sick and dying human family.

In his gospel, John speaks concerning the Logos—the only begotten of the Father. He explains that Jesus, in his prehuman relationship with the Creator was as a son, and a coworker with his Father. This took place during the original work of Creation, where we read, "All things were made by him; and

without him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:3) What a high honor and privilege was thus bestowed upon our Lord Jesus as the Logos and only begotten Son of God.

The apostle understood that the faithful members of his church would participate with our glorified Lord in the work of lifting up the human family under the administration of Christ's future kingdom. He learned from the Master, and through the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, that the manner of love that caused the Heavenly Father to beget us as his sons, had also purposed that we become partners with him and with Jesus in the restoration of the whole world from sin and its penalty—death.

This exalted position of Divine sonship in the plan of God is a priceless gem of Truth and, when writing his gospel account of Jesus' ministry, John laid special emphasis upon this relationship. The Jewish nation, as the natural descendants of Abraham, were the first to receive such high favor bestowed upon them. (Rom. 3:1,2) But nearly all in Israel, to whom Jesus came at his First Advent, rejected him. The apostle tells us, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."—John 1:12

Having laid down this foundation fact early in his gospel account of the Master's life, John then selects, from the everyday experiences and sayings of Jesus, many things that enhance our appreciation of the marvelous love of God as manifested in his beloved Son. These things are displayed in extending to true believers an understanding of our High Calling. We note that some points that may

have been omitted by the other gospel writers are mentioned by John. Some of these have to do with Jesus' sonship, as well as our sonship and partnership in the family of God.

## NICODEMUS

He records the conversation that took place between Jesus and Nicodemus. Jesus revealed the necessity for a rebirth on the part of those who enter the kingdom of heaven as joint-heirs with him. We read, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3) He explained that becoming sons of God, as Jesus was, involves a high degree of devotion and faith. Sonship, in this wonderful arrangement of the Divine plan, called for a new birth—not merely a reformation of character as human beings. It is a new life that has now been begotten and is being perfected by the Holy Spirit of God to a glorious new birth in the first resurrection. Then 'we shall be like him' and 'see him as he is.'

## THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

John also recorded the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman who was drawing water at the well. Jesus asked the woman for a drink of water, but she was surprised that a Jew should ask such a favor of a Samaritan, and so expressed herself. Jesus explained to her that those drinking the water which he gave would find that it would be in them as "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."—John 4:14

All true believers in Jesus know that those who believe on him will have everlasting life. But, in this

particular conversation, John wrote of the wonderful future blessing for the Samaritan woman, and all mankind as well. Not only do believers of this age receive life through the Master, but because they are begotten and born into the heavenly family they become partners with him for that work. They will share in the wondrous privilege of dispensing life to the fallen race during Christ's future kingdom. In them, there will be wells of water 'springing up' to give 'everlasting life' to all who seek it during that time. We have further confirmation of this most wondrous High Calling, which 'the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.'

## WATERS OF LIFE

The apostle records that on another occasion Jesus, using the symbolism of water, explained the great privilege of all true believers during this present Gospel Age, saying, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:38, *New American Standard Bible*) Jesus taught that his disciples were to be partners with him in giving the water of life to others. The Master was referring to the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of his people. To be a disciple of Christ involves much more than that which we receive from him. Precious is the gift of life that all believers receive for themselves, but we should not overlook the glorious reality of our partnership with Jesus in the blessing of others.

If the Holy Spirit of God and of Christ is the motivating and 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 laying down our lives in sacrifice for the blessing of others. If faithful unto death, our partnership with the Father and the Son, which begins now, will be perfected and enlarged upon as shown in the revelator's vision. "He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him."—Rev. 22:1-3

## DIVINE PARTNERSHIP

We see God's love manifested in all that Jesus said and did during his earthly ministry. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) 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, that I might take it again. . . . This commandment have I received of my Father." John 10:17,18) Doubtless it is this, and other similar expressions by Jesus, that help us understand how truly important it is that love should be such an overwhelming force in our lives. We, like Jesus, must sacrifice all that we have and are in God's service, that we might share together in the blessing of all the families of the earth.

In the Divine partnership, love is the motive in which the Father, the Son, and his disciples all work together toward a common cause. They are unselfishly interested in the well-being of each one participating in this united work. Love thus energizes this wonderful partnership and its service for others. The love of God for a fallen race is the love that brought Jesus to earth from his heavenly home. It was this same love that caused him to lay down his life willingly in sacrifice. This love prompts all of his faithful disciples to similarly lay down their lives.

Love begets love, and the love that Jesus manifested in his supreme sacrifice for humanity called forth the boundless love he had for his Father. It is the same with his followers, for God loved us "while we were yet sinners" (Rom 5:8), and gave his Son to die for us. If we desire to be loved by him as a father loves his children, the basis upon which we may be assured of this is that we lay down our lives also.

## PARTNERSHIP IN WORK

Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." (John 5:17) Having been invited to share in this wondrous partnership of work with the Father and the Son, it is now our privilege to work for God, for Christ, and for each other in this blessed fellowship of love. One of the evidences of Jesus' sonship, which his disciples who were not yet Spirit begotten saw, was the miraculous works that he performed. Jesus always accredited to God the power by which these miracles were performed. The Master disclaimed that the message he delivered was his own, but rather that it came from his Heavenly Father.

He was desirous that his disciples comprehend this thought, in order that they would give glory where it properly belonged. He said, "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."—chap. 14:10,11

When emphasizing this mutual partnership of the Father and Son, Jesus did not fail to tell his disciples that, as believers in him, they were to become associated with him as coworkers. He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, 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

It is difficult to comprehend the possibility of performing greater works than the outstanding miracles that Jesus performed during his earthly ministry. 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. These works will be greater from the standpoint that they will be available for the whole human family, and greater also because of their enduring qualities.

The entire length of Jesus' ministry was only three and a half years, but during that time his days were crowded with many things. 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 very

few indeed. Of all the countless millions who have died, the record indicates that Jesus awakened only three. Even the comparatively few who were restored to health by him had no assurance that they would not again become sick and die. They all finally were struck down by the grim reaper, death. Even those whom he awakened from death went again the way of all the condemned human creation into death.

These limited good and miraculous works performed by Jesus were but illustrations of the greater work that will be accomplished during his future kingdom of peace and righteousness. At that time, all the sick will be healed, and all the dead will be awakened. Every individual, who then believes and obeys, will be restored to absolute perfection, and have the privilege of living in peace and happiness forever here on a perfected earth. Laden with meaning, therefore, are the marvelous works of the Master, "The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel." (chap. 5:20) In these words, we see further confirmation of the abounding love of the Heavenly Father that provided for a 'little flock' of believers taken from the fallen and condemned race. They will be brought into a glorious partnership, where they will share in the work of restoring their fellow men to that which was lost in Eden.

## HUSBANDMAN, VINE, BRANCHES

In the parable of the vine and the branches, the Lord's people see the wonderful teachings of Jesus. We have presented to us, from yet another

standpoint, the precious truth of our partnership in the Divine family. We see represented the unity of the partnership—a unity made possible, not because of our worthiness of the position to which we are called, but by the grace of God as exemplified through Christ. He said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman." (chap. 15:1) The parable further teaches concerning the fruit from the vine that comes through the branches. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."—vss. 4,5

The branches cannot bear fruit without the vine, and neither can the vine bear fruit without the branches. The husbandman is supreme in this illustration, in that he exercises the care in cutting off the branches that bear no fruit, and pruning those whose fruitage is deficient. The Father, the Son, and his church, together, thus constitute a glorious partnership whereby the Divine purpose of blessing all mankind first buds, next blossoms, and then bears fruit to the glory of God.

## JESUS' PRAYER

As a climax to all the wonderful teachings of the Master pertaining to our partnership in God's family, we note the prayer of Jesus that was uttered near the close of his ministry. (John 17) In this prayer, Jesus first reports to the Father that he has finished the work of his earthly ministry. Part of that work was the selection and instruction of those who

were to carry on the ministry after he returned to the Heavenly Father. 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.

Jesus says, "That they all may be one; 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

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 celestial partnership, they also would need the words of God that they might be inspired and guided by them. Jesus explains in this prayer that he was sanctified by God's Truth, and prayed that his disciples might be sanctified by the same Truth. From this we see that the oneness of the heavenly family is based upon a common understanding of God's will, and a dedication on the part of Jesus and his disciples to do that will.

Jesus said, "I and my Father are one." (chap. 10:30) They were one 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 that wonderful partnership, other than being one with the Father and with the Son, even as they are one, which is a oneness in the wonderful plan and purpose of the Father.

**"THERE YE MAY BE ALSO"**

Jesus promised his disciples that when he returned at his Second Advent he would receive them unto himself, and that where he was there they might be also. (chap. 14:3) His followers were also to become sons of God on the Divine plane, and partake of the heavenly glory. This promise was in keeping with the Father's will. He asked on behalf of his disciples that they might be rewarded with the privilege of being with him and share in his glory.

He said to his disciples, "In my Father's house are many mansions." (vs. 2) This is a reference to the many planes of existence already created by God through the Logos. Jesus would have known of these, because without him 'was not any thing made that was made.' He did not promise one or more of these many mansions to his disciples. He alludes to them in connection with the promise that he made, and that they might appreciate more fully the surpassing love of God manifested in calling them into this partnership. In this promise, Jesus said that, although there were many 'mansions' in his 'Father's house,' none of them was sufficiently high, or glorious enough, to be suitable for the position that they, as his bride, were to occupy with him and with the Father.

He promised, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2)—a place on the Divine plane of life, and a position that none other than the Creator him-self has ever occupied. He would go to the Father and appear in his presence with the blood of his sacrifice, which by faith has made us acceptable for this high position, if we lay our lives down in sacri-fice. He did not attempt to explain the details of the glory to which his followers were invited. He knew that they could not possibly comprehend the heav-enly glory. New Creatures in Christ Jesus may un-derstand spiritual things, but are unable to peer beyond the veil to glimpse the realities of that glory.

We are thus thrilled by the anticipation of the heavenly partnership in service and in glory, but are unable to visualize the grandeur of our home beyond the veil and the limitless powers of those who will become partakers of the Divine nature. 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."—I John 3:2,3 ■