

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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OF THE GOSPEL —
MANY SONS
CONFORMED TO
THE FIRSTBORN SON

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Living Stream Ministry

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THE GOAL OF THE GOSPEL— MANY SONS CONFORMED TO THE FIRSTBORN SON OF GOD

In our reading of Romans we may pay attention to condemnation, justification, sanctification, and glorification, but neglect the matters of sonship, transformation, conformation, and the Body life. The central thought of Romans is not condemnation or justification; it is not even sanctification or glorification. In [Romans 1:1](#) and [3](#) Paul says that he was separated unto the gospel of God concerning God's Son. This indicates that the central concept of the gospel of God is related to the Son of God. God's intention is to bring many sons into glory.

GOD'S DESIRE—MANY SONS

According to the Bible, the spiritual significance of sonship is that a son is the expression of his father. God desires to have many sons because His intention is to have Himself expressed in a corporate way. He does not want simply an individual expression in the only begotten Son,

but a Body expression, a corporate expression, in many sons. [John 1:18](#) says, “No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” Although God’s expression in the only begotten Son is marvelous, God still desires an expression in many sons. His intention is to make the only begotten Son the Firstborn among many brothers. Before the resurrection of Christ, God had just one Son; that is, He had an individual expression. But by means of Christ’s resurrection, God now has a multitude of sons; that is, He has a corporate expression.

Many of us were taught that we were sinners, that God loved us, and that God sent His Son to die on the cross for our redemption. Furthermore, we were told that as Christians we should live for the glory of God and seek to enjoy fellowship with Him. Then we were taught that we shall eventually be taken to heaven. Very few of us had heard about God’s goal to produce many sons for His corporate expression. For eternity, God will be expressed through a corporate Body of glorified sons. This is His intention.

THE MODEL AND PATTERN

According to the book of Romans, the gospel

of God is a gospel of sonship. The central aim of God's gospel is to produce many sons conformed to His Son (8:29). His only begotten Son is a pattern, a model, for the producing of the many sons. Romans 1:3 and 4 describe this model, whereas Romans 8 reveals the mass production. Eventually, the only begotten Son—the model—will become the Firstborn among many brothers—the mass production.

As the model, Christ has two natures: the nature according to the flesh and the nature according to the Spirit of holiness. “Holiness” in verse 4 refers to the essence, the substance, of God. Before His incarnation, Christ did not have humanity, the nature according to the flesh. Through incarnation He put on human nature. However, when He put on human nature, He did not lose the divine nature. Thus, when He was on earth, He was a mystery. According to His outward appearance, He was altogether a human being. But many of the things He said and did were extraordinary, things which no ordinary human being could possibly say or do. For example, in the Gospel of John the Lord said that He was the life and that He was the truth (14:6). He also said, “I am the light” (8:12), and, “I am the bread of life” (6:35). Furthermore, He said that

anyone who did not believe in Him could not have eternal life ([3:36](#)). No philosopher would dare make such a statement. Because Christ is both divine and human, people wondered about His identity when He was on earth. They knew His family, but they could not explain how He was able to do certain things ([Matt. 13:54-56](#)). The reason for their perplexity was that the Son of God had clothed Himself with humanity.

Those responsible for the crucifixion of Christ did not realize that crucifixion was the best way for Him to be designated, to be glorified. We may use a carnation seed to illustrate this point. If the seed is put to an end by being buried in the soil, it will eventually sprout, grow, and blossom. In the same principle, through death and resurrection Christ “blossomed” as the Son of God. Satan expected the crucifixion of Christ to mark His termination, but the Lord Jesus knew that this was actually the beginning, that it would lead to His designation according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection from the dead. Without death, there can be no resurrection. Hallelujah, in resurrection Christ was designated the Son of God in power!

As the designated Son of God, Christ still has two natures, both that of divinity and that of

humanity. However, the humanity He has now is not the natural humanity, but the humanity uplifted in resurrection. Even His flesh has been designated the Son of God. Hence, He has been designated the Son of God with both divinity and humanity. As such a marvelous Person, He has become the model, the pattern, of all those who are being designated sons of God. A son of God must have both the divine nature and the resurrected, glorified, uplifted human nature.

TWO NATURES

God does not intend that we lose our humanity. On the contrary, we shall bear our humanity for eternity. But our humanity in eternity will not be natural; it will be resurrected, glorified, and uplifted. This is proved by the contrast between the natural body and the spiritual body, the resurrection body, in [1 Corinthians 15](#). Today our physical body is like a seed. But one day this “seed” will be resurrected and glorified.

How can we have divinity? We have it by being regenerated in our spirit by the Spirit of Christ. Through incarnation Christ put humanity upon Himself and thereafter had two natures, the divine nature and the human nature. Through His resurrection and through coming into us as

the Spirit, Christ has brought divinity into us. Therefore, we also have two natures, the human nature and the divine nature. By being born of the Spirit we have become partakers of the divine nature ([2 Pet. 1:4](#)). God no longer has just one Son, the only begotten Son, but many sons, Christ as the Firstborn and us as the many sons of God. Christ has already been designated the Son of God, but we are still in the process of designation. One day this process will be completed, and for eternity we shall be the same as Christ, God's firstborn Son.

DESIGNATED BY RESURRECTION

Christ was designated the Son of God “out of the resurrection of the dead” ([Rom. 1:4](#)). In [6:5](#) Paul says that “we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection.” Christ was designated by resurrection, and we shall be in the likeness of this resurrection. As we share Christ's resurrection, we undergo the process of being designated the sons of God.

To designate something is to mark it out, not merely to label it. As sons of God, we are designated by resurrection, that is, by a change in life. Let us use a carnation seed as an illustration once again. Most people cannot tell the difference

between a carnation seed and other kinds of seeds. Some may think that the way to tell which among many seeds is a carnation seed is to label the carnation seed. This however, is not the way of life. According to the way of life, the carnation seed is designated by being put into the earth so that it can grow into a blossoming carnation plant. When a carnation plant is still a tiny sprout, it is very difficult to recognize that it is a carnation, for it looks the same as other kinds of sprouts. But the more the carnation plant grows, the more it is designated. Eventually, by its blossom, we all can recognize that it is a carnation.

In the same principle, we are designated the sons of God by a change in life through the process of resurrection. The day is coming when we shall reach the stage of “full blossom.” That will be the time of the redemption, the glorification, of our body, which is the full sonship ([Rom. 8:23](#)). The life of the Son of God has been implanted into our spirit. Now we, like the carnation seed that is sown into the earth, must pass through the process of death and resurrection. This causes the outward man to be consumed, but it enables the inner life to grow, to develop, and ultimately, to blossom. This is resurrection. Praise the Lord that we are daily being put to death so that we may

share Christ's resurrection in a practical way. Hallelujah, we shall be designated sons of God by resurrection!

THE PROCESS OF DESIGNATION

Most of us today may not have the confidence to say that we are sons of God. We do not yet have the appearance, the expression, of God's sons. We are like the carnation plant that has not yet produced flowers. Nevertheless, we are under the process of designation by resurrection, and eventually, after we have been fully processed, all will know that we are sons of God. The entire creation is waiting and groaning for this. We also groan because we do not yet have the appearance we should have. We know that we are still short in so many respects and wrong in many things, and we still have failures. But under the Lord's sovereignty, even our failures are used as part of the process. The Lord allows us to fail time after time so that we may be processed. By our failures, our ugly self is torn down, and the Lord has a greater opportunity to work within us.

Praise the Lord for the divine process! We are on the way of resurrection. Not only have we been grafted into Christ that we may have a vital union with Him in His death, but we also enjoy

His resurrection. We all are presently in the process of being designated sons of God by means of resurrection.

FOUR ASPECTS OF RESURRECTION

In this process of resurrection there are four aspects: sanctification, transformation, conformation, and glorification. In [Romans 6:22](#) Paul says, “But now, having been freed from sin and having been enslaved to God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life.” Sanctification, the process of being made holy, brings us into the enjoyment of eternal life. Thus, the end, the issue, of sanctification is eternal life.

In [Romans 12:2](#) Paul speaks of transformation, saying that we should not be conformed to this age, but that we should be transformed by the renewing of the mind. In [Romans 8:29](#) Paul speaks of conformation, and in the next verse, of glorification. Our future glorification will be the ultimate step of resurrection; it is resurrection as applied to the body. Because our bodies are still subject to death, we are sometimes weak and even physically ill. Thus, we need the redemption of our bodies; we need resurrection applied to our bodies. As those who are in the process of resurrection, we have as the last step of

resurrection the transfiguration, the glorification, of our bodies.

SANCTIFICATION

We have seen that sanctification is a part of resurrection. The more we are sanctified, the more we are resurrected. When we speak of sanctification, we do not mean sinless perfection, nor even the mere change of position. Some have pointed out from [Matthew 23](#) that the gold is sanctified by being placed in the temple and that an offering is sanctified by being laid upon the altar. Therefore, these ones teach that sanctification has nothing to do with sin, but that it is related to the change of position. For example, when the gold was in the market, it was common, secular; but when it was put into the temple, it was sanctified. Sanctification, however, means much more than this. It includes not only a change of position, but also a change in disposition. The sanctification spoken of in Romans is dispositional sanctification. We need to be sanctified in both our position and our disposition.

Making tea is a good illustration of dispositional sanctification. When a tea bag is placed in a cup of water, the tea “tea-ifies” the water. This causes the water to change in color, appearance,

and taste. We may say that the water undergoes a dispositional change. The more tea that is put in the water, the more the water is “tea-ified.” This “tea-ification” is a picture of our subjective experience of sanctification. Christ is the heavenly “tea,” and we are the “water.” The more of Christ that is added to us, the more we are sanctified dispositionally.

TRANSFORMATION

Not only are we sanctified, but we are also transformed. Sanctification involves substance, whereas transformation involves form, a change from one form into another. To be sanctified is to have more of Christ added to us. To be transformed is to be shaped into a certain form through the addition of the divine substance. Transformation is the second aspect of resurrection. The more we are transformed, the more we are resurrected.

CONFORMATION

The third aspect of the process of resurrection is conformation, which is closely related to transformation. In this process we are conformed to the image of Christ. As [Romans 8:29](#) says, “Because whom He foreknew, He also predestinated

to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He should be the Firstborn among many brothers.”

GLORIFICATION

We have pointed out that the ultimate step of the process of resurrection is glorification, the transfiguration of our body. The divine life within us will eventually be expressed through our physical body in a full way, transfiguring it into a glorious body. In this way, mortality will be swallowed up by the divine life within us. At that time, we shall be fully sanctified, transformed, conformed, and glorified. This means that we shall be altogether in resurrection, with the divine life and nature permeating our whole being. That will be full sonship ([Rom. 8:23](#)).

We all have the sense within that today our sonship is not yet full. However, it will get fuller and fuller until it reaches the peak at the time of our glorification, when we shall be fully resurrected and designated the sons of God in nature and in appearance. Both in name and in reality we shall be the sons of God in spirit, in soul, and in body. Just as a carnation seed grows from a seed into a full-grown blossoming plant, so we shall be processed through resurrection until we are fully glorified and designated as the many

sons of God. We are now in the process of resurrection so that we may be sanctified, transformed, conformed, and glorified. This process will go on until we are sons of God in full. This is the central aim of the gospel.

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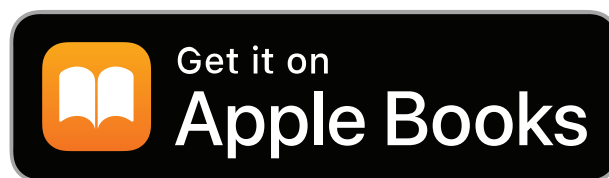
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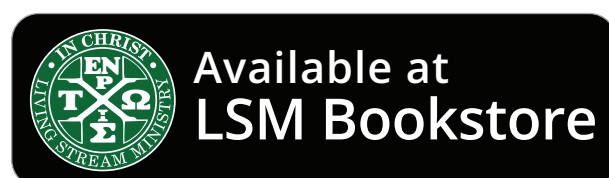
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