

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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THE GOAL OF
GOD'S
SALVATION

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SONSHIP—THE GOAL OF GOD’S SALVATION

In [Romans 1:9](#) Paul said that he served God in the gospel of His Son. This indicates that we all should serve God in the gospel of Christ. In order to do this, however, we need to know what the gospel is.

The gospel does not simply involve matters such as redemption, forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, cleansing, and regeneration. All these are aspects of God’s salvation. But God’s salvation has a goal, and that goal is sonship. This means that redemption, forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, cleansing, and regeneration are all for the fulfillment of God’s desire to have many sons to be His expression.

God’s eternal intention is that He be expressed through a Body constituted of glorified sons. Originally, God had just one Son, His only begotten Son. But now that the resurrection of Jesus Christ has been accomplished, He has many sons. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, millions of sinners have been made sons of God. This is God’s eternal purpose. Hence, the book of

Romans reveals that the goal of the gospel is sonship, the producing of the many sons of God.

The first four verses of Romans are extremely important. In the very first verse Paul says, “Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, a called apostle, separated to the gospel of God.” The fact that Romans opens with a word about the gospel of God indicates that the gospel is the subject of this book. The gospel of God is not concerned with religion, doctrine, or forms; moreover, it is not concerned merely with redemption, forgiveness, or justification. As [verse 3](#) makes clear, the gospel of God is concerned with God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. This indicates that the gospel is concerned with sonship. God’s delight, desire, and pleasure are all related to His Son. It is His intention to produce many sons conformed to the pattern, the model, of the Firstborn. Through Him, in Him, and with Him many sons are being produced. Thus, the gospel of God is concerned with this producing of many sons conformed to the image of Christ.

DESIGNATED THE SON OF GOD

In His incarnation Christ came as the seed of David according to the flesh ([Rom. 1:3](#)). In the Bible the word “flesh” is not a positive word.

Nevertheless, the Gospel of John declares that the Word became flesh (1:14). The gospel of God concerns the Son of God who became flesh, who became the seed of a man according to the flesh. In Romans we see that this flesh has been designated the Son of God!

Through this designation the Christ who was already the Son of God before His incarnation became the Son of God in a new way. Before His incarnation, He was the Son of God only with divinity. But now, through His resurrection, He has been designated the Son of God both with divinity and in humanity. If Christ had never put on human nature, there would have been no need for Him to be designated the Son of God, for in His divinity He was already the Son of God, even from eternity.

Romans 8:3 says that God sent His Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin. This indicates that Christ did not have the sinfulness of the flesh; He had only the likeness of the flesh of sin. In this respect, He was like the brass serpent lifted up on a pole in the wilderness (**Num. 21:8-9**). The brass serpent had the form of a serpent, but it did not have the poisonous nature of a serpent. In the same principle, Christ had the form, the appearance, the likeness, of the flesh of sin, but

He did not have the sinful nature of the flesh of sin.

Because Christ, the Son of God, had clothed Himself with the flesh, He needed His human nature to be designated the Son of God in power by resurrection. Death in Adam is terrible. The death of Christ, however, is wonderful. This is because His death terminated all the negative things and opened the way for resurrection. Through resurrection Christ was transfigured and designated the Son of God.

[Psalm 2:7](#) says, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” Since Christ was already the Son of God, how could there have been the need for Him to be begotten as the Son of God? [Acts 13:33](#), which quotes from [Psalm 2:7](#), indicates that Christ was begotten as the Son of God on the day of His resurrection. But was He not the Son of God before that day? Certainly He was. Nevertheless, He still needed to be begotten by resurrection because He had put on humanity. As to His divinity, there was no need for Him to be begotten. But as to His humanity, there was the need for this. On the day of His resurrection, Christ’s flesh was uplifted and transfigured into a glorious substance. This is the begetting power by resurrection. This begetting is

also the designation. In this way, Jesus, the Man in the flesh, was begotten and designated the Son of God.

THE SPIRIT OF HOLINESS

Romans 1:4 says that this designation was according to the Spirit of holiness. The illustration of a carnation seed will help us understand the meaning of this. When a carnation seed is put into the soil, the seed dies. But this death prepares the way for resurrection. Eventually, the seed sprouts and grows into a mature plant that produces carnation flowers. When the carnation plant blossoms, it is designated. The carnation flower is the designation of the carnation seed. A carnation seed is designated, not by being labeled, but by being buried into the ground and by growing into a blossoming carnation plant. This indicates that the carnation seed is designated according to the life which is within it; that is, it is designated according to life. If I put a stone into some soil, nothing will happen because there is no life in the stone. But after a carnation seed is placed in the earth, it will be designated according to the life within it.

In the same principle, when Christ was resurrected from among the dead, He was designated

in power by resurrection according to the Spirit of holiness that was in Him. Now He is the Son of God in a way that is more wonderful than before, for now He has both the divine nature and the resurrected, transformed, uplifted, glorified, and designated human nature.

As the Son of God with both divinity and humanity, Christ is now the pattern and model for the mass production of the many sons of God. We have seen that God does not want just one Son, the only begotten Son; He desires many sons, all of whom are the mass production of the Firstborn. In [chapter one](#) we have the pattern, but in [chapter eight](#) we have the mass production. [Chapter eight](#) clearly reveals that the only begotten Son has become the Firstborn among many brothers.

MANY SONS

Now we need to consider how these many sons are brought into being. The key to understanding this is in [Romans 1:3 and 4](#). In these verses there are a number of crucial terms: according to flesh, according to the Spirit, the Spirit of holiness, power, resurrection, and the Son of God. In a sense, the entire book of Romans is structured around these phrases. [Verses 3 and 4 of chapter one](#) actually summarize the whole book.

The book of Romans is a record of sinners in the flesh becoming sons of God in power and by resurrection. In [Romans 3:20](#) we read that “by the works of law no flesh shall be justified before Him.” This indicates that the flesh, the fallen man, is hopeless. [Chapter seven](#) reveals how ugly and troublesome the flesh is. [Chapter eight](#) then describes the utter inability of the flesh to keep the law of God. Before we were saved, we were just flesh; we were hopeless, troublesome, and weak. But Christ was made in the likeness of the flesh of sin, and in His crucifixion He brought this flesh to the cross and terminated it.

According to the flesh, we cannot be designated sons of God. We can only become sons of God according to the Spirit of holiness. As believers in Christ, we have both the flesh, which we received of our natural parents, and the Spirit of holiness, who has been given to us by God. Like the Lord Jesus, we also have two natures, the human nature and the divine nature. Now we can boldly say, “Lord Jesus, You have two natures, and we have two natures also. You were made flesh, and we also are flesh. Within You there was the Spirit of holiness, and within us there is the Spirit of holiness.” Oh, within us we have the Spirit of holiness, who is actually the wonderful

Person of Christ Himself! Holiness is the substance, the essence, the element, the nature, of God. This holy nature of God is absolutely different from all other things and separate from them. The Spirit of holiness refers to God's very essence. Thus, by having the Spirit of holiness, we have God's substance within us. According to this Spirit, we are being designated the sons of God.

GRAFTED INTO CHRIST

As believers, we have been grafted into Christ. Suppose a branch from a poor tree is grafted into a better tree. Through this process of grafting, the poor branch becomes a good branch, part of a good tree. Having been grafted into Christ and into the likeness of His death, we are now undergoing the process of resurrection. According to [1 Peter 1:3](#), we were regenerated by the resurrection of Christ. This means that we were born again when Christ was resurrected. In a very real sense, we were born again before we were born. Now we are experiencing the resurrection of what has already been resurrected and the release of what has already been released. For this reason, we can say that we are in the process of being resurrected.

This concept is found in [Romans 8](#). He who raised Christ from among the dead gives us life through His Spirit who dwells in us ([v. 11](#)). This indicates that we are presently undergoing the process of resurrection.

RESURRECTION

On the one hand, to be resurrected means to put everything negative to death; on the other hand, it means to release all the positive things, to uplift what has been put to death and resurrected. Strictly speaking, in God's economy there is no outward correction, adjustment, or improvement. There is only resurrection, which is the termination of the negative and the release of the positive.

Suppose a certain brother is very proud. The religious way is to teach him to be humble. But this is not God's way. The way according to the divine economy is to graft this proud man into Christ and to allow the death of Christ to work within him and, eventually, to terminate him. The death of Christ will then open the way for His resurrection power to release something of Christ from within this brother. In this way the life of Christ will swallow up his proud nature. This is not correction; it is resurrection.

In the early years of my ministry, it was my habit to correct and adjust others. But I gradually learned that this is not God's way in His economy. Because we have the Spirit of holiness within us, there is no need for outward adjustment. If we turn to the Lord and contact Him, we shall experience His death and resurrection. This resurrection is according to the Spirit of holiness. Hallelujah, the resurrection life with the resurrection power is within us!

How absurd it would be to try to help a flower grow by correcting it outwardly! The proper way is simply to water the plant. In the same principle, we should water one another. As [1 Corinthians 3:6](#) says, Paul planted and Apollos watered, but God gives the growth. We need to water the brothers and sisters and to nourish them. Then the inner life will grow, and eventually a beautiful "flower" will be brought forth. This is resurrection.

In a very real sense, God's children do not need to know so much doctrine. What we need is the Word and the power of resurrection within us. No teaching or doctrine can replace resurrection. According to the power of resurrection we are being designated the sons of God.

SANCTIFICATION

To be designated means that we are being sanctified. Holiness is the substance, but sanctification is the process of becoming holy. Some Christians regard holiness merely as sinlessness. Others point out that holiness denotes separation, a change of position. Neither is a proper or adequate definition. Holiness includes both sinlessness and separation, but it also involves a change of disposition.

Consider the illustration of making tea. When tea is added to water, the water is “tea-ified.” This is a picture of sanctification. Christ is the heavenly “tea,” and we are the “water.” The more divine “tea” is added to us, the more we are “tea-ified.” The more Christ is added to us, the more we are sanctified. Sanctification is not simply a change in position, but a change in disposition. In the illustration of making tea, the disposition of the water, even its essence, is changed as the water is “tea-ified.”

Sanctification involves transformation. As the water is “tea-ified,” it is also transformed. Thus, resurrection, sanctification, and transformation are all related.

THE PROCESS OF SONSHIP

Transformation is for conformation. According to [8:29](#), we all shall be conformed to the image of Christ. By conformation, we are brought into the reality of sonship. When we were born again, we had just a small portion of the sonship. Now the sonship needs to spread within us until it saturates our whole being. Eventually, at the time of the Lord's coming back, even our physical body will be saturated with the sonship. Thus, the saturation of our body with the sonship is the redemption of our body.

Today our spirit is in the sonship, but our body is not. According to the spirit we are sons of God, but according to our physical body, we are not yet in the sonship. The transfiguration, the redemption, of our body at the Lord's coming back will be the last step of the sonship. At that time, we shall be brought wholly and thoroughly into sonship. In every part of our being—spirit, soul, and body—we shall be the real sons of God. Then we shall be glorified. Praise the Lord that today we are undergoing the process of sonship, the process of becoming sons of God.

Within us we have the Spirit of sonship as a foretaste. When we cry, "Abba, Father," we have

a sweet enjoyment of the Holy Spirit as a foretaste. This Spirit of sonship is now resurrecting us, sanctifying us, transforming us, and conforming us to the image of Christ.

THE BODY BUILT UP WITH SONS

These many brothers, the many sons of God, are the members of the Body of Christ. Because the Body can be built up only with sons of God, not with sinners in the flesh, the sonship is mentioned first and the Body is mentioned later. [Romans 12](#) is the direct continuation of [Romans 8](#). Only after we have been conformed to the image of Christ can we have the reality of the Body, of which we all are members.

The goal of the gospel as revealed in the book of Romans is to transform sinners in the flesh into sons of God in the spirit for the formation of the Body of Christ. The Apostle Paul served God in this gospel. We today must also learn to serve God in such a gospel. God establishes us according to the gospel unfolded in Romans ([16:25](#)). This gospel is not just for unbelievers, but also for believers. God establishes the believers according to the gospel concerning the Son of God who became a man in the flesh and who in His humanity was designated the Son of God

according to the Spirit of holiness in power by resurrection. [Romans 1:3 and 4](#) are a summary of the gospel, and the remainder of the book of Romans is the complete content of the gospel. In this gospel God is transforming sinners in the flesh into sons of God in power, by resurrection, and according to the Spirit of holiness.

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Life-study of Romans

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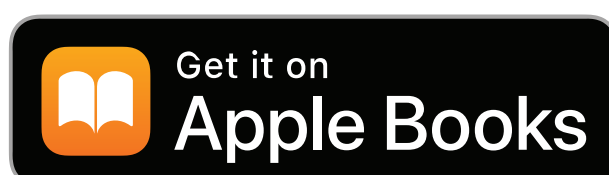
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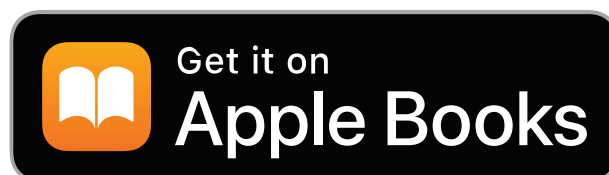
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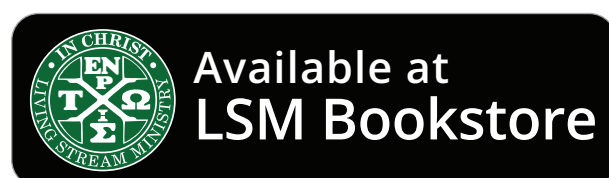
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