

Children of God, Sons of God

Every genuine believer in Christ agrees that it is a matter of most extreme seriousness to tamper with the Word of God—to add to it, to take away from it, to change it, or to dilute it. It is surely deplorable to alter the meaning of the Word for the sake of popular acceptance. Nevertheless, this is precisely what the translators of Today's New International Version (TNIV) have done in obliterating the God-revealed distinction between the believers in Christ as children of God and as sons of God. Since the goal of God's eternal economy is to produce, through regeneration and transformation, many matured sons for His corporate expression—in the Body of Christ and ultimately in the New Jerusalem—to fail to translate accurately the Greek words for *children* and *sons*, and thus to obscure the difference between them, is to hinder the uninformed reader of the New Testament from understanding the crucial element of sonship in God's purpose. Regarding the children of God and the sons of God, the TNIV translators have been unfaithful both to God and to God's people. Was the erasure of the distinction between children of God and sons of God, possibly displaying the influence of the Zeitgeist upon Christian theological thought, motivated by a desire for so-called gender equality and political correctness? The answer to this question is fully known only by God and thus will not be considered here. What will be considered is the divinely intended distinction between children of God and sons of God and the desire of God to produce sons, not children, for the fulfillment of His heart's desire to express Himself in a corporate organic entity composed of millions of glorified sons.

First, it must be clearly and emphatically demonstrated that TNIV has virtually abolished the distinction, grounded in the Greek text, between children of God and sons of God. Numerous examples will now be presented. In one instance after another, an accurate translation of a verse will be quoted and then contrasted with the inaccurate rendering found in TNIV.

Matthew 5:9 says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God." TNIV says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Matthew 5:44-45 says, "But I say to you, Love your enemies,

and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become sons of your Father who is in the heavens." TNIV says, "I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven."

Luke 6:35 says, "But love your enemies, and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He is kind to the unthankful and evil." TNIV says, "But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked."

Luke 20:36 says, "For neither can they die anymore, for they are equal to angels, and they are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." TNIV renders the last of the verse this way: "They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection."

John 12:36 says, "While you have the light, believe into the light, so that you may become sons of light." TNIV says, "Put your trust in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of the light."

Romans 8:14 says, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." TNIV says, "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God."

Romans 8:19 says, "For the anxious watching of the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God." TNIV says, "The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed."

Romans 9:26 says, "There shall they be called sons of the living God." TNIV says, "They will be called 'children of the living God.'"

Galatians 3:7 says, "Know then that they who are of faith, these are sons of Abraham." TNIV says, "Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham."

Galatians 3:26 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." TNIV says, "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith."

Galatians 4:6-7 says, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father! So then you are no longer a slave but a son; and if a son, an heir also through God." TNIV translates verse 7 like this: "So you are no longer slaves, but God's children; and since you are his children, he has made you also heirs." Significantly, in verse 6 TNIV adopts the rendering *sons*, but in verse 7 it translates the same word as *children*, indicating thereby that, for the TNIV translators, *children* and *sons* are indistinguishable and interchangeable. That God thinks differently from the TNIV translators is proved by the fact that, as the divine Author, whose breath is the source and essence of the Word (2 Tim. 3:16), He directed the writers to speak of both children and sons.

First Thessalonians 5:5 says, "For you are all sons of light and sons of the day." TNIV says, "You are all children of the light and children of the day."

Hebrews 2:10 says, "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in leading many sons into glory, to make the Author of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Keeping *sons* and inserting *daughters*, TNIV says, "In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through what he suffered."

Hebrews 12:5-8 says,

And you have completely forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as with sons. "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when reproved by Him; for whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives." It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons. For what son is there whom the father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all sons have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

TNIV says,

And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as children? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, / and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, / because the Lord disciplines those he loves, / and he chastens everyone he accepts as his child." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their parents? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate children at all.

Finally, Revelation 21:7 says, "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to Me." TNIV says, "Those who are victorious

will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children."

From all these examples we see that TNIV persistently changes *sons* to *children*. In so doing, TNIV obliterates the distinction between children of God and sons—a distinction made by God Himself as He inspired the writing of the holy Scriptures.

Children of God Becoming Sons of God

The New Testament speaks of both children of God and sons of God and makes a distinction between them. Those who receive Christ, the incarnate Word and the light of life, are born of God to become children of God: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name, who were begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). Through the divine birth—regeneration—we become children of God possessing the life and nature of God. This marvelous birth, by which we receive the life of God and begin to partake of the nature of God, is the beginning of our deification—the organic process of God's salvation in Christ in which we become the same as God in life and in nature but neither in the Godhead nor as an object of worship. Our becoming children of God manifests the love of God: "Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and we are.... Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been manifested what we will be. We know that if He is manifested, we will be like Him because we will see Him even as He is" (1 John 3:1-2). We have the inner witness of the Spirit to the fact that we are God's children: "The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). "The Spirit witnesses to our most basic and elementary relationship with God, namely, that we are His children; it does not witness that we are His sons or His heirs" (Recovery Version, note 3).

If we, the children of God, would become sons of God qualified to be heirs of God, we need to grow in the divine life unto maturity. Whereas all those who have the witness of the Spirit are children of God, only those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God (v. 14). Sadly, TNIV has erased this distinction, concealing the development unveiled in this chapter between the believers' being children of God in the beginning stage and their being sons of God in an advanced stage.

Sons here indicates a more advanced stage of growth in the divine life than does *children* in v. 16.... *Children* refers to the initial stage of sonship, the stage of regeneration in the human spirit. Sons are the children of God who are in the stage of the transformation of their souls.

They not only have been regenerated in their spirit and are growing in the divine life, but they also are living and walking by being led by the Spirit. (Recovery Version, Rom. 8:14, note 3)

The fact that the begetting Father wants His children to grow unto maturity is presented clearly in Ephesians 4. Early in this Epistle Paul says that the Father has predestinated us unto sonship (not unto salvation) through Jesus Christ (1:5). In eternity past God predestinated us not to be His children, remaining in the initial stage, the stage of immaturity, but to be His sons, attaining to the final stage, the stage of maturity. This tremendous revelation is the background for Paul's exhortation in chapter four, where he says, "Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (v. 13). In order to arrive at this degree of maturity, we should be "no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error" (v. 14). For this, we must hold to truth in love that "we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ" (v. 15). By means of such growth, the children of God become the sons of God for the fulfillment of the economy of God.

Paul's burden for the believers' growth to maturity permeates 1 Corinthians. "I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual men," he tells the saints at Corinth, "but as to fleshy, as to infants in Christ" (3:1). Instead of being led by the Spirit—the experience of the sons of God—the Corinthian believers were fleshy, that is, infants in Christ. Because they were infants, they were childish in their understanding, devoid of proper spiritual evaluation and discernment. This is why Paul admonished them, saying, "Brothers, do not be children in your understanding...in your understanding be full-grown" (14:20). As the result of their growth in the divine life, the sons of God, in contrast to the children of God, are mature, full-grown, in their understanding.

If we consider the divine revelation in the Gospels, in the Epistles, and in Revelation, we will realize that although the Father begins by begetting children, His goal is to

have sons who are the duplication and reproduction of Christ, the firstborn Son. These many sons of God are the many brothers of Christ (Heb. 2:10; Rom. 8:29). For this reason, the Gospels, the Epistles, and Revelation are one in speaking concerning sons and in unveiling the spiritual significance of sonship—that a son is the expression of his father and that the sons of God are the expression of God the Father.

Sons of God in the Gospels

In the third chapter of the Gospel of John, the Lord Jesus spoke directly and emphatically about the new birth through which those who believe into Him become children of God possessing the eternal life and the divine nature (vv. 3-8; 1:12-13). Elsewhere He spoke pointedly regarding the sons of God: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God" (Matt. 5:9). God our Father is the God of peace (Rom. 15:33; 16:20), having a peaceful life and a peaceful nature. According to the revelation in Ephesians 2, Christ Himself is our peace (v. 14), on the cross He made peace (v. 15), and in resurrection and as the life-giving Spirit "He announced peace as the gospel" (v. 17) to those who were far off (the Gentiles) and to those who were near (the Jews). We have been born of the God of peace to be His children, sharing His life and nature of peace. This is an accomplished, irrevocable fact; once we have been born of God to be children of God we cannot be unborn. Unfortunately, we may fail to deny ourselves and live by the divine life and nature in our regenerated spirit. If this is our situation, we will remain little children, even infants in Christ, and will not have the capacity to be peacemakers. But if we deny the self and live by the eternal life and the divine nature, abiding daily in the peaceful life and nature of our Father, we will become blessed peacemakers. "As those born of Him [God the Father], if we would be peacemakers, we must walk in His divine life and according to His divine nature. In this way we will express His life and nature and be called the sons of God" (Matt. 5:9, note 2).

Because we have been born of God, we are called children of God (1 John 3:1). Since this is what we are by virtue of the divine birth, this is what we may rightfully be called. However, we do not have the standing to "be called the sons of God" unless we grow in the divine life, live by the divine life and according to the divine nature, and express the Father in His life and nature. Only those who manifest the peaceful life and nature of God are the peacemakers who may be called "the sons of God." Our being called children of God is settled forever by our new birth; our being called sons of God is, by contrast, dependent on our growth in the Lord and on our daily living in the Spirit.

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Whereas Matthew 5:9 speaks of being *called* the sons of God, verse 45 speaks of *becoming* sons of God. In verses 44 and 45 the Lord Jesus declared, “But I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become sons of your Father who is in the heavens, because He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust.” This word was addressed to regenerated believers—children of God who eventually, in this age or in the coming age of the kingdom, will become sons of God. Those who grow and develop in the divine life in this present age, the age of grace and mystery, will be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (v. 48). In particular, they will be perfect in the Father’s love, for they will be constituted with the very God who, in His essence, is love and will become the same as God (actually, become God) in His loving essence. Having been born of God to become children of God, there is no need for us to become children of God, but there surely is the need for us to *become* sons of God. This becoming involves a gradual process of the growth and development of the Father’s life within us until we reach a degree of maturity in this life. Then, being the same as God in loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us, we may become sons, not mere children, of our Father.

The Lord Jesus utters a similar word in a parallel passage of Scripture: “Love your enemies, and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High” (Luke 6:35a). We need to consider this verse in light of 1:32, which, referring to Jesus (v. 31), the Son of God and “the holy thing” (v. 35), says, “He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High.” Jesus is the Son of the Most High, the Supreme God, and the believers, once they mature in the divine life received through regeneration, will be sons of the Most High. What a marvelous revelation is found here! In a unique sense Christ is the Son of the Most High, and in a real yet limited sense the believers, as the brothers of Christ (John 20:17; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11) and His duplication and reproduction (John 12:24), are bona fide sons of the Most High.

What we find here in Luke is, in an incipient form, an unveiling of the divine sonship in God’s economy—the marvelous truth that God, for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose, has predestinated us in Christ unto sonship, marking us out in eternity past and determining that in time we would be created, called, redeemed, regenerated, and transformed to become sons of God for the constitution of the Body of Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem. To speak of children in Luke 6:35, as TNIV does, is to obfuscate, if not nullify, the truth concerning the divine sonship in the divine economy. God has

determined that His unique Son, the only begotten Son, the Son of the Most High, would become the firstborn Son among others who, to the Son, are His many brothers and, to the Father, are His many sons. God, for eternity, intends not to dwell among countless children but to be wrought into and expressed through innumerable sons—sons of the Most High.

Sons of God in the Epistles

Whereas in the Gospels we have the initial revelation concerning the believers as sons of God, in the Epistles, especially in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, we have the development of this revelation.

If we would understand Paul’s word in Romans concerning the sons of God, we must first consider what he says concerning Christ as the Son sent by God through incarnation and as the Son designated by God in resurrection. Regarding the former, Romans 8:3 says, “For that which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” God’s sending His own Son was the first step of His giving His only begotten Son so that we may believe into Him, be born of God through Him, and have eternal life in Him (John 3:14-16). Romans 1:3-4 presents another aspect of Christ’s status as the Son of God: “Concerning His Son, who came out of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.” The Son who was sent in 8:3 was incarnated to be “the seed of David according to the flesh” in 1:3. This seed of David according to the flesh—the Son of God who had become the Son of Man—was designated the Son of God in resurrection. Through incarnation, the only begotten Son took on an element—humanity, the flesh—that was not the Son of God. Although He is the only Begotten from eternity to eternity with respect to His deity, He nevertheless needed to be designated, and was designated, the Son of God with respect to His humanity. Far from providing a basis for the Christological heresy of adoption (which teaches that Christ was not the Son of God from eternity but was adopted as the Son after His incarnation), these verses reveal that Christ, the unique,

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eternal, only begotten Son who became a man through incarnation, was born in His resurrection (Acts 13:33) to be the Son of God in another sense, that is, in His humanity, not to be the only begotten Son, which He always was in the Godhead, but the firstborn Son, which He became in God's economy. As the only begotten Son sent by God, He is God becoming man to be the Son of Man; as the firstborn Son designated by God, He is man becoming God to bring forth the many sons of God.

If we see this, we will be in a position to understand the crucial matter of sonship in Romans 8. Yes, the Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God (v. 16). This is what we are through regeneration. Now we must progress to become sons of God through organic salvation (salvation in life—5:10), which, according to the revelation in Romans, includes sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification (6:19; 12:2; 8:29-30). The more we are sanctified, renewed, transformed, and conformed, the more we become sons of God, awaiting “the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (v. 21). This glory is related to the redemption, the transfiguration, of our body, which is the full sonship (v. 23).

Sonship is actually a process that includes our entire tripartite being—spirit, soul, and body. Sonship began with the regeneration of our spirit, and it continues with the transformation of our soul through the renewing of the mind (12:2). Eventually, sonship will consummate with the redemption of our body, an event which the creation is eagerly anticipating. “For the anxious watching of the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God” (8:19). With the transfiguration of our body, the process of becoming sons—“son-izing”—will be completed, and Christ will be the Firstborn among many brothers, God's glorified sons, who are the same as He in life, in nature, in constitution, in appearance, and in expression.

While the process of “son-izing” is gradually taking place, the believers may be comforted by the consciousness of the spirit of sonship within them. “You have not received a spirit of slavery bringing you into fear again, but you have received a spirit of sonship in which we cry, Abba, Father!” (v. 15). The spirit of sonship is the spirit of being

a son. It is possible for us to be children of God and sons of God only in our spirit (hence, the crucial importance of distinguishing, as the Word does, between our soul and our spirit). When the Spirit of the Son of God (Gal. 4:6) came into our spirit at the time of our regeneration, our spirit was mingled with the Spirit of the Son and thus became a spirit of sonship. Now we have the spirit of being a son, a spirit of sonship. Furthermore, if we are saved in the divine life according to the content and context of Romans, we will experience the leading of the Spirit. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (8:14). Whereas those who have the witness of the Spirit are children of God, those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God. The Spirit witnesses that we are children, not that we are sons, and the Spirit leads the sons of God, not the children of God.

At this juncture we need to consider the central thought of the book of Romans: God in His salvation is making sinners into sons, who are the members of the Body of Christ expressed in local churches. Significantly, Romans begins with sinners and ends with churches. Through faith sinners are justified and born of God to become His children. Through organic salvation the children of God become sons of God to be the members of the Body of Christ; thus, the sons in Romans 8 are the members in Romans 12. From this we see that God justifies sinners and imparts His life into them (8:10, 6, 11) in order to have sons (not mere children) as members of the Body of Christ. God's goal, therefore, is the Body, and the Body is expressed in local churches.

By the sovereign grace of God sinners become sons to constitute the Body of Christ expressed in local churches. But what if there were only children of God and no sons of God? If this were the situation (and among the vast majority of believers it is the situation), there could not be the Body of Christ in reality and practicality. In order for Christ to have an organic Body in which to live and move and through which to express Himself, the children of God must be saved in life and grow in life to become sons of God.

The principle is the same with Galatians and Hebrews. Central to the divine concept in Galatians is the fact that God's Son is versus man's religion; thus, according to the revelation in this book Christ is versus religion. Paul realized this and had the ground to talk about it: “I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries in my race, being more abundantly a zealot for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me that I might announce Him as the gospel

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among the Gentiles” (1:14-16). This revealed Son is the wonderful One who, in Paul’s appreciation, loved him and gave Himself for him (2:20). This is the Son sent forth by God, “born of a woman, born under law, that He might redeem those under law that we might receive the sonship” (4:4-5). God sent forth His unique Son, the only begotten Son (John 3:16), that through the redemption accomplished by Him we might become sons of God in Him (Gal. 3:26). Instead of redemption being an end in itself or being for the superstitious goal of populating heaven with a vast number of saved persons, redemption is for sonship and brings us into the divine sonship. Christ has redeemed us from the custody of the law that we might become sons of God.

According to the revelation in the New Testament as a whole and in Galatians in particular, God’s economy is to produce sons for His expression. Sonship, therefore, is the focal point of God’s economy. God’s intention is not merely to beget children—God’s intention is to produce sons, believers in Christ who, having been born of God to be children of God, grow in life unto maturity and thereby have both the position and privilege of sonship. In and through His economy—His dispensing based upon His redemption—God is producing many sons for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose.

How, according to the context and content of Galatians, can sinners against God become sons of God? First, the crucified, resurrected Christ must be preached to them, “openly portrayed crucified” (3:1) and declared to be the One whom God the Father raised from the dead (1:1). The Son is revealed in them, and they believe into Him and are baptized into Him (vv. 15-16; 3:26-27). Following this, they must allow the Christ who dwells in them to live in them as they “live in faith, the faith of the Son of God” (2:20). The One who lives in them must then be formed in them: “My children, with whom I travail again in birth until Christ is formed in you” (4:19). Consider this succinct summary:

When the Galatian believers were regenerated through Paul’s preaching of the gospel to them the first time, Christ was born into them but not formed in them. Here [4:19] the apostle was travailing again that Christ might be formed in them. To have Christ formed in us is to have Christ fully grown in us. First, Christ was born into us at the time we repented and believed in Him, then He lives in us in our Christian life (2:20), and, finally, He will be formed in us at our maturity. Christ’s being formed in us is needed that we may be sons of full age and heirs to inherit God’s promised blessing, and that we may mature in the divine sonship. (Recovery Version, Gal. 4:19, note 4)

Those who are mature in the divine sonship are the corporate expression of God. In Galatians, three designations are given to this corporate expression: a new creation (6:15), the Israel of God (v. 16), and the Jerusalem above (4:26). Unlike the old creation, which was produced by God’s speaking but does not contain the element of God, the new creation is produced by God’s inward operation (Phil. 2:13) and is constituted with the divine element. Emerging from within the old creation through God’s work in regeneration, sanctification, renewing, and transformation, the new creation is actually a mingling of divinity with redeemed humanity. Furthermore, as a corporate entity the new creation is composed of God’s divine sons, those who have been born of Him and who have matured in Him to express Him. This new creation is a corporate person—the Israel of God, who not only expresses God in His glory but also reigns for God, representing Him with divine authority. The believers began as so many “Jacobs,” supplanters grasping at every opportunity to advance their personal interests, but through God’s organic salvation (Rom. 5:10) they are first regenerated to become children of God and eventually transformed to become sons of God caring for the economy of God. The sons of God who are both the new creation and the Israel of God also are the constituents of the Jerusalem above. To be sure, Paul tells us that the Jerusalem above is our mother (Gal. 4:26); however, if we understand this in light of the New Testament as a whole, we shall see that our mother, the Jerusalem above, the heavenly Jerusalem, is composed of the very sons born of her; the sons who proceed out from the mother in turn constitute the mother. The New Jerusalem unveiled in Revelation is the consummation of the new creation and the Israel of God. This consummation requires the believers to develop from children of God into sons of God. To deny the need for this development is to obscure, even to nullify, God’s desire and intention to express Himself corporately through His glorified sons, among whom the Firstborn has the preeminence, the first place.

The book of Hebrews also speaks concerning the Son of God, the sons of God, and the corporate expression of God. God has spoken to us “in the Son, whom He appointed Heir of all things, through whom He made the universe” and who is “the effulgence of His glory and the

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impress of His substance” (1:2-3). As God, the Son’s throne is forever and ever (v. 8). Verse 5, a quotation from Psalm 2:7, indicates that in His resurrection Christ was begotten of God to be the Son of God in His humanity and thereby to become the firstborn Son of God (cf. Rom. 1:3-4). Then referring to the Son’s second coming, Hebrews 1:6 goes on to say that again God will bring “the Firstborn into the inhabited earth.”

In His first coming He was God’s only begotten Son (John 1:14). Through the process of resurrection the only begotten Son became the Firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29). Thus, in His second coming He will be the Firstborn. (Recovery Version, Heb. 1:6, note 1)

As the unique, eternal, only begotten Son in the Godhead, Christ is the unique Son possessing divinity but not humanity, and as such He cannot have brothers. However, as the firstborn Son in His resurrection, possessing both divinity and humanity, He has many brothers: “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers” (Heb. 2:11). It is to these brothers, brought forth in His life-imparting resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3; John 20:17), that He, the Firstborn among them, declared the Father’s name (Heb. 2:12). To Christ, the firstborn Son of God, we are the many brothers, but to God the Father, we are the many sons, whom the Father is bringing into glory (v. 10). Significantly, God is leading sons, not children, into glory, into His resplendent expression. Glorification follows sanctification, renewing, and transformation, aspects of God’s salvation in life through which the children of God grow, develop, and mature into sons of God. Eventually, the Father will lead these grown, developed, and matured sons into glory. As an external help to the inward process of organic salvation, the Father disciplines us, the believers in the Son, “that we might partake of His holiness” (12:10), for without sanctification “no one will see the Lord” (v. 14).

As in Romans and Galatians, the many sons are for the constitution and building up of the church, the Body of Christ, as the corporate expression of God. The many sons in Hebrews 2:10 are for the church in verse 12. According to the revelation in this portion of the Word,

The believers in Christ have God as their divine Father, for they are His divine sons born of His divine life with His divine nature. As the many brothers of Christ, the believers are the same as the firstborn Son; He is divine and human, and the believers are human and divine.

the church is a living composition of the many sons of God, who are the many brothers of Christ, brought forth in His resurrection. As the components of the church, the believers in Christ have God as their divine Father, for they are His divine sons born of His divine life with His divine nature. As the many brothers of Christ, the believers are the same as the firstborn Son; He is divine and human, and the believers are human and divine. Since the church is composed of sons of God and brothers of Christ, who are both human and divine, the church is an organism, a corporate person, with two lives and natures combined and mingled together to form a single entity, although the divine and human elements are not confused but remain distinguishable. Thus, the church is both human and divine.

The basic revelation concerning the church in Hebrews 2 is enhanced and enriched by the other aspects of the church unveiled in this book. The church is the corporate partnership with Christ (3:14; 1:9), with the firstborn Son as God’s appointed Heir and the many sons as the joint heirs. Because Christ as the firstborn Son of God is God’s appointed Heir and we as the many sons of God are His joint heirs, we are Christ’s partners, sharing the same interest in the divine enterprise. The church is the house of God (vv. 4-6). As such, the church is the family of God, a living composition of sons of God into whom Christ is building Himself and whom He is building into Himself to produce a mutual abode (Eph. 3:17; John 14:2-3, 23). The church, being the enlargement of Christ in whom God finds rest, is the Sabbath rest spoken of in Hebrews 3:11 and 4:9. The Scriptures reveal that there is only one kind of situation that can satisfy God—a situation in which God has gained a group of people to be His expression and representation (2:12; 3:6, 14). The church, today’s Sabbath rest, is God’s satisfaction and rest because in the church God has His habitation for His expression and representation (Eph. 2:22). In addition, the church in Hebrews is the unshakable kingdom of God (12:28) and the flock of God (13:20-21). Just as the church is the increase of Christ in life, the kingdom is the increase of Christ in administration. In the proper church life according to the New Testament, we are living in the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5; Rom. 14:17; Rev. 1:9), and we are being exercised and equipped in the divine authority through the endurance of sufferings and for our learning to reign in life that we may reign with Christ as His co-kings in the coming millennial kingdom. The church as God’s flock is under the all-inclusive, tender care of Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep. Every aspect of the church is dependent on believers who are not merely children of God but also sons of God, for it is the sons who are the components of the church.

Sons of God in Revelation

What is revealed regarding the sons of God in the Gospels and in the Epistles is fully manifested in the book of Revelation. This means that in Revelation, a book of signs, we have the consummation of the Son, the sons, and the corporate expression of God presented in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. This consummation is signified by the last and greatest sign in Revelation—the holy city, New Jerusalem. To be sure, the New Jerusalem is not a literal, material, physical city; the New Jerusalem, as the wife of the Lamb, is a corporate person, a corporate God-man.

This corporate person, like the church, is composed of divine-human sons—God’s redeemed, transformed, conformed, and glorified tripartite elect. Actually, the New Jerusalem is the aggregation, the totality, and the consummation of the divine sonship. Revelation 21:7 indicates this: “He who overcomers will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to Me.” It is correct to say that the sons of God will dwell in the New Jerusalem, participating in its supreme enjoyment. However, if we consider Revelation 21 together with Galatians 4, which speaks of sons of God and their mother, the Jerusalem above, we will realize that the sons of God dwell in the New Jerusalem not as something apart from themselves but in the sense of dwelling in what they themselves are—the ultimate, consummate, corporate composition of God’s glorified sons. The New Jerusalem, therefore, is the fulfillment of God’s decision in eternity past to predestinate us unto sonship. When we enter the New Jerusalem by becoming the New Jerusalem as the aggregate of the divine sonship, we will have become the glorified and glorious sons that God predestinated us to be.

The sons in Revelation 21:7 are different from the peoples in verse 3. Whereas the sons compose the New Jerusalem, the peoples are the nations in the new heaven and new earth outside the New Jerusalem. Furthermore, whereas the sons are regenerated, transformed, and glorified, fulfilling God’s purpose in His creation, the peoples are simply restored to the pure, unfallen condition of humankind at the time of creation. The failure of theologians and Bible teachers to discern the difference between the sons and the peoples is a major blunder which results from supposing, contrary to the truth, that the believers in Christ will exist not as glorified sons of God, God-men who are the same as God in life and in nature, but simply as restored human beings. Such a misunderstanding completely negates God’s goal in His economy and replaces the divine revelation with a natural human concept. The peoples outside the city are healed by the leaves of the tree of

life (22:2); the sons of God who compose the city eat of the fruit of the tree of life, receiving as their supply the divine life that caused them to become divine sons for His expression.

God’s expression involves God’s glory, for glory is the expression of God, God Himself expressed. Revelation 21:11 speaks of the New Jerusalem as “having the glory of God.” The glory of the New Jerusalem is the glory into which God the Father is leading His many sons (Heb. 2:10); thus, there is a vital connection between the sons of God and the glory of God. This connection lies at the heart of the divine economy—God’s arrangement to dispense Himself in Christ as the Spirit into His chosen and redeemed people to make them mature sons for His eternal corporate expression. God’s eternal purpose, we should note, is to have a corporate expression of Himself in Christ as the glorified firstborn Son of God with the believers as the many glorified sons of God. Therefore, the purpose of God, the economy of God, the sons of God, and the glory of God are intimately related. This relationship is strikingly revealed in Ephesians 1. According to the context of this chapter, the divine purpose (v. 9) and the divine economy (v. 10) are for the divine glory (v. 12), and the Father’s predestinating us unto sonship (v. 5) issues in “the praise of the glory of His grace” (v. 6). Likewise, the Son’s redemption (v. 7) and the Spirit’s sealing and pledging (vv. 13-14) result in “the praise of His glory” (vv. 12, 14).

In His economy the God of glory (Acts 7:2) is producing a city of glory composed of the many sons brought into glory. The Triune God is a God of glory: God the Father is the Father of glory (Eph. 1:17); the Son is the effulgence of God’s glory, the brightness of the Father’s glory (Heb. 1:3); and the Spirit is the Spirit of glory (1 Pet. 4:14). The Triune God of glory created His elect to express God for His glory in order that “He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He had before prepared unto glory” (Rom. 9:23). Unfortunately, we sinned and now come short of God’s glory (3:23). To be fallen is not merely to commit sins; to be fallen is to come short of God’s glory, God’s expression. Although we were dead in sins and pitifully short of God’s glory, God arranged in His sovereign grace for the

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gospel of the glory of God to be announced to us that we might “obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10). We have been called into “His eternal glory” (1 Pet. 5:10); we have Christ in our regenerated spirit as the hope of glory (Col. 1:27); and we may now “with unveiled face” behold and reflect “like a mirror the glory of the Lord,” being “transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18); and consummately we will be glorified and brought into God’s glory, for Christ will come “to be glorified in His saints” (2 Thes. 1:10). Then the overcomers, as the Lord’s co-kings in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, “will receive the unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet. 5:4). Ultimately, at the end of the kingdom age and in the new heaven and new earth, the New Jerusalem will come “down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God” (Rev. 21:10-11). This city of glory will be the eternal, corporate expression of the Triune God in the glorified sons of God, who have been built up together in the God of glory to be His expression in glory. The sons of God will enter into the glory of God by becoming the glory of God according to the economy of God. They will be to the praise of His glory.

The Seriousness of Denying That the Believers Are Sons of God

Perhaps now we are in a position to realize what a disservice TNIV performs by abolishing the distinction, emphasized in the Bible, between children of God and sons of God. According to the entire divine revelation in the Scriptures, God’s eternal economy, according to His good pleasure, is to produce sons for His expression. Sonship—the life, maturity, position, and privilege of sons—is the focal point of God’s economy and the goal of God’s complete salvation, including judicial redemption and salvation in life, organic salvation. In the carrying out of His economy, God is dispensing Himself into His children for their growth unto maturity, unto full sonship.

Since the economy of God is to make us sons of God, to eliminate the sons is to nullify the economy. If there were no sons of God, there would be no Body of Christ, because the sons are the members of the Body. If there were no sons of God, there could not be the new man for the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose, because the new man is the corporate enlargement of the firstborn Son. If there were no sons of God, there could not be the bride of Christ, because the preparation of the bride depends upon the building up of the Body with sons as the members. If there were no sons of God, there would be no co-kings to reign with Christ in the coming kingdom, because there would be no overcomers in the manifestation of full sonship. If there were no sons of God, there would not be the New Jerusalem, because the New Jerusalem, as the aggregate of the divine sonship, is a composition of God’s

glorified sons. For the sake of God and the economy of God, faithful Bible translators should distinguish between children of God and sons of God and then reflect this distinction in translation. Otherwise, they are not true to the God of truth or to His word of truth.

Revelation and Deification

If the children of God—genuine believers in Christ redeemed by His blood and regenerated by the Spirit in their spirit—are to grow and develop into sons of God, they need to receive revelation and experience deification. By *receive revelation* I am referring not to any kind of extra-biblical revelation, which is forbidden by the Word (Rev. 22:18), but to seeing, through a spirit of revelation (Eph. 1:17), the revelation given by God in the Word infallibly and once for all. In order to be the sons of God, we need to see the revelation regarding the sons of God. Any translation of the New Testament that removes the distinction between children of God and sons of God will hinder the believers from receiving this crucial revelation.

What we see through revelation we become through deification. By *deification* we denote that organic process in Christ by which the believers in Christ, having been justified, forgiven, and cleansed by God and reconciled to God, are regenerated and transformed by Him to be God, that is, to be the same as God in life, in nature, and in expression but not in the Godhead and never as an object of worship. With the children of God, deification is in the initial stage, for they are the same as God (as defined above) in their spirit but not yet in their soul. With the sons of God, deification advances from the stage of regeneration to the stage of transformation as the believers become the same as God not only in their regenerated spirit but also in their transformed soul.

Only mature sons of God can be the corporate expression of God—as the Body of Christ today and as the New Jerusalem for eternity. Only such a glorious expression, through the glorious firstborn Son and the glorious many sons, can fulfill the desire of God’s heart. For the sake of God’s good pleasure, the children of God need to see the truth concerning the divine sonship through revelation and then be the reality of the divine sonship through deification. Then with joy the Father will be able to declare, “These are My beloved sons, in whom I have found My delight!”

by Ron Kangas

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