

MANIFESTATION OF THE SONS OF GOD

The concept of the church being the “sons of God” is part a seven-fold description of the church that Paul presented in his letter to the Christians at Ephesus. [The other six are Army of God, Body of Christ, Bride of Christ, Household of God, Temple of God, and Workmanship of God.] This “son-ship” concept carries with it the idea of maturity in that a distinction is made in the designation of being “children” of God and in being “sons” of God.

The Sons of God -

He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—(Eph 1:5, NIV)

"We are not meant to remain as children...but to grow up in every way into Christ..." (Eph 4:14-15 Ph)

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation - but not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a Spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of son-ship. And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his suffering in order that we may also share in his glory. (Rom 8:12-17, NIV)

Responsibilities and Benefits: As sons of God, we are obligated to seek to know God's will and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in our everyday walk that we may share in the inheritance that is ours in Christ Jesus. The practical expression of this obligation is that we will engage in Bible Study and Prayer and that we will be faithful to do the work God has for each believer in the Church.

Let's look at the sequence in verse 17 of “children > heirs > heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” Going from *children* to *heirs* is the maturation process mentioned earlier. Being *heirs of God* can have a double meaning. First, the obvious thing is that we inherit *that which belongs to God*. The second possible meaning is that we “inherit God.” Of course, this is not to imply that we “own” God, but that we receive His nature. Being *joint heirs with Christ* speaks of the idea of inheriting that which belongs to God - specifically His glory (abundance, wealth, treasure, and hence honor). Being joint heirs with Him also speaks of the extent and shared character of our inheritance. Christ being the first born receives a double portion (that is, He has the preeminence) and he has the responsibility of apportioning the inheritance among the other heirs. Sharing in His glory is a consequence of being sons or of having matured from status of children.

How does suffering fit into this concept of maturity? Let look at Psalms 119:107.

107 ¶ I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word. (KJV)

107 ¶ I have suffered much; preserve my life, O LORD, according to your word. (NIV)

Compare this to Roman 8:11.

But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

C. H. Spurgeon writes in his commentary on Psalms 119:107 regarding “suffering” that our service in the Lord's kingdom “does not screen us from trials” (afflictions) but rather “secures them for us.” In other words, suffering, affliction and/or trials come with the work of service. The more we are obedient, the more we will experience trials. The remedy for such suffering, affliction or trial is being quickened or given a vigorous spiritual life. The more we are subjected to trials, the more we develop or grow and the stronger will be our life in all areas: spiritually, soul-life, and in our physical bodies. [Think of going to college. The purpose is to learn. Part of the process is studying and part is testing. Think of the tests as afflictions. This is where we have an opportunity to see if we have

grasped the concepts which we have been studying and it is in the trials that we convert the concept from the abstract to the concrete.]

The nature of the suffering is that it is the suffering that Christ endured (and still endures) and we share in it because we are in Him. Christ being the Head of the Church is being afflicted and persecuted even today and we, in the church, are (in this present age) the direct recipients of the affliction. You may think that such suffering is being experienced by the Christians in Sudan or Indonesia but not where we live. That may be true. However, do you think that Christ “feels their pain?” Now, if He feels their pain, then should we be feeling their pain, also? If we don’t, then what does that say about us? (Perhaps that we are not closely connected to the Body.) If we do feel their pain, then what is the appropriate response? [What did we say that the remedy was for suffering, affliction and trials? From Psalms 119:107 we see that David called for “quickenings” or an infusion of “life.” Jesus said (John 14:6) “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” Every situation of testing or trials or suffering should be leading us to have more LIFE – more of Jesus. (Compare that to Rom 8:28-29)]

We’ve been talking about shared glory and shared suffering. How can we put these two things in perspective with each other? Look at Romans 8:18

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (NIV)

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (KJV)

What do you think Paul had in mind by using the words “this present time?” The time in which Paul live was a certainly a time of great persecution of the church. That is likely what Paul was thinking about. However, I suspect that the truth is more universal in that it applies to any time of life in this world. There was a time of great persecution by the Catholic church in the 1260-year period ending around 1800. We are currently in a period of great persecution of the church in other areas of the world and to some extent in our own society.

When will this “glory” be revealed in us? The obvious answer is when we all get to heaven or when Christ returns for the church and we are changed in an instant from the perishable to the imperishable or perhaps when Jesus comes to set up His millennial kingdom and we will be like Him (sharing in His glory). While the *fullness* of this revelation will have to wait until sometime in the future, there will be previews of this glory as the life of Christ is manifested in us today as we bear the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. The “glory” here spoken of could also mean the glorious Gospel of Christ, which was more and more to be revealed in the Gentile world, “in” or “by” the apostles.

Why is a comparison of the suffering and the glory not a reasonable thing to do?

- The suffering is temporal, the glory is eternal.
- Our suffering is “light” compared to the suffering of Christ.
- There is not any direct causal relationship; i.e., more suffering does not imply that we will have more glory. (The glory is based on the merit of Christ and the extent of His suffering.)
- The suffering is inconsequential compared to the justice we deserve.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. [20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same] in hope 21 that the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. 23 And not only they, but ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. (KJV)

What is meant by the term “creature?” Possibilities:

Creature	COMMENTS
All of creation	– some part is separate from the “all” (verse 23)
Angelic beings	– obligation to minister to sinful man, but when all the children of God shall be brought in, then they will be released from this obligation. (But, the anticipated deliverance from bondage and corruption does not apply to angels.)
All mankind in general	– but all mankind (in general) does not have a desire for things spiritual (Rom 3:11,12). Plus, it does apply to those mentioned in verse 23.
Renewed persons	– these born again believers, who being burdened with indwelling sin, groan under it, long for deliverance from it, and are waiting for the heavenly glory. However, these cannot be said to be in a state of bondage to corruption, for they are freed from the dominion of sin, and are become the servants of righteousness.
Gentile world	"The creature" (v. 19), and "the whole creation" (v.22) are the same; The phrase <i>pasa ktisiv</i> , "the whole creation", or "every creature", as it may be rendered, signifies the nations of the world, in distinction to the Jews. (See Mr 16:15, Col 1:23). The Hebrew word for "the creatures" was a name the Jews (often in their writings) call the Gentiles, to distinguish them from the Israelites.

What is it that the Gentile world is waiting and looking for? The manifestation of the sons of God! When does or will the manifestation of the sons of God happen?

At Conversion: Public Confession or Profession; Baptism

Sovereign Grace View: These people were already the sons of God by divine predestination, and through the covenant of grace; as such they were given to Christ. Because they were His, he assumed their nature, and died for them, in order to gather them together. This relationship is the basis and foundation of the Spirit of Christ being sent down into their hearts, to manifest their adoption to them; for before conversion, it is not manifested, neither to themselves nor others, but at conversion it is made known. This is particularly applied to the Gentiles, and God’s elect among them. They were the sons of God before they were manifested as such; they are spoken of in prophecy in that relationship and seemed to be who is being refer to by "the children of God scattered abroad" (see John 11:51,52). These were not known, nor looked upon by the Jews, to be the children of God; but when the Gospel came to them, as the power of God unto salvation, it manifested them to be the children of God: so that where it was formerly said, "ye are not my people", there it is said, "ye are the sons of the living God." (Hosea 1:10).

Free Will View: The Holy Spirit draws people to Christ and when they (under the influence of the conviction of the Holy Spirit) make a decision to accept the atoning work of Jesus and to receive Him as their Lord, then they become the children of God. At that point of conversion they are manifest in some measure just as was described in the Sovereign Grace description.

Daily Walk: We show evidence in our conduct of life (attitudes, words, actions and interpersonal relationships) whether we are, in fact, the sons of God. The lost, for whom Christ died, are desperately looking for such evidence that this salvation is real and can be seen in the life of those who profess to believe.

Second Coming: The full manifestation of the sons of God will be in their glorification at Christ’s second coming. At that time they shall be openly taken into God’s family, and this relationship shall

be acknowledged by Christ. They will appear, not only to themselves, but to all the world, to be what they are. The full revelation of this is what the Gentiles might be said to be in earnest expectation of, and waiting for.

Verse 20 (expect the last two words) is best viewed as a parenthetical statement.

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *them*.

If the “creature” means the Gentiles, then we can see that they, having only general or natural revelation, but being separated from the law and the Gospel and without knowledge of God and the revelation of Him in Christ as enabled by the Holy Spirit, would then be void of spiritual insight and would be caught up in the vanity or emptiness of the world system. In their vain conceits, those in this system presume themselves to be wise in their own philosophies, their religion (polytheism), their idolatry, and even in their sinful practices. (Compare with Romans 1:21,22: Because that, when they knew God (*from evidence in creation*), they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools)

Though such people are willing in their vanity and in their evil practices, Paul tells us that they are not willingly under (or subject to) this vanity. In other words, those who are without Christ are trapped in an enslavement to sin from which they cannot extricate themselves. How did they get into such a mess? They were born into it (being born of the seed of Adam) and, therefore, they are slaves to the prince of this world – to the devil.

Based on what we have discussed, let’s restate verses 19-21. “The Gentiles, being trapped in an enslavement to sin and without knowledge of the Gospel are eagerly looking for some evidence of a salvation that would free them from the frustration of a meaningless life to allow them to become all that God intended from them to be. That evidence is found in the life of those who are saved and are walking in the freedom of new life in Christ.”

(KJV) 22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

(NIV) 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

This anticipation by the “whole creation” or “every creature” has been going on in past times, “up to the present time.” That has two possible meanings:

1. The anticipation has been going on and it is still going on even at the time of Paul’s writing.
2. The anticipation has been going on and now it is starting to see fulfillment in those who were being saved among the Gentiles.

Which ever of these possibilities is the case, this fulfillment is not the end of the anticipation. There is more to come!

For those who are already saved, there is a further anticipation of the full revelation and “adoption” as sons, specifically the redemption of our bodies – the resurrection.

What is meant by the “first fruits of the Spirit?” It could be either the very presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives which is the “earnest of our inheritance” or the Gifts of the Spirit which enable the work of the kingdom of God to be done on earth, or it is the fruit of the Spirit which is the manifestation of the character of Christ in the life of the believer. That could mean that the manifestation of the sons of God is the demonstration of the character of Christ in our lives.

24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

The hope Paul is writing about is the anticipation of the redemption of our bodies – the resurrection. Some false teachers were claiming that the conversion experience and being born again was the resurrection. Paul was making the argument that if that is all there is to the resurrection then we don’t have a lot to look forward to – “who hopes for what he already has?” While we can experience a measure of the manifestation of our status of son-ship, the full realization of it is yet to come.