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SPIRIT-BEGOTTEN SONS OF GOD AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT

"If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."—*Romans 8:13,14*

ONLY those who have the right spirit, disposition, will or intention, can keep the Divine Law, and only those who are in perfect harmony with God will He recognize as sons. The holy angels are sons of God on the angelic plane; and Christ and the Church in glory are sons of God on the Divine plane. All these are sons of God, yet they exist on different planes. They are all governed by the Spirit of God; and unless they had that Spirit, they could not be recognized as sons; for no one can keep the Divine Law except those who have the Divine disposition.

Before Adam fell he was a son of God. (*Luke 3:38*) He had the Spirit of God, in the sense of having the right spirit, disposition, will, intention. But after he had become a transgressor of the Divine Law, he was considered a sinner. All of Adam's race are still sinners except those who have come into Christ. In the Millennial Age, however, Adam's race will have the privilege of coming into Christ. He will be The Everlasting Father, the Father who will give everlasting life to all those who will obey the instructions given under the Messianic Kingdom.

In order to reach that condition of Divine approval, mankind must have the spirit of the Truth, and must be developed along that line. Before they will be counted, or recognized, as sons, they must have the spirit, or disposition, of righteousness. Until they attain that spirit, they will not be able to render acceptable service; for the Lord seeketh such to worship Him as worship Him in spirit and in truth. In their fallen condition mankind are not able to keep the Divine Law. Even during the Millennial Age they will keep it only in part, until they shall have been brought back to the image of God in the flesh.—*Genesis 1:26*.

WHO ARE THE SONS OF GOD?

Thus far there has been a very limited number of sons of God on earth, according to the Scriptures. Throughout the Jewish Age God was the Instructor and Guide of His people through Moses and the Prophets; but the Israelites were not sons of God, and they did not have the Spirit's begetting to sonship. On the contrary, they were only a House of Servants. (*Hebrews 3:5*) The Holy Spirit of God was not yet given to any of the fallen race; for Jesus was not yet glorified.—*John 7:39*.

The Scriptures speak of the Spirit of God as a special influence coming from God upon a special class, in a special manner, since a particular event—and not *before* that event. This coming of the Spirit was made manifest at Pentecost, so that it might stand out separate and distinct from anything that had ever before occurred. This power, or influence, is variously called the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of a sound mind, the Spirit of sonship. The various qualities described by these appellations are all applicable to the same class; namely, those who are begotten of the Spirit.

These spirit-begotten ones are a particular class who have taken up their cross and become followers of Christ, and who are on this account recognized of the Father by the begetting of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit of Truth so illuminates the Bible that the Revelation of God may be better understood by those who have the Holy Spirit. They are able to comprehend the things of God, which cannot be comprehended without it. While others not having this Spirit of God might get some truth from the Scriptures, this special class have the very essence of the Truth.

SOME NATURALLY DRAWN TO GOD

We call to mind certain Scriptures which speak of a leading of God's people prior to their begetting of the Holy Spirit. Speaking of a kind of drawing that came to those who afterward became His disciples, our Lord said, "No man can come to Me, except the Father who hath sent Me draw him." (*John 6:44*) This drawing is not the work of the Holy Spirit of begetting, which comes to those accepted of God through Christ and received as sons. On the contrary, that which the Scriptures speak of as a drawing of God, and which we have all experienced, seems to be a natural drawing along the lines of the flesh, not toward things sinful, but toward holiness, yet along lines which belong to the natural man.

For instance, when God created Adam, naturally he would love God, naturally he would desire to serve God, naturally he would desire to be obedient to God and to worship Him. These desires were all natural to him because he was in a natural condition—the condition in which he was created—*pure*. Sin has made mankind *unnatural*. But even after sin had entered in and had perverted the original character which God gave, certain longings for God remained in the human heart—even amongst depraved people. They would rather be in harmony with Him, be related to Him, have Him as their Protector and Friend.

God does not draw mankind by any other means than that original power which He implanted and which has not been altogether lost through the fall of the race of Adam. All mankind have degenerated from the image of God; but the desire for worship, for righteousness, for harmony with God, is much stronger in some people than in others. In proportion as one desires righteousness, in that proportion that one is drawn toward God, feels after God, if haply he might find his Creator. He is feeling after God because he wishes to *find* Him.

HOW THEY ARE DRAWN

This is the drawing, we believe, that comes to every one of us. Before we gave ourselves to God in consecration, we had a desire to come to Him, and that desire was something awakened in us. But it was there before it was awakened. Then something occurred that turned the thoughts toward God. Perhaps it was some great sorrow, some calamity, which drew the heart to God; and with it came the feeling that our grief should be taken to Him. Along with that desire, probably came the thought, "God will not hear me." This is a very proper conclusion, for there is no way of approach to God except through the Redeemer, who said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."

Just as the Roman centurion Cornelius needed instruction as to how to approach God, so the soul feeling after Divine assistance also needs instruction. We verily believe that thousands upon thousands have been turned away from God because of the creedal misrepresentations of His righteous character. When people begin to realize that our God is loving, just, merciful, they will turn to Him.

This, we believe, is the way in which we are drawn to the Father, whose influence is related to everything beautiful and harmonious in nature. Not until we have the desire to go back to God are we ready to be directed by the great Advocate; for when we come to the Advocate, He very pointedly says, "I cannot

receive you except upon one condition." That condition, He tells us, is that we take up our cross and follow Him. (*Matthew 16:24*) Consequently it would not be wise to tell anyone about the narrow way unless he had some drawing toward God.

We see, then, quite a clear distinction between the drawing of the Father—that drawing which persists everywhere—and what in the Scripture is called the Spirit of God. That Spirit is given only to the sons of God. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (*Romans 8:14*) That Spirit takes hold of them, guiding them in various ways—sometimes by putting property into their hands, sometimes by taking it away from them, sometimes by permitting sickness to come. The experiences of these sons of God enable them to grow in grace, in knowledge and in love, that thus they may be fitted and prepared for positions on the spirit plane.

THE SPIRIT Poured UPON ALL MANKIND

During the Millennial Age things will be somewhat different from what they are now. Christ will have representatives in the earthly phase of the Kingdom, and through them the Word of God will go forth to the people. As many as will then be drawn toward God will be privileged to come into relationship with Him through consecration. They will then receive the Spirit of God in the sense of *blessing*, but not in the sense of *begetting*, as the Church receives it now.

The Ancient Worthies of Hebrews 11, will be the earthly representatives of the Messianic Kingdom. The Christ, however, will be the great Teacher in glory, from whom all instruction will come through these earthly representatives. As people begin to get the true, the real knowledge about the glorious character of God, they will begin to see how inferior they are. Then they will be in condition to receive instruction.

No one will be compelled to have instruction, however; but whoever is out of accord with the Kingdom will have restrictions put upon him. The Prophet Zechariah, speaking of earthly affairs under the Kingdom, says, "And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain." (*Zechariah 14:17*) If we interpret the word *rain* symbolically, we perceive that the thought is that upon such nations there will be no Divine blessing—if there were no rain, there would be no fruitage. But the rain, the blessing, would be upon those who would be in harmony with the Lord.

When people come into harmony with God, they will consecrate their lives and their bodies to His service. Then they will begin to get the blessings in their minds and bodies; and in this sense of the word they will get more of the Spirit of the Lord—the Spirit of His mind. So through His Truth and through the Divine judgments of that time, the Lord will "pour out His Spirit upon all flesh." (*Joel 2:28*) In proportion as they receive His Spirit, they will come into the attitude of sonship.

But even then they would not be sons in the full sense of the term. We might say that the Church are not sons in the full sense of the word, but that we shall be sons indeed when we shall have experienced our resurrection change. So in the Millennial Age, as people come into harmony with the Divinely arranged Messianic Kingdom, they will be coming nearer and nearer to the standard of sonship. By the end of the Millennial Age they will have attained that condition of mentality which Adam had when he was perfect. All this blessing they will get through Christ and His associated Church.

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH

Because our Lord will give everlasting life to the world of mankind, He is called "The Everlasting Father," the Father who gives everlasting life. (*Isaiah 9:6*) All the willing and obedient will become His children during the Millennium. Then at the close of the Messianic Kingdom the children of The Christ will be introduced to their Grand-Father. Since they are to be sons of Christ, who is the Son of God, the Heavenly Father will be their Grand-Father. Then the whole world will be back into harmony with God as the sons of Christ.

During this Gospel Age, however, God is not operating upon the world. Whatever there is in the world of natural beauty is the result of the operation of the Power of God in a general way. Our text does not refer to this operation of God's Power, or Spirit, but to His influence upon the hearts of men. In the New Testament writings it refers to those who have become His people by making a full consecration of themselves and then being begotten of the Holy Spirit as New Creatures in Christ. (*2 Cor. 5:17*) All such are recipients of special Divine care.

The Scriptures speak of the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of the Father, the Spirit of Christ. All these are synonymous terms, which represent the Divine influence exercised upon the people of God. Having been begotten of the Spirit,

we should remember that, as the Apostle suggests, we are to be perfected. We must make a certain development. We progress until finally we are born in the First Resurrection. Perfection will be attained then, not before. Meantime, in order to be ready for that resurrection, a certain development *must* take place.

MAKING READY FOR SPIRIT CONDITIONS

In our context the Apostle is telling how we may attain to this life condition, how to make ready for the birth of the Spirit in due time. He says that such a development will be attained through the Spirit, or Power, of God. This Spirit operates in various ways. For instance, God's Message applies to the Church. Therefore the more we understand the Plan of God, the greater will be that Power in our hearts; and the deeper our consecration to the Divine will, the more sympathy will we have and the greater will be our desire to do the Divine good pleasure.

The change going on within our hearts is neither by men nor of men. God began this work in us. Therefore we must look to Him to complete the work which He has begun in our hearts by the Message He has given us. So we go to Him in prayer, and we study His Word, to know the meaning of that Word and thus to be enabled to put it into expression in our lives. Just as we require food to strengthen our mortal bodies, so we must also have spiritual food to strengthen the New Creature. This spiritual food God has given us abundantly, in order that we may get spiritual strength to understand His will better than before.

This operation of God through the Holy Spirit is a gradual work. So beclouded are we by the errors of our former beliefs that we are not prepared to see the deep things of God at the first glance. Therefore, we need to study, to meet together with those of like precious faith. Thus, we are helped to see the deep things.

GOD'S WILL CONCERNING US

As we come to understand the matter more clearly, our thought on the subject changes gradually. When we first came to God, we had the thought that God's will toward us was that we should enjoy ourselves, live good, moral lives, and take care of our bodies; and that if we are God's people, we should have abundance; and that those who could not live in harmony with God would be destroyed. This would be the thought of the natural man. The Apostle says that

the natural man cannot see the things of the Spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned. But this is not at all God's way of dealing with us.

By and by we begin to discern that our Heavenly Father prepares us for the spiritual things by showing us how to destroy the earthly condition and how this will be brought to an end. This is a new thought to us; and we ask ourselves, Does God wish me to mortify, deaden, destroy, the earthly condition? Am I not to seek to cultivate my talents and to live a natural life?

The natural man says, Follow natural things; do as you please so long as you are not interfering with the rights of others. But the New Creature is not to heed the natural inclinations of the flesh. We have asked the Lord to transform us, to renew our mind, and ultimately to give us what He has promised. Therefore, we do not belong to the world at all, and our course is to be that which is marked out in the Scriptures.

THE WORK OF THE NEW CREATURE

Our text does not mean that we are to mortify our bodies in the way that some have thought. According to history, there have been earnest souls in the past who have used whips on their bodies until they produced severe pain, and then have worn hair jackets, etc. Sometimes these bodily tortures have been carried so far that the skin would be covered with sores. Others have undertaken to mortify their bodies by lying down to be literally walked on, etc. We cannot question that whoever would do these things must have a motive for so doing, and we cannot think it a bad motive; nevertheless, we believe that those who do such things have a wrong conception of the meaning of our text.

By the expression, "Mortify the deeds of the flesh," the Scriptures mean that the people of God are to put to death in themselves all natural practices that are not in harmony with the Spirit of God. We are all born sinners, the Bible declares, and therefore we are not to follow the bent of our fallen nature. We are to have the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, which will guide us in the way in which we should go. We are to mortify every inclination of the body that is not indorsed by the new mind.

There are certain qualities of the mortal body that are to be destroyed, and therefore are to be warred against at all times. Then there are other qualities which are to be utilized in the service of righteousness. Once we were under sin; but now we have a new mind. Henceforth we are to treat the old creature as an earthen vessel merely. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, we are to know

how to do this. The first step in the process is to reckon our body dead. Having reckoned it dead toward sin and toward everything of an earthly nature, we are then to reckon it alive in the sense of awakening, quickening, all the tendencies, attributes, that can be brought into the service of God. This is the second step.

THE DAILY BATTLE OF THE SPIRIT-BEGOTTEN

After we have been begotten of the Spirit, we are New Creatures. In every sense of the word we are free from our body. Whatever parts of our human nature we find to be in opposition to God and His will we are to mortify, deaden, as soon as we discover them. This process is a continual warring against, fighting against, the old nature. The Apostle distinctly calls it a warring between the flesh and the Spirit (**Romans 7:19-25**). But while warring against certain elements which are legally dead, we find that the *flesh* is not *dead* actually. But if we live according to the Spirit, and not according to the flesh, God will not recognize the flesh, nor shall we. We shall recognize only the New Creature.

The battle is a daily one. All our members must be brought into harmony with God and His will. We are to endeavor to see everything from the Divine standpoint. The thought is not that we shall ever perfect these mortal bodies, but that while we are living on the earth and have to do with these bodies, it is our duty and our privilege to make the body do the will of the New Creature.

Our bodies were slaves to Sin. Now we say, "I have the right to control this body. I am a New Creature, but this is my body. I shall increase my power over this body, and use it more and more in the service of the Lord. It is not my intention to do foolish things—to leap from a pinnacle to see whether my body will remain alive; but under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I am to get out of it the most that I can, in the service of the new Master."

All this is necessary to our development in character. God has called the Church to glory, honor, immortality and joint-heirship with Christ. If we do not prove overcomers, we shall never be ready for so great an exaltation. This exalted position will not be given to any mortal merely because he says that he desires to be something different from what he is. On the contrary, we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Those who profess entire consecration to God must demonstrate this by putting away everything that is contrary to the Divine will. As these seek to build character, they will be growing "strong in the power of His might." Those who will pursue this course to the end

are the class that He is calling for, and those alone will prove worthy of the place to be given to the "more than overcomers."

REJOICING IN TRIBULATION

The world will have a thousand years during which to bring their bodies into harmony with the will of God. Gradually mankind will come to the place where they will be thoroughly loyal to the Lord. The stony heart will be taken away. To all those who through obedience reach this condition God will be pleased to give life everlasting.

But with the Church it is different. During this Gospel Age the Lord is selecting and directing those who of their own will desire to lay down their lives in His service. They love Him, and He is pleased to call them His holy ones. No good thing will He withhold from this class (**Psalm 84:11**). Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, what God hath in reservation for those that love Him (**Isaiah 64:4; 1 Corinthians 2:9**)—those who have through consecration been begotten of the Holy Spirit, and who are going forward from grace to grace, living not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (**Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:25**). For this class God has provided His very best things.

To this class the Scriptures declare that "through much tribulation we must enter into the Kingdom of God." (**Acts 14:22**) Some might say that these have a hard time. But all Christians can agree that it is possible to reach that degree of development where one can rejoice in all these experiences in which the flesh is being mortified, deadened. This is not because we are so different from other people that we like what they dislike, but because we see a reason why this tribulation is permitted. We know that this is God's plan for us; and by these evidences of mortification of the will of the flesh, of the things of the flesh, we see that we are growing in the favor of our Heavenly Father.

These have the peace of God ruling in their hearts. They know that all of their affairs are under Divine supervision. The world have their troubles and fears and forebodings. But those who have put their trust in the Lord have a peace which the world can neither give nor take away. But we cannot explain this to the world; for they cannot understand it.—**Philippians 4:7; John 14:27**