

What Is Your Destiny?



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The Question of the Ages

What is your destiny? Why do you exist? Is there a reason, a purpose, for human life? These questions have baffled the greatest thinkers and philosophers down through the ages.

We ponder the meaning of life. A child naturally wonders, “Where did I come from?” As adults we ask, especially in our twilight years: “Is this physical life all there is? Does my life have a purpose?”

Think about your own existence. Can you see a purpose for your own life with its ups and downs, its mixture of joys and sorrows? Do you sense lasting value in its toil, challenges and uncertainties?

Just *why* were you born? In the pages that follow, we will explore this, one of the greatest of all mysteries.

Man’s place in creation

Three thousand years ago King David considered the apparent insignificance of human beings when compared to the vastness of the night sky. As a shepherd, he had spent many nights outdoors gazing at the star-studded expanse overhead. Notice the thoughts he recorded in Psalm 8:3-4: “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?”

David wondered why, considering the magnificent and vast universe, God is so concerned with human beings and their future. He realized that, within the larger scope of the vast heavens, we can appear to be insignificant. Yet he perceived that, in the plan of the great Creator God, no part of God’s physical creation even begins to compare with His purpose for human beings.

Understanding that only God can reveal His purpose for creating us, David continued his reflection on the destiny of man: “For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have *dominion* over the works of Your hands; You have put *all things* under his feet, all sheep and oxen—even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas” (verses 5-8, emphasis added throughout).

David was reflecting on the dominion God gave mankind at creation, using some of the same language as Genesis 1:26. Here God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So man was made in God’s image to rule over His creation.

David realized that God has already granted people the capacity to manage a significant part of His creation—our planet and its wonders. But he knew that *much more was to come*.

David’s words in Psalm 8 are quoted in Hebrews 2:6-8, with an explanatory comment at the end: “But there is a place where someone has testified: ‘What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet.’ In putting *everything* under him, *God left nothing that*

is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him” (New International Version).

“Everything” here is translated from the Greek *ta panta*, meaning “the all”—essentially, “the universe.” *This* is what God has determined to be in subjection to man—but, as clarified here, *not yet*.

Indeed, as he gazed at the celestial grandeur overhead, David may well have recalled God’s amazing proclamation given through Moses that “the sun,



As a shepherd David spent many nights outdoors gazing at the star-studded expanse overhead. He perceived that no part of God’s creation begins to compare with His purpose for human beings.

the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven . . . the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage” (Deuteronomy 4:19).

This is astounding to contemplate! These verses reveal that man was created to share dominion with God *over the entire created universe*. Yet this is *only one aspect of an even greater reality*.

Beyond our wildest dreams

What does it mean to say that God made mankind “a little lower than the angels”? As David looked at the vast expanse above him, was he really saying that man was only a little lower than immortal spirit beings? As mortal, material creatures, we are far, far below what Scripture reveals about the power and glory of beings in the heavenly realm.

Instead of “a little lower,” perhaps a better rendering is the New American Standard Bible’s translation of Hebrews 2:7: “You have made him *for a little while* lower than the angels . . .” This seems likely, considering the vast gulf between us and the heavenly realm, and the implication is stunning. For if we are only *temporarily* at a lower level of existence than the angels, then what does that say of the future?

Consider again what God said in Genesis 1:26: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion . . .” In all of God’s physical creation, He made *only man* in the image and likeness of Himself. He

gave *only man* dominion or rule over the creation. *Mankind is unique* within the creation of God. And God has planned for us an unfathomable destiny!

The apostle Paul said of God's marvelous plan, "This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to his own holy

The Spirit in Man

Human beings do have a spiritual component to our makeup. As Job 32:8 says, "There is a spirit in man." And the apostle Paul pointed out, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him" (1 Corinthians 2:11).

It is this human spirit that imparts human

has no consciousness apart from the body, for man is mortal. When we die, we will have no awareness of anything at all—until, that is, the future time when God places our individual spirits within new bodies He will give us, thereby bringing us back to life.

The human spirit is critical to our destiny,



The spirit in man imparts human intellect to our physical brains. It is what makes people vastly more intelligent than animals.

intellect to our physical brains, creating the human mind. It is what makes people vastly more intelligent than animals.

Yet this spiritual aspect of human existence is nothing like the immortal soul concept. The spirit in man is not animate of itself. It is not a spirit entity that "lives on" after death. As Scripture shows, the human spirit



since God's Holy Spirit joining with it is what makes us God's children (Romans 8:16). And just as the human spirit gives us human understanding, so God's Spirit gives us higher, godly understanding (1 Corinthians 2:10-16). We are not born with the Holy Spirit but receive it from God following repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38).

people" (Colossians 1:26, New Living Translation; compare 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 3:9).

Throughout the ages the overwhelming majority of people have failed to grasp the amazing future God has in store for those who develop a proper relationship with Him. As the apostle Paul put it: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and *no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him*" (1 Corinthians 2:9, NLT).



Man was created to share dominion with God over the entire created universe. Yet this is only one aspect of an even greater reality.

The Scriptures tell us that our destiny can exceed anything we could imagine in our wildest dreams! Isn't it time we let God explain—from His Word—what He has in mind for us?

A prophetic passage gives us our first clue to our fantastic future. Speaking of the resurrection of the dead, it tells us that a time is coming when "many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." It adds: "*Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever*" (Daniel 12:2-3, New Revised Standard Version).

This is *just a hint* of the amazing future God has planned for us—to *live forever, shining in glory like brilliant stars!*

What man is now

Before we can comprehend man's eternal destiny, however, we need to clearly understand what man is now. We are physical beings composed of the chemical substances of earth. That is how God created us: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).

But almost all ancient religions taught the error that man is a nonmaterial spirit entity confined for a time in physical flesh. They taught that man has a dual composition, that a human being is both a physical body and an immortal soul.

Even today most people believe that after our physical body dies, our supposedly immortal "soul" will continue as a living and conscious entity apart from the body. This idea that we have a soul that is immortal is never taught in the Holy Scriptures. It came to us from the superstitions of ancient religions—possibly as far back as Eden, when Satan convinced Eve she would not die if she disobeyed God (Genesis 3:2-4).

On the contrary, the Bible clearly tells us that our "soul" is mortal, rather than

immortal, because it can die (Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Matthew 10:28). Indeed, the words commonly translated “soul” in Scripture—Hebrew *nephesh* in the Old Testament and Greek *psyche* in the New—refer simply to physical, mortal creatures. They are used not only to refer to human beings, but to many kinds of animals, including birds, reptiles and fish.

The Bible makes it plain that immortality is *not* something we *already possess*. Paul clearly tells us that *God alone* has immortality (1 Timothy 6:13-16). He explains that we are “corruptible” and “mortal” and that “this mortal *must put on* immortality” by being changed from corruptible to incorruptible existence when Jesus Christ returns at the last trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:51-53; compare 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 11:15).

At this present time God’s servants are those who “*seek for* glory, honor, and immortality” (Romans 2:7)—showing they are not already immortal. But they do understand that, by sacrificing His life for ours, Jesus Christ “has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10). Immortality is available only through mankind’s Savior, Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

Again, man is mortal! Human life is temporary! We are physical beings who can die; we can cease to exist. Our life does not reside in some supposedly immortal soul. No such teaching can be found in the Scriptures. When we die, our consciousness ceases (Psalm 6:5; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10); it doesn’t continue in an altered form.

There *is* a spiritual element to man’s existence, but it is nothing like the concept of an immortal soul (see “The Spirit in Man,” page 4).

God’s gift of life to come

Many passages reveal that our only hope for eternal life lies in being *resurrected from the dead* in a transformed body just as Jesus Christ was. (For a thorough explanation of what really occurs at death and afterward, and the many misconceptions associated with the afterlife, be sure to write for our booklets *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* and *What Happens After Death?*)

Moreover, the Bible also makes it clear that being resurrected to immortality comes only through the gracious mercy of God: “For the wages of sin is *death* [not immortal life in some other form or place], but the gift of God is *eternal life* in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Eternal life is the *gift* God has in store for those who turn from the way of sin and begin obeying Him from the heart. Again, it is not something human beings inherently possess. Rather, it is something God offers to us—if we turn from our old sinful ways and, through Christ, accept His forgiveness and direction for our life.

This is what He wants for everyone: “God our Savior . . . desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4). He is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). God desires to give us the precious gift of life forevermore. He will do everything He can to ensure that we receive the eternal destiny He has planned for us!

But just what is that destiny? Let’s look further at what the Bible reveals.

Destination and Course Correction: Planned From the Outset

The apostle Paul tells us that God made plans for our marvelous future even before He created our first parents, Adam and Eve. He planned our destiny “according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus *before time began*” (2 Timothy 1:9).

Our eternal future was a part of God’s great plan and purpose before this world came to be. Even then, God had determined that only a perfect Redeemer could bring His master plan to completion—as He foresaw that human beings would veer from the course He set for them.

At the creation of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, God presented a choice between two ways of life. He clearly instructed these first human beings to partake of the tree

chose to rely on themselves. They set off on a wrong course that is a *mixture* of good and evil.

By their decision, they brought on themselves the penalty of sin, which is suffering and ultimately death (Romans 6:23). Since their time, all of humanity has followed their example and become corrupted by sin (Romans



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of life. As their Creator, God wanted them to develop a close personal relationship with Him. The tree of life in the Garden of Eden symbolized an obedient relationship leading to eternal life (Genesis 2:9; 3:22).

However, there was another option—one that would lead to disaster! Instead of choosing life through obeying Him, they could select a life of *deciding for themselves* what is right and wrong in disobedience to God. Another tree in the garden symbolized this choice—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-6). God explicitly commanded them not to take from this tree, but He didn’t *prevent* them from doing so. He allowed them free will.

By their determined actions, Adam and Eve rejected the way of living that God had commanded (Genesis 3:6). Rather than relying on God to show them the right way to live, they

5:12). *All* have fallen short of God’s revealed way of life (Romans 3:23). Humanity to this day continues in that way, which leads to death (verses 9-12).

For that reason God’s plan includes a Savior, the Messiah—“the [sacrificial] Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Through Jesus Christ’s sacrifice, human beings can be reconciled to God, and God’s forgiveness of their sin will remove the death penalty (Colossians 1:20-22).

With God’s forgiveness and help, man can be set back on course to receiving from Him the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23; 8:11). The destiny of man lies in this eternal life. (Read about how human beings can be reconciled to God in our free booklets *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *The Road to Eternal Life*.)

God's Own Literal Children

Scripture reveals that all people have descended from the first two human beings, Adam and Eve. We are their extended family. Through direct creation in God's likeness, Adam was a son of God (Luke 3:38; compare Genesis 5:1-3). Therefore, since we are descended from Adam, we are also children of God. God is our Father because He fathered our first human father. As Acts 17:28-29 tells us, "We are the offspring of God."

But *God's purpose goes far beyond the creation of mortal, perishable human beings*. He is in the process of fashioning and forming "a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17), fathering His own spiritual children—immortal and incorruptible children imbued with His very nature and character.

The more we understand just what that means, the more awestruck we will become—at not only the majesty of God's purpose but at what this entails *for each of us personally*.

A family in God's image

Paul explains this new creation by contrasting the "old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires," with the "new self, *created to be like God* in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24, NIV).

Paul is describing a much-needed spiritual transformation in people. It first involves a change in a person's nature and character. This is followed by the resurrection—a total metamorphosis into a spirit being with eternal life.

God is accomplishing this transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit. A biblical term for this spiritual transformation is *salvation*. Paul describes those who will receive salvation as the children of God: "The Spirit itself [that is, God's Holy Spirit] beareth witness with our spirit [our individual human spirit], that *we are the children of God*: and if children, then heirs; *heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ*; if so be that we suffer with him, *that we may be also glorified together*" (Romans 8:16-17, King James Version).

Can we start to grasp the significance of Paul's inspired statement? It explains why we are here, the very reason for our existence, *why we were born*. It gives meaning to life itself. It explains why God wants all people to come to the knowledge of the truth. God, the Scriptures tell us, *is creating a family—His own family*. We have the priceless opportunity to be a part of that family, the *family of God!*

That family relationship—our becoming *children of God the Father*—is the heart and core of God's incredible plan for humanity!

From the beginning this purpose has been clearly stated by God. Note again the words of Genesis 1: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man *in Our image, according to Our likeness* . . . So God created man *in His own image*; . . . male

and female He created them" (verses 26-27). Men and women are created *in God's image and likeness*, to be *like Him*.

This language concerns family. Consider that it was after creating plants and animals to reproduce each "according to its kind" that God said, "Let *Us* make man *in Our* image, according to *Our* likeness" (verse 26). This shows that man was created according to the "*God* kind." Indeed, to help us understand the parallel with God creating man *in His image and likeness*, Genesis 5:3 says that the first man Adam later "begot a son *in his own likeness, after his image*, and named him Seth." So God was essentially *reproducing Himself* through humanity. We'll see more about this shortly.



God makes it clear that His family includes people who are now physical men and women, both sons and daughters: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither

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slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26-28).

The Bible often collectively refers to physical children of both genders as "sons" because that was the custom at the time the Bible was written. That custom has continued in many languages over the centuries. In the Hebrew and Greek languages, in which the Bible was originally written, "sons" was used to refer to "descendants" generally. We similarly use the words *mankind* and *brethren* in a collective sense to include both sexes.

God also tells us, "I will be a Father to you, and *you shall be My sons and daughters*, says the LORD Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:18). Just as both men and women are God's children through physical creation, so both can be God's children *through spiritual means*.

Truly God's children?

But when God calls us His children and instructs us to call Him our Father, is this meant in a real sense? Is God actually *engendering* a family of others like Himself through a process of reproduction? Or is this meant in the same sense as God being a Father to the human race through creation?

By act of creation God is also a Father to the angels, calling them "sons of God" in Job 38:7. But there is a more important sense in which He desires to be a Father to human beings—a privilege not bestowed on the angels.

We can start to see this in the book of Hebrews: “For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You’? And again: ‘I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son’?” (1:5). In this passage, a comparison is being drawn between the status of the angels and that of Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God. Yet there is an application to human beings here as well.

Jesus, we must recognize, stands in a unique position as God’s “only begotten Son” (John 1:18; 3:16; 1 John 4:9). As the divine Word, He was God with the Father before His human conception (John 1:1-3, 14). Then, through God the Father exercising the power of the Holy Spirit, He was supernaturally conceived as the human being Jesus Christ in the womb of Mary while she was yet a virgin (Luke 1:35; Matthew 1:20).

Jesus had no immediate human father. Rather, God the Father was directly His Father in even a physical sense through the Holy Spirit. Simultaneously, Jesus was also begotten of the Father to spiritual life through the same Spirit (compare John 5:26; 6:63). And at His resurrection, following His death, Christ returned to His former glory with the Father, having prayed just before He died, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5).

While other human beings are not *physically* conceived the supernatural way Christ was, they can follow Him in being *spiritually* fathered by God—though later in their physical existence. Converted Christians are also referred to as “*begotten*” of God (1 Peter 1:3; 1 John 5:1, 18, KJV), as *children of God* (John 1:12; Romans 8:16, 21; 1 John 3:1-2), as *sons of God* (Matthew 5:9; Romans 8:14, 19; Galatians 3:26) and, as earlier stated, as God’s “*sons and daughters*” (2 Corinthians 6:18).

Indeed, they are described in 1 Peter 1:23 as “having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed [Greek *sperma*—that is, not of a male sperm cell fertilizing a female egg to produce only mortal, perishable life], but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth” (American Standard Version).

This incorruptible, imperishable life to which they are led by Scripture comes by God implanting His Spirit within them, for “the Spirit alone gives eternal life” (John 6:63, New Living Translation). Indeed, the Holy Spirit is the agency of spiritual conception. Note again Paul’s words in Romans 8:16: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (KJV). And through that Spirit it becomes possible for us to be “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), the very nature of God.

Returning to the book of Hebrews, we should understand that the language of being begotten by God, while not applicable to the angels, is applicable not just to Jesus Christ but also to His followers. “Angels,” we are told, “are only servants—spirits sent to care for people who will inherit salvation” (1:14, NLT).

These converted human beings are God’s children, Christ’s brothers who, like Him, are begotten of God. Christ, we are further told, is “bringing *many* sons to glory . . . For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one [that is, of the same Father or the same family, other translations note], for

which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (2:10-11).

Jesus is to be the “*firstborn* among *many* brethren” (Romans 8:29). These must be “born of the Spirit” (John 3:6) to become like Him, who now, as a “life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45), sits “at the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12).

Indeed, they will yet join Him in glory as fellow “sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36)—Christ being the “*firstborn* from the *dead*” (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5).

Thus it should be plain that Spirit-converted Christians *truly and literally become God’s children through spiritual regeneration*—being begotten again through the Holy Spirit to new life. So God really is producing us according to His “kind,” as Genesis 1 implies—not just as physical models in the flesh but as *spiritual entities like Himself* (John 4:24). A few verses have been read to say that Christians are *adopted* sons of God rather than His actual begotten sons, but this is based on a misunderstanding (see “Adoption or Sonship?” beginning on page 16).

We will be like Jesus Christ

Recognizing that we’re made in God’s image and to follow in Christ’s footsteps into future glory, let’s give further thought to what this entails. How completely can we be like God when all is said and done?

God’s purpose is to make us fully like Jesus Christ! In Ephesians 4 Paul makes this clear. He explains that members of God’s Church are to “come . . . to the measure of the stature *of the fullness of Christ*” (verse 13). Paul’s comment in Galatians 4:19, “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,” expresses the same concept in different words.

Do you glimpse the significance of what Paul is saying in explaining that we will have the fullness of Christ? We can become fully and completely like Jesus Christ, with His character formed in us. But that’s not all!

As we’ve seen, Jesus, the Son of God, is also God the Son. He is God *along with* God the Father—two divine Beings united in profound oneness (for more on this, see “The God Family” beginning on page 12.)

As Jesus is God’s Son, our destiny is also to be the immortal children of God. Of course, Jesus is God’s Son in a unique way, as we’ve seen. Unlike us, He was the divine Word of God from eternity with the Father (John 1:1). Nevertheless, the New Testament declares that Jesus is, as we’ve also seen, “the *firstborn* among many brethren” (Romans 8:29) and makes clear that His followers are *also* the sons of God.

The apostle John explains what this ultimately means: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called *children of God!* . . . Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:1-3).

Human beings inducted into the family God is creating will ultimately be *glorified spirit beings like the resurrected Jesus Christ* (Philippians 3:20-21), who reigns over the universe in His glorified state at the right hand of God the Father.

This is what is meant by Daniel's description of righteous people in the future "shin[ing] . . . like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:2-3, NRSV). Human beings resurrected to eternal life will be *like the glorified Jesus Christ!*

But what does this really mean? Consider that human children are *like* their parents and *like* their brothers and sisters. They are all the same kind of beings—*human* beings. In the same way, ultimately God's children will be *like* Him and *like* Jesus Christ their divine Brother.

Jesus Christ, God the Son, is *like* God the Father—with the same kind of glory and power. These passages of Scripture tell us that God's other children, glorified when resurrected, will be *like* the Father and Christ! They will be *the same kind of beings* the Father and Christ are—*divine* beings, as hard as that may be to believe!

The God Family

Scripture clearly states that there is only one God (Isaiah 46:9; Malachi 2:10; Romans 3:30; James 2:19). Nevertheless, it is evident that the one God comprises more than one Being existing together as a divine family (compare Ephesians 3:14-15)—of which the human family is a physical type.

The Hebrew word translated "God" throughout the Old Testament is *Elohim*, a plural noun pointing to more than one almighty Being—essentially "Gods." However, it is normally singular in usage when referring to the true God of Israel, being paired in such cases with singular verbs and adjectives. Where such passages are quoted in the New Testament, the Greek word used to translate the term is the singular *Theos*, meaning God.

We have a comparable example in American English of a noun being plural in form but singular in usage—the national name United States. While the plural form represents a true plurality of states, singular usage shows the constituent states to form a unit. We might say, "The United States *is* going to intervene," but not—since the country's early years—"The United States *are* . . ." Thus there is one United States made up of a plurality of states that are united. Even so, there is one God consisting of more than one divine Being. Indeed, in two telling places in the book of Genesis,

rather than using the singular pronouns "Me" or "My," God uses the *plural* pronouns "*Us*" or "*Our*" (1:26; 3:22). The New Testament reveals two Beings as God—God the Father and the Word, the One who became Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14).

Christ's title *the Word* refers to His position as the One who speaks and acts on the Father's behalf (compare John 8:26-28; 12:49-50; 14:10). Numerous passages refer to Jesus Christ as God (Isaiah 9:6; John 20:27-28; 1 Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8-9).

The plural aspect of God is often taken as evidence supporting the doctrine of the Trinity, which maintains that God is three distinct persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in a single being. Yet this idea runs counter to reason and sound logic.

More importantly, this doctrine is unscriptural. Again, God—that is, the God family—that present comprises God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is never listed in Scripture as a third person who is also God. For instance, the apostle Paul says we are to be aspiring to understand the "mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2-3). There is no mention here of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not a person but is the

The awesome potential of any person, as it is presented to us in God's Word, seems so incredible that most people cannot grasp this biblical truth when they first read it. Although it is plainly stated in the Bible, people usually read right over it. In fact, this awesome future is *the whole purpose and reason* that God made mankind. It is why we were born, why we exist!

You are gods?

Let's get to the heart of this matter. The Jews of Jesus' day accused Him of blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God: "Because You, being a Man, make Yourself God" (John 10:33).

Notice His intriguing response: "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your

power, mind, life and shared essence of God (compare Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Romans 15:13; Romans 8:27; 1 Corinthians 2:16; John 4:24; 5:26; 6:63).

Furthermore, contrary to the Trinitarian view that the Father and Son are coequal in authority (along with the Holy Spirit), Jesus Christ not



The human family was meant as a lesser model or type of this greater spiritual reality—that God is a family.

only said, "My Father . . . is greater than *all*" (John 10:29), but He even said, "My Father is greater than *I*" (14:28; see also 1 Corinthians 11:3; 15:27-28).

The Trinity doctrine has done much to obscure the plain truth of Scripture that God is a family. God is the name of the Father, and it is also the name of the Son—as well as of both of Them together. Moreover, God intends for this family name to also be the name of other

sons He is in the process of bringing to glory, as the rest of this booklet explains.

Irenaeus, a second-century bishop, was right when he observed: "There is none other called God by the Scriptures except the Father of all, and the Son, and those who possess the adoption [i.e., sonship as God's children]" (*Against Heresies*, Book 4, preface; compare Book 3, chap. 6). Note that there is no hint here of a Trinitarian formula in this early time period. That doctrine wasn't formulated until much later.

Again, God is a *family*—presently consisting of two divine Beings, the Father and Christ, but with more to come who will likewise bear the family name. Indeed, the human family was meant as a lesser model or type of this greater spiritual reality. Marriage is another aspect of this, as it is God's intention for those who are

added to His family to enter a divine marriage relationship with Jesus Christ, the human covenant being patterned after the higher, God-plane relationship (compare Ephesians 5:22-23; Revelation 19:7-9).

To learn more about what the Bible has to say on these matters, be sure to send for or download our free booklets *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*, *Who Is God?* and *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*.

law [in Psalm 82:6], “I said, ‘You are gods’”? If He [God] called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, “You are blaspheming,” because I said, “I am the Son of God”?” (John 10:34-36).

In other words, said Christ, “if Scripture outright called human beings *gods*, why are you upset when I merely state that I am God’s *Son*?”

Yet are human beings actually gods? What did He mean?

In Psalm 82:6, from which



The Spirit-begotten Christian is a child of God, an actual member of the God family—but not yet in an ultimate sense. As children, we must still go through a development process in this life—a period of building godly character, becoming more and more like God.

Jesus quoted, God says to human beings, “I said, ‘You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.’” The key here is the word *children*, just as we’ve seen in other verses. We must understand that God is *a family—a divine family of more than one person*. There is *one* God (the God *family*) comprising *more* than one God *Being*. (Again, see “The God Family” beginning on page 12.)

As noted earlier, the God family from the beginning comprised two divine Beings—God and the Word, the latter becoming flesh 2,000 years ago as the Son of God, Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14). After Jesus’ human life and death, He was resurrected to divine spirit existence as the “*firstborn* from the dead” (Colossians 1:18) and “*firstborn among many brethren*” (Romans 8:29). Thus Jesus was spiritually born in the resurrection as the *first* of many “brethren” or children to follow later.

Again, as pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, Acts 17:28-29 states that human beings are God’s “offspring” (the Greek word *genos* here meaning “kindred,” “race,” “kind,” “stock” or “family”). And as we saw from Genesis 1, God’s purpose in creating man in His own image and likeness was to make him according to the “God kind”—to thus reproduce Himself through mankind.

Psalm 82 is much easier to understand in this light. In verse 6 the word *gods* is equated with “children of the Most High.” That makes perfect sense. When any entity bears offspring, its offspring are *the same kind* of entity. The offspring of cats are cats. The offspring of dogs are dogs. The offspring of human beings are human beings. The offspring of God are, in Christ’s own words, “gods.”

PictureQuest

But we must be careful here. Human beings are not *literally* gods—not yet, at any rate. Indeed, people initially are not literally even God’s children, except in the sense that He created humanity and did so in His image and likeness.

God is eternal spirit. Human beings are mortal flesh, albeit with a spiritual component, as noted earlier—the human spirit that gives us understanding. This is an important distinction.

In Psalm 82, when human beings are referred to as *gods*—in the sense of being God’s offspring intended to represent Him in authority and judgment throughout the earth—they are still declared imperfect and subject to corruption and death. So they are of the divine family in only a restricted sense.

One aspect of this is that man has been created in God’s image and likeness on a physical, mortal level with limited dominion, resembling God but without His divine character and glory. Another aspect of this is that man has the *ultimate potential* of becoming the same kind of beings the Father and Christ now are.

In fact, God often “calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Romans 4:17, KJV)—looking on His purpose as already accomplished. Amazingly, God’s purpose is to *exalt human beings* from this fleshly existence *to the same level of divine spirit existence* that He has, as we will see.

Toward the ultimate outcome—divine glory

This involves the process mentioned earlier of *spiritual* reproduction in which God fathers us as His children. Indeed, with a fuller picture now of what God is doing, let’s revisit that for a moment. The spiritual reproductive process starts with God’s Spirit joining with our human spirit. Again: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16, KJV). Through this miraculous union, we become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

Thus the Spirit-begotten Christian is a child of God, an actual member of the God family—but not yet in an ultimate sense. As children, we must still go through a *development process* in this life—a period of building godly character, becoming more and more like God in the way we think and behave. And at the end of this life, in the resurrection at Christ’s return, true Christians will be changed into divine spirit beings like the Father and Christ.

Look once again at this amazing truth recorded by the apostle John: “Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

In fact, to expand on this, we are told in numerous passages of Scripture that we will receive the divine glory of the Father and Christ: “In his kindness God called you *to share in his eternal glory* by means of Christ Jesus” (1 Peter 5:10, NLT; see also Romans 5:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; Colossians 1:27; Hebrews 2:10).

Moreover, as coinheritors with Christ, we will receive dominion over all things, including the entire vast universe—dominion just as Christ has (compare

Adoption or Sonship?

As this booklet makes clear, Scripture reveals that man's destiny is to be fathered by God in an actual sense, with His Holy Spirit implanted into our minds to engender us as His literal begotten children. Yet a few verses from the apostle Paul have been interpreted to say that God *adopts* us rather than directly *begets* us as His children. What difference does it make? And what is the truth of the matter?

As typically rendered, Romans 8:15 says that Christians "have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (KJV). Verse 23 says that we "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body." The next chapter says that Israel, God's nation, was given the promise of, according to most English translations, "adoption" (9:4). Similarly, Galatians 4:5 and Ephesians 1:5 in the New King James Version both use the phrase "adoption as sons" for the standing God gives us.

A number of versions, however, instead use the term "sonship" or something like it, as the New International Version does in Romans 8:15. In its entry on "adoption," *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (1985) explains that the original Greek word here is "*huiothesia* . . . from *huios*, 'a son,' and *thesis*, 'a placing,' akin to *tithemi*, 'to place'"—so the placing as a son. Scholars have noted that this word was used a few times in the ancient Greek world in reference to adoption, and that is certainly fitting.

Adoption means taking a child of other parents as one's own son or daughter. It is a wonderful and noble act to provide a home and family to one who needs it—and it is typically a great blessing to both the adoptive parents and the child. There are many who accept and love their adopted children as much as they would a child of their own body—as well they should, for he or she is a human being made in the image of God. (Consider that Jesus Christ Himself was essentially adopted

by Joseph, who was not His real father—that being God the Father.)

Yet there are problems in applying the terminology of adoption to our relationship with God.

Some might imagine that we are transferred from our biological parentage or from the devil as a father (see John 8:44) to God as our new parent. Yet all human beings are ultimately God's offspring from the start even biologically (Acts 17:28-29)—as He was the Father of Adam and Eve by creation (Luke 3:38) and because He is involved in the procreative process in the womb (Psalm 139:13-16).

Satan has been a father to people only in the sense of wielding dominion and influence over them and raising them in his way. Yet they are truly *God's* children—and He redeems them (buys them back) through His plan of salvation. Moreover, when God spiritually engenders us as His own children, produced from His own being, this in no way equates to adoption.

Vine's states: "The KJV, 'adoption of children' is a mistranslation and misleading. God does not 'adopt' believers as children; they are begotten as such by His Holy Spirit through faith." This is important to recognize—as it directly impacts our destiny. In human adoption, the adopted children are human just as much as the new parents—yet only because the children were adopted from other human parents who physically begot them. But if God merely adopted us and did not truly beget us in His image, we would be different kinds of beings from Him altogether—as He would not be adopting us from others like Himself. It could be likened in some sense to adopting a pet as a family member (albeit one that could talk).

Sadly, this is close to what many envision—that we are and forever will be totally different, lesser kinds of beings than God. And so they have no problem with taking the Greek word in question in the verses we've seen to mean adoption. But this notion of God's purpose for us is not the truth, as Scripture makes clear that God actually

begets us spiritually in His own image—with the intention that we ultimately become the same kind of beings He and Jesus Christ now are.

So what was Paul talking about? While *huiothesia* (placing or setting as a son) was certainly applicable to adoption, Paul obviously meant it in a different sense.

We can start to see what he means in Galatians 4:1-5, where the NIV translates the word as

Scripture makes clear that God actually begets us spiritually in His own image—with the intention that we ultimately become the same kind of beings He and Jesus Christ now are.

"full rights of sons." Notice why from the context: "What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive *the full rights of sons*" (verses 1-5, NIV).

Note that in the parallel the one receiving the *huiothesia* (the setting as a son) was already the child of his father who was setting him as such. So this circumstance was not adoption.

Paul's imagery fit well with the Roman world of the time. Historian Will Durant tells us: "The child found itself absorbed into the most basic and characteristic of Roman institutions—the patriarchal family. The power of the father was nearly absolute . . . He alone of the family had any rights before the law in the early Republic . . . Over his children he had the power of life, death, and sale into slavery" (*The Story of Civilization, Vol. 3: Caesar and Christ*, 1972, p. 57). By Paul's day this had softened somewhat, but it was still generally the case.

During a boy's teen years, his father would determine when it was time for him to pass from

childhood to adulthood—typically around 14 or a little later. In a formal public ceremony, having put aside his childhood toga, he would appear in the *toga virilis* (toga of manhood), mark of citizenship and his right to now vote in the assembly:

"When the boy was ready, the procession to the Forum began. The father had gathered his slaves, freedmen, clients, relatives and friends, using all his influence to make his son's escort numerous and imposing. Here the boy's name was added to the list of citizens, and formal congratulations were extended . . . Finally they all returned to the house,

where the day ended with a dinner party given by the father in honour of the new Roman citizen" (Roman Children," ClassicsUnveiled.com).

A son's status was elevated at this point. He was now legally invested with all the rights, powers and privileges of a son and heir of his father—and of a citizen.

This coming of age at maturity must be what Paul is referring to. God has begotten us as His children. And in one sense He reckons us as already having reached a certain maturity—considering us beyond the status of being as slaves to being set as sons with certain privileges (even though we are as mere babes!). Yet the fullness of our coming of age is yet future—at the time of "the revealing of the sons of God" in the resurrection (Romans 8:19).

Notice Romans 8:23 in the New Living Translation: "And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering. We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us *our full rights as his children* [*huiothesia*], including the new bodies he has promised us."

So these verses from Paul do not in any way take away from our destiny as God's full and literal children. Indeed, they only confirm and clarify this incredible biblical truth!

Romans 8:17; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:5-9; Revelation 21:7). To truly exercise dominion over all things—including the raging thermonuclear furnaces of 50 billion trillion suns and every subatomic particle of every atom of every molecule in the cosmic expanse—*requires the omnipotent power of God*.

And what about our minds? As human beings, we couldn't count all the individual stars of the universe, at one per second, in a trillion lifetimes. But God, in a passing remark, says He knows all the stars by name (Psalm 147:4). Amazingly, Paul states, "Now I know in part, but then I shall know *just as I also am known* [that is, by God]" (1 Corinthians 13:12), showing that we will possess the omniscience of God. And why not, for we will have the Holy Spirit, the mind of God, in full!

Consider this: Converted human beings are to one day possess divine nature, divine glory and total power over the creation, sharing God's infinite knowledge. *All of this requires nothing less than divinity!*

Indeed, at that time, like Jesus, we will at last be "*filled with all the fullness of God*" (Ephesians 3:19; compare Colossians 1:19; 2:9). How can someone be filled with all the fullness of God and be anything *less* than what God is? Therefore, at our ultimate change, we too *will be divine*—though the Father and Christ will forever be greater than us.

The teaching of deification

This biblical truth will surely come as quite a shock to those who have heard only the traditional view of mainstream Christianity regarding the ultimate reward of the righteous. Yet those who might be quick to assail this teaching will perhaps be even more surprised to learn that many early "church fathers" of mainstream tradition—not so far removed from early apostolic teaching—*did understand* this incredible truth, at least in part. And hints of this are sometimes seen even today.

Notice paragraphs 398 and 460 of the current *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1995), footnoted sources in brackets:

"Created in a state of holiness, man was destined to be fully 'divinized' by God in glory [but sinned] . . .

"The Word [Jesus Christ] became flesh to make us 'partakers of the divine nature' [2 Peter 1:4]: 'For this is why the Word [Christ] became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God' [Irenaeus (2nd century), *Against Heresies* Book 3, chap. 19, sec. 1].

"'For the Son of God became man *so that we might become God*' [Athanasius (4th century), *On the Incarnation of the Word*, chap. 54, sec. 3]. 'The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us share in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, *might make men gods*' [Thomas Aquinas (13th century), *Opusculum* 57, lectures 1-4]" (pp. 112, 128-129, emphasis added).

This teaching is even more prevalent in Eastern Orthodox tradition, where it is known by the Greek term *theosis*, meaning "divinization" or "deification." It is

wholly unlike the New Age concept of absorption into universal consciousness or seeing oneself as inherently and presently divine. Notice the remarkable explanation of the early Catholic theologian Tertullian, writing around A.D. 200:

"It would be impossible that another God could be admitted, when it is permitted to no other being to possess anything of God. Well, then, you say, at that rate we ourselves possess nothing of God. But indeed we do, and will continue to do so. Only it is from *Him* that we receive it, and not from *ourselves*. For we will be even gods, if we deserve to be among those of whom He declared, 'I have said, "You are gods,"' and 'God stands in the congregation of the gods.' But this comes of His own grace, not from any property in us. For it is He alone who can make gods" (*Against Hermogenes*, chap. 5, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, p. 480, quoted in "Deification of Man," David Bercot, editor, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, 1998, p. 200).

Indeed, this was the standard view during the early Christian centuries (see "Early Theologians on Becoming Divine" beginning on page 20).

More recent authors have also glimpsed this biblical truth. C.S. Lewis, perhaps the most popular Christian writer of the last century, wrote: "The command *Be ye perfect* [Matthew 5:48] is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. He said (in the Bible) that we were 'gods' and He is going to make good His words.

"If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said" (*Mere Christianity*, 1996, p. 176).

The ultimate family relationship

Of course, this matter requires some important clarification. The Bible's teaching is not that we will somehow mystically become a singular being with God, losing our individual identities. The reality is that God is *a family*. And just as individual members of a human family are distinct entities with unique identities, *so will it be in the God family*.

Yet through the Holy Spirit the members of the God family will share a special oneness of mind, purpose and nature that goes far beyond the common identity and union that is possible within the human family.

Indeed, there is only one God, but that God is a family. The term *gods* in reference to our destiny is really meant to distinguish multiple God *beings* constituting the one God—the one God meaning the one God family. As mentioned before, there are at present two fully divine members of the God family—two distinct Beings—God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ. And, as incredible as it sounds, there will be *more to come*.

God has declared, as we earlier saw, “*I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty*” (2 Corinthians 6:18). *And He means it.* The Father intends to bring us forth as *His full children*, to transform us into the very kind of beings that He and Christ now are—though, again, forever subject to Their loving authority and leadership.

Indeed, even though saved human beings truly will be elevated to existence at the divine level as real children of God and full members of the God family, they will never challenge, individually or collectively, the preeminence of the Father and Christ as leaders of the family. Truly, all will be subject to Jesus, except the

Early Theologians on Becoming Divine

While the biblical concept of deification or divinization—exaltation to godhood—is commonly ignored or dismissed in modern Christian teaching, this doctrine was well established among early theologians of mainstream tradition. Though the writings of these men are not always biblically accurate, the following quotes from their writings demonstrate that in the first centuries after the New Testament was written many still understood the clear implications of its teachings on this subject:

Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165): “[By Psalm 82] it is demonstrated that all men are deemed worthy of becoming gods, and of having power to become sons of the Highest” (*Dialogue With Trypho*, chap. 124).

“We have learned that those only are deified who have lived near to God in holiness and virtue” (*First Apology*, chap. 21).

Theophilus of Antioch (ca. 163-182): “If he [man] would incline to the things of immortality, keeping the commandment of God, he should receive as a reward from Him immortality, and should become God” (*To Autolytus*, Book 2, chap. 27).

Irenaeus (ca. 130-200): “For we cast blame upon Him [God], because we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods; although God has adopted this course out of His pure benevolence . . . He declares, I have said, You are

gods; and you are all sons of the Highest [Psalm 82:6]” (*Against Heresies*, Book 4, chap. 38).

“How, then, shall he be a God, who has not as yet been made a man? Or how can he be perfect who was but lately created? How, again, can he be immortal, who in his mortal nature did not obey his Maker? For it must be that you, at the outset, should hold the rank of a man, and then afterwards partake of the glory of God” (*Against Heresies*, Book 4, chap. 39).

“There is none other called God by the Scriptures except the Father of all, and the Son, and those who possess the adoption [i.e., sonship as God’s children]” (*Against Heresies*, Book 4, preface; compare Book 3, chap. 6).

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215): “Yea, I say, the Word of God [Christ] became man, that you may learn from man how man may become God” (*Exhortation to the Heathen*, chap. 1).

“But that man with whom the Word dwells . . . his is beauty, the true beauty, for it is God; and that man becomes God, since God so wills. Heraclitus [the ancient Greek poet], then, rightly said, Men are gods, and gods are men” (*The Instructor*, Book 3, chap. 1).

“It leads us to the endless and perfect end, teaching us beforehand the future life that we shall lead, according to God, and with gods . . . After which redemption the reward and the honours are assigned to those who have become perfect; when they have got done with purifica-

Father, and Christ will Himself be subject to the Father (see 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). The Father and Christ will remain at the top of the family forever, reigning supreme even with the addition of billions of divine children.

This, then, is *why you and I were born!* It is the ultimate potential destiny of all mankind. It is the awe-inspiring purpose for which we were created. As Jesus quoted, foreseeing our destiny reached, “I said, ‘*You are gods.*’” Our future can’t get any higher or better than that!

Next we will see how *you* can become part of the immortal family of God and examine further details about the wonderful life that lies in store for us.

tion . . . Then become pure in heart, and near to the Lord, there awaits them restoration to everlasting contemplation; and they are called by the appellation of gods, being destined to sit on thrones with the other gods that have been first put in their places by the Saviour [or, some translate, ‘with the other gods who are ranked next below the Savior’]” (*Stromata [Miscellanies]*, Book 7, chap. 10).

Tertullian (ca. 160-230): “It will be impossible that another god should be admitted, when it is permitted to no other being to possess anything of God. Well, then, you say, we ourselves at that rate possess nothing of God. But indeed we do, and shall continue to do—only it is from Him that we receive it, and not from ourselves. For we shall be even gods, if we shall deserve to be among those of whom He declared, I have said, You are gods [Psalm 82:6], and, God stands in the congregation of the gods [verse 1]. But this comes of His own grace, not from any property in us, because it is He alone who can make gods” (*Against Hermogenes*, chap. 5).

Hippolytus (ca. 170-236): “And you shall possess an immortal body . . . And you shall be a companion of the Deity, and a co-heir with Christ, no longer enslaved by lusts or passions, and never again wasted by disease. For you have become God . . . These [things] God has promised to bestow upon you, because you have been deified, and begotten unto immortality . . . You shall resemble Him, inasmuch as you shall have honour conferred upon you by Him. For the

Deity, (by [this] condescension,) does not diminish anything of the divinity of His divine perfection; having made you even God unto His glory!” (*Refutation of All Heresies*, Book 10, chap. 30).

Origen (ca. 185-255): “The first-born of all creation [Christ], who is the first to be with God, and to attract to Himself divinity, is a being of more exalted rank than the other gods beside Him, of whom God is the God, as it is written, The God of gods, the Lord, has spoken and called the earth [Psalm 50:1]. It was by the offices of the first-born that they became gods, for He drew from God in generous measure that they should be made gods, and He communicated it to them according to His own bounty. The true God, then, is The God, and those who are formed after Him are gods, images, as it were, of Him the prototype” (*Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Book 2, chap. 2).

Athanasius (ca. 293-373): “For He [Christ] was made man that we might be made God” (*On the Incarnation of the Word*, chap. 54, sec. 3).

“He [Christ] was God, and then became man, and that to deify us” (*Four Discourses Against the Arians*, Discourse 1, chapter 11, sec. 39).

Augustine of Hippo (354-430): “But He that justifies does Himself deify, in that by justifying He does make sons of God. ‘For He has given them power to become the sons of God’ [John 1:12]. If we have been made sons of God, we have also been made gods” (*Expositions on the Psalms*, On Psalm 50, sec. 2).

Life in God's Family

The grand purpose for which God created mankind is utterly awe-inspiring. And realize that this destiny is not only for humanity in a general sense—but it is meant for *you* personally. God wants to exalt *you* to share eternal, divine life with Him and all of His children.

If God is opening your mind to the awesome potential for which He made you, then He is inviting you to be among the forerunners in His plan for mankind—to be His spiritual son or daughter now in anticipation of the full glory to be bestowed at the resurrection of the dead when Jesus Christ returns.

Who, then, are the children of God today? Who will yet become part of God's immortal spiritual family? How can you or any of us attain that awesome destiny? And what will life be like when we are ultimately raised to glorified existence?

Entering the family

The Bible explains that those inducted into God's immortal family must first sincerely repent of their sins, be baptized and receive the gift of God's Spirit (Acts 2:38). By receiving the Holy Spirit, they become converted members of Christ's spiritual body (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), which is His Church (Colossians 1:24). They await the resurrection at Christ's return, when they will be given immortality (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

Receiving God's Spirit is essential to conversion. The apostle Paul makes it clear that you must receive the Holy Spirit to become a part of God's family and Church: "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His" (Romans 8:9).

Why are those without God's Spirit not the people of God? Because, as Paul explains, "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (verse 14). Paul clarifies the relationship of God's Spirit to salvation: "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit" (verse 11). Only those with God's Spirit will inherit eternal life. Indeed, it is through the Spirit that we are begotten to spiritual life, as we earlier saw.

How, then, may you receive God's Spirit? The apostle Peter explained that you must "*repent*" and "*be baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38, NASB). (Real repentance and baptism, which open the way into God's family, are thoroughly explained in our free booklets *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *The Road to Eternal Life*. Download or request your free copies today.)

God's children, then, are those who are led by God through His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the power and presence of God working within them (see 2 Timothy 1:6; Psalm 51:11; Philippians 2:13). Those who receive God's Spirit are regarded as the children of God even in this life. "Beloved, now we are children

of God; and . . . everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

Yet what we are now is nothing compared with what we will be like at Jesus Christ's return. At that time the faithful children of God will be resurrected from physical flesh and blood *to immortal spirit* so they can *share eternity with Him on His plane of existence*.

A future beyond compare

Paul describes the marvelous transformation that will occur when the dead are resurrected: "There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; and the splendour of the heavenly bodies is one thing, the splendour of the earthly another. The sun has

a splendour of its own, the moon another splendour and the stars yet another; and one star differs from another in brightness.

"So it is with the resurrection of the dead: what is sown as a perishable thing *is raised imperishable*. Sown in humiliation, *it is raised in glory*; sown in weakness, *it is raised in power*; sown a physical body, *it is raised a spiritual body*. If there is such a thing as a



How, then, may you receive God's Spirit? The apostle Peter explained that you must "repent" and "be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

physical body, there is also a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:40-44, Revised English Bible).

These verses depict an awesome change indeed—to a brilliance and majesty we can barely conceive of (see "The Likeness of God" beginning on page 26). That is why Paul says, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared *with the glory which shall be revealed in us*" (Romans 8:18; see also 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Do you get the picture? Being resurrected into God's family as a very child of God, a part of God's own family, is so magnificent that it is futile to try to compare it to anything we have ever known. No amount of trials, problems and suffering in this life could ever approach the priceless gift of eternal life as glorified children of God in the full likeness of the Father and Jesus Christ. That incredible future is what life is all about. That is *why you were born*.

No wonder Paul exclaimed, "The created universe is *waiting with eager*

expectation for God's sons to be revealed" (Romans 8:19, REB).

Our role in the Kingdom of God

The wonderful world of tomorrow will be inaugurated at the return of Jesus Christ, who will rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16). Every kingdom, power and government will be brought under His divine rule (Revelation 11:15). He will establish the Kingdom of God on earth. This was the heart of His message—the gospel, or good news, that He preached (Mark 1:14-15). (Be sure to download or request your free copy of our booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom* to better understand this central theme of both Christ's message and the entire Bible.)

Those sons and daughters of God who have been faithful to Him will share in Christ's rule. Notice Christ's promise: "To him who overcomes *I will grant to sit with Me on My throne*, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21). Those who overcome will be given responsibility as kings and priests of God in that Kingdom (Revelation 1:5-6).

This amazing future was earlier foretold in the Old Testament. For example, the prophet Daniel was given a vision of Christ receiving His Kingdom from God the Father:

"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man [Jesus Christ], coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days [God the Father], and they brought Him near before Him. Then *to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him*. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed . . .

"Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, *shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High*. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him" (Daniel 7:13-14, 27). Again, the "saints of the Most High"—that is, those who are sanctified or set apart as holy, meaning all of God's true followers—*will be kings and rulers with Jesus Christ*.

This shared divine rule over the physical nations of the earth will have a tiered structure of administration. For instance, we are told that King David will again serve as ruler over all Israel while the 12 apostles of Christ will be given rule over the 12 individual tribes of Israel (Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 37:24-25; Matthew 19:28). And there will be further gradations under these and in the governance of other nations as well.

One of Christ's parables reveals that the further God's servants progress in service to Him during this life in proportion to their ability, the greater will be their authority in the coming Kingdom—here represented by each being placed over a different number of cities (Luke 19:11-27). Thus, while those of God's family will share ownership of the earth and will rule it together, it is evident that they will have varying degrees of administrative responsibility under Jesus Christ. Still, every position will be filled with majesty and glory beyond imagining.

More amazing than ruling over physical nations is the fact that even the angels will be subject to the glorified children of God. As Paul wrote: "Don't you know that someday we Christians are going to judge the world? . . . Don't you realize that we Christians will judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:2-3, NLT). Indeed, as Hebrews 2 says, God "has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels" (verse 5)—but rather, as the following verses make clear, to human beings exalted in the family of God, with Jesus Christ as a forerunner in this inheritance (verses 6-13; compare 1:13-14).

How can we mere human beings ever hope that God the Father and Jesus Christ would share with us such incredible responsibility? Certainly we can never do so while we are still weak, imperfect human beings. Indeed, as so many scriptures show, we must be *changed*.

Paul explained: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but *we shall all be changed*; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and *the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*" (1 Corinthians 15:50-52).

In fact, we should recognize that the Kingdom of God is not merely the dominion of God, which human beings will one day share in. Rather, it also concerns a *plane of existence*—being changed to experience life with the Father and Christ on Their level.

It's worth noting that the term *kingdom* is sometimes used to classify certain levels of existence. There is the mineral kingdom, the plant kingdom, the animal kingdom and, at the top of the physical creation, the human kingdom.

Above these in the spirit realm is the angelic kingdom. And above all is the *God Kingdom*. God intends to raise man from the human kingdom, over the angelic kingdom, *to the God Kingdom—the Kingdom of God*. Indeed, in an ultimate sense, the Kingdom of God is synonymous with the ruling family of God, all members of which will share the full nature of God.

Perfected in loving character

The rule of Christ and His glorified followers will be vastly different from the rule this world has usually experienced. They will serve as true public servants rather than exploit humanity.

Jesus described the kind of giving, serving, loving leadership that will characterize those who rule with Him: "Among the Gentiles, kings lord it over their subjects and those in authority are given the title Benefactor. Not so with you: on the contrary, the greatest among you must bear himself like the youngest, the one who rules like one who serves" (Luke 22:25-26, REB).

God is creating not just a family of kings, but kings *who are servants*, kings who will pass on *blessings* to those they serve. As Proverbs 29:2 tells us, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice." The *whole world* will rejoice under the righteous rule of the family of God!

God's character is based on love—outflowing concern for others—so much so that the Bible says that “God *is* love” (1 John 4:8-16). The loving character of God is also evident in all His children. That loving character is what distinguishes the true children of God—what reveals who is really part of His family. As the apostle John wrote: “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10).

Jesus taught the same: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, *that you may be sons of your Father in heaven* . . . You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-45, 48).

The Likeness of God

In Genesis 1:26, God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness”—the plural “Us” and “Our” denoting both God the Father and the Word who would later be born in the flesh as Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14). What is meant by God’s *image* and *likeness* here?

Most importantly, God made us like Him in qualities of mind, such as abstract thought, emotion, creativity and planning. But the underlying Hebrew words used here concern *actual form and appearance*. The word *tselem* (“image”) has the sense of a statue, while *demuwth* (“likeness”) refers to physical resemblance.

Yet, as John 4:24 tells us, “God is spirit.” The Greek word translated “spirit” here and elsewhere in the New Testament is *pneuma*. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated “spirit” is *ruach*.

Both these terms can also mean “wind.” Because wind is formless, some argue that immaterial spirit cannot have form and shape. Yet in many places in Scripture God and angelic spirits are described as having bodily form. Thus it is apparent that spirit must be able to have form and shape—and God the Father and Christ have the same form and shape as the human beings who are patterned after Them on a lesser, material level.

The “wind” comparison comes from the fact that spirit is invisible to human eyes unless physically manifested. Also, spirit can exist in a formless state, such as God’s Holy Spirit being everywhere, filling the entire universe (Jeremiah 23:24).

God appeared in human form to a few people in the Old Testament (Genesis 18; 32:24, 30; Exodus 24:9-10; Joshua 5:13-15). In these manifestations, though, God did not reveal His full, shining glory because the intensity would have been unbearable. As God told Moses, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me and live” (Exodus 33:20). Yet Moses, shielded by God’s power, was allowed to see God’s radiant form from the back (verse 23).

A few supernatural visions in Scripture do give us glimpses into the awesome appearance of God in His supreme splendor. The prophet Ezekiel recorded what he saw:

“There was a form with the appearance of a human on the throne high above. From what seemed to be His waist up, I saw a gleam like amber, with what looked like fire enclosing it all around. From what seemed to be His waist down, I also saw what looked like fire. There was a brilliant light all around Him. The appearance of the brilliant light all around was like that of a

The practice of godly love by the resurrected, immortal children of God will produce the wonderful world of the future. God is perfecting the attitude of love and mercy in His sons and daughters who are the firstfruits of His spiritual harvest of humanity (James 1:18). They will be children befitting His family, children who will demonstrate to the remainder of mankind that obedience to God’s law is the right way of life.

God is creating in His children His holy and righteous character—the pattern of life, ingrained through habit, of choosing the right way, the way of love, even against temptation and self-desire. The present life in physical, temporary human bodies is our training ground toward this end, a time for God’s children to develop righteous character—to become like the Father and Christ in our minds and lifestyle.

rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day. This was the appearance of the form of the LORD’s glory” (Ezekiel 1:26-28, Holman Christian Standard Bible).

The Old Testament appearances of God were not of God the Father, since John 1:18 says of Him, “No one has seen God at any time” and Jesus said, “You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form” (John 5:37). Rather, these were appearances of Jesus Christ before His human life. Again, though, the Father and Christ share the same image and likeness.

In the New Testament book of Revelation, the apostle John saw the glorified Jesus Christ as “someone ‘like a son of man,’ dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a

when they are glorified at the resurrection to eternal life—when “those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:2-3, New Revised



When fully in God’s likeness, we will be able to fulfill our awesome responsibility of exercising dominion over—of assisting Him in managing—the vastness of His creation.

golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters . . . His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance” (1:13-16, New International Version).

This is a limited description of the likeness of God that human beings will also have in full

Standard Version). Then, fully in God’s likeness, we will be able to fulfill our awesome responsibility of exercising dominion over—of assisting Him in managing—the vastness of His creation. This is the future God has planned for you, *your* destiny, if you embrace it fully with an obedient heart and remain a dedicated and faithful follower of God and His teachings as revealed in the Holy Scriptures!

Rest assured, there is no way God will imbue us with His omnipotent power and immortality unless we are thoroughly yielded to His direction, walking humbly in His way of love and service to others. Thankfully, God helps us to grow in this way throughout our lives as we submit to Him. And when we are fully transformed into His likeness at the resurrection, we will have His perfect loving character as our own.



No vestige will be left of selfish human nature—only total, selfless love and care for others just as God has. Thus there will be perfect harmony among all

The analogy of firstfruits is drawn from the agricultural year of ancient Israel, wherein a smaller spring harvest was followed by a greater late summer and fall harvest.

those of God’s family. And with total concern for the good of the governed, God’s family will reign over the angels and all human beings as yet unchanged.

Still more to come

As pointed out above, God’s converted people of this age, His saints, are the firstfruits of His spiritual harvest of mankind. They are called *firstfruits* in recognition of the fact that more will follow. This analogy is drawn from the agricultural year of ancient Israel, wherein a spring harvest was followed by a late summer and fall harvest.

This agricultural cycle and related events are commemorated in the annual festivals God gave to Israel—as a picture of progressive steps in His great plan of salvation. (To learn about these, be sure to request or download our free booklet *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.)

During the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ and His saints over all nations (Revelation 20:6), represented by the great fall harvest festival, the Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Ingathering, the people of the earth will be taught the way of salvation and nearly all will ultimately embrace it—so as to later join the saints in being glorified and added to God’s family.

Following this period is the time of the last judgment, when all who have ever lived without a proper understanding of God’s truth will be given their only real opportunity for salvation and glorification (compare Revelation 20:5, 11-12; Matthew 11:21-24; Ezekiel 37:1-14).

God’s plan is all-encompassing. During this time the vast majority of human

beings will receive the opportunity for everlasting life. Remember, God “desires all men to be saved” and is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Through His wondrous plan, all of humanity will be given the opportunity to learn God’s truth, come to repentance and receive salvation. (This wonderful truth is thoroughly explained in our free booklets *What Happens After Death?* and *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*)

Then, as Revelation 21 reveals, there will be a new heaven and new earth—and the city of New Jerusalem will descend to the earth from heaven as the capital of the universe and the eternal dwelling of God. At last God the Father as well as Jesus Christ will live with humanity, now glorified as God’s divine children. Verse 7 encourages us with these awesome words: “He who overcomes *shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.*”

As we saw at the outset, “all things” means the entire universe and spirit realm. We will have a permanent dwelling with God in the New Jerusalem, but we will not be confined there or to the earth—or even to this galaxy. Rather, we will have the freedom to enjoy the entire cosmos, which we will then possess along with God the Father, Jesus Christ and the rest of the divine family.

Of course it may be that, just as there will be different levels of administrative responsibility over the nations during the 1,000-year rule of Christ and His saints, so the glorified members of God’s family may likewise have different regions of oversight throughout the universe. With more than 100 billion galaxies of 100 billion stars, there will be plenty of responsibility to go around!

In any case, we will be able to travel anywhere within the universe instantaneously—at the speed of thought—just as God can, and beautify and expand on



We will not be confined to the earth—or even to this galaxy. Rather, we will have the freedom to enjoy the entire cosmos, which we will then possess along with God the Father, Jesus Christ and the rest of the divine family.

it under the direction of the Father and Christ. For we will share Their infinite power and mind. To quote the words of the apostle Paul again, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and *no mind has imagined what God has prepared* for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9, NLT).

Joy and pleasures forevermore

This future is so transcendent in its magnitude and meaning that it is impossible to really get our minds around it! The truth is that we don't know all that we will experience when we at last dwell in resplendent glory with God and all repentant humanity in the age to come, as God has not revealed it and we probably would not be able to comprehend it with our finite minds.

But we can rest assured that life then will never be dull and uninteresting. It will always be filled with new opportunities and joyful living. In Psalm 16:11 King David prayed to God, "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is *fullness of joy*; at Your right hand *are pleasures forevermore*."



You were born to become a glorified, immortal member of the God family—to live and reign with the Father and Christ in joy without ending, to shine as the stars forever and ever.

Mention of David again brings us back to where we began, with his reflections in Psalm 8:3-4: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?"

The Bible has shown us why God is mindful of mankind: He has planned for us *an astounding future*. We have seen that our ultimate destiny, the purpose of our existence, *is to become the divine children of God*, who is our Father. He wants to share His very life with us—desiring that we ultimately inherit not only *all that He has*, but even *what He is*. Could anything be greater than that? What more could anyone *possibly* wish for?

Never underestimate the value of your life. You were born to become one of God's divine children. You were born to receive His very nature and character and, eventually, eternal life on His level of existence. *You were born to become a glorified, immortal member of the God family—to live and reign with the Father and Christ in joy without ending, to shine as the stars forever and ever.*

This is your incredible destiny! May God grant you a heart willing to surrender your life to Him so that you may receive His incomparable gift!

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P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795
Web site: www.gnmagazine.org
E-mail: info@ucg.org

Canada: United Church of God—Canada
Box 144, Station D, Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada
Phone: (905) 876-9966, (800) 338-7779
Fax: (905) 876-0569 Web site: www.ucg.ca

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Martinique: Église de Dieu Unie—France
127 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France

Spanish-speaking areas: Iglesia de Dios Unida
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795
E-mail: info@ucg.org

EUROPE

Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg):

P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, Netherlands

British Isles: United Church of God
P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts, WD19 6FZ, England
Phone: 020-8386-8467 Fax: 020-8386-1999
Web site: www.goodnews.org.uk

France: Église de Dieu Unie—France
127 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France

Germany: Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten
Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany
Phone: 0228-9454636 Fax: 0228-9454637

Italy: La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita
Casella Postale 187, 24121 Bergamo Centro, Italy
Phone and Fax: (+39) 035 4523573
Web site: www.labuonannotizia.org

E-mail: info@labuonannotizia.org

Scandinavia: Guds Enade Kyrka
P.O. Box 3535, 111 74 Stockholm, Sweden
Phone: +44 20 8386-8467 E-mail: sverige@ucg.org

AFRICA

East Africa—Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda:

United Church of God—East Africa
P.O. Box 75261, Nairobi 00200, Kenya
E-mail: kenya@ucg.org
Web site: www.ucgeastafrica.org

Ghana: P.O. Box 3805, Kumasi, Ghana
E-mail: ghana@ucg.org

Malawi: P.O. Box 32257, Chichiri, Blantyre 3, Malawi
Phone: 085 22717 E-mail: malawi@ucg.org

Mauritius: P.O. Box 53, Quatre Bornes, Mauritius
E-mail: mauritius@ucg.org

Nigeria: United Church of God—Nigeria
P.O. Box 2265 Somolu, Lagos, Nigeria
Phone: 01-8113644 Web site: www.ucgnigeria.org
E-mail: nigeria@ucg.org

South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland:

United Church of God—Southern Africa
P.O. Box 2209, Beacon Bay, East London 5205
South Africa

Phone and Fax: 043 748-1694

Web site: www.ucg-rsa.org

Zambia: P.O. Box 23076, Kitwe, Zambia
Phone: (02) 226076 E-mail: zambia@ucg.org

Zimbabwe: P.O. Box 928
Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe
Phone: 011716273 E-mail: zimbabwe@ucg.org

PACIFIC REGION

Australia and Papua New Guinea:

United Church of God—Australia
GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia
Phone: 07 55 202 111 Free call: 1800 356 202
Fax: 07 55 202 122 Web site: www.ucg.org.au
E-mail: info@ucg.org.au

Fiji: United Church of God
P.O. Box 11081, Laucala Beach Estate, Suva, Fiji

New Zealand: United Church of God
P.O. Box 22, Shortland St.
Auckland 1140, New Zealand
Phone: Toll-free 0508-463-763

Web site: www.ucg.org.nz

E-mail: info@ucg.org.nz

Tonga: United Church of God—Tonga
P.O. Box 2617, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

ASIA

All except Philippines: United Church of God,
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795
E-mail: info@ucg.org

Philippines: P.O. Box 81840
DCCPO, 8000 Davao City, Philippines
Phone and fax: +63 82 224-4444
Cell/text: +63 918-904-4444
Web site: www.ucg.org.ph E-mail: info@ucg.org.ph

ALL AREAS AND NATIONS NOT LISTED

United Church of God
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795
E-mail: info@ucg.org

Authors: Roger Foster, Tom Robinson *Contributing writers:* Scott Ashley, Jerold Aust *Editorial reviewers:* Jim Franks, Bruce Gore, Paul Kieffer, Graemme Marshall, John Ross Schroeder, Richard Thompson, David Treybig, Leon Walker, Donald Ward, Lyle Welty *Cover:* Photo illustration by Shaun Venish/Stockphoto/NASA

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