

Sons and Daughters of God

By Elder Rubén V. Alliaud
Of the Seventy

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Today I would like to address one of the most joyful, glorious, and powerful gospel truths that God has revealed. At the same time, it is ironically one for which we have been criticized. An experience I had some years ago profoundly deepened my appreciation for this gospel truth.

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As a representative of the Church, I was once invited to a religious conference where it was announced that from that moment on they would recognize as valid all baptisms performed by almost all other Christian churches, as long as the ordinance was done with water and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Then it was explained that this policy did not apply to baptisms performed by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

After the conference I was able to delve deeper into the reasons for that exception with the leader in charge of the announcement. We had a wonderful and insightful conversation.

In short, he explained to me that that exception had primarily to do with our particular beliefs about the Godhead, which other Christian denominations often refer to as the Trinity. I expressed my appreciation for him taking the time to explain to me his beliefs and the policy of his church. At the end of our conversation, we hugged and then said goodbye.

As I later contemplated our discussion, what this leader said about Latter-day Saints not understanding what he called the “mystery of the Trinity” stayed in my mind. What was he referring to? Well, it had to do with our understand-

ing of the nature of God. We believe that God the Father “is an exalted man” with a glorified “body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; [and] the Son also.” Thus, every time we talk about the nature of God, in some way, somehow, we are also talking about our own nature.

And this is true not only because we all were made “in [His] image, after [His] likeness,” but also because, as the Psalmist recorded, God said, “Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.” This is for us a precious doctrine now recovered with the advent of the Restoration. In summary, it is nothing more or less than what our missionaries teach as the first lesson, first paragraph, first line: “God is our Heavenly Father, and we are His children.”

Now, you might say, “But many people believe we are children of God.” Yes, that is true, but their understanding may be a little different from the implication of its deeper meaning that we affirm. For Latter-day Saints, this teaching is not metaphorical. Rather, we truly believe that we are all literally the children of God. He is “the Father of [our] spirits,” and because of that, we have the potential to become like Him, which seems to be inconceivable to some.

It has now been over 200 years since the First Vision opened the doors to the Restoration. At the time, young Joseph Smith sought guidance from heaven to know what church to join. Through the revelation he received that day, and in later revelations given to him, the Prophet Joseph obtained knowledge about the nature of God and our relationship to Him as His children.

Because of that, we learn more clearly that our Heavenly Father has taught this precious doctrine from the very beginning. Allow me to cite at least two accounts from the scriptures to illustrate this.

You might remember God’s instructions to Moses as recorded in the Pearl of Great Price.

We read that “God spake unto Moses, saying: Behold, I am the Lord God Almighty, and Endless is my name.” In other words, Moses, I want you to know who I am. Then He added, “And, behold, thou art my son.” Later he said, “And I have a work for thee, Moses, my son; and thou art in the similitude of mine Only Begotten.” And then finally, He ended with, “And now, behold, this one thing I show unto thee, Moses, my son.”

It appears that God was determined to teach Moses at least one lesson: “You are my child,”

which He repeated at least three times. He could not even mention the name of Moses without immediately adding that he was His son.

However, after Moses was left alone, he felt weak because he was no longer in the presence of God. That is when Satan came to tempt him. Can you see a pattern here? The first thing he said was, “Moses, son of man, worship me.”

In this context, Satan’s request to worship him may have been only a distraction. A significant temptation for Moses in that moment of weakness was to become confused and believe that he was only a “son of man,” rather than a child of God.

“And it came to pass that Moses looked upon Satan and said: Who art thou? For behold, I am a son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten.” Fortunately, Moses was not confused and did not allow himself to become distracted. He had learned the lesson of who he really was.

The next account is found in Matthew 4. Scholars have entitled this “the three temptations of Jesus,” as if the Lord was tempted only three times, which of course is not the case.

Hundreds of gallons of ink have been used to explain the meaning and content of these temptations. As we know, the chapter begins by explaining that Jesus had gone into the desert, “and when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.”

Satan’s first temptation apparently had only to do with satisfying the Lord’s physical needs. “Command that these stones be made bread,” he challenged the Savior.

A second enticement may have had to do with tempting God: “Cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee.”

Finally, Satan’s third temptation referred to the aspirations and glory of the world. After Jesus had been shown “all the kingdoms of the world, ... [Satan] saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.”

In truth, Satan’s ultimate temptation may have had less to do with those three specific provocations and more to do with tempting Jesus Christ to question His divine nature. At least twice, the enticement was preceded by the challenging accusation from Satan: “If thou be the Son of God”—if you really believe it, then do this or that.

Please notice what had happened immedi-

ately before Jesus went into the desert to fast and pray: we find the account of Christ's baptism. And when He had come out of the water, there came "a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Do we see the connection? Can we recognize a pattern here?

It is no wonder that every time we are taught about our divine nature and destiny, the adversary of all righteousness tempts us to call them into question.

How different our decisions would be if we really knew who we really are.

We live in a challenging world, a world of increasing commotion, where honorable people strive to at least emphasize our human dignity, while we belong to a church and embrace a gospel that lift our vision and invite us into the divine.

Jesus's commandment to be "perfect, even as [our] Father which is in heaven is perfect" is a clear reflection of His high expectations and our eternal possibilities. Now, none of this will happen overnight. In the words of President Jeffrey R. Holland, it will happen "eventually." But the promise is that if we "come unto Christ," we will "be perfected in him." That requires a lot of work—not just any work, but a divine work. His work!

Now, the good news is that it is precisely our Father in Heaven who has said, "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."

President Russell M. Nelson's invitation to "think celestial" implies a wonderful reminder of our divine nature, origin, and potential destination. We can obtain the celestial only through Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice.

Perhaps that is why Satan enticed Jesus with the very same temptation from the beginning to the end of His earthly ministry. Matthew recorded that while Jesus hung on the cross, those "that passed by reviled him, ... saying, ... If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." Glory be to God that He did not hearken but instead provided the way for us to receive all celestial blessings.

Let us always remember, there was a great price paid for our happiness.

I testify as with the Apostle Paul that "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are 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.”In the name of Jesus
Christ, amen.