



STATEMENT DM010

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SONS OF GOD

Evangelical Christians today are being increasingly confronted by the phrase “manifested sons of God.” People who are apparently Christians are proclaiming that these words sum up the key work that God is doing in the church today. Many of these groups are radical fringes of the Pentecostal movement. Although they all emphasize the manifestation of the sons of God, their interpretations of exactly what this means vary greatly.

One thing that all groups that emphasize the doctrine of the manifestation of the sons of God seem to hold in common is the belief that Romans 8:19 is referring to an event that takes place in history as we know it now, in the church as it is now established, and the manifested sons of God will still possess the bodies of flesh and blood that are familiar to this age. The question of when this event takes place, and what nature it will take on, are where the differences lie.

Almost all of these people are post-tribulationists (they believe that before the church is caught up to be with Christ we must endure the great tribulation spoken of in such biblical passages as Matthew 24:21). Some are premillennialists, which means they believe that Christ will return bodily to the earth before the 1000 year reign of peace mentioned in Revelation 20:6, known as the Millennium. Others are postmillennialists, and they believe that Christ will reign through His church during the Millennium. Many of them believe He will return bodily after that. Still others are amillennialists. They believe that biblical references to the Millennium are only figurative for something that likely already has taken place in church history.

Some believe that the manifestation has not yet taken place, but will at some point during the tribulation period. These people are often visionaries, looking forward with great anticipation to the alternative society that the perfected church will offer to the world, which at that time will be ready for it. They emphasize the kingdom of God in their preaching, and authority in the church, which they feel is a part of the kingdom.

Others preach that some people in the church, namely themselves, have already been perfected, and are the manifested sons of God. They believe that they have fully attained the state of spiritual and moral perfection that the redeemed will possess in heaven. Thus, they see themselves in a class above the average Christian.

Some who are post or amillennialists believe that the second coming of Christ will not be a personal, physical one, but will occur through the church in its manifestation as sons of God. A few even go to the extreme of saying that Christ and the church are meant to become one in essence or nature. Thus, some of them teach that ultimately there will be no distinction between Christ and His church.

Despite the sincerity and genuine devotion to Christ exhibited by some who hold these doctrines, it is our contention that they have fallen into religious subjectivism. They have allowed their beliefs to be determined by what certain leaders have claimed to receive as the “Word of the Lord for the Church today,” and not tested this “word” by a thorough examination of what the Scripture has to say about the subject. We say this because it seems evident that none of these doctrines could have developed, had there been a sound exegesis of Romans 8:19. Such an exegesis we now attempt to provide.

An overview of Romans eight, and the entire New Testament, presents the following picture of God’s plan of redemption. Verses 29 and 30 show us that each of the redeemed was foreknown by God, and that in each case He proceeds to predestine, call, justify, and finally glorify, in that order. We know that when a person places faith in Christ as Lord and Savior that individual is saved, justified, and spiritually regenerated (vv. 1, 9–10, 24). (For this exegesis to have its full impact, it is important that the reader personally look up the Scriptures that are being cited.) At that point he becomes a child of God (v. 16). However, Scripture indicates that glorification has not yet taken place (vv. 17, 18). The chapter clearly shows us that what is being referred to by the term glorification is the putting off of our mortal bodies, wherein dwells our sinful nature (vv. 10, 23), and the putting on of

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

glorified bodies, being fashioned after the resurrected body of Christ (v. 11, Phil. 3:21). There is no scriptural ground in saying that our sin natures will be eradicated before our bodies are glorified. It should be apparent from mere observation that no one on earth today has received a glorified body. Speaking of the glorification of our bodies as our hope, verse twenty-four asks: "For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one hope for what he sees?" Scripture makes it plain that the glorification of our bodies will take place at the personal, physical return of Jesus Christ to the earth (Phil. 3:20, 21; 1 Cor. 15:23, 50-57; 1 John 3:2). Finally, Romans 8:17-25, especially verse 23, clearly show that the manifestation of the sons of God is referring to the manifestation of the saints in their glorified bodies at the second coming of Christ.

To sum up what has been scripturally demonstrated above, the hope of the Christian is that one day he will be delivered from his corrupt, sin-prone body, and be transformed into conformity to the glorified body of the risen Christ. This hope is inseparably related to the personal return of Jesus Christ; the two events happen at the same time. Consequently, the "manifestation of the sons of God," which refers to this event, is something that cannot happen in the midst of this age; it will happen at the consummation of it. Until that time, no one is totally delivered from the Christian's age-long struggle with his sin nature. This does not mean, as once was true before our conversion, that we must be powerlessly enslaved to sin. Through the power of the cross, if we "walk by the Spirit," we will not "carry out the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

We see therefore that the basis for these interpretations of Romans 8:19 is unsupported by careful exegesis. Some of the doctrines that have developed from these interpretations, such as the merging of Christ's identity with the church, are pure heresy. We do not deny that these people could be Christians, for it is possible for Christians to become deceived (2 Cor. 11:3,4). However, we would advise all believers to steer clear of this doctrine, as, being built upon an unscriptural base, there is no automatic check to keep its propagators from drifting into the further reaches of heresy, as has already happened in many cases.