

Theosis: Becoming Like God

"Are we just God's pets?" No—we are His literal children with divine potential

1. BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR THEOSIS

Central Question: Are humans merely creatures who can never become like God, or are we God's literal children with divine potential?

Image & Likeness of God

Genesis 1:26-27 (NRSV): "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them."
→ Hebrew *tselem* (image) + *demuth* (likeness) = physical & spiritual resemblance

Children of God & Joint Heirs

Romans 8:14-17 (NRSV): "All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. You received a spirit of adoption... that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him."
→ Not servants, not pets—CHILDREN, HEIRS, to be GLORIFIED with Christ

Partakers of Divine Nature

2 Peter 1:3-4 (NRSV): "His divine power has given us everything pertaining to life and godliness... so that through them you may... become participants in the divine nature."
→ Greek *θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως* (theias koinonoi physeos) = partakers/sharers of divine NATURE

We Will Be Like Him

1 John 3:2 (NRSV): "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is."
→ Future transformation: we WILL BE LIKE HIM

Be Perfect as God Is Perfect

Matthew 5:48 (NRSV): "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
→ Greek *τέλειοι* (teleioi) = complete, mature, fully developed. Command to become perfect AS the Father is.

You Are Gods

Psalms 82:6 (NRSV): "I say, You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you."

John 10:34-36 (NRSV): Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'? If those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods'—and the scripture cannot be annulled—can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'?"
→ Jesus affirms "you are gods" and says scripture cannot be annulled = it's TRUE

Offspring of God

Acts 17:28-29 (NRSV): "In him we live and move and have our being; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold or silver or stone."
→ Paul affirms: we are God's OFFSPRING (not just creations)

Judge the World & Angels

1 Corinthians 6:2-3 (NRSV): "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters?"
→ Saints will judge world AND angels = exalted authority

Sit on Christ's Throne

Revelation 3:21 (NRSV): "To the one who conquers I will give a place with me to sit on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne."
→ We sit with Christ on His throne, as Christ sits with Father on His throne

Transformed from Glory to Glory

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NRSV): "All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."
→ Progressive transformation into Christ's image, glory to glory

2. EARLY CHURCH FATHERS ON THEOSIS

Theosis (deification) was MAINSTREAM Christian doctrine for the first 1,500 years

Irenaeus (130-202 AD):

"If the Word became man, it was so men may become gods... Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, of his boundless love, became what we are that he might make us what he himself is."
We were not made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods."

Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD):

"The Word of God became man, that thou mayest learn from man how man may become God."

Athanasius (296-373 AD):

"He became man that we might become god."
"He himself assumed humanity that we might become God."

Augustine (354-430 AD):

"He that justifies also deifies, for by justifying he makes sons of God. For he has given them power to become the sons of God. If then we have been made sons of God, we have also been made gods."

Basil the Great (330-379 AD):

"Man is a creature that has received the command to become god."

C.S. Lewis (Mere Christianity):

"The command Be ye perfect 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 will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine."

3. PROTESTANT INTERPRETATION

Modern Protestant View:

- **Image of God**" = moral/spiritual qualities only (reason, morality), NOT physical form or divine potential
- **"Partakers of divine nature"** = moral transformation (becoming holy), NOT ontological change
- **"You are gods"** = metaphorical (human judges), NOT literal divinity
- **"Joint heirs"** = spiritual blessings, NOT co-equal status with God
- **Infinite gap:** Creator vs. creature distinction NEVER bridged

Key Concerns:

- Theosis seems to blur Creator/creature distinction
- Sounds like pride/self-exaltation
- Only God is eternal, self-existent, omnipotent
- Humans remain dependent, finite, created

4. LDS PERSPECTIVE ON EXALTATION

Doctrine & Covenants and Book of Mormon affirm biblical theosis explicitly

They Shall Be Gods

D&C 132:19-20: "If a man marry a wife by my word... and if ye abide in my covenant... it shall be done unto them in all things whatsoever my servant hath put upon them, in time, and through all eternity; and shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things... Then shall they be gods, because they have no end... Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them."

D&C 76:58-59: "They are they who are the church of the Firstborn. They are they into whose hands the Father has given all things—They are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory; And are priests of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek... Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God."

D&C 84:33-38: "For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods... and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies. They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God. And also all they who receive this priesthood receive me, saith the Lord... And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father's kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him. And this is according to the oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood."

Not Angels, But Gods

D&C 132:37: "Abraham received concubines, and they bore him children; and it was accounted unto him for righteousness... Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... have entered into their exaltation, according to the promises, and sit upon thrones, and are not angels but are gods."

Glory Added Forever

Abraham 3:22-26: "Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers... and there stood one among them that was like unto God... And the Lord said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; **thou wast chosen before thou wast born...** And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon... and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever."

King Follett Discourse

Joseph Smith (1844): "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!... You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation."

Lorenzo Snow Couplet

**"As man now is, God once was;
As God now is, man may be."**
→ Expresses eternal principle of divine progression

Book of Mormon Support

Mosiah 3:19: "The natural man is an enemy to God... unless he... **becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child,** submissive, meek, humble."

3 Nephi 12:48: "Therefore I would that ye should be **perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.**"

Aspect	Protestant View	LDS View	Biblical Support
Human Nature	Creatures, eternally separate from God	Literal children of God with divine potential	Rom 8:16-17, Acts 17:28-29, Heb 12:9
Image of God	Moral/spiritual attributes only	Physical & spiritual likeness, divine DNA	Gen 1:26-27, Acts 7:55-56, Heb 1:3
"Partakers of divine nature"	Moral holiness, character transformation	Ontological participation in divinity	2 Peter 1:4 (θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως)
"You are gods"	Metaphor for judges/rulers	Literal truth about human potential	Ps 82:6, John 10:34-36 ("scripture cannot be annulled")
Eternal destiny	Worship God forever as creatures	Become like God, joint heirs with Christ	Rom 8:17, Rev 3:21, 1 John 3:2
Creator/creature gap	Infinite, never bridged	Bridged through Atonement & priesthood	2 Cor 3:18, Matt 5:48, 1 Cor 6:2-3

Are We Just God's Pets?

Protestant view: Humans = beloved pets (loved but never family, never equal)
LDS/Biblical view: Humans = literal children (immature now, but capable of growing up)

Which view honors God more?

**A God who creates eternal servants, or
A God who begets eternal children capable of becoming like Him?**

The Real Question:

When 2 Peter 1:4 says we become "partakers of the DIVINE NATURE" (θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως)—is that:

- **Protestant:** Just moral transformation (becoming nicer people)?
- **LDS/Early Church:** Actual participation in divinity (becoming like God)?

Which reading is more natural? If Paul meant "moral improvement," why use "DIVINE NATURE" instead of "holiness" or "righteousness"?