

# Who are the “Sons of God” in Genesis Chapter 6?

## Part 1: Properly Engaging the Scriptures

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A curious portion of Scripture is found in Genesis 6:1-4.

For most of my life these verses struck me as a little odd, and I know others who still see them that way. But after studying these verses for a few years, I'm fascinated with this divinely-inspired text.

I feel its message provides clarity to other passages within the Old Testament *and* the New Testament. I am also quite sure that one's grasp of the prophetic Scriptures will fall short if the implications of Genesis 6:1-4 are not properly understood.

I want to back up a few paces to lay a foundation, and that calls for some personal history. About ten years ago, the Lord led me to teach a class at my church that I still teach. My life is a busy one, but that class is a huge blessing to me and I'm humbled to hear it's the same for so many others. If the Lord wills it, I'll continue to teach it as I have been doing.

*"...as I have been doing."* There is weight to those words.

There are standards I try to maintain as I teach. These are convictions I have that shape how I do what I do. Properly handling the Word of God is an immense responsibility whether I am speaking about it or writing about it.

With the subtitle of this article in view, and with the premise that Genesis 6:1-4 deserves the same reverence as any other portion of the Bible, here are my standards as I teach God's Word. I offer them in no particular order:

### **I believe in expository teaching.**

I define this to mean that, whenever possible, it's important to explain the precise meaning of a given portion of Scripture. As I maintain this standard from one verse to the subsequent one, I'm most enabled to receive and declare the message God intended those specific passages to communicate.

And because I believe the Bible was intended to be read and understood literally – with legitimate figures of speech having their proper place – then I believe it says what it means and it means what it says.

If I choose instead to assume the Bible is vague and unclear, then I have stained its Divine Author with the same brand. It takes discipline and humility to yield to the intentions of any Biblical text, and this is especially true if its message conflicts with my individual partialities.

I've learned this expositional discipline is a two-sided coin. As one side of it adheres to teaching what IS there, the other side avoids teaching what is NOT there. I'm convinced that efforts to

extract an alternate derivative from a passage that is plainly moving in a different direction are unwise at the least and apostate at the worst.

This process of investigating the intentions of Scripture with the goal of arriving at its proper interpretation is commanded by the Bible itself. In 2 Timothy 2:15 it says, *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth”* (NASB). This says there’s an accurate way to communicate God’s Word which also means there’s an inaccurate way to do the same thing. Imposing my own biases upon a specific Biblical passage would be a serious mistake.

It is disconcerting that the habits of cults and many churches are not too dissimilar since both groups deliberately massage and manipulate the Scriptures to mean something other than what’s really being said. Both groups find it necessary to limit the Bible’s divine power and impact to achieve their own agenda.

### **I believe in avoiding political-correctness.**

The crux is this: I cannot properly teach the truth of God’s perfect Word without crossing the grain of man’s imperfect condition. If the intent of the Scriptures somehow offends the preferences of some people, so be it.

This issue acknowledges the one-cannot-serve-two-masters principle. To be right with God has generally meant to be wrong with man, and that’s seldom been more evident than now. Political correctness has a problem stating the plain truth plainly and so it’s not an ally of sound doctrine. Since God’s truth is measured by divine parameters, the chasm between pleasing man and pleasing God is immense.

When handling the Word of God, I must give constant effort to answering an important question, “Whom do I really serve?” The Bible deals with delicate issues forthrightly, which means God’s standard is to teach those things the same way. Tip-toeing around uncomfortable themes or leap-frogging sensitive passages may satiate the crowd that doesn’t want to “rock the boat,” but these are lukewarm stances to God and I believe He detests them.

Whenever man’s methods are esteemed, God’s message is eroded. Placating the world’s passions to the compromise of Biblical truth is a slippery slope, and this conduct has no place in the intentional fellowship of the Body of Christ.

### **I believe we should let the Bible interpret itself.**

This rule emerges, once again, from a Biblical reminder. In 2 Peter 1:20 we read, *“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation.”* (NASB) Two points emerge here: first, be convinced of the veracity of Scripture, and second, take your own biases out of the mix when handling God’s Word.

Let me boil this down to the basics as I see it for myself. I must not interpret the Word of God according to my personal preferences and my comfort tolerances. I should not rest on any

position just because it's my pastor's or my alma mater's view. I must not teach what I – or others - may wish the Scriptures said instead. Finally, I must not let the limitations of my reasoning ability override the limitless nature of God's revelation.

There is only one right approach to Biblical interpretation. I must expend my best efforts to make clear what God's Word is trying to say. This is a very high standard, but it's the right one.

Division arises when the comprehensive revelation of God's Word is not permitted to speak. Unity is a 'du jour' theme of many churches, but it must be Spirit-led unity around a proper Biblical standard. Forced unity for conformity's sake is always a dangerous and irresponsible pursuit.

I believe there are some common sense guidelines for letting the Bible interpret itself which are manifest within the Scriptures themselves, and I try my best to be faithful to them. Concerning this article's question about the Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4, here are three very important guidelines to consider:

- a. Passages must be understood in light of their original Biblical meaning
- b. Passages must be in harmony with other passages on the same subject
- c. Passages must be in compliance with the development of the context

The proper interpretation of Scripture ALWAYS accommodates these three guidelines at the same time. No accurate interpretation of any Biblical passage has ever violated any of them.

It's just like a stool with three legs. If one leg is compromised, you are at risk if you sit on it. As one is foolish to depend on a stool with a bad leg, so one is unwise to accept any position that diminishes any of these three standards of interpretation.

This naturally reinforces the fact that serious personal study is a prerequisite to proper Biblical interpretation, and for too many people this is a big hurdle. They claim they don't have enough time, ability, resources, knowledge, or whatever. Really - they don't have enough reverence.

It's easier to parrot something the way you first heard it or because someone you like taught it that way. This mindless choreography of simply regurgitating what one reads or hears somewhere receives no praise in the Word of God.

The opposite is lauded instead. In Acts 17:11, Paul commended the Bereans for returning to the Scriptures on their own and evaluating what he'd said against what they found there. The takeaway is diligent personal study should always play a role in determining Biblical truth.

**I believe that tensions in our theology keep us faithful.**

This point yields no ground to stopping short of quality Bible study. Rather, this premise concedes that some doctrines are less clear than others, and some are so removed from the capacities of human comprehension that they must be accepted by faith alone.

Consider a couple of examples for illustration's sake.

*True or false: God chooses us for salvation. True or false: We choose to receive salvation.* If you answered “true” on both counts you deserve a star because both positions are emphasized in the Scriptures.

By the measures of human understanding, this makes no sense for these two statements seem disparate. Each one is saying something which feels against the other, yet both are integral to the proper total perspective. It’s the humble heart that ceases to rage against this arrangement and accepts this tension as evidence of God’s matchless character.

Let’s look at another example. There is only one God, right? Yes. But there are three distinct entities that comprise that God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Each reflects the fullness and equality of God, yet not one of them is fully inclusive.

Go figure. Better yet, don’t – because you can’t. Just accept that this doctrine of the Trinity is a vital element of the only faith that truly redeems a lost soul. Sometimes we need to understand that we are not required to fully understand.

We should not strive against any tenants of Scripture just because they defy the parameters of conventional human experience. Consider some of the things we accept in the Bible that make zero sense to the unregenerate heart. The universe emerged from a spoken Word and will disappear the same way. People once lived for more than 900 years. The whole earth was drowned in a flood while the human race was rebooted in a boat. A donkey spoke, a fish vomited a live man, and the sun stood still. People were not burned by fire, but water was. Water also came from a rock, floated an axe head, turned into blood, and changed into wine. Jesus was born without a human father, lived free of human sin, died by human hands for the human condition, came back to life apart from human power, returned to heaven in human view, and He’s coming back the same way to receive all humans who fully believe every bit of all that.

A classic reaction to Scriptures that tax our understanding or our tolerances is to question the plainly-stated intentions of the text. Knowing it’s unconscionable to exclaim, “That’s not true!” some people pontificate with, *“It likely means something other than what it is saying.”*

Give me a break!

It’s the same irresponsibility either way. Neither reaction accepts the text at face value. The Word of God is infallible and complete, and it requires our absolute acceptance and belief. The right relationship with God is in every way an all-or-nothing proposition.

There is no defensible option that permits a middle ground here. Choosing to disregard the statements of Scripture or to discount the basic rules of interpretation, in order to arrive at a meaning which is more palatable to individual tastes, is disrespectful to a sovereign God and dangerous to one’s spiritual well-being.

Let's get super honest here. Too many of us have become callous to the Bible. We move through it like we are at a buffet: *"I'll take a little of this, but not too much of that. Ooh! I really like that over there – I'll have another helping! Yuck! What's this? I can't believe they put that here!"* Smile (or grimace) if you will, but that analogy pretty much defines how many people manage their approach to the contents of the Word of God.

Having established these issues as an introduction, we will return to the original question in Part 2 of, ***"Who are the "sons of God" in Genesis 6?"*** Our focus will be the first four verses of that chapter. We'll see if the rules and guidelines which we've reviewed here will help to clarify the right answer.

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