

Becoming a Child of God

1 John 3:1-3

Introduction

The landscape of the book reveals a God who is close and personal; who, at the same time, is also knowable in a loving relationship.

God's essential nature is love and this love is personified in the Lord Jesus Christ, ultimately through his sacrificial death on the cross for our sins (**Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 4:9-10, 16**).

Through the Spirit, the Lord Jesus is evident in our relationships; his love is extensive as we yield to the Spirit's working in our lives.

1 John 3:1-3 is central to the message of the book and unfolds a three-fold unity of what it is to be "fathered by God."

This truth is among the most powerful as it shapes the very essence of what it means to be a Christian.

One should be aware of John's tendency to think in terms of polar opposites. We might say that John leaves little room for shades of gray and is dogmatic where it comes to the essential features of Christianity. See, for example, **Jn. 3:18-21** with **1 Jn. 1:5-10; 2:3-11, 18-19; 3:4-10; 4:7-8, 20-21; 5:12**.

John presents the father-children analogy of the Christian life in stark terms of either being included in or excluded from the family of God (see **Jn. 1:10-13**).

Being in the family of God is a matter of personal assurance (**1 Jn. 5:9-13**), a testimony that issues from the Spirit of God (see **Rom. 8:12-16; 1 Jn. 3:9 [2 Pet. 1:4], 24; 4:4-6, 13; 5:6**). This amounts to a personal existential experience of God that is grounded in the work of the Spirit.

This includes the "love of God" that is poured out in our hearts by the Spirit (**Rom. 5:5**). It is this "love" that dominates the book and serves as not only the occasion for the way to God being open to sinners, but also serves as the chief mark or characteristic belonging to those who have been radically transformed by God (**3:16-17; 4:11-12**).

In this book, John cites the theme of being-becoming a child of God as though the revelation of this truth is aimed at explaining the qualities and characteristics that now reside in the people of God; qualities that contrast with our former estate and represent a down payment (**2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14**) of what will be the full measure of God's work to come.

So, we ask the question: **"Why is the truth about being-becoming a child of God important to our daily lives as Christians?"**

The question itself is important because it takes the reader from an intensely theological approach to the Christian life to a deeply intimate and transforming relationship with God.

Let's answer the question under three headings:

1. Fathered by God
2. Faithful to God
3. Focused on God



I. Because we must live as one who is Fathered by God, v. 1a

A. A Received Gift, "See what sort of love...has given to us."

The book is an explanation of the "love of God," a love that is essential to the nature of God (**4:8**), personified in the person of the Lord Jesus (**4:9-10**), offered to humanity as a gift (**3:1**), and resident in the heart of the believer through the Spirit (**4:13**). It now defines the manner in which God relates to his child. It also dominates the manner in which believers ("the children of God") relate to one another. This is the new commandment previously modeled and mentioned by Jesus (see **Jn. 15:13; 13:34-35; 1 Jn. 3:14**).

B. An Established Theme, "the Father," **2:28-29; 3:8-10; 4:7-10; 5:1-4; 5:18-21**

It is no coincidence that Jesus taught his disciples to live in terms of their fatherly relation to God. For his disciples, they were aware of his sonship with respect to God, but to live before God as their Father was a radical concept, see **Matt. 6:1-18** (giving, praying, and fasting are obligatory measures that are performed under the scrutiny of God as Father).

C. A Personal History, "that we should be called God's children."

In Johannine fashion, the polar opposites are revealed. We are either the children of the devil and subjects of his kingdom, or we are the children of God and subjects of his kingdom, **3:8-10**. This begs the question of origin. For example, what must one do to become a child of the devil? He must only be born naturally into this world (**Eph. 2:1-3**). What must one do to escape the coming wrath upon the kingdom of Satan and his subjects? He must enter into the kingdom of God. How so? Jesus explained that one enters the kingdom by a supernatural birth (**Jn. 3:3, 5**). This birth occurs through the power of the Word (truth revealed, **1 Pet. 1:23; Rom. 1:16; 10:17**), the witness of the Spirit who convinces us of sin (**Jn. 16:8**), the drawing of the sinner to a Savior (**Jn. 6:35-40**), and the response of faith (**Jn. 1:12**).

D. A Transformational Reality, "and indeed we are."

The force of this addendum may seem trivial or superfluous, but it invites the reader to advance beyond merely agreeing with the stated truth to the point of living in accordance with it. John is exposing and emphasizing what is to be an abiding component to one's consciousness, not a fact to be filed in the memory bank.

Applications:

1. Whatever one might think of the Lord Jesus, he embodies the love of God in such a way that we can know it and receive it. To become a child of God is no less than receiving his love. This is a matter of receiving the Lord Jesus (**Jn. 1:12**).
2. It is natural for the child of God to express his devotion in terms of the father-child relation. This new awareness is the experienced fruit of the Spirit of God (**Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6**). The Spirit of God has produced in us the trusting spirit of a child (a humble deference to the Father's will, **Matt. 26:38-44**). This is the essence of the work of grace performed in the heart of the one made new in Christ by God, **Matt. 18:3; Lk. 18:15-17**.
3. Can you trace a personal history of escape from certain ruin into the loving care of a heavenly Father? The man born blind could easily trace the sudden reception of sight (**Jn. 9:25**). The demon-crazed man of Gadara was conscious of his deliverance and went forth proclaiming the news (**Mk. 5:1-20**). Is it possible that our present silence and lack of witness is related to the singular fact that we've either not experienced deliverance from sin, or that the experience has waned to insignificance?

4. Consider the varied circumstances of your life and then ask: “What difference will knowing God as my Father make with regard to each?” Will God really take care of me? Can God provide for my needs? Will God lead me? Will God protect me? Will God be merciful to me? Will God forgive me? What would a Father who can act only in love do for those he calls his children?

Illustration

A construction crew was building a new road through a rural area, knocking down trees as it progressed. A superintendent noticed that one tree had a nest of birds who couldn't yet fly and he marked the tree so that it would not be cut down. Several weeks later the superintendent came back to the tree. He got into a bucket truck and was lifted up so that he could peer into the nest. The fledglings were gone. They had obviously learned to fly. The superintendent ordered the tree cut down. As the tree crashed to the ground, the nest fell clear and some of the material that the birds had gathered to make the nest was scattered about. Part of it was a scrap torn from a Sunday school pamphlet. On the scrap of paper were these words: He careth for you.

II. Because we must live as one who is Faithful to God, vv. 1b-2

- A. We now have a Changed Identity, “the world does not know us, because it did not know him,” v. 1b.

The world now relates differently to us as we have left its ranks. This book reveals a number of defining marks that distinguish Christians from the world **2 Cor. 5:16**. These marks effectively set us apart from the world: (1) desires fellowship with other Christians (1:7); (2) recognizes his sinfulness (1:8); (3) desires to keep the commands of God (2:3); (4) does not love the world or the things of the world (2:15); (5) knows Jesus and His divinity (2:23); (6) looks forward to the return of Christ (3:2); (7) does not live a lifestyle of sin (3:8-9); (8) has love for Christians (3:14); (9) loves preaching and teaching from the Word (4:6); and (10) proclaims the Gospel intentionally (4:15). This is God setting his “city on a hill” (us) that “cannot be hid” (**Matt.5:14**).

The “Father-child” relation of the believer with God is dominated by “love.” This “love” is common to all believers and shared by them in mutual relationships. When the believer departs the ranks of the world, he or she enters into a dynamic of living previously unknown. It is a dynamic wherein they are captivated by the love of God (see **2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 Jn. 4:19**).

- B. We now have a Changed Perspective, “we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not been revealed,” v. 2a

We have a sense of “now” v. “then.” This sense permits a “this is not all that there is” outlook that envisions “better things to come” (**Phil. 1:23**). Besides the notion of “better things,” there is the sense of the fullness of God’s work in us being completed (**Phil. 1:6; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; 2 Cor. 4:16; 5:1-10**, together, these passages indicate a day when the complete work of redemption will be accomplished; a day when the renewal of the outer man will match that of the inner man). This “day” is synonymous with the return of Jesus (**2:28**).

- C. We now have a Changed Assurance, “We know that whenever it is revealed we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is,” v. 2b.

For the Christian, there is a knowledge that permits us to “live by faith and not by sight” (**2 Cor. 5:7**). The substance of this “faith” is a grasping on what has been revealed to our spirit concerning our full redemption (**2 Cor. 5:1-10**). We “grasp” what is unseen as though it is real, because it has been revealed to our spirit (**Heb. 11:1-2**). The fact is that Jesus is coming again (**Jn. 14:3**). We will meet him (**1 Thess. 4:17**). That meeting will effectively perfect us in love in the sense that the fullness of our redemption, both outer and inner man will be complete (**1 Jn. 4:16**). This assurance of meeting

the Savior has a sobering effect on our daily lives as we live with a view to the coming judgment (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10).

Applications

1. How unmistakably recognizable are you from the world (attitudes, pursuits, affiliations)? See Acts 4:12-13.
2. Are you weary enough of this world so as to groan after the fullness of all that awaits us at the appearing of our Savior? See Tit. 2:11-13.
3. Do you live in terms of immediate gratification, temporal concerns, or eternal reward? See 2 Cor. 4:17-18; Matt. 6:33.

Illustration

There are three huge gates that lead into the Cathedral of Milan. Over one gate there is an inscription in marble under a beautiful flower bouquet that says, "The things that please are temporary." Over the second gate, there is a cross with this inscription: "The things that disturb us are temporary." However, over the central gate, there is a big inscription saying, "Eternal are the important ones."

III. Because we must live as one who is Focused on God, v. 3

Until that day, we live by what God has given as a reference point for our faith. In other words, we are to keep the eyes of our faith focused on Jesus, the "pioneer and perfecter" of our faith (Heb. 12:2). This means that we do as he did and say as he said (2:6; 4:17). He is the exemplar.

The verb translated *purifies* (ἀγνίζω, *hagnizō*) is somewhat unusual here, since it is not common in the NT, and occurs only once in the Gospel of John (11:55). One might wonder why the author did not use the more common verb ἀγιάζω (*hagiazō*), as in John 17:19, where Jesus prays, "On their behalf I consecrate myself, so that they may also be consecrated in the truth." It is possible that there is some overlap between the two verbs and thus this is another example of Johannine stylistic variation, but the verb ἀγνίζω is used in the context of John 11:55, which describes ritual purification for the Passover, a usage also found in the LXX (Ex 19:10-11, Num 8:21). **In this context the use of ἀγνίζω would remind the readers that, if they have the future hope of entering the Father's presence ("seeing him as he is" in 3:2), they need to prepare themselves by living a purified lifestyle now, just as Jesus lived during his earthly life and ministry (cf. 2:6 again).** This serves to rebut the opponents' claims to moral indifference, that what the Christian does in the present life is of no consequence. (The NET Bible notes)

Application

What model do you look to from which to make your decisions and form your character? Consider the following from Larry Richards as worthy aspects of models fitting for educators: (1) There needs to be frequent, long-term contact with the model(s). (2) There needs to be a warm, loving relationship with the model(s). (3) There needs to be exposure to the inner states of the model(s). (4) The model(s) need to be observed in a variety of life settings and situations. (5) The model(s) need to exhibit consistency and clarity in behaviors, values, etc. (6) There needs to be a correspondence between the behavior of the model(s) and the beliefs (ideal standards) of the community. (7) There needs to be explanation of life style of the model(s) conceptually, with instruction accompanying shared experiences.

Illustration

The outstanding Baptist preacher, Dr. George W. Truett, was helping a struggling congregation raise money for their church building. They still needed \$6500. Truett found the response weak. With only \$3000 pledged he said in exasperation, "Do you expect me to give the other \$3500 needed to reach your goal? I'm just a guest here today."

Suddenly, a woman near the back stood. Looking at her husband seated on the platform recording pledges, she said in a shaking voice, "Charlie, I wonder if you would be willing for us to give our little home? We were offered exactly \$3500 cash for it yesterday. If the Savior gave His life for us, shouldn't we make this sacrifice for Him?"

Truett reported that the fine husband responded with equal generosity. "Yes, Jennie, I was thinking the same thing."

Turning to Truett, he said, "Brother Truett, if it's needed, we'll raise our pledge by \$3500." Silence reigned for a few moments. Then some of the folks began to sob. Those who fifteen minutes earlier had refused to do more now either added their names to the list or increased their donations. In a short time, their goal had been achieved, and Charlie and Jennie didn't have to forfeit their home. Their willingness to sacrifice had stimulated others to similar generosity.



Conclusion

Care-free

Little children don't care what kind of clothes they wear, or what kind of car their mom or dad brings them to school in. They don't care what neighborhood they live in or what kind of house they live in. They don't care whether someone is tall, short, skinny or fat; they see beauty in everyone and everything. Little children never worry about what other people think of them; they are unaware of social expectations. They don't pretend to be something they're not; they simply are happy to be themselves without any reservations.

Humble

I love to teach little children; they are full of wonder and excitement. When it comes to learning, they are like sponges, soaking up everything you provide for them to discover, investigate and experience. As they grow quickly in their knowledge and skills, they want more! More challenges, more discoveries, more experiences. Little children never think they know everything. They never think they are more important than anyone else.

Innocent

Little children are blameless. They do not intentionally cause frustration. They do not plot and plan someone else's demise. They don't gossip. They honestly express what they see, hear, and feel. Little children never think or do evil things.

Loveable

Little children love to be loved. They love to sit close to you and talk. They love to walk with you and hold hands. They love to look into your eyes and smile. They love to call your name and hear you answer. They love to lay their head on your shoulder and feel your arms around them. They love to be friends. Little children never refuse to love or be loved. They always seek to be in a loving relationship.

Dependent

Little children know they need help. When they are scared or hurt they cry and ask to be comforted. When they need help to accomplish something, they ask for assistance. When they don't know the answer, they ask for instruction. When they need to be reassured, they ask for words of encouragement. When they are hungry, they ask to be fed. Little children depend on others for help; they don't hesitate to ask or worry about what others think. Little children never think less of others for needing help. In fact, they love to help.

My Prayer

Lord, please help me to become as a little child; I fall short in so many areas. Help me to overcome the worries and fears that stand in my way. Help me to turn away from behaviors that cause harm to others. Help me to embrace who I am, and to reach out to others for what I need help with. Help me to always seek to be in loving relationship with those you've placed in my life. Help me to honestly express what I see, hear and feel. Help me to always be willing to learn and grow. Help me to not think more of myself than I really am. Help me to be authentic.

Thank you Jesus for your love and mercy. Thank you for accepting and loving me just the way I am.

Care free - My Father is in control. He gives me what I need, when I need it.

Humble - I am weak, but He is strong.

Innocent - Though my sins be scarlet, He washes me whiter than snow.

Loving - My Father loves me just the way I am, and I love Him.

Dependent - My Father will never leave or forsake me, no matter what.

<http://wheretheroadleadsweeklyblog.blogspot.com/2007/04/become-as-little-children.html>