

1 JOHN 3:1-3

INTRODUCTION

Being a child of God is a tremendous privilege that we probably don't ponder often enough. Now when I talk about being a child of God I want to be clear what I mean by that phrase for it is a phrase that is used and abused by all types of so called Christian groups. Those who had left the church in John's day would have said that being a child of God involves having this secret knowledge passed on to them through some sort of anointing of the Holy Spirit.

There are churches today that teach that we are all children of God and although that is true in a very loose sense in the sense that we are all created by God and belong to the human race but that is not how the term is used within this context or within the bible.

Now John makes it clear in his gospel what he means by children of God (John 1:9-13). Here John makes it clear that it is those who received Jesus, those who believed in his name were given the right or authority to be called the children of God. This is not something that happens naturally by birth but it is supernatural, it is not being born into this world that makes someone a child of God but it is being born of God. It is being spiritually born again, having our souls awaken unto God by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Well having now established what John means by using the phrase children of God, let us look at the implications of being a child of the living God.

1. A CHILD OF GOD IS LOVED BY THE FATHER (v.1).

John wants us to grasp how different from all other kinds of love, God's love really is. The AV translation 'Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us' gets nearer to what the verse is saying than the NIV translation. There is an imperative at the beginning of these verses in order to draw our attention to this amazing love. Look or see or behold! Catches the force of the word. What John is saying is to let this truth sink in, we need to take the time and ponder God's love for us.

We need to reflect on this love and allow its reality to sink down into the depths of our being. This amazing love is meant to take our breath away, to startle us amaze us so that we are left grasping at the love God has for his children. It is a love in which God takes the initiative to make us his children a love that gives lavishly and freely to those who are utterly undeserving.

When we think of our sin, rebellion and hatred for Christ and contrast that with God who is holy, pure and perfect in every way then we just begin and I mean we just begin to sense something of John's wonder that God should ever love people like us never mind the fact that he sent Jesus to die for us in order to save us from sin and hell.

Yet God's love for sinners like us is such that he delights to change us into children of God, and John is so amazed by this wonderful truth that he actually says that this is what we are now (v 1). This is not some wishful thinking or some theological truth that is very abstract but this is an eternal reality. We are now the children of God, in this vile and wicked world.

Now if I were to stop this sermon now then that truth would be enough to transform our lives. That phrase is enough to keep us pondering the love of God for the rest of our lives. If you are born again then you are a child of God; does that not amaze you? We have been adopted into the family of the living God we have millions of brothers and sisters throughout the world. But again let me emphasise that this is not something that we chose for ourselves, no left to ourselves we would still be in rebellion against God we would still be opposing him.

We have to remember that the choice lay entirely with the Father and was motivated by pure love, love that is at the very centre of God's being. Adoption is a legal action by which a person takes into his family a child who is not his own, who has no rights within that family, in order to give that child all the privileges of his own children.

An adopted child according to the law of the land is entitled to all the rights and privileges of a natural born child. What motivates someone to do that perhaps at considerable cost to themselves? Well there are all sorts of reasons for doing so. It might be a longing for children by someone who is unable to have any. It might be pity towards those children who have no family; it might be something about a particular child that adoptive parents are attracted too. It might be out of friendship towards the adopted child's parents who have died.

There are all sorts of reasons but then we have to ask what makes God adopt us. The answer is pure love. For there was nothing appealing about us that he should be attracted to us in fact the opposite is the case we were repulsive to him because of our sin. He couldn't even look at us and think there is someone who deserves to be adopted and therefore we drew his love from him. No! The truth is that we are his children adopted into his family because of his sheer love for us.

God chose to love us because He is love. It was this same love that chose Israel to be God's people within the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). Every Christian knows that it is this sort of love that is clearly demonstrated in the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:8), he lifted us out of a life of sin and he has placed us within his family and has given us the authority to call ourselves children of God.

However some Christians do find it difficult to accept God's love for them. God's love is unconditional and limitless and we never experience that sort of love to the same extent in any other human relationship. There are some Christians who have only known conditional love and restrictive love and love that is based upon what we do and how we respond.

As a consequence such people don't always find it easy to accept God's perfect love. They feel that they always have to earn love for that is how it was as a child; they feel that they have to meet certain expectations before they know love. One of the commentaries tells a story of a student who rang his Father to tell him of his

success in his exams. His Father's response shocked him a little, for he said "Good, that means we can still be friends."

That is conditional love and that sort of attitude cuts deeply into our thought and emotions so that for some people it is simply hard to accept that God loves them unconditionally full stop. What happens when we do not accept God's unconditional love for us? We try to impress God by our lives so that we at least feel we are earning his love. We can embark upon ceaseless Christian activity always trying to prove ourselves to God and others.

But actually such thinking perverts the love of God and it turns God's grace into a religion of works. But God's love and grace is not dependant on whether we reach a certain standard that pleases him, he loves us because he loves us. He lavishes his love upon us day after day and week after week no matter how we have been living before him. When we have fallen into sin he does not love us any less as a result. Of course that does not mean that God does not demand anything of us, or that he is not grieved when we fall into sin or is concerned about our weakness or apathy.

His love for us is so great that he deals with us when we sin, that he constantly reminds us of our Christian duties and that he works in us when we become apathetic. But he does all of that and much more because he loves us. God never will love you any less or any more than he loves you at this moment of time.

He will not love us any more in heaven when we are perfect than he loves us now. His love is unconditional and it is very important that we learn that lesson, otherwise we might be tempted to serve him in order to impress him rather than serving Him because we love him in response to his love for us.

We all need to stop from time to time and assess our lives honestly before God and ask how much do we do to impress God or perhaps others. Or is our Christian activity a true response to the amazing love the Father has for us as his children. Our security comes through an understanding of our Father's love for us in Jesus Christ. Our identity as the children of God does not depend upon our activity but upon his sovereign love for us. Now having an absolute assurance of God's love will help us with the remaining points that I am about to make.

2. A CHILD OF GOD KNOWS HOSTILITY FROM THE WORLD (v 1).

Of course knowing the love of God in our lives means that we know God and when we know God then the result of that is hostility with the world (v 2). The world does not recognise us it dismisses our message and us. We are dismissed as people who are weird and with a message that is outdated and not relevant. The reason for this is that the world did not know the Lord Jesus it failed to recognise him and his message. In fact the world was so hostile towards Jesus that they schemed to put him to death.

The world did not recognise Jesus as from God and in a similar way it fails to recognise us as children of God. The world has no understanding of our relationship with God it sees it all, as a delusion and it has no understanding of what we are talking about. This is why the media in our day pass over biblical truth as old

fashioned and boring. This is why the only time the church of Jesus Christ hits the headlines in our newspapers is when a leading light in the church falls into sin and brings disgrace upon the name of Christ.

We have to realise that the world hates God's children (3:13) because we do not belong to the world. We do not think like those of the world, our priorities are different from those of the world and our morals are completely different.

Our message from time to time disturbs the consciences of those in the world. It is no wonder that the world does not know us but that very fact is just further evidence or proof that we are children of God. Sometimes when we face hostility from the world, perhaps at work or within our families or somewhere else we can often feel cut off from God, we may even be tempted to give up our faith because of the hostility and yet we ought to look at it in a different way.

The fact that the world bothers to be hostile towards us is evidence that we are different from them and do not belong to this world. This ought to have the effect of strengthening one's faith as even the world recognises that we have passed from death to life even though they might not call it that. The very sad fact with the church in Britain is that we are far too like the world so much so that people do not even realise that we are different.

We do not face much hostility as a church perhaps because we are not living, thinking and acting, as God's children but are just a very poor imitation of what we should be. This ought to cause us to ponder and to repent so that we are more like what we ought to be which is less like the world and more like Christ.

3. A CHILD OF GOD HAS A FUTURE HOPE (v 2)

Although there is plenty about the future that we do not know, one thing is absolutely sure we have a future hope. It is wonderful being loved by the Father but we can be absolutely sure that our future state will be even more wonderful. We know something of Jesus here and now, we are being changed in this world and are becoming increasingly like the Lord Jesus but that is nothing compared to the fact that when Jesus Christ returns we will see him as he is in the fullness of his glory and we shall be like him.

The privileges of knowing Jesus now will be known in a much fuller way when Jesus appears. There is much that we do not know about heaven and the future but we can be sure of this that Jesus Christ is coming back, and we are going to see him as he is and then we shall be like him the full implications of what that means is still hidden from us. At that stage the process that started in us when we came to know God as a result of his electing love will then be made complete, as God's work of sanctification will be finished.

What we must remember is that this world has an end; History is working towards a climax, when Jesus will appear. This future fact is both a great hope and a great stimulus to the Christian. One day we will be like Jesus but in the meantime we will live in the light of that future hope. We live knowing that we are eternally loved by the

Father, that we enjoy all the privileges in this world of being a child of God privileges like sins forgiven, justified before God, and sure hope of heaven and so on.

We live with complete confidence that what we have been promised in the future will take place and that one-day we will enjoy all that God has in store for us. This sure hope does not make us complacent however and this leads me on to my final point.

4. A CHILD OF GOD IS CONCERNED WITH HOLINESS (v 3)

Here is the evidence that one is a child of God. To put it differently here is the result of being loved by the Father and being adopted into His family. If our future hope is centred upon Christ then we will want to be like him now. There is no exception here everyone who has this hope will seek to be holy.

The present tense 'purifies' indicates a continual process, which is taking place at this moment. Of course we will never have arrived when it comes to holiness in our journey towards heaven. We must daily seek to root out of our lives all sin we must seek to walk with honesty before God as we go about our daily business. We must have hearts that are sensitive to sin and turn to the Lord in genuine repentance when we give in to temptation and fall into sin.

Jesus is our example; although he knew no sin he lived in this world with all its attractions and temptations yet he did not sin.

One day we are going to be like him but until then we must remember that we are God's children, loved by God from eternally past and although we have to face hostility in this world, we have a future hope that is absolutely guaranteed. Therefore we must seek to be holy and live in a way that is pleasing to our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen