

Reformation
10/31/2010

You are a child of God! ...now. ...in eternity.

Pastor Michael Ewart
1 John 3:1-2

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I can't count how many times someone has come up to me when my kids are running around and said, "You can definitely tell which ones are yours!" That's not an unusual thing, is it? "She looks just like her mother!" Or "He acts just like his father!" Even when the looks aren't there, sometimes you'll see a child with a mannerism that immediately reminds you of the parent.

We also recognize the lack of a parental figure often has negative impact. A boy growing up with a father in the home leads us to say, "He has no male role model." We understand the importance of children having role models that they can imitate in their life.

In our sermon today, we'll be talking about another parent / child relationship. Throughout the Scripture in many places, God calls us his children. Time and again, we hear God called our Father. If there is this father/child relationship, we would expect that we would see some likeness or similarities between the Father and his children.

So let me just ask you up front. Are you a child of God? This was a question that tormented Martin Luther at one point in his life. He understood a child of God should be like God. He looked at his own thoughts, words and actions, and he compared them to God's commands and God's ways. And he reached a conclusion that terrified his soul. He saw God's righteousness and his own lack of it, and concluded: I must not be a child of God.

Has that terrifying thought ever troubled your conscience? Have you ever gotten tired of selflessly doing things for other people? Have you ever thrown up your hands and said, "That's it! I'm not doing it any more! They don't deserve it?" Then you stop and think. Wait... my heavenly Father never said that to me. He never stopped his forgiveness or his blessings, even when I didn't deserve it. Why, I'm nothing like my Father in heaven." The doubts creep in. Am I his child?

Have you ever found yourself gossiping about someone... saying bad things about someone who wasn't there, knowing you were their reputation? Did you ever stop and think: "That's not what my Father wants me to do. I am living in opposition to him. So am I really the child of God?"

Take a hard, honest look at your life. Look at your actions, your motives, your relationships. You see your failings, don't you? Your mistakes? Satan often will help us see these things, and focus on them. He does this to make us doubt our relationship with God. He whispers in your ear: "You're nothing like your Father. That's because you're not really his child. You're too wicked. Too sinful. You've done so much wrong, that God has disowned you. You are an orphan. There is no hope."

Friends, if you've ever felt that way. **"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"** There is a word in the Greek that isn't translated in the NIV, but it was properly included in the old King James Version. "Behold! How great is the love the father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God." That word "behold" is supposed to be an attention grabber. It indicates that the words that follow are particularly important and should be especially noticed. In modern English we don't say, "Behold." Maybe we would say, "Now listen to this..." What is so amazing and so important for us

to grasp here? That God has given and continues to give us his wonderful, astounding love... love that moved him to label us: "his children." And we *are* what God has declared us to be.

Now our conscience steps in and says, "Wait a minute. I am not enough like the Father. I have disobeyed him. I cannot possibly be his child. I do not in any way deserve it." And it's true. We don't deserve to be called his children. We have fallen short in every way. Because of sin, we are nothing like our Father.

You know when man became this way, right? It was already back in the Garden of Eden. There Adam and Eve really were like God. They were holy and pure. They obeyed him in thought, word and action. They were perfect children of a perfect Father. But then Satan came and convinced them that they really were not like God at all. If only they would eat of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil, *then* they would be like God. They fell for the trick, and just like that they became children of the devil instead of children of God.

But not for long! God soon stepped in and set things straight. Satan had interfered with God's plan and made man God's enemies and Satan's children. But God said to Satan, "I will make you an enemy of the woman once again, just as you are my enemy. She will again be my child. And the descendents of the woman who trust in me, they too will be your enemies and my children. And there will be a particular descendent of the woman who will crush your head, utterly defeat you, Satan. Your power over my children will be crushed forever."

God made good on his promise. He sent Jesus, his one and only Son... true God and true man... to defeat our enemy once and for all. Jesus' holy life and innocent suffering and death on the cross were exactly the sacrifice demanded by our holy God for the sins of the world. That sacrifice was complete and fully accepted: the resurrection of Jesus proves it. In that one great, selfless act, God brought us back into his family. He made us his children. He declared us righteous in his sight for Jesus sake.

So our God declares to you and to me today: "Now listen up: I have given you my unrestrained, astonishing love, and I have declared you to be my children." You are children *of God*. Let that sink in. Feel the overwhelming impact of those words. You are the immediate family of God Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.

What does this mean for you now? It means you are blessed. It means God favors you. It means you are recipients of his special care and affection. It means his gifts are poured out on you. And in the words of Psalm 23, your cup overflows with God's goodness and mercy. God wants you to know for a fact that you are forgiven, accepted, noticed, accompanied and free... all because of God's amazing love.

These things are an accomplished fact. How does that make you feel? You have been adopted into God's family simply because of his decision and mercy. Is there something you want to say? Does "thank you" come to mind? Is there something you want to do? Is "serve him" something you now eagerly desire and can't wait to do? (1) Having heard his love that has made you his child, don't you want to *grow in your relationship* with your Father? That happens as you read the Word of God regularly, as you worship every week, as you pray continuously. Grow in your relationship with your Father!

(2) Knowing you're a child of God, don't you want to grow in your *relationship with the rest of the family*? Look around you today. Look at everyone in this church. This is your family. These are your brothers and sisters! You have the same Father. Every time we gather for worship, we're having a family reunion! We're gathering to celebrate the weekly anniversary of our brother and Savior's resurrection. We encourage our other family members and give them hope when they might be discouraged.

(3) But we can't stay here. We go back into the world. But we go knowing that we are children of God who are the recipients of his amazing love. So won't we want to serve our great God and Father with every minute of every day of our life? Won't we strive to be like him in our homes?... in our work place?... in our neighborhood? Won't we strive to make our loving Father known to everyone around us?

Being a child of God now, also means some challenges for us, though. Our text says, "**The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.**" When John says "the world" here, he's referring to the sinful, unconverted world. These are the people who have rejected God's love and continue to live in open rebellion with God. They don't know God or recognize his love for them. They reject his Son. They reject any notion that God has a claim on their life. They demand to be free of God's influence, and in doing so they free themselves from his love and forgiveness as well. They don't know God. So it shouldn't surprise us that they don't know us either. They don't recognize us as children of the Father. They don't recognize any benefit to our relationship with a God they reject. And just as they hate God, they hate us because of our relationship with God. They hate the Father, so they hate his children too.

The challenge we face now... is persecution from the world... ridicule... mockery. This often makes life in this world difficult for Christians. But there's more. You see being a child not only has an impact now, but also in eternity.

In our text for today, John says, "**Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.**" John acknowledges that there is much we don't know when it comes to eternity. But we know enough. When Jesus will come again to judge the world our bodies will be changed. Our bodies will be raised imperishable, just as Jesus' body. "**We eagerly await . . . the Lord Jesus Christ, who . . . will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.**" (Philippians 3:20-21)

So our bodies will be like Jesus' glorious body after his resurrection. But what else does it mean: "**We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.**" It means that we will be holy just as God is holy. It means that we will have a perfect knowledge of what is good and pleases God. It means that we will have a perfect desire to obey God out of love. It means that the image of God in which Adam and Eve were created will be fully and perfectly restored to us in heaven. *We will be like him!*

Dear friends, You are children of God. Let this good news fill you with comfort and peace today. It means all your guilt is gone. You are now already fit for heaven. What an amazing privilege! What amazing love our God has shown us. Now contemplate this: what will your life now look like as God's son or daughter? How will you relate to your brothers and sisters here? How will you work with them to God's glory? How will you live for your Father during the coming week? How can you praise your Father by modeling your life after his this week?

You are a child of God! And that means everything. Amen.