

7. Living as Children of God (3Q 2009—Loved and Loving: John’s Epistles)

Biblical material: Gen. 3:5; Ps. 51:4; Isa. 1:2; John 1:12; Heb. 9:26, 28; 1 John 3:1–10.

Quotes

- The Holy One . . . requires the heart. *Judah ben Ezekiel*
- The world loves a spice of wickedness. *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*
- The world is a kind of spiritual kindergarten where millions of bewildered infants are trying to spell “God” with the wrong blocks. *Edwin Arlington Robinson*
- Man rejects, ridicules, and retaliates but God embraces, accepts, and forgives. *Duane Alan Hahn*
- Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. Do not believe in anything because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason, and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, accept it and live up to it. *Buddha*

Questions

Is it just a question of God “calling” us children, or are *really* God’s children? How? In what ways do we become like him? As a consequence what is our relationship to the Devil and his “alternative” life/methods? How badly do we want to be rid of sin? What is the basis of the Devil’s challenge to God? How is this unmasked?

Bible discussion

“Consider the incredible love that the Father has shown us in allowing us to be called ‘the children of God’—and that is not just what we are called, but what we *are*.” (1 John 3:1 Phillips).

This is not just some “imputed” name. We really are God’s children—this is what God promises. Not just in name either, but in actuality. We *really are* God’s children as we respond to God’s love, repent and are transformed by the work of the Spirit. Technical terms such as “imputed righteousness” and “imparted righteousness” may obscure the process, suggesting that the first is the identification and the second the actuality. John doesn’t differentiate righteousness here, he just says that we are not only so identified but are considered by God truly to be his children. And don’t forget that the Devil is ready on hand to cry “Foul!” if God were to do something unjust... God’s claims for his children is far more than just pronouncing “Not Guilty” over a bunch of rebels. Heaven is peopled not with pardoned criminals but transformed children of God totally accepted by him.

“We shall be like him, *for we shall see him as he really is*.” (1 John 3:2 TEV, my emphasis). Seeing is the transforming word: seeing meaning more than visibility, but also illumination and understanding. Once we begin to really see God *as He really is* then we begin to be changed into His likeness—spiritually, morally, behaviourally. This process commences as we come to God, and will be completed by the return of Jesus, when in a twinkling of an eye, we are changed!

How does John identify one reason for Jesus' first coming? To destroy the works of the Devil. And what is implied in this? That Jesus came to undo the damage done by Satan, to clear up misconceptions about God, and to end the rule of demonic deceptions. For as John notes: "the devil has been sinning from the beginning" (1 John 3:8 NIV). Jesus' coming was God's ultimate answer in the Great Controversy. He destroys the work of the Devil by showing it to be based on lies and deceit, on false insinuations and erroneous claims. The Devil is revealed as he truly is, and all his anger, hate and evil is brought out into the searchlight of God's brilliant and glorious truth.

"Anyone who does not what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother." (1 John 3:10 NIV). We cannot identify ourselves as true children of God if we do not demonstrate in our own lives the qualities of God. If we are truly part of His family, then others should expect us to act and think in ways that correspond to God's.

Similarly "not loving your brother" demonstrates which "Father" you have: as Jesus said to those who demonstrated similar attitudes, "Ye are of your father the Devil" (John 8:44 KJV). Like those religionists, you may *say* you are a follower of the true God, you may *claim* to be upholding all the doctrines, you may even *believe* that you have met all the requirements—but if you demonstrate lack of love, then you are not God's child.

Comment

"If, then, the whole purpose of Christ's first appearing was to remove sins and to undo the works of the devil, Christians must not compromise with either sin or the devil, or they will find themselves fighting against Christ. If the first step to holiness is to recognize the sinfulness of sin, both in its essence as lawlessness and in its diabolical origin, the second step is to see its absolute incompatibility with Christ in His sinless Person and saving work. The more clearly we grasp these facts, the more incongruous will sin appear and the more determined we shall be to be rid of it." John R W Stott, Epistles of John (London: Tyndale Press, 1964), 125.

Ellen White Comments

If there is anything in our world that should inspire enthusiasm, it is the cross of Calvary. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." 1 John 3:1. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. Christ is to be accepted, believed on, and exalted. This is to be the theme of conversation—the preciousness of Christ. . . . {CT 338}

The plan of redemption is not merely a way of escape from the penalty of transgression, but through it the sinner is forgiven his sins, and will be finally received into heaven,—not as a forgiven culprit pardoned and released from captivity, yet looked upon with suspicion and not admitted to friendship and trust; but welcomed as a child, and taken back into fullest confidence. {RH, September 21, 1886}

But in heaven, service is not rendered in the spirit of legality. When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator. Obedience is to them no drudgery. Love for God makes their service a joy. {MB 109}

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