

# God's Children

1 John 2:28-3:10

April 15, 2018

I'd like to begin today by asking you a simple question: Whose child are you? This seems like such a simple question. But, the reality is, that for many of us, the answer is complicated. Either because of some tragedy or act of abandonment or some other challenging situation, only some of us can just answer with the name of one dad and one mom. For example, my standard answer to the question "whose child are you?" is "I am the child of Ken and Becky Eades." This is kind of my go-to answer with people who I don't know very well or when I don't have a lot of time to explain the details. And, that's true. Those are the parents who raised me and I love them both and appreciate them so much. However, when I give this answer, it often introduces some curiosity. You said "their last name was Eades?" "Isn't your last name Johnson?" Hum. Well, yes, it is. So, a more accurate answer might include information about my biological father, David Sodke. You see, I'm his child too. But, that still doesn't satisfy most people's curiosity. "You said his last name is Sodke, but isn't your last name Johnson?" Like I said, it's complicated.

How about you? Whose child are you? I hope that there's an uncomplicated answer for you. But, I'm guessing, that for many of you, it's probably a little more complicated. Christianity offers each one of us an incredible opportunity to be adopted into God's family. 1 John 3:1 says, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! ð + Whatever our family of origin may be, as God's child, we can hold our heads high. God chose us to be part of His family!"

Please turn in your Bible to 1 John. John writes to teach them what it means to be one of God's children.<sup>2</sup> The first thing he teaches them is in 1 Jn. 2:28, "And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming." John encourages them with this powerful truth:

**1. God's children can continue in Christ with unashamed confidence.** The key to this "unashamed confidence" is this word CONTINUE.<sup>3</sup> John uses it 3 times in our passage this morning: 1 John 2:28 tells us to, "continue in him (Jesus)" 1 John 3:6 says, "No one who continues to sin has ð known him (Jesus)." 1 John 3:9 says, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin." Sin bothers the Christian conscience. At least, it should bother you, if you've been genuinely born of God. It bothers us because it robs us of our unashamed confidence. Sin does not peacefully coexist within the hearts of those who have been made righteous. This mismatch grates on our soul and makes us miserable. As we wrestle against sin, we feel this consternation within ourselves "cannot go on sinning!"

So, we take our sin to Christ once again. Rather than continuing in sin, we chose to continue in Christ. We confess our sin and ask Jesus to help us with it. We learned about this back in 1 John 2:1 where John wrote, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." God's children are in a maturing process.

Following Christ can feel a little bit like when you were just a little guy and you tried to walk behind your dad or some other adult in the really deep snow. You try to put your feet in your dad's footprints so that it's a little easier to walk. But, it's not so easy because he is so much bigger and stronger than you. Sometimes, you fall down in the snow and maybe even get frustrated with yourself. You maybe even get down on yourself or sit there in the snow and just start crying. "I just can't do it! I'm so stupid! I'm just a little weakling! I'll never make it through all this snow!" Then, your dad walks back to you and brushes you off and urges you to try again. Over time, your legs get longer and you grow more mature and walking in his footsteps becomes not so awkward and not so hard.

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<sup>1</sup> Consider 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.

<sup>2</sup> Once again, the Apostle John expresses his affection for these dear bros/sis in Christ. He calls them his "dear children" because of the close spiritual parenting he has done in their lives. When John addresses his readers as "dear children" it also points to the more important reality that they are children of God. John would not even have this close relationship with his readers, were it not for the fact, that they share the same Heavenly Father.

<sup>3</sup> See also 1 John 5:18.

<sup>4</sup> Here, the **ESV** translation is helpful: "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning ð +"

Continuing in Christ does not mean that we will never fall into sin. Living with unashamed confidence is really about living each day honestly before God, in the midst of our sin and our stumbling and our broken mess.<sup>5</sup> One Bible commentator explains it this way, %John is not setting before us a terrifying perfectionism; but he is demanding a life which is ever on the watch against sin, a life in which sin is not the normal accepted way but the abnormal moment of defeat.<sup>6</sup> Children of God are not perfectly sinless, but they should not unabashedly continue to sin either. They should continue in Christ, becoming more and more like Christ, one step at a time. This leads right into another thing that John teaches them about being God's children...

**2. God's children will bear His likeness.** 1 John 3:3 says, %All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.+1 John 3:7 says, %Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.+ Just as He is pure. Just as He is righteous. God's children are becoming JUST LIKE HIM.<sup>7</sup>

John has spoken before regarding his concern that these dear children not be led astray. His concern is not just about false teachings. John is also concerned that God's children not be led into impure and unrighteous behavior by these false teachers.<sup>8</sup> Having God as our Heavenly Father means that we have a lot to live up to. In one sense, John is calling us to live up to the family name. Obeying God's truth is one of the ways we show our love for God. It demonstrates that we want to be just like our dad, because we look up to Him and want to make Him proud. We are looking for that %well done good and faithful servant+when Christ returns.<sup>9</sup> There is a standard we are called to live up to as Christians, because of who we are. Because of WHOSE we are; we are children of God and we need to live like it! 1 John 3:9 tells us that, %No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.+Have you ever heard someone say, %You remind me of your father?+Or, %You look so much like your mother?+There is a similar effect in God's children. Not so much the physical characteristics but the spiritual ones. The righteous and godly ways you have about you. The reason that we bear God's likeness, is that God's seed remains in us. We have been born of God. Therefore, God's Spirit lives in us. You could say this creates a kind of %spiritual DNA+within us.<sup>10</sup> We share His characteristics because we've got his %spiritual genes+so to speak. We are new creations in Christ. We have a distinct spiritual life within us. One of the things that makes God's children so special, is that they bear God's likeness. Bearing God's likeness is diametrically opposed to the devil's likeness. 1 John 3:10 ends today's passage this way, %This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.+

So far, we've covered two important truths about God's children:

1. God's children can continue in Christ with unashamed confidence.
2. God's children will bear His likeness.

John calls us to do what is right, because doing what is right, is the natural by-product of being the child of the God, who is righteous. But John is not only calling us to do what is right. John is calling us to do BUT ALSO to be, calling us to be who we are: God's children. But I wonder about this. I'm troubled by this. Do we really understand who we truly are? Do we actually know what it means to be in God's family? I'm not so sure that we do.

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<sup>5</sup> Each day, we recognize that continuing in Christ is our only hope for daily Christian living. Over time, we learn to live the way God's children are supposed to live, with unashamed confidence. Now, this is not confidence in ourselves, but confidence in Christ. It's knowing, that as we continue in Him in the present, there's no need to feel ashamed about our past.

<sup>6</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1976, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> In 1 Jn. 2:29 he says, %If you know that he is righteous, you know that **everyone who does what is right has been born of him.**+Just to be clear, this %Righteous conduct is not a condition for rebirth but a consequence of it.+(Glenn W. Barker, *1, 2, 3 John: The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 12*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1981, p. 330.) Let's be careful not to get the cart before the horse. We bear God's likeness after, not before, we become His child.

<sup>8</sup> Kruse, C. G. (2000). *The letters of John* (p. 122). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.

<sup>9</sup> See Matthew 25:21.

<sup>10</sup> A good example of this would be the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. When we keep in step with the Spirit, it results in love/joy/peace/patience/kindness/goodness/etc.

**3. God's children should celebrate their identity in their Heavenly Father.** In Christ, your identity is this **YOU** are a child of God. This is your new name. This is your new status. This impacts your inheritance; where you will spend eternity and where your home will be. You get to sit at God's table because you are God's child. So, let me ask you something, **Are you living out this identity?** 1 John 3:1 declares, **See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!** <sup>11</sup> Through Christ, it's our privilege to be called children of God. But, **we** are not merely called the children of God; we are the children of God! <sup>12</sup> That is what we are! That's our identity. When Jesus taught us to pray, He taught us to pray **Our Father who art in heaven.** This should not feel foreign or strange to us. It shouldn't feel like we are overreaching in any way to think that we have access to the Living God. This is God's plan, God's idea. Romans 8:15 says, **The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, Abba, Father.** <sup>13</sup> Our Heavenly Father is also known as Abba. <sup>14</sup> Abba is an Aramaic word for father. But that translation doesn't quite catch the expression that's implied in this word. It is more helpful to translate it **papa** or **daddy** because it speaks of intimacy and familiarity. Is it ok to call the God of the universe Daddy? If you don't already know the answer to that question, then this next part of this sermon may be especially intended for you today.

Romans and 1 John are talking about the same Heavenly Father. One who lavishes great love on us. While at one extreme we certainly don't want to lose our proper reverence for God as our Master and Creator, it is equally important that we not lose our understanding that He has chosen to reveal Himself as our Heavenly Father. God chose to adopt us into His family. Don't miss this. And, don't lessen the closeness of this relationship. This is a critical piece of theology and an essential part of our development as disciples. Don't keep God at arm's length. If that's really what God wanted, the HS would have never inspired the authors or Romans/1 John to write what they wrote. In 1 John 3:1, John wants us to marvel at this, **See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!** <sup>15</sup> Some translations say **Behold!** <sup>16</sup> Take note of something very special here, notice this!

But, the fact is, some of us just don't see it; we can't see it. The intimacy and love that God intends to have with us is blocked. It might be blocked by shame or pain from the past or by some difficulty that was caused by our own earthly father. Perhaps our view is blocked by something else. My prayer for each one of us today is that God will help us to break through whatever might be blocking our intimacy with Him. He loves YOU so much! He is especially fond of you. Through Christ, you are His child. And God wants to lavish His great love on you.

Let me give you a picture of what I mean. There's a Christian band called Audio Adrenaline. They've got some great theology in their song **Big House** (1993): **Come and go with me to my Father's house** It's a big big house with lots and lots a room. A big big table with lots and lots of food. A big big yard where we can play football. A big big house; it's my Father's house All I know is

<sup>11</sup> Here's a sidebar to ponder. (I heard this in a sermon from Pastor Dave Johnson, Church of the Open Door.) Sometimes we treat people differently based on the family they come from. Maybe because their family has money and influence or maybe because they have an older brother who is big/strong and will beat the tar out of anyone who messes with his little brother/sister. Here's why I share that. Sometimes we might forget that our spouse is not just the son or daughter of our in-laws. Our spouse is a son or daughter of God the Father. And we best be careful not to disrespect or mistreat them, because our Heavenly Father is strong and he is watching. And He takes care of His own.

This also applies to who you are dating. Maybe their earthly father and mother don't know what you're up to. But their Heavenly Father knows. So, you best be careful how you conduct yourself and how you treat other people. Parents do well to remember this too. You son or daughter is your child. But if they are in Christ, they are also children of their Heavenly Father. You would do well to remember to treat them well. Understanding our Heavenly Father gives us a good perspective on all kinds of different relational dynamics. We shouldn't use or abuse anyone. We should value everyone.

<sup>12</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude, Rev. Ed.*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1976, p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> See also Mark 14:36 and Galatians 4:6. Consider also 1 John 4:18.

<sup>14</sup> **ἄββα** originally a term of endearment. Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 1). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>15</sup> = **το** take special note of something, see, notice, note+Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 279). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>16</sup> They didn't usually use punctuation when writing New Testament Greek, but the NIV recognizes the force of this sentence, so it adds an exclamation point 2 times in a row.

a big ole house with rooms for everyone. All I know is lots a land where we can play and run. All I know is you need love and I've got a family. All I know is you're all alone, so why not come with me?%

Now, Scripture does tell us that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us. And we learn about a big banquet that God will host one day.<sup>17</sup> So, it's not out of line to say that God has a BIG BIG house with LOTS/LOTS of food.

And that's why it seems at least somewhat plausible to me that God must have a really HUGE refrigerator. Where else would He keep all that food? But, this refrigerator isn't just for food. There's another reason why God needs such a BIG fridge. Like every great parent, on the front of God's refrigerator, is where He keeps the artwork from all of His kids. Any of you parents still do this? (pic) Your son/daughter comes home from school with a beautiful stick drawing of a few people with enormously large heads and skinny legs. %Look Mommy! I drew this for YOU. See Daddy! That's you, you're the big one and I'm the little one!+You cherish those drawings don't you, or at least you cherish the intentions behind them. That's how God cherishes His kids. I figure He must sit around in His kitchen once and a while, just bragging about his kids to the angels. The reason for this is His great affection for us. The God we serve is the kind of Heavenly Father who has your picture on His fridge.



In 1 John 3:1 shouts it forth: %**See what great love** the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! ã +Do you see God's great love for you this way? Or is your vision blocked by something? You can believe that His affections for you are this real! Believe it. Believe it. Let that into your heart. Let it impact your experience with God and your daily walk with Him. Our human hearts are designed for relationship. And until we find a loving relationship, that satisfies this deepest need, we'll look everywhere for it. We'll try to meet this need in all kinds of other unhealthy ways. If we don't discover, this genuine, heart-filling relationship with our Heavenly Father, we'll drive ourselves into the dirt searching for it.

That we should be called children of God! That is what we are!

Bros/Sis in Christ, you are a child of the Most High God. **Live out that identity!**

Ephesians 1:3-5 says, %Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, **in accordance with his pleasure and will.**+Amen.

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
on April 15, 2018 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*

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<sup>17</sup> See John 14:1-4, Matthew 8:11, and Revelation 19:9.