

Southport Presbyterian Church
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Living as the Children of God
John 1:10-13; 1 John 3:1-3 (NIV)

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.” (John 1:10-13, NIV)

“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! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, 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. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” (1 John 3:1-3, NIV)

In both of our scripture passages today, the Apostle John makes the bold statement that Christians—followers of Jesus—are given the right, the privilege, of being called the children of God.

To describe our relationship to God as His children was new to the world at this time. It was a new concept to see God as our Father—a powerful concept Jesus introduced to us when He taught the Lord's Prayer starting out by saying “Our Father”. He said we could call God “Father,” “Abba,” or “Daddy.” This implied an intimate relationship, a child-parent relationship, with the God of the universe.

But being called a child of God also has some other powerful ramifications for us who follow Jesus, which we are going to look at today.

First, it means that we receive this relationship not because we were born physically into it but because we have had a spiritual rebirth. As John said in **John 1:12-13**: **“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.” (John 1:12-13, NIV)**

William Barclay writes about being a child of God: “It is by the gift of God that a man [person] becomes a child of God. By nature a man [person] is the creature of God, but it is by grace that he becomes the child of God. There are two English words which are closely connected but whose meanings are widely different, paternity and fatherhood. Paternity describes a relationship in which a man is responsible for the physical existence of a child; fatherhood describes an intimate, loving, relationship. In the sense of paternity all men [people] are children of God; but in the sense of fatherhood men [people] are children of God only when he makes his gracious approach to them and they respond.” (William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, p. 73)

The statement in John 1 that we become the children of God not by human birth but by God—a spiritual rebirth—was a sharp contrast to what the Pharisees believed. Listen to the following conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees over the issue of biological lineage versus spiritual lineage in **John 8**: **“Abraham is our father,’ they answered.**

“If you were Abraham's children,’ said Jesus, ‘then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father [meaning the evil one] does.’” (John 8:38-41a, NIV)

William Barclay writes on these verses: “...Quite literally the Jew believed that he was safe because he was a descendant of Abraham. ...It was not flesh and blood which made a man [person] a descendant of Abraham; it was moral quality and spiritual fidelity.” (William Barclay, *The Gospel of John, Vol. 2*, pp. 24-26)

Many people believe that they are Christians by what they do. They say, “Because I live a good life and don’t hurt anyone, I’m a Christian.” That’s not true.

Many times people also believe they are Christians because they do Christian things like go to church, or help people in need. These are fine and good and important, but they do not make one a Christian. We are a Christian because we are a follower or disciple of Jesus and love Him above all and follow Him above all. Our doing Christian things such as going to church or helping those in need flows out of this relationship with Jesus. The acts themselves do not define us; our relationship with Jesus defines us. It is that relationship that makes us a child of God.

What we do then flows out of this relationship with God. We do good things not to earn God’s favor but to please Him because we love Him.

Second, we also have a new identity as Christians when John says in **John 1:12** and **1 John 3:1**: **“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12, NIV) “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1John 3:1, NIV)**

This new identity of being called a child of God provides us with security. We are secure in the fact that we know we belong to God and nothing can change that.

Many people, Christians included, often tie their identity and self-worth with their job. They see their value in the position they hold, how much they earn. They become closely associated with what they do—pastor, doctor, lawyer, secretary, administrative assistant, teacher, barber, plumber, sales clerk, etc. However, what happens is when they are suddenly let go from their job, as has been the case of many in our nation’s financial climate, or they retire, they go through a crisis of identity. Who am I if I am no longer doing what I do, if I am no longer employed in this position? Am I of any worth? Many a person who is in this state may cry and grieve over the loss. They feel depressed.

But for the Christian, our identity is not found in our occupation or what we do, it is found in who we are and whose we are. Listen to this passage from **Luke 10**: **“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. ... The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’**

“He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’” (Luke 10:1, 17-20 NIV)

When Jesus talks about “your names are written in heaven” He means here the names of those who belong to God, who have responded to His gracious invitation and have become His children. Jesus is saying in this passage, “Don’t rejoice in what you do (that you have driven out demons). Rejoice in who you are, rejoice that you are a child of God, rejoice that your name is written in Heaven.”

The most important identity we have is to be a child of God. It is more important than any thing we do, even the things we do for God. Being a child of God means the emphasis is on a new identity that surpasses and transcends all other identities that we claim.

Brothers and sisters, when someone asks you to describe yourself, the first thing you should tell them is that you’re a child of God. Live like a child of God. Be a child of God because that’s what you are when you are a follower of Jesus.

Finally, the Apostle John writes these words right on the heels of **1 John 3:1**, where he said we are called children of God. He says: **“And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1b, NIV)**

He says we are the children of God. He is emphasizing this important and critical fact—we are the children of God! It is something we are, that we cannot earn or achieve or even improve upon. It is a gift from God.

Many times non-Christians in our society are hostile to any person of faith but especially Christians. They will attack our identity as the children of God, trying to make us feel we are anything but the children of God.

They will exaggerate to try to make Christians fit a certain caricature in their minds of being ignorant, narrow minded, hypocritical, angry, hostile, etc. They will often use one negative example of a Christian in their own experience, and with a broad brush they falsely and dishonestly paint all Christians to be as such.

People will use such tactics to try to redefine us as Christians and make us feel like we are worthless and have nothing to contribute to the world.

Another area the evil one may use involves the issue of shame. “Imposed shame [is] disgrace or devaluation inflicted by another...” (Daniel R. Green, Ph.D., “Guilt and Shame in Christian Perspective,” *New Life Resources*, October 19, 1999) Recently Dr. Susan Watson taught on shame at a John 17 teaching time, and I wish to share a point from this teaching with you because it is one way the evil one seeks to destroy Christians by robbing us of our identity as children of God.

She said: “Shame robs you of your identity to feel, to know and to live as a child of the Father...to truly know and to live from the knowledge that you are a child of the Most High God... The feeling of shame is about our very selves, not about something we said or did.” (Dr. Susan Watson, “Despising the Shame”: *Restoring True Worship*)

Many of you have probably seen the following You Tube video recently from Great Britain concerning Susan Boyle. Just like we have the popular “American Idol” here, in Britain they have “Britain’s Got Talent.” Simon Cowell from American Idol is a judge on this show as well.

On a recent show, a 47-year-old unemployed, single woman, who sings in a church in a rural area in Britain, auditioned. Her name is Susan Boyle. A *USA Today* writer describes it this way: “Ten days ago, Boyle—47, unglamorous, unfashionable, unknown—faced down a sneering British audience and panel of judges on *Britain’s Got Talent*, including the very-sneery Simon Cowell. Then, in an instant, she turned jeers to cheers with her rendition of one of the ... numbers from *Les Miserables*. ...[She is the] youngest of nine, learning disabled and bullied as a

child, caretaker for her dying mother, never been kissed, singer in the choir, possessor of big dreams.” (Marie Puente, *USA Today*, April 20, 2009, p. 7-D)

I am going to show you this You Tube video of Susan Boyle. If you’ve already seen it, view it again but differently. As you watch this clip, note the sneers, the judgments being made about her, defining her as a loser before she even sings. Cal Thomas describes it well: “As she walks to the stage, the condescension is as thick as a London fog... The message they send with their facial expressions and body language is reinforced by cutaway shots of the audience: What are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be mopping the stage instead of singing on it?” Then, brothers and sisters, watch the responses of the audience and the judges as she sings, and hear the confessions of the judges afterwards. Through it all, look at how Susan Boyle refused to allow all this to define her.

Let’s roll it...(Susan Boyle video)

“Rahn Hasbargen, an accountant in St. Paul, cites John 7:24: ‘Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.’ ‘Never has that verse been explained more dramatically than in the case of Susan Boyle,’ Hasbargen says.” (Marie Puente, *USA Today*, April 20, 2009, p. 7-D)

Brothers and sisters, this example in the natural world is a good one for us as Christians. Susan Boyle refused to be intimidated by the snickers, the sneers, the rolling eyes, the condescending attitudes, the non-verbal judgments and definitions of her by the audience and the judges. She refused to let them deter her from being a singer and doing what God gifted her to do.

And so we, brothers and sisters, as Christians, as followers of Jesus, must refuse to allow anyone to intimidate us by their words, by their actions, by their attitudes, by their attempts to redefine us, by their attempts to humiliate us. We must refuse their attempts to shame us, to criticize us, to put us down and to make us feel anything less than what we are. For no one or nothing can ever change the fact of what God has declared us to be—His children, the children of God, and as the Apostle John stressed it so well, **“And that is what we are!”**

Amen!