

November 3, 2019

I John 3:1-3:

“Children of the Heavenly Father”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

From the Bible we learn that there are two spiritual families that exist in the world - the family of faith and the family of unbelief. The Lord God said to the serpent in Genesis 3: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (3:15)." The offspring of the woman, that is, the "he" of Genesis 3 is Jesus of Nazareth. All those who believe in him are counted as **Children of the Heavenly Father** - the family of faith - and also offspring of the woman (Rev. 12:17). On the other hand, the offspring of the serpent are understood as children of the devil - the family of unbelief (1 John 3:8).

Adam fully understood and believed this for he gave to the woman the name "Eve," which means "mother of all the living." Immediately after the naming of the woman, we are told that "the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them (3:21)." The good works of fig leaves cannot be a suitable covering for humanity's shame. The living are those who believe in the offspring of the woman - Jesus - and who live only on account of his sacrifice. Having defeated sin, death, and the devil at the cross, he becomes for us garments of skin that cover with forgiveness so that we may unashamedly stand as **Children of the Heavenly Father**.

This concept of two spiritual families carries over into the New Testament age. We are told in the Gospel of John (8:42-47) that says Jesus to the Jews who had believed in him:

If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.

Those are some extremely strong words. Again, please don't miss the fact that Jesus said these words to the Jews who had believed in him, but no longer do. They had moved from being **Children of the Heavenly Father** to children of the devil. Whoever is of God hears his words. They had rejected his words and so are counted as being "not of God." This is a powerful warning to all of us.

If you decide to have children, and they are not home schooled, they will eventually learn from someone how to report child abuse and neglect to governing officials. There are those who need this information and there are those who don't. In the group of those who don't need the information there are those who will nevertheless try to use the information to their full advantage. The time will eventually come when their good parents will keep them from doing what they want or will discipline them for something wrong that they did. Convinced that it will do the trick, they will "pull out the abuse and neglect card," so to speak, and threaten to report their good parents if they don't conform to their wishes.

Of course, the governing officials are trained to deal with false accusations and situations like that. But, there's always a certain fear that maybe someone will not have good discernment and will make a case out of nothing. Some parents panic. What the child is assuming is that in the end of the day they will hit the jackpot, rule their parents, and stay with their family where the word "no" and all forms of discipline will magically disappear. That's when you have to explain to them the truth. Mostly, you explain to them what's going to likely change in their lives, what they're going to probably lose, and what's going to be the outlook for their future. In the Christian life, there is the ever present danger that we forsake our good family for another because we think that the grass is greener on the other side - because we think that evil is good and good is evil.

Being **Children of the Heavenly Father** is a wonderful thing! Paul writes: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27)." Sin and shame have been covered in the holiness and honor of Jesus. By faith in him, we are children of God and heirs according to promise. The apostle Peter exclaims "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:3-5)."

The living hope into which we have been born again is to see God as he is and, beholding love, there is forever love and every good thing. Our Heavenly Father says, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (2 Cor. 6:16)." When we see the face of our bridegroom Jesus, we shall be "like him" our epistle lesson tells us. We will derive from him those qualities that humans may receive, and we will benefit from all that remains divine. In a perfect union that we cannot even begin to comprehend, the forever conversation of God, that is more real than anything in creation, will be ours. We will exist in pure existence, we will love in pure love, and we will know as we are known. And whatever is of rebellion and attributed to death will be no more. This old order of things will give way to a bliss that is for now inexpressible.

This is the kind of love the Father has given to us. "And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure," John writes. The pure are made pure by faith in the one who is pure. Those who have been made pure by the Savior of the world do not wish to lose their purity. Faith, which is certainty in what is unseen, and hope, which is the anticipation of reaching what is ours by believing in Jesus our bridegroom, creates within us a fierce opposition to all that might somehow take away what is to come and our status as children of God. Willful failure to see the kind of love that the Father has given to us leads to a forfeiture of the inheritance that is ours in him alone. John writes (1 John 3:4-10):

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to

destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

There is a part of us who is like the child in the illustration I gave to a few moments ago - who hears "no" from his or her parents and despises discipline even when it is for good. We get it into our heads that this is abuse and neglect. We get it into our heads that the other family might be better, for in that family there isn't any "no" and we can do whatever we want. We think to ourselves that the "labor" of doing what is right and accepting discipline is far too harsh in comparison to the easy road of the family that does not care. But this is the nature of the family of unbelief, for the father of the family is the devil, who is a liar and a murderer from the beginning. He does not stand in the truth.

Luther writes in the *Large Catechism* (The Large Catechism: 3, 44): "Just as it is a shame and disgrace to an earthly father to have a bad, unruly child who antagonizes him in word and deed with the result that on his account the father suffers scorn and reproach, so God is dishonored if we who are called by his name and enjoy his manifold blessings fail to teach, speak, and live as godly and heavenly children with the result that he must hear us called not children of God but children of the devil." Think real hard about it before you do anything silly and forsake your family. What's going to likely change when you are no longer **Children of the Heavenly Father**? What are you going to lose? What will be the outlook for your future? "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

Therefore, as **Children of the Heavenly Father**, remember these powerful words of the apostle Paul (Rom. 8:12-17):

...all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

As the hymn we will be singing says it in verse four (LSB 725): "Though He giveth or He taketh, God His children ne'er forsaketh; His the loving purpose solely To preserve them pure and holy."

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott