

“God’s Children”—1 John 3:1

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “God’s Children”, is 1 John 3:1 → *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

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

“Our Father, who art in heaven.” How many times have you prayed these words which open the prayer that our Lord taught us to pray? Perhaps you’ve prayed them so much that you haven’t given much thought to what it is you are saying. However, if you stop to think about it, it is a remarkable gift that you and I can come to God—the almighty, everlasting, righteous and holy Creator of the cosmos—and call Him “our **Father**.” It means we are His children and that is no small thing.

In the meaning of the Introduction to the Lord’s Prayer we are reminded: “With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true father and we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.”

(Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation, © 2017 Concordia Publishing House.)

So how does it happen? How do you and I become children of God?

Some might say that you don't "become" children of God. They would say we're already children of God by virtue of His creating us. After all, Scripture does say that there is *one God and Father of all, Who is over all*. (cf. Ephesians 4:6) While this statement describes God's claim of Fatherhood over all people because He created them, it has a limited meaning in terms of relationship since our Father demands perfect obedience to His will from His creatures. Because we are corrupted in sin and cannot deliver that perfect obedience, His will for us is expressed in John 6:29 → *This is the work of God, that you believe in Him Whom He has sent*—that is, His Son, Jesus, the Christ, Who has worked out our salvation and forgiveness of sins for us. One can only know God as a Father of steadfast love through faith in Jesus. By faith we embrace God's **total work** in our lives, both as our Creator and our Redeemer.

There are some who may say becoming a child of God happens because of something you have done by consenting to be His child in some way. They would say that by giving your life to Jesus or "accepting Him" as your Lord and Savior **you make God your Father** and only then will you be His child. It is strange to think that a child has the ability to choose his own father. More importantly it is a misunderstanding of the working of the Holy Spirit in conversion according to the Bible. (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14; 12:3)

Ephesians 2:3 says to you, who were made children of God by *by grace . . . through faith* in Jesus Christ as *the gift of God* (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9), **were** *by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind*. Since according to our sinful nature we were not children of God and part of His family, we had to be made God's children so that we can come Him and confidently call Him "our Father?"

Verse 1 of our text reminds us how it happens. See . . . God says, "Look! Behold!" *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are*. In this simple confession of faith we learn at least three things about how we become children of God.

First, it happens because of **God's** love. Fathoming God's love is difficult in light of the concepts of love in our culture, where it is primarily thought of as an emotion and nothing more than a feeling. As a result, we hear about people "falling into" or "out of love" based on nothing more than how intense their feelings may be for another person. This kind of love is subjective and quite uncertain, based on fleeting and ever-changing emotions.

Not so with God's love. Scripture teaches us that God's love is not subjective, but objective. It does not ebb and flow like human love, but remains steadfast and constant. It is not based on God's feelings, but upon His work for you in Christ Jesus. So 1 John 4:10 says: *In this is*

love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Romans 5:8 says: God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Over and over again the Scriptures reveal a love of God which is an objective act that He has accomplished for you in Jesus. God's love is known objectively in the Person & Work of Christ, in His death and resurrection.

We become God's children because His love is something which God gives to us. We learn from Scriptures that this objective love of God in Jesus is a gift. It is not something that we have to earn or prove ourselves worthy to receive. If so, we would soon discover that we are unworthy of His love because of our sins. However, God's love says that even though you are unworthy you are worth it. As Titus 3:4-5 says: *But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy.* The love of God in Christ is a gift, not a wage that we must earn.

Through that gift, God calls us His children and declares that we are members of **His** family. We learn from Scriptures that God's children are His children because He declares them to be His children. Our text says we have been **called** *children of God; and so we are.* When the saving work of Jesus is proclaimed to sinners such as you and me, through that Word, God makes us His children. The powerful, living, and active Word

of God—the same Word which spoke the universe into existence—also declares you to be His beloved child.

That is the promise given to you in the waters of your baptism. Galatians 3:27 says: *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* And so you, dear baptized, are now an heir of God's promises. You are adopted into His family. You are His child. Why? Because He has said so. Now all the treasures of heaven belong to you: forgiveness of your sins, peace with God, new life and eternal salvation.

As children of God, our lives should embody our identity. No longer do we rejoice in the works of darkness from which we have been delivered. No longer do we believe the father of lies, the devil, when he tries to deceive us into unbelief, but rather we cling to our Father Who speaks the truth. Now our lives are marked by daily repentant petitions to our heavenly Father. We go to Him with boldness and confidence, knowing His promises, and asking Him as dear children ask their dear father. And what do we ask Him?

We ask Him to grant us forgiveness for our many sins—and He does! We ask Him to grant us love for our neighbors—and He does! We ask Him to give us our daily bread—and He does! We ask Him for the strength to withstand the daily temptations of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh—and He does. *All because He Who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it.* (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:24)

We do not worship some distant, unknown and unconcerned deity.
We worship the one true God Who is truly our loving heavenly Father.
This is the love of God: that He has declared you His own child through
Jesus, and He has done so as a pure gift to you. Consider that the next
time you fold your hands and pray, "Our Father who art in heaven."
Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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