

# Children of God | Living With God As Your Father

## Family Traits

1 John 2.24-3.3, 13-16; Ephesians 4.31-5.2; Psalm 63.8  
7.19.15

**1 John 2.24-3.3** - *As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.* <sup>25</sup> *This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.* <sup>26</sup> *These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.* <sup>27</sup> *As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.* <sup>28</sup> *Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.* <sup>29</sup> *If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is **born of Him.*** **3:1** *See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.* <sup>2</sup> *Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.* <sup>3</sup> *And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

**1 John 3.13-16** - Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. <sup>14</sup> We know that we have **passed out of death into life**, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. <sup>15</sup> Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. <sup>16</sup> We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

**Ephesians 4.31** - *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.* <sup>32</sup> *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.* <sup>5:1</sup> *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;* <sup>2</sup> *and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.*

**Psalm 63.8** - *My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me.*

This is the fourth week in a series on knowing God as one's Father.

We're using as a kind of guide/outline a book by the Scottish writer Sinclair Ferguson called Children of the Living God (available on the S.A.L.T. shelves in the back – good summer reading).

Today's topic builds on the last TWO TOPICS. The Bible teaches that the human condition is as grave as it can be. Everyone is born without a "spiritual receiver" – we're inwardly dead AND we are also averse to God. We're incompatible... AND we don't even know it. And the way the

Gospel, (the basic message of Christianity) deals with our double-trouble is by a double-cure. Jesus Christ brought new life to reverse our spiritual death AND a new standing to transform our hostility against God.

He raises people to new life (spiritually) and He gives strangers and enemies the new status of beloved sons. He makes us “born from above” and He shares His status with us...we become alive AND we get a new identity – not offenders but Children of God.

Today, we look at what difference that makes and we notice that ONE apostle sort of focused on the NEW LIFE results and ONE apostle focused more on the NEW IDENTITY results. John concentrates on what happens when people are “born of God” and that phrase occurs repeatedly in his writings. Paul emphasizes the new identity and ASKS what our new Sonship means for the way we live...how it translates into a new approach to life.

That’s why we’re looking at John and Paul and their two different angles on the spiritual life... Let’s look at: 1) TWO ANGLES on RESULTS 2) The ONE shared dynamic and 3) Progress, Pitfalls and Power

TWO ANGLES ON RESULTS – St. John and St. Paul each have an emphasis. John was the writer who told us about Jesus Christ’s interview with Nicodemus when we heard those now-famous words, “You must be born again”. And JOHN is intrigued and thrilled to THINK of God’s Spirit blowing, mysterious and powerful like the wind (as Jesus Christ had said to Nicodemus) and God, the Spirit is bringing fallen people from DEATH TO LIFE.

AND...as Jesus Christ told Nicodemus...we can’t see the wind’s origin or destination...but we can see its results. The trees bend; the leaves move. SO, when the wind of God’s Spirit brings inwardly dead people to LIFE...makes us alive and responsive toward God, there are certain telltale signs. And IN his first letter, St. John returns again and again to four indicators that the Spirit has quickened a person and made him/her spiritually alive. John wants to give his readers some evidence of spiritual life.

There are four signs in John’s letter. FIRST, a changed orientation to sin: it’s NOT that the spiritually alive person stops sinning but that repentance keeps interrupting. Patterns of sin may be very persistent and stubborn, but the person who is “born of God” (as John likes to put it) that person falls down and gets up...falls down and gets up...falls down and gets up. She keeps confessing her sin and keeps bringing it to God, out of the shadows of secrecy and shame (“you’re only as sick as your secrets” – AA) into the light – a new orientation to sin.

Also, the spiritually alive, regenerated, born-again person has a new orientation to the church. He begins to see the church as the arena of the spiritual life; it’s the context in which our life is expressed. We share this Life in common and we’re family. John expresses this vividly (v.14), “This is how we know we’ve passed OUT of DEATH and INTO life because we love the

brethren..." He states it like a diagnostic test ...somehow, this NEW LIFE we receive makes us love the Christian Community, we begin to think of the Church as brothers and sisters.

Thirdly, a change in the way we think of and relate to the world. We begin to zero-in on those three foes of the spiritual life, the world, the flesh and the devil. We begin to see that the whole world is fallen and as a system, the world is opposed to God. "God so loved the world..." - we all know that verse...and yet the world is not hospitable to God and His Reign. "Do not be surprised, brethren, that the world hates you" (v.13). The world is a force, always advertising that IT is our true home....And it really DOESN'T want to let go of us... It opposes God and the New Life.

Last, in St. John's First Letter, he says that those into whom God's Spirit breathes new life have a new orientation to Jesus Christ. We begin to see Him as He is – as Savior and King. We begin to trust that He IS INDEED who He claimed to be. He is God incarnate and He bought me... and all my allegiance belongs to Him...He wants my past, present and future (I don't know why He'd want it but He does! He wants it all.)

So, this is it; THIS is John's angle. Those who are born of God, begin to show this evidence...life begins to express itself...and here are four categories.

St. Paul also sees this but stresses a bit more on the STATUS SIDE. In other words, for Paul being adopted by God... moving from stranger and orphan and rebel and being endowed with the title "Beloved Child of God" – that new identity begins to show up. It's almost like John stresses NATURE and Paul stresses NURTURE. Paul says, "Being under the care and nurture of a new and Perfect Father who becomes Abba, Papa...that begins to show up in our lives." It's St. Paul's angle on results.

Paul says, "We begin to respond to His parenting! We begin to imitate Him. We receive this unbounded forgiveness and the experience of relief and joy LIBERATES us to forgive others."

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us...

See...it DOES something to you to be parented that way! When God our Father nurtures us and we are showered with forgiveness and tenderness... that begins to melt those ingrained patterns we learned in the world (anger, clamor, slander...along with all malice) and enables you to be "kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love..."

And that's Paul's angle on results. John's focus is that LIFE shows UP – our new nature begins to express itself; God's DNA is in us (1 John 3.9). And St. Paul adds that our new identity as God's Beloved Children, under His nurture we begin to change: family traits.

And yet...even though these two great apostles have their own emphases...they are deeply rooted in the same soil. They both see the spiritual life working in the same way. They agree on the basic dynamic of spiritual life. God takes the initiative and WE respond. Neither St. Paul nor St. John nor any Christian writer in the Bible or in the history of the Church believes in Karma.

They are NOT saying, "YOU do your part and then God will do His!" They are NOT saying, "Change your orientation toward sin and the church and the world and toward Jesus Christ and THEN, God rewards you with eternal life and blessings and THEN He'll adopt you and love you" – NO! It's just the opposite!

John puts it this way: "This IS the promise He made to us: eternal LIFE... As for YOU, the anointing which you received from Him abides/remains in you..."

In other words, "God has promised us and GIVEN us life, life, eternal life. It began when LIFE came down in the Person and work of Jesus Christ! God made good on His promise before we even measured up!"

John goes on to say, "the anointing which YOU have received from Him abides in YOU..." That word is not a word we use everyday "anointing" but it literally means, "Christ-ing". Every believer in Jesus Christ is Christ-ed, not in response to our shaping up or producing evidence or fruit or results. The Christ-ing is what produces the results.

It's ONLY when we are received by God and accepted, forgiven, made alive and granted eternal life – ONLY THEN can we even begin to live in righteousness. Before we have life...we can't live.

We can't begin to exhibit the family traits until we become members of the family.

It's only as we are adopted and cherished and forgiven and loved that we can start to act that way.

These traits come from hearts secure in the Father's love – abiding hearts.

"Walk in love...just as Christ first loved you", says Paul. This is NOT KARMA – it's grace. It's different from every religion and every self-help plan or spiritual program ever devised. It's God making us alive, adopting us as His children and then parenting us.

Is there effort involved on our behalf? Well...yes... but NOT in the way religions or self-help plans call for effort. In this, in the Gospel, we cling to God but all the while His right hand is upholding us.

God is always previous. God is always the initiator and WE are always the respondents. His life enters in, and He calls us to live. His anointing teaches us WITHIN that this is true and then we believe that this is TRUE. He instills hope in us that WE WILL BE PURE and then we HOPE for purity and walk in that way. He forgives us a MOUNTAIN OF GUILT and then calls us to forgive the little mounds of guilt committed against us. He lays down His life for us and then calls us to follow Him. He call us to self-sacrifice put first instills a kind of security in us so we say with Jim Elliot, "He is no fool who gives what He cannot keep in order to gain what we cannot lose".

Lord, I seek you...because YOU are first seeking me. My soul clings to you because YOUR right hand upholds me.

Now, PROGRESS, PITFALLS and POWER as we try to enjoy this and put it to use (PROGRESS, PITFALLS and POWER).

Somehow the progress we make is related to the New Family. It's a mistake to see this as simply a call to measure one's own personal spirituality and private development. Notice John, "LOVE for the brethren..." is where-it's-at ! And Paul, "These are the vices of our OLD family and the virtues of our NEW family – kindness, tender-heartedness, forgiveness". If you are a visitor, just trying to get an idea of what the Christian thing IS – you have to know that it happens in community. If you insist on staying aloof in "DIY spirituality", well, either the New Life will draw you into community OR if you're NOT drawn into the church and real community you can know that you don't yet have the New Life.

Progress happens in relationship with others...it's a family of adopted Children.

Pitfalls: First, there's the UN-examined life and the OVER-examined life. Socrates said the unexamined life is not worth living. There is a kind of American, pre-packaged, sign-on-the-dotted-line spirituality that's really a parody of the Gospel, that says, "I have received Jesus Christ and I'm saved by grace and John 3:16 and all that...and that settles it!"

But First John and the writings of Paul and of the whole Bible call us to ask, "HAS the life of God entered in? Am I Christ-ed...anointed with an inner knowledge and presence of God that no one can teach? Am I 'born of God' (a new nature) and being parented by God (a new nurture) and is there any change?"

The other danger is the over-examined life. The farmer goes out every day and gently pulls the carrots out of the soil just to see if they're growing. And I know I've wrestled in my own life with a kind of impatient insecurity trying to convince myself I was measuring up, a kind of self-

conscious, artificial growth that wasn't beautiful and wasn't righteous... (I was loving humanity but hating my next-door neighbor!) It's not about stapling plastic fruit on the tree – it's organic and alive.

What's your tendency? The UNexamined life or the OVERexamined life... real fruit comes from this lovely fixation on Jesus Christ and a confident, patient growth under the perfect parenting of the Father...not a radical Christian life – just the normal Christian life (which CAN produce extraordinary results – see v.16)

And that brings us to the POWER of this life that does produce love and growth... The first verse, "Let that abide in you which you heard from the start". It is believing the Good News which we first heard and then ...repenting and believing again...and again... and again (like you're doing NOW). That's what it means to have the message abide/remain in you and THAT'S the power of God to save and change us. (Rom 1.17)

If we have this hope fixed on Him...we will find power for purity... And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

I've used this illustration many times...but it fits so well here...I got it from Donald Whitney. A 12 year old boy LOVES guitar and takes lessons. His dad is listening to him practice and then the scales stop. The dad yells into the bedroom... "Kevin! I don't hear you practicing!"... "Sorry, Dad!" And after a while more Kevin falls asleep on the bed and Dad shakes him awake but ...it's not Dad...it's an angel...and taking Kevin's hand he whisks him off into space and Kevin lands in a dark room. Looking around...adjusting his eyes, he sees a dimly lighted sign, "Carnegie Hall". He's in the balcony and the angel directs him to look down at the stage. Just then a man walks out and sits on a barstool and the crowd applauds. And there in the spotlight the man begins to play like Kevin has never heard anyone play...Flamenco music. The crowd is awestruck and Kevin is mesmerized. With the last strum the crowd leaps to their feet and Kevin is open mouthed amazed. He asks the angel... "I have to know! Who is that man?" Well Kevin this is 20 years in the future and that man is YOU.

Then Kevin wakes up in his bed and looks at his guitar and ...knowing his destiny...he picks it up and practices like never before... And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. The work of Jesus Christ forgiving us, giving a new status and new life has power to propel purity and seeing our destiny has power pulling us forward...