

# Sermon: Whose Child Are You? - A Paternity Test

Text: [1 John 2:28 - 3:10 ESV](#)

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**Introduction:** The Apostle John has been taking us on quite a journey recounting his own experiences with Jesus. [1 John 1:1-4 ESV](#) <sup>1</sup> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— <sup>2</sup> the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— <sup>3</sup> that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> And we are writing these things so that our [your] joy may be complete.

John, in his writing to the church, insists a person can physically hear words and not understand, a person can physically see and be blind not only to a miracle, but the Lord of the universe. Last week John continued his teaching us about opposites like Christ and AntiChrist. He insists we live either in darkness or light, and that we are either dead or alive. These antithetical comments help us understand whether we are headed to heaven or to eternal punishment. In today's text, we are given tests to determine who our Father (father) is.

If you are spiritually blind, you will be like those who did not recognize Jesus. Everything true seems to be a hoax or a lie. Let's go back to the opening prologue of John's gospel and listen to the problem of the people's perception in the first century. [John 1:10-13 ESV](#) <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

What does it mean, after all, to be a child of God? How can you tell if God is your Father? Spiritually there are only two possibilities when determining paternity. In our text today, John will give us some tests - ways one can tell who our Father (father) is. [John 8:42-44 ESV](#) <sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "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. <sup>43</sup> Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. <sup>44</sup> 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.

**Illus. *Craddock Stories* (Copyright: ChalicePress.com, 2001, pp. 156-157),**  
Nettie and I had returned from Oklahoma to one of our favorite vacation spots, The Great Smoky Mountains. We were at dinner in a restaurant out from Gatlinburg near the small community of Cosby. We were in a rather new restaurant called the Black Bear Inn. It was very attractive and had an excellent view of the mountains.

Early in the meal, an elderly man approached our table and said, "Good evening." I said, "Good evening." He said, "Are you on vacation?" I said, "Yes," but under my breath I was saying, "It's really none of your business." "Where are you from?" he asked. "We're from Oklahoma." "What do you do in Oklahoma?"

Under my breath, but almost audible, I was saying, "Leave us alone. We're on vacation, and we don't know who you are." I said, "I am a Christian minister." He said, "What church?" I said, "The Christian Church."

He paused a moment and said, "I owe a great deal to a minister of the Christian church," and he pulled out a chair and sat down. I said, "Yes, have a seat." I tried to make it seem like I sincerely meant it, but I didn't. Who is this person?

He said, "I grew up in these mountains. My mother was not married, and the whole community knew it. I was what was called an illegitimate child. In those days that was a shame, and I was ashamed. The reproach that fell on her, of course, fell also on me. When I went into town with her, I could see people staring at me, making guesses as to who was my father. At school, the children said ugly things to me, and so I stayed to myself during recess, and I ate my lunch alone.

"In my early teens I began to attend a little church back in the mountains called Laurel Springs Christian Church. It had a minister who was both attractive and frightening. He had a chiseled face and a heavy beard and a deep voice. I went to hear him preach. I don't know exactly why, but it did something for me. However, I was afraid that I was not welcome since I was, as they put it, a bastard (sic). So I would go just in time for the sermon, and when it was over I would move out because I was afraid that someone would say, 'What's a boy like you doing in a church?'

"One Sunday some people queued up in the aisle before I could get out, and I was stopped. Before I could make my way through the group, I felt a hand on my shoulder, a heavy hand. It was that minister. I cut my eyes around and caught a glimpse of his beard and his chin, and I knew who it was. I trembled in fear. He turned his face around so he could see mine and seemed to be staring for a little while. I knew what he was doing. He was going to make a guess as to who my father was.

A moment later he said, 'Well, boy, you're a child of...' and he paused there. And I knew it was coming. I knew I would have my feelings hurt. I knew I would not go back again. He said, 'Boy, you're a child of God. I see a striking resemblance, boy. Then he swatted me on the bottom and said, 'Now, you go claim your inheritance.' I left the building a different person. In fact, that was really the beginning of my life.'

I was so moved by the story I had to ask him, "What's your name?" He said, 'Ben Hooper.' I recalled, though vaguely, my own father talking when I was just a child about how the people of Tennessee had twice elected as governor a bastard (sic). Ben Hooper.

Knowing who your father is can change your whole life and outlook, and John wants us to be sure of our spiritual paternity. Listen and look at these black and white comparisons of spiritual paternity as we read and cover our main text throughout the sermon.

There are tests our Scripture gives us to understand our spiritual paternity. If we are abiding in Jesus there will be:

## 1. A confidence and no shame (2:28-29)

**I John 2:28-29 ESV** <sup>28</sup> And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. <sup>29</sup> If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

How is it possible to be so sure before our soon-coming Lord? John is indicating that our strategy needs to be "to abide in him." The NIV gives us a hint of what John was saying to the church: "continue in Him." In other words, John is telling the church, in spite of difficult days and those who are leaving Christ, persevere, hang in there, don't give up, and remain in Him. This is no time to quit, but to practice righteousness.

Why? Because by practicing righteousness we can be sure of our relationship with God. It is the difference between being sure and shrinking back and being ashamed in God's presence.

Raymond Brown reminds us: "The author is applying to the parousia (second coming) the basic insight of **John 15:1-6**; It is not enough for the branch to be on the vine; it must bear fruit, and it does that by abiding in Christ. 'He who abides in me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit'" (**John 15:5**).

James Boice writes (*The Epistles of John*, p. 96) that in the New Testament, "... one verse in twenty-five deals with the Lord's return. It is mentioned 318 times in the 260 chapters of the New Testament. It is mentioned in every one of the New Testament books, with the exception of Galatians, which deals with a particular doctrinal problem, and the very short books such as 2 and 3 John and Philemon." Jesus repeatedly mentioned His own return. On the night before His crucifixion, He made promises to His anxious disciples: **John 14:1-3 ESV** <sup>1</sup> "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

When Jesus appears at his second and final coming we can have confidence and be sure of our eternal home all because of our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

The word translated in the ESV text "confidence" (*παρρησια*) carries the idea of "speaking everything, openness, boldness, confidence. The word originally meant openness in speaking and came from a political scene (*that doesn't make sense in my ears, but*). It was soon taken over into the ethical area and was closely connected w. the concept of friendship. Philo used the word regarding a slave who had 'openness,' 'confidence with his master when he had a good conscience. The person who has been cleansed from sin and continues in love also has 'freedom of speech' w. his master who is also the ruler of the whole world" (Schnackenburg; s. also TDNT; **Heb. 3:6**)

**Hebrews 3:6 ESV** <sup>6</sup> but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.[a]

### **Footnotes:**

[a] Hebrews 3:6 Some manuscripts insert *firm to the end*

These alternative ideas of practicing righteousness (**2:29**) and "not" practicing righteousness (**3:10**) serve as literal bookends to identify whose child a person is. "Practice makes perfect" if you are repeating the same course of action prescribed by God.

There are further tests for our spiritual paternity. If we are abiding in Jesus there will be:

## **2. A recognition of God's Love and we know Him (3:1)**

**3:1a** See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

Love is one of the greatest motivators in the world. When someone loves you, it gives you hope and strength. When you feel unloved or rejected by someone you love, it can be devastating.

George Matheson was a 19th century Scottish pastor. He was born with an eye defect that left him totally blind by age 18. Shortly after this, his fiancée left him, deciding she would not be content to be married to a blind preacher. Years later, at age 40, Matheson was alone on the night of his sister's wedding. Something happened, perhaps the memory of being rejected by his own fiancée years before, that caused him severe mental suffering. Suddenly, the words of a hymn came to him as if dictated by some inward voice. The whole thing was done in five minutes and he never had to edit or correct it (from Kenneth Osbeck, *Amazing Grace* [Kregel], p. 49). The first verse is:

O love that wilt not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in thee.  
I give thee back the life I owe  
That in Thine ocean-depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be.

The third verse reflects Matheson's experience of God's love through suffering:

O joy that seekest me through pain,  
I cannot close my heart to thee;  
I trace the rainbow thro' the rain,  
And feel the promise is not vain  
That morn shall tearless be.

In his blindness and loneliness, perhaps feeling forsaken by the love of a woman, Matheson sought and found comfort in the unchanging love of God (this story is also in, John MacArthur, *The Love of God* [Word], p. 151).

The difference in the world's love and God's is between a passing acquaintance and commitment, and a deep relationship that is never defaulted on by the One who sought us.

**v. 3:1b** “The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” They do not have the same father and are not in the “family of God.”

“St. Augustine compares the attitude of the world towards God to that of sick men in delirium who would do violence to their physician.” - Plummer, p. 121

And I thought of how the children of the world (devil) mocked and killed Jesus when all he wanted for them was to give them life everlasting and a home in heaven.

There is a further test for our spiritual paternity.

**3. A desire to be pure like our Heavenly Father** who we recognize (3:2-3)  
**I John 3:2-3 ESV** <sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. The difference is about attitude and is between protecting and enhancing our Father's reputation or bringing disrepute on His name (which we never want to do).

The evangelical church in America desperately needs holiness. In *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience* ([Baker], pp. 12-13), Ron Sider writes, "Scandalous behavior is rapidly destroying American Christianity. By their daily activity, most "Christians" regularly commit treason. With their mouths they claim that Jesus is Lord, but with their actions they demonstrate allegiance to money, sex, and self-fulfillment.

The findings in numerous national polls conducted by highly respected pollsters like The Gallup Organization and the Barna Group are simply shocking. "Gallup and Barna," laments evangelical theologian Michael Horton, "hand us survey after survey demonstrating that evangelical Christians are as likely to embrace lifestyles every bit as hedonistic, materialistic, self-centered, and sexually immoral as the world in general." Divorce is more common among "born-again" Christians than in the general American population. Only 6 percent of evangelicals tithe. White evangelicals are the most likely people to object to neighbors of another race. Josh McDowell has pointed out that the sexual promiscuity of evangelical youth is only a little less outrageous than that of their nonevangelical peers."

What is wrong with us? Somehow we have bought the lie of the Devil and the gnostics of John's time that belief and behavior can be held separately. Nothing could be further from the truth. And confession of unrepentant sin is of no value at all. **I Peter 1:14-15 ESV** <sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, <sup>15</sup> but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

Another test for our spiritual paternity is there is:

**4. A contrast between children who practice sinning or lawlessness (3:4-9)**  
**I John 3:4-9 ESV** <sup>4</sup> Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.

Sin in **verse 4** is called “lawlessness.” It seems to me that breaking God’s law is the opposite of loving God and one’s neighbor.

There are two kinds of children in this world:

Those who practice sinning (children of darkness)

Those who practice righteousness (children of the Light)

Saint Augustine has said this: “The devil made no man, begat no man, created no man: but whoso imitates the devil becomes a child of the devil, as if begotten of him. In what sense art thou a child of Abraham? Not that Abraham begat thee. In the same sense as that in which the Jews, the children of Abraham, by not imitating the faith of Abraham, are become children of the devil.”

**Ephesians 5:9-12 JB** - You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord; be like children of light, for the effects (fruit) of the light are seen in complete goodness and right living and truth. Try to discover what the Lord wants of you, having nothing to do with the futile works of darkness but exposing them by contrast.

If the first step to holiness is to recognize the sinfulness of sin, both in its essence as lawlessness and in its diabolical origin, the second step is to see its absolute incompatibility with Christ in His sinless Person and saving work. The more clearly we grasp these facts, the more incongruous will sin appear and the more determined we shall be to be rid of it.

- John Stott, p. 125

The difference between these children we mention is that the children of God try their best not to engage in dishonorable lifestyles. As children of light, we certainly are not happy when we fail to meet God’s standards. We are saved by grace and our lives we live are a love offering given back to the One who gave us life. We have been born of God (v.9).

The last test we mention for our spiritual paternity is:

## 5. A “practicing” of righteousness (3:10)

**I John 3:10 ESV** <sup>10</sup> 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.

John Stott reminds us “The child exhibits his parent’s character because he shares the parent’s nature.”

As children of God, our Father wants us to grow up, develop a deeper relationship with Him and think like Him. Can you imagine your 40 year-old child still behaving as if he/she were still 4 years old. We must grow away from our attitude of only trying to get something for ourselves to what can I do for others or give to you.

Being a child of God is more than just knowing the right words to say like catechism. Theology and practicum -A parrot can mimic words, but has no idea of the implication.

Christianity is not about knowing the answers to the questions, but about putting into action the principles we have learned. That is why writers like Paul will take the first 11 chapters of Romans to deal with very difficult theology and the last 5 chapters to deal with practical matters in living the Christian life, as well as personal greetings.

When Jesus sums up the law by saying that we are to love God and love our neighbor (here, *brother*), these have to be more than words.

**Conclusion:** Next week we will look at another antithesis prevalent in John's instruction to the church: "love and hate," and how they are recognized and lived out.

"...walking toward the light and away from darkness is an ongoing movement (*vocation*), until finally we come to the God who is light and in whom there is no darkness (*deception*) at all ([I John 1:5](#))." - Raymond Brown, p. 431

As God's children who have been given the Holy Spirit as a down payment until we make it into the presence of God, we will not live our lives perfectly. We continue to sin, but that is not our goal or desire. We want to do our very best for the one who loves us like no other.

Steven Cole shares this illustration: So John is not talking about sinless perfection, but rather about the direction of the life of a believer. If God has imparted new life to you, so that you have become His child, you cannot go on living in sin. When you do fall into sin, you will recognize that you cannot go on in it. God will convict you of it and you will repent and walk in righteousness. A pig and a sheep may fall into the same mud hole, but there is a difference. The pig will love it and wallow in it, because that's its nature. The sheep will want to get out and avoid that mud hole the next time, because it has a different nature. If God's seed abides in you, you cannot wallow in the mud. If you like it in the mud and don't want to get out, you may need to ask whether you truly have been born of God.

**Are you a part of God's family or His enemy's?**