

## THE FAMILY OF GOD

1 John 3:14-24

**Intro:** When the Apostle Paul was preaching the Gospel in Athens, he spoke of his agreement with the Greek poet who said, speaking of God and all of the people on earth, “For we are also His offspring” (Acts 17:28). By that Paul meant that we have all come from God. He is our Creator. We are made in His image and likeness. Our origin is traceable to the God of heaven and earth. This is what Luke had in mind when, in the genealogy found in Luke 3 he spoke of Adam as “the son of God.” Let me read what Paul said to the Athenians. It is a good illustration of how we might introduce the Gospel to people who do not know the Lord.

In Acts 17:22, where this passage begins, we read:

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device (Acts 17:22-29).

You can see how important it is for us to know and to believe that we are beings created by God, and in His image. But the Apostle Paul did not mean that we are the children of God in the way that he and other writers of the NT spoke of the family of God. In fact, on one occasion when our Lord was speaking to a group of Pharisees, who were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of Israel, He said to them,

44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

45 And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not (John 8:44-45).

So we can say that everyone born into this world is related to God as our Creator, but since sin came into the world through the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden, we have also been by birth, children of the Devil. But the Apostle John was not talking about either of these when he wrote in 1 John 3:1, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God,” or a better translation of the Greek would be, *the children of God*. The word τέκνα really means *children*, and *children by birth*. This is what the Lord was talking to Nicodemus about, being born again, or being born from above, being born of God.

This is what the Apostle John was speaking about in John 1:11-13. (Read.) The prevailing idea among the Jews during the time that our Lord was on earth, and both before and after, was that if you were a Jew, you were a child of God. But the Apostle Paul writing to the Galatian churches, which were predominantly Gentile, told them, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 3:26). There he actually used the Greek word for *sons*, υἱοὶ, but the basic meaning remains the same. No Jew or Gentile is actually a child of God, possessing eternal life until he or she has been *born of God*. The new birth is a work of God, a work of the Spirit of God, whereby a person becomes a new creature, or creation, in Christ. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17.

This is not something that we wait for until we die, but it is a work in the hearts of those who believe in Christ, and immediate work. And so the Apostle John began our chapter (1 John 3) by saying, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God.” And then the Greek adds, καὶ ἔσμεν, *and we are!* But then, lest there be any doubt in anyone’s mind, John went on to say in verse 2, “Beloved, now are we the children of God . . .” This is very important to understand. If you do not become a child of God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ before you die, there is no possibility that you can become a child of God after you die.

Now two things happen when a person is saved, or becomes a child of God. He immediately becomes an alien and a stranger in the world and to the people of the world. And the Apostle John said as much in the first verse, the latter part, of 1 John 3:1 when he wrote, "Therefore the world knoweth us not because it knew Him not," speaking of our Savior.

But the other thing that happens is that we become members of God's family. We are born from above, or born again, and we have God's life in us. That is what eternal life is. We still have our physical life, but in addition we have eternal life, God's life. And that brings us into a most wonderful fellowship. This what the Apostle John was referring to when in chapter 1, verse 7, he said that "we have fellowship one with another." We have fellowship with God and with Christ. See 1 John 1:3. But we have fellowship also with one another. And, among other things which the Apostle John declared in this epistle, he said that one of the ways we know that we have born again, one of the ways we know that we have eternal life, is that we love the brethren. Who are the brethren? They are other people who have been born again, other people who are born again. We love them. We love being with them. We have things that we love to talk about that we can't talk to everyone about. We love to talk about the Lord. We love to talk about the Word. We have a deep personal interest in each other. When they are hurting, we hurt. When they rejoice, we rejoice. We feel closer to people who know the Lord than we do to members of our biological family who do not know the Lord. This does not mean that we don't love people who aren't born again. We often love them more than we did before we were born of God, born of the Spirit. But there is a difference in our relationship with others who are in God's family. Before we were born again, Christians were the last people in the world that we wanted to have anything to do with. But after we are saved, they are the people we love to be with. It is hard to understand a person who claims to know the Lord, but you may have a hard time getting him or her to come to church.

This point is so strong with the Apostle John that he says that if you don't love the brethren, the brothers, the people in God's family, then you are still spiritually dead, separated from God, not a possessor of eternal life. The Apostle John didn't leave any possibility for a middle ground. Either you are born again, or you are not. If you are, you are going to love the people of God, but if you don't, then you won't, which means that you are not saved.

And this touches every area of our lives. And sometimes the initiative will come from your former friends who will begin to drop you off because you don't do what you used to do. You don't talk like they do. You don't laugh at the stories that used to amuse you because now you recognize that they were bad stories. Cf. 1 Peter 4:1-5. Cf. also Titus 3: 1-8 and all of Ephesians 2. A true child of God is not someone who has just "turned over a new leaf," but one who has received a new life. He is not perfect, but he is different. "Old things are passed away . . ." (2 Cor. 5:17).

When a person comes to know the Lord, his heart will be filled with compassion for those who do not know the Lord, and he will want to live for the Lord that others might see the change that has taken place in his life, but the greatest change will be seen in his love for the people of God. "Blest be the tie that binds" will be a hymn he loves to sing.

But specifically how will the love of God in us manifest itself toward the family of God? See 1 John 3:16 and 17.

And yet we have to keep examining our hearts to make sure that we are not being hypocrites, but that we really love each other. So it must not just be something that we say, or talk about, but that which has a profound effect upon our lives. And, in turn, this increases our assurance that we are really saved. See 1 John 3:19.

Basic to all of the commandments that God has given us in His word is His command that we love one another. That is so unique in human relationships, that it is fundamental to our testimony to the world. Remember what the Lord said were the two great commandments in the Law. Cf. Matt. 22:34-40.

But let us notice also that it is in this context that we find one of the great prayer promises of the Bible: 1 John 3:22.

Finally let us notice the last two verses of 1 John 3.

Notice that the word "commandment" is singular, but then the Apostle John went on to speak about two things. He was indicating that where you find one, you will find the other, and that if you think that you have one but don't have the other, then it means that you don't have either. This is the reason that the Lord could not give the great commandment in

the Law without giving two.

Notice what that are: believing and loving in the present tense. This means that we continue to believe, and we continue to love. It is not just something that we do in spurts in either case, but two characteristics that are always there. They may not be as strong as they need to be, but they will never be absent.

And what, according to the last verse, does this lead to? This is what leads to a life of abiding in Christ. And this means more real fellowship with God, and with Christ, and with the Holy Spirit.

**Concl:** Now when we go through a passage like this, what should we be primarily concerned about? Should it be the present condition of the professing church, or the level of life of many professing Christians? Of course that has to be a major reaction that all of us have. But, as important as these are, these are not the most important. *Our most important reaction should be, what does this passage tell me about my own life? We need to turn the focus of the Word of God upon our own lives. Can I say, can you say, that you are sure that you have passed out of spiritual death into spiritual life by your love for the brethren. Or, as you look at your life, do you have the most fun when you are with non-Christians? What about church attendance? Do you come out of habit, or because when the family of God gets together, you would rather be there than any other place on the face of the earth?*

Let us honestly examine our own hearts in the light of God's Word. What the Apostle John was writing, he was writing so that we could be sure that we have been born again. We desperately need to be right here because if we are wrong, and our profession is just so many empty words, then it is impossible for us to measure how tragic our life really is. Make sure of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.