

Exegetical Big Idea: God has granted his people adoption into his family, over which he is the Father. God's children should therefore know who the Father is, and be ever changing from our old flesh-gratifying selves, into true children of God who reflect his image.

Homiletical Big Idea: **Authentic children of God reflect the glory and image of the Father.**

Fallen Condition Focus: Our sinful nature has stain our image-bearing capacity as children of God. For those who persevere in rebellion against God this means eternal separation from him. But for his people, our gospel witness to the world is diminished as we desire anything less than being authentic children of God.

Intro:

[In many ways I have become like my father. I remember as a kid, my brothers and I would know exactly who to go to if you wanted something. My dad. Often times we would go to him and ask him for something and get a "no" answer. But we knew the game. We knew that if we pressed on pestered him and asked him over and over again we would eventually get the response changed from "no" to "we'll see". And when those words came out of his mouth, we knew we were well on our way to an eventual "yes". Now with children of my own I often catch myself doing the exact same thing. My kids will ask me for something and my immediate response is no, but the more they ask and press me, I find myself giving in and being tempted to just say "we'll see", or eventually "yes". It's not only in actions that children often take on the characteristics of their parents, but in appearance too. My younger brother in his childhood photos looks identical to my father in his childhood photos. It's in our DNA, and in our upbringing that children will inherently have similar characteristics to their parents.] John in these verses calls Christians "children of God" for a reason. Here John is making the point that as God's children, we should desire to reflect the glory and image of God.

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Verse 29: Children of God live righteously, as God is Righteous.

John starts off by speaking to the church, and what he says is formed in an "if/then" statement. The genius of this type of writing is that he makes the "if" part indisputable, so that the "then" part is implied to also be indisputable. So he starts by saying "if you know that he is righteous...". The "He" here being God, and the obvious answer to this is that of course they know he is righteous. He's God!

The knowledge of the fact of the righteousness of God, means that all who claim to be of God, will by nature live by the same kind of righteousness as God.

If genuine Christians know that God is righteous, then all genuine Christians will therefore act righteous as God is righteous. The implication here is clear and John has made it many times already: If you claim to be in Christ, and yet walk in opposition to God, you are lying about being in Christ. This is exactly what the false teachers are doing. The false teachers are living as if there is no law of God. But of course if there is no righteous law of God, then God himself must not be righteous.

The language here is literally that "everyone who does righteousness is born of God". The implication here is that you can only act in a righteous manner if you are born of God, because God alone is

righteous. This doesn't mean that non-Christians can't be kind, of course they can. But it does mean that any action, as good as it may look, done by an unbeliever, is still not a truly righteous action. It cannot be, since the unbeliever does not know God, and they therefore cannot do anything with the motivation of bringing glory to God. And if an action is done in any other motivation, it is not a truly righteous action in the true sense of the term.

That's why John points out those who do righteous actions are born of God, not born by the decisions and actions of human parents and a natural process. It is brought about by God himself, by his will, through the power of the Holy Spirit giving the gift of faith in Christ and as a result receiving the gift of grace of Christ.

If we see God for who he truly is, then the natural response is be like him.

[I had a style in my youth group days. Sweat pants and pull over fleeces. I had many of each. I was not the most popular. I remember one night though some of the youth were playing the music, and one of the older teens was wearing black jeans with a button up shirt that was unbuttoned, and a solid color t-shirt underneath. I thought he was super cool. I remember in that moment realizing my style was just embarrassing. The next morning I woke up, and you know what I put on? Black jeans, solid color t-shirt, and a button-up shirt, with the buttons undone of course. Now I was cool]

If we are born of God and truly know God's holiness and righteousness, it should overwhelm us. The natural consequence is to want to be like our object of admiration. We will do righteousness.

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Verse 3:1: We are God's children by the virtue of God's love.

The NIV translates this verse as "how great is the love the Father has lavished on us". But that's not exactly how that verse starts. It actually starts with a command. It actually reads "see what great love...". John wants to focus the attention of his reader here on something very important. What he wants them to know is that they are children of God based not on what they have done or not done, but by God's divine sovereign love.

John makes us understand here that God did not adopt us because of any sense of duty or obligation, but by his love and grace alone.

"What great love" originally meant "from what country". John wants to paint for us the picture of the love of God that is unlike any love that we could possibly imagine or experience. And this love is not just simply "given" to us, it's "lavished" upon us.

I get the strong impression that God didn't do this reluctantly. But to the praise of his glorious name. IN fact that's exactly what we read in the opening chapter of Ephesians. God has predestined those whom he wills to be saved, and the reason that Paul gives for God doing this is "for the praise of his glorious name". And John includes himself in the "we". We are walking and talking examples of the love of God, that by the virtue of his love alone we are his children to the praise of his glorious name.

John takes this one step further though. In case there is any confusion about what this means to be a son or daughter of God; in case anyone thought that this was some kind of cutsy saying that does really

mean anything but sounds nice, John makes it crystal clear. We are not just called that by name, this is our reality. This is not just a nice title, this is actually who we are! John says “and that is what we are!”

[Suppose for a minute that you are the hugest hockey fan in the history of hockey, and that you are having a birthday party. Now I think most people know the name “Wayne Gretzky”. He is arguably one of the greatest players to ever play the game. So suppose I want to get you an awesome gift and I let you know that I have contact Mr. Gretzky and that he is coming to your party to wish you a happy birthday. So the big day comes and you are greeting your guests, but mostly you’re excited for Wayne Gretzky to show up. Then all of a sudden a limo pulls up and obviously this is him. Out of the limo steps a complete stranger who looks nothing like the hockey hero. So you go up to him and say “hey, you’re not Wayne Gretzky, where is Wayne Gretzky?” The man looks at you weird and says “Of course I’m Wayne Gretzky”, and he pulls out his drivers’ license and sure enough, his name is legally Wayne Gretzky. How is that going to go over? Not well. Why? Because you were not looking just for someone who is *called* Wayne Gretzky, you were looking for the *real* Wayne Gretzky.]

We are not just called sons and daughters of God because it sounds nice. Our adoption into the family of God is a reality. God is our Father, Christ is our brother, and all the benefits and blessings of being a child of God belong to us because of the promises of God in Christ Jesus. Our inheritance as children of God is kept for us in heaven where it cannot be robbed or destroyed.

We are children of God, but the natural consequence of that is that the world dismisses us. Look at the last part of verse 1. The world does not “know us” because they do not know God.

Now remember that John starts off this section by saying we “know” God, and what we know of God is his righteousness. So by saying here that the world does not “know” God, he is saying that they do not accept and glory in the righteousness of God. This is rebellion against him! As a result, those who reject the righteousness of God then are self-righteous, looking for a righteousness from within. And the actions of the world reveal this. Remember that it was the rejection of the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus that led to the crowd shouting for his crucifixion on the first Good Friday.

The world dismisses us, as they dismissed Christ. Remember what the world did to Christ. But let us not shrink back in fear...for we are children of God. Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world. The world may think we are crazy, unloving, or even immoral, but we are God’s children and we aim to reflect the glory and image of our Heavenly Father for his glory and the good of all mankind.

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Verse 2: Our adoption as sons and daughters is a reality now that is only fully realized later.

John has just established that we are children of God, and he repeats that again in this next verse. He wants to be absolutely clear that we understand that our present reality is that we *are* children of God. And yet, we are not all that we are meant to be currently. In fact, John puts it like this “what we will be has not yet been made known”. The Scriptures don’t fully reveal to us just what the New Heavens and New Earth will be like when we are there in the presence of God. I think on one level, there aren’t words to describe the glory of that day. I think John indicates this with this verse. There’s a sense in which what we will become when Christ returns and we are resurrected from the is beyond imagination and

whatever we are capable of imagining, what God has planned for those who love him is beyond expectations.

[I enjoy time travel movies and shows. Of course the reality of time travel is impossible, but imagine for a minute you could hop into a device that transported you back let's say...a few thousand years. Now try and communicate to someone what the internet is. Good luck. You'd first have to explain to someone what electricity is. Again, good luck with that. In fact, you'd first have to explain to someone what atoms are and electrons and electric charge. Good luck. It's beyond comprehension for them. How much more then is comprehending what we will be like when we meet Christ in the New Heavens and the New Earth.]

Who can fathom the riches of God's glory that we will behold as we stand before him? No wonder John says "It has not yet been made known".

And yet one thing is known. We will be like Christ our Brother. And we have an assurance of this because John says "we know". God's Word has made this much clear to us.

Even though we cannot fathom what that looks like in its entirety now, we know that we will be like him because as John points out, we will see him as he is.

Seeing Christ is transformational. Think of it. To see and know Christ today is transformational in that when a person comes to know Christ by faith they are united with Christ in his death and his resurrection. They are a new creation.

If that is our reality now, but much more will it be our reality when we stand before Christ in all his glory?

And in this context I think we need to see Christ as the *perfect* Son of God. Paul tells the Roman church that Christ is the second Adam. See Adam was *supposed* to reflect perfectly the glory and image of God. and Adam failed because of his sin. And we fail too because our image bearing is stained by sin. We cannot fully and perfectly reflect the glory and image of God in this state. But Christ can, and he did. And when we stand before Christ, having his righteousness applied to us, we too will finally reflect the image and glory of God our Father as we were meant to be.

This is language of being recreated in Christ. This is resurrection language.

We will be like him, Christ is the perfect Son, the second and true Adam, the fully obedient Son, example of what being made in the image of God ought to be like. Look at the imagery here. Humans were created from the dust, to the dust we return, and from the dust we are resurrected and made new again, like Christ, or one could say "in the image of God".

Our hope is that one day we will see Christ. Not in his earthly state, but as he is now, in blazing glory. We will return to Eden, where God dwelt with his creation in perfect relationship. We will be made in his image as we were, and ought always have been, without the stain of sin. And Christ our brother makes this all possible by his righteousness bestowed upon us.

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Verse 3: Authentic Christian hope spurs us on to holy living.

“This hope” that John speaks of is being pure like Christ. This hope is presented as something to strive for. John’s future looking has a purpose. He shows us the hope of what we will be, to bring us back to what we ought to strive for today.

John here tells the churches that anyone who has this hope, the hope of being like Christ, is to purify themselves just as Christ is pure. Now, it’s important to note that John does not here mean the purity that only Jesus can give. John has been very clear so far in the letter than we are all under sin and need the purifying grace of Jesus to make us right with God. We call that justification. Justification is what gives us the hope of seeing and being like Christ one day. But what John *is* saying is that anyone who *is* righteous now engages in what we call sanctification. Simply put, it is becoming more like Christ daily while we are here on this earth.

If our desire is to be like Christ, and it is for the authentic Christian, then his people now strive for what will be our future reality.

It makes no sense for the Christian to have the hope of being righteous like Christ and instead of wanting now to reflect the glory of God, to be content with less than that.

[Remember Christ in the wilderness being tempted by Satan for 40 days. One instance was when Satan led Jesus to a high mountain and Luke tells us that in an instant Satan showed Jesus all the kingdom of the world. He offers all of this to Jesus, if Jesus will only worship him. And what does Jesus chose? He chooses instead to reflect the glory and image of God by walking in obedience and righteousness. That’s the desire of Christ, and he would not settle for anything less.]

The desire of every authentic Christian is ultimately to be able to reflect the glory and image of God. And our God is willing and able to make that happen! And while yes that will happen fully when we are with Christ in glory, but we have been given the gift of growing in holiness now!

Do we desire holiness? Are we practicing holiness? Or are we content with unrighteous

John is telling us to participate in the purification process by allowing the work of the Spirit in our lives to replace the desire for sin, with the desire for Christ and his coming.

What a glorious honour that has been given to the church. As we live our lives as a reflection of God, we hold out to the world a better way: Adoption into God’s family by virtue of his love

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