

CHILDREN OF GOD

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name." John 1:11-12.

To be a child of God is the highest position to which one can aspire. It involves so much in the life that now is and everything in the life which is to come.

I. The Greatest Tragedy.

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not." The verb "came," which is in the aorist tense, denotes a definite act--the incarnation. "Unto his own," which is in the neuter plural, means "unto his own things." Everything was "His own" by creation, possession and absolute dominion. Israel was the home of our Lord. Palestine was His land. He came to humanity in general, but through a particular nation.

"And his own received him not." "His own" in the masculine plural means "his own people"--the Jewish people, the chosen people to whom Christ came first. The Jews were "His own":

1. By divine choice.

They were chosen from among the nations of the earth to be the recipients of God's special revelations of His will, the objects of His special care and protection, and the special medium of His great redemptive thoughts and purposes.

2. By special covenant.

God entered into a covenant with them by which they were to obey and serve Him, and He was to protect and bless them.

3. By special training.

They were trained by special revelations, discipline, protection and privileges.

Christ came as Immanuel, but so far were His own from receiving Him that they accounted Him a "sinner," and "many of them said, He hath a demon, and is mad; why hear ye Him?" He came as Redeemer and Saviour, but they received Him not because they did not see their need of redemption and had no desire for real spiritual blessings. Many never paid any attention to Him, to His discourses, to His mighty deeds or to His holy character. The greatest stupidity in the history of the human race is that moral blindness which led the Jews to reject the Saviour when He came to them. Though He walked in their midst, performed miracles of mercy, taught them the love of the Father and revealed the amazing glory of God, all the answer they made seemed to have been one of utter repudiation, culminating in His crucifixion on Calvary.

Those who had been prepared through many generations, who had been taught to be the special reception committee to receive the Lord and introduce Him to the world, would not receive Him when He came. This is the saddest story of human conduct with reference toward Him. They felt the jibe of the truth He spoke, but resented it; they felt the appeal of the salvation which He offered, but rejected it; they felt the charm of His personality, but refused the blessing of it; they felt the urge within their own hearts to yield, but stifled it. Uncomfortable in the presence of His holiness, they were determined to destroy Him.

II. The Greatest Transaction.

"But as many as received Him." He was received by a small but noble minority. Although the majority, which included the best educated and most influential, rejected Him, the independent and courageous minority received Him. Their doing so was an evidence of the courage of their convictions and the decisiveness of their character. It is easy to go with the popular current, but it is difficult to go against it.

To receive Christ and to believe on Him are one and the same thing. You may believe that He is divine, that He is the Son of God, that He is the Saviour, but unless you receive Him you will never be saved. Receiving is a definite transaction. It is a personal act. Each one must receive Christ for himself. It is possible to know the facts about Christ and accept them as true, without receiving Him personally. It is at this point that thousands of people are making a fatal mistake, confusing the knowledge of the facts about Christ with their own personal acceptance of Him as Saviour and Lord.

The only way to become children of God is by a definite and personal acceptance of Christ as Saviour. Sitting down at a well-filled table will not save anyone from hunger and starvation. Believing that the food upon the table is good and nourishing is not enough. One must reach out and take it and make it his own. Have you done this with Christ? Salvation comes by receiving Christ. As the empty cup receives from the flowing fountain, so we receive Christ into our emptiness.

III. The Greatest Transmission.

"To them gave He power." This word contains more than the notion of privilege or right. It is true that the Lord gives us the right, but He also imparts the ability to become what we were not--the children of God. Even the distaste for the sinful life and a desire for God and salvation are not produced by man, but they are the work of the Holy Spirit. The very first impulse to become a child of God comes to one from the outside, for it is God Who worketh in us, both to will and to do. To those who receive Christ, He gives power to repent of sins, believe with the heart and make an unreserved dedication of self to Christ. Regardless of character, education or position, this power is given to those who receive Christ. To those who receive Him, Christ gives all of the rights and privileges of children of God.

What a privilege to be a child of God! "Privilege" isn't a word we use very often about our Christian faith and discipleship. We often talk about the wisdom, the duty, the difficulties and problems of being a child of God. We stress the desirability and the necessity of it, but neglect to magnify the privilege. In Christ we place our faith and to us He gives the power to become the children of God.

IV. The Greatest Transformation.

"To become the children of God." Only believers in Christ are the children of God. Christian parentage, inestimable blessing though it is, does not constitute us children of God. Unlike Judaism, Christianity does not run in the blood. There must be a personal experience of Christ through simple faith in Him before we become the children of God. "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Thus it is apparent that all of God's children are His by birth; that is, by the communication of His life to them.

God's children are born, but not of blood; not by natural reproduction or through any hereditary process. The natural forces of generation cannot bring forth children unto God. In our day many have fallen into the erroneous belief that because they come from a Christian home and Christian environment they are Christians. God says, "We were by nature the children of wrath." Grace and salvation do not run in the human bloodstream. The most godly parents cannot produce sinless offspring. All are sinners by birth.

"Nor of the will of the flesh." In other words, we are not God's children because we will to be. It is not the result of self-determination or self-effort. One must be born into the family of God. "Nor of the will of man." Men do not have the power to make another a member of God's family. It is only by supernatural and divine power that people enter God's family. Christians are children of God by the miracle

of the new birth. The new birth is a miracle performed by the Holy Spirit in the soul of the believing sinner through the instrumentality of the inspired Word. It is absolutely necessary, intensely mysterious and entirely supernatural. Receiving Christ as personal Saviour is the act that gives us the right to become children of God and opens up the way for God to communicate His life to us. No one can become a member of God's family apart from a miracle having been wrought. No one can possibly make himself a Christian no matter how hard he tries to do so. Salvation is not worked up from within, but it is that which comes down from above. It is given and not earned. This glorious privilege is extended to those who receive Christ.

Have you ever thought about the meaning of that expression, "the children of God"? It means to have God as our Father, Christ as our Saviour, the saved as our brethren, and the angels as our friends. As God's children we have liberties, privileges and blessings which do not belong to mere servants. We need a new consciousness of the dignity of our standing in Christ. What are some of our privileges as children of God?

1. The audience of the Father's presence.
Every barrier has been removed, and a golden highway has been opened for us into the divine presence. As His children we have the incontestable right, and the inestimable privilege, of direct access into His presence to confess our sins, to have fellowship with Him and to receive His blessings. His door is never locked against His much-loved children.
2. The bounty of the Father's table.
A bountiful provision has been made for us and we are invited to come and partake of it until our souls are satisfied. The emaciated spiritual appearance of many children of God is evidence that they are not feasting on the good things which have been made ready for them. To the Father's spiritual table all believers are invited to come and dine. On it there is pardon, peace, love, joy, power, victory, hope and every blessing which we need as we journey to the eternal homeland of the soul.
3. The shelter of the Father's home.
In Christ we are safe from the storms that rage; we enjoy the protection of the Father's care; we feel the grip of the Father's hand; and we nestle on the bosom of the Father's love. If the difficulties, perplexities, disappointments, heart-breaks and burdens of life drive us to the Lord in prayer, they are really worthwhile.
4. The guidance of the Father's hand.
It is an almighty hand, a loving hand, an experienced hand, a restraining hand and an overruling hand. It is full of blessings which are offered to us and which are to be gratefully received and appropriated. Because of our unbelief, prayerlessness, worldliness, disobedience and sin, we do not enjoy the guidance of the Father's hand as we ought. Circumstances, common sense, the advice of Christian friends and Bible study enter into the guiding providence of God.
5. The fellowship of the Father's children.
It is God's will that His children should be an encouragement and help to each other along the pathway of life. Those who are in fellowship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit will be in fellowship with one another. It is a tragedy when those who have been united to Christ are estranged through misunderstanding, jealousy, envy and sin.
6. The comfort of the Father's companionship.
Our Lord not only glorifies life for us in this workaday world, but He will be with us in the hour of death. O. Henry, the famous story-writer, was dying. Thinking

that the end had come, the nurse began lowering the shades of the windows. Opening his eyes, and seeming to understand, he said, "Let up the shades! I don't want to go home in the dark." Friends, if we have received Christ into our hearts, we shall not have to go home in the dark.

Upon all of the children of God there devolves the solemn responsibility of representing Him aright in this world of sin. Too often we have given others wrong impressions of what it is to be a Christian. We have frequently been morbid and self-centered, whereas we should have been joyful and Christ-centered. Born into the family of God, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we should display the character of children. Is there anything about you which would lead others to conclude that you are a child of God? With orthodox believing there should be orthodox living. As children of God, we should love, honor and obey Him. Our love should be more ardent, our reverence more real and our obedience more wholehearted.

Years ago a Chinaman was led to Christ through the efforts of the Salvation Army, and some time afterward dooned one of their uniforms. While riding on the streetcar one day a friend accosted him by saying, "I see you belong to the Salvation Army." "No," said John, "I belong to God. I have joined the Salvation Army." That Chinaman had far more insight than thousands of intelligent Americans who cannot see the difference between joining a church and becoming a child of God. The one thing that matters is, Are you a child of God or have you merely united with a Christian institution?

To accept Christ is to be saved, to become a member of God's family, to enjoy the divine favor, and to be admitted to a home in heaven. Penitently and affectionately receive Christ as your Saviour now, while we sing, "Only Trust Him."