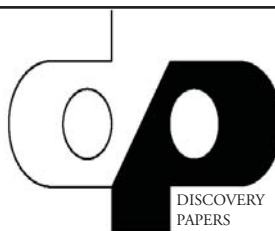


WHO'S YOUR DADDY?

SERIES: IN HIM IS NO DARKNESS AT ALL



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1 John 2:28-3:12
4th message
Steve Zeisler
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In my study at home I have a picture that was taken in September 1957 in Marion, Ohio, during a celebration of my grandparents' fiftieth wedding anniversary. I was eight years old, and I'm in the picture, standing near the right edge of a gathering of thirty-nine people—four generations of my father's family. I am grateful to have the picture and its testimony to family history.

Family connections and the lessons learned in families are extremely important in Scripture. When God wants to speak to us about the deepest truths, he will very often use the language of family: parents and children, brothers and sisters. We have come to a section in our text where the apostle John is going to use the metaphor of family for the first time in this letter.

Children of God

First John 2:28-29:

And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

In verse 28, the Lord's appearing is for those who have grown to maturity, at the end of their journey—not ashamed of the life choices they have made. Verse 29 hearkens back to birth and introduces a discussion of life in the Father's family.

First John 3:1-3:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Verse 1 begins with a trumpet blast, which is obscured in the NIV: Behold! Give attention to the lavish love of God! We are named as his children because we are his children. There is no greater blessing imaginable.

But we also know that in human experience not all fathering has love at its center. For many the term "father" is a reminder of hurt or disappointment. Not so here. Our heavenly Father has lavished love upon us.

Love is the central experience of children of God, but notice also that two aspects of the relationship are mentioned. We are *called* children of God and we *are* children of God: a formal declaration and an inner reality.

Being recognized as and named or called a child of God is important. I was recently with a ministry team in a juvenile detention facility in San Mateo County. Many of the residents, some as young as ten or twelve, had very tenuous relationships with fathers and families. Much of their threatening and self-destructive behavior was a search for a name—a father's voice calling them "my son." What a privilege for them to hear the gospel declared in that detention center—the lavish love of the Father calling each of us his child!

Behold God's love, and see also the rejection of the world. Our standing by faith means nothing in the world, which treated the incarnate Son of God with contempt.

Adding more glory, John tells us that our standing as children of God now means that we are destined for a breathtaking future. The world has never known him, but we know him now, will see him at the end of the age returned in majesty, and we will be like him—changed by seeing him glorified.

The apostle John was one of three men who were permitted to go with Jesus to the top of a mountain where Jesus was transfigured before them, attended by Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). His appearance was dazzling and Moses and Elijah, also dazzling, were made beautiful by his beauty. Being changed to be like Jesus is not a privilege reserved only for the great saints of old. It is a promise held out to all the Father's children.

In verse 3 John draws an important conclusion: "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." Knowing our future motivates us to honor the Lord in the present. Children who are loved imitate the ways of their parents. We know ourselves to be God's children now and are promised transformation when Jesus appears, and so we live lives of humility, godliness, and love.

The next section, verses 4-12, brings the lies of false teachers back into view, and continues with the metaphor of family life. The devil has children, too, we will see in

this passage. In a grotesque parody, the devil's family is not marked by purity but lawlessness and rivalry. In this family Cain kills his brother.

Jesus Takes Away Our Sin

Verses 4-12:

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

Expanding on the call to purify ourselves, John challenges any so-called believer who "keeps on sinning . . . does what is sinful . . . continues to sin." His concern is not with those who struggle to obey, who fail, repent, and are restored (see 1 John 2:1-2). His concern is with the teaching of the Gnostics, who claim that sinful behavior doesn't matter, who defend and enjoy unrighteousness while clothing themselves in religious language.

Remember, Jesus said to pray *every day*, "Forgive us our debts" (Matthew 6:11-13). All of God's children have weaknesses and blind spots and tears and failure. But none will embrace hypocrisy and laugh at God's holiness.

Twice in this section John uses the language of Jesus' appearance. The first place is verse 5: "He appeared so that he might take away our sins." He takes away the guilt of our sin. He takes away the allure of our sin. He breaks the power of sin to command us.

Being honest, most of us are glad for an end to pain-producing sins, but we are not always so sure we want

the sophisticated, subtle, attractive, comfortable sins taken away. But he "appeared" to do away with all sin, and if we are children of God, then we will agree with our Father, we will long to be like him, and we will let the Son do the work of undoing all the ways in which sin has gripped us. He is committed to making us free.

Jesus Destroy's the Devil's Work

The second place John speaks of Jesus' appearance is verse 8: "The Son of God appeared...to destroy the devil's work." So on the one hand he takes away sin, and on the other hand he destroys the work of the devil, the evil one. He does battle with a person—the desecrator, the life-taker, the dungeon-maker. He destroys the destroyer.

As rival to God the Father, the devil creates his own children. He offers kingdoms. He makes promises. He insists that humans will gain power and significance through him. He seduces and allures, lies, and kills. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.

Cain never intended to be a murderer. He didn't start out to be wicked. But he believed the lie that he should grasp for himself what he desired. He was eaten up by jealousy and killed his brother. That is the way of the devil's family. God calls on us to love our brothers and sisters; the devil calls on us to compete with them and finally destroy them.

We read back in verse 3, "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." Jesus used another phrase: "Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...will be filled" (Matthew 5:6). We are children of God with a promise of sharing in Jesus' glory for eternity. These realities form our deepest longings. Though short-term pleasure and temporary status have an allure, we know that they do not provide satisfaction for a heart that has been bathed in the lavish love of the Father. The one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness will be satisfied.

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