

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

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I don't know about you, but I've been called all sorts of things down through the years. For whatever reason, it's the negative stuff that sticks with me. For example, when I was in grade school, a teacher at my school called me an “instigator.” At the time, I wasn't a hundred percent sure what that meant, but I went and found out and...I guess she had a point.

What have you been called? Good or bad, positive or negative, we have a natural tendency to listen to what we've been called—and take it to heart. We live up to—or down to—what we've been called. If someone calls you “worthless” enough times, you tend to start believing it. If someone calls you “the best thing that ever happened to me,” you will want to live up to that assessment. We've all been called a lot of things, and I think most of us, on balance, would be happy with being called “a good person.”

But according to the inspired words of John, you're not a good person. You're far better than that. You are a child of God.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us,” John writes, and what kind of love is that? We find it in the chapter before: in His love for us, God the Father has given His only Son; given Him up to death in your place. He's declared, “I so love you and desire your salvation that I have judged My Son in Your place. I do not ask you to earn your salvation by your works and efforts and sacrifices; instead, I have given My Son to work and sacrifice and die. And I have raised Him up again!”

What does this mean to you? It means that by the grace of God, you're a child of God. You're not the lost one looking in from the outside, nor the hypocrite who pretending to be good and hoping the Lord doesn't get wise: you're a child of God. You're not a slave who has to earn his keep and keep the Master's favor, nor are you an employee who has to get a good performance review in order to make the cut. You're a child of God. For Jesus' sake, He says, “At your Baptism, I made you My own. I put My name on you, made you a member of My household—and My household lasts forever.”

For Jesus' sake, you're a child of God. Not, “you will be a child of God,” but “you are.” It's done. You're in. The adoption has been finalized. The only way, dear believers, that you could not inherit heaven now would be for you to embrace sin and death and run away from home.

Furthermore, you're pure. Your sins are gone, because Jesus has taken them all away. He's died for them all. Again, since you're forgiven, God doesn't see you as an okay person trying hard to do the right thing: He sees you as right and righteous, because Jesus has taken the wrong away. He doesn't see you as hypocritical, hiding your sins: because of Jesus has taken them away, you have no sins left to hide. They're gone.

You're a child of God—now. You're pure before Him—now. That's what the Gospel declares. You just don't appear that way right now. If the world seriously acknowledged that you were a child of God, do you think it would hassle you at all for being a Christian? Bullies don't pick on kids with really big brothers, so why would the world choose to dismiss Christianity and mock it?

John tells you: "The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him." The world didn't recognize Jesus as the Son of God—instead, the world crucified Him. Don't expect any praise or favors from the world for being a Christian. Expect the world to say, "You don't look like a child of God, so you're getting no respect from us."

Furthermore, you don't appear pure, either. People will see and remember your mistakes, not the grace that God gives. You'll remember them, too, especially those sins along the way where the Law has especially crushed you, where you were the instigator, and you know it. Sin still clings to you in this life, and will try to persuade you that you're not pure and never could be. But that's the appearance, and the Gospel declares that you're far better than you appear. You're not pure before God because you never sinned: you're pure because Jesus has taken those sins away.

You don't appear to be a pure child of God—to the world or to yourself. But you've got Jesus' Word on it. Today, He's declared His powerful, effective words, "I forgive you all of your sins." Soon, He visits you in, with and under bread and wine, with His body and blood, for the forgiveness of sins. If your sins are forgiven, you're pure. If your sins are forgiven, you're a child of God.

On this Sunday of All Saints, we remember those who received Jesus this way. We thank God for those who lived among us as children of God and now are truly home. But it always comes as a surprise to learn that you are numbered among them. You don't see it yet—you don't appear that way. Neither do you see Jesus yet—rather, He cloaks Himself in His Word and Supper to give you forgiveness and purity again.

It won't always be like this. Jesus is coming back in glory for all to see. You haven't seen Him revealed in His holiness and glory yet. But you will. You will see Him as He is, the glorious Son of God who took on flesh and died for you. And then, as one redeemed and forgiven, you'll be exposed for who you truly are even now for Jesus' sake.

You're pure.

You're a saint.

You're a child of God.

You are. Let that stick.