

CHAPTER VIII

*DIVINE SONSHIP TESTED BY
PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS*

(The First Test . . . The Second Time)

I John 3:1-3

A. *The Text*

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew not him. (2) Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. (3) And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. What "manner of love" has God bestowed upon us?
1. Why does the world not know the sons of God?
3. How will seeing Him as He is make us to become like Him?

C. *Paraphrase*

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us That children of God we should be called, And such we are! Therefore the world understandeth us not, Because it understood not him. (2) Beloved! now are we children of God; And not yet hath it been made manifest what we shall be, We know that if it should be made manifest Like unto him shall we be, Because we shall see him just as he is. (3) And whosoever hath this hope on him Is purifying himself, just as He is pure."

D. *Translation and Comments*

1. Sonship produced by divine love . . . v. 1
- (1) "See what sort of love the Father has given in our behalf, that

we should be called children of God, and we are. On account of this the world is not knowing us, because it did not know Him."

The opening exclamation here, "See what sort of love the Father has given on our behalf" is reminiscent of John 3:16. There John concludes from Jesus' preceding conversation with Nicodemus concerning the new birth; "For God loved the world like this, so that He gave His only begotten Son . . ."

Neither of these verses can be taken as a measure of *how much* God loved. Rather they set forth the *manner* in which that love was brought to bear on our need. John 3:16 concludes that it was "in order that we might not go on perishing but have eternal life." I John 3:1 treats this eternal life in terms of divine sonship resulting from the same manifestation of God's love.

It is not just Calvary, but the entire incarnation experience which brought this love to meet our need and give us the right to become the sons of God. (Cf. John 1:12) The eternal Word of God left the gold-decked streets of Heaven where His praises are sung continually for the stinking disease-ridden streets of a fifth-rate planet. Here he was mocked and betrayed and denied and spit upon by those whose best are not worthy to stoop down and untie His sandals! And He did it that we might be called and indeed become the children of His Father!

How ridiculous it is that the emptying of Himself (Phil. 2:6-8) should become the very reason for His being rejected by those for whom He emptied Himself! But it has ever been so. His contemporary countrymen rejected Him because they could not accept a Galilean carpenter as the Son of God. The gnostic could not accept His humanity without rejecting His deity. And today's pseudo-intellectual denies His unique Sonship to go in quest of "the Jesus of history."

If God's sense of humor is as great as His love, He must double over with laughter at the stupidity of those who profess themselves to be wise!

Looking back on some sixty years as a child of God, John is still astounded at the privilege. The humility of Christ in the incarnation, as well as the awful price paid in the cross to grant this privilege remains beyond human comprehension.

This amazement on the part of the apostle stands out in vivid contrast to the self-asserting assumption by many of our day that all men are the children of God. In the presence of such pious platitudes as the "fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man," it is well to remind

ourselves that brotherhood is the result of a common fatherhood, rather than an easy going tolerance. We need also to remember that divine sonship does not rest upon "the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God." (John 1:13)

To be a child of God one must receive Jesus. (John 1:12) This is precisely what the gnostic could not do. His prejudice concerning the incompatibility of spirit and matter made it impossible for him to believe that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14)

It sounds lofty today to talk about God's love to all men, and to assume that all men are therefore His sons. However, to remain outside the pale of this love, as it is focused upon our need of redemption in the incarnation, is to fall into the same trap as the gnostic and hence, fail ever to become a child of God!

2. Present situation and future hope . . . v. 2

(2) "Beloved now we are children of God, and it is not yet demonstrated what we shall be. We know that as He shall be openly demonstrated we shall get to be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is."

One of the weakest areas of understanding in the minds of most modern Christians about eternal life is the failure to realize that it is a present reality. How many times we hear faithful men pray, "At last in Heaven save us."

The final hope of Heaven is not to be decried, but we gravely err when we assume that salvation and eternal life are something for which we must wait until death puts an end to everything else.

We are *now* the sons of God. The life that vibrated in the being of the Incarnate Word and could not be held by death is ours *here*. It begins when we are begotten of God through faith (I John 1:5). It begins to grow toward fruition when we are born again. (John 3:5) We have here and now ceased being mere creatures of God as Creator and have become sons of God as Father.

It is true that this present situation is only the beginning, but it is the beginning. We are *now* the sons of God. Eternal life *has begun* for those begotten of God.

" . . . it is not yet made manifest what we shall be." (I John 3:2) "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." (II Cor. 2:9) We are indeed presently His children, but what we shall be in eternity is not yet made known.

The answer to Job's question, "If a man die shall he live again," is ours. Paul's passage in I Cor. 15:35-ff assures us that in the real world these bodies now limited by corruption and dishonor and weakness shall be raised in incorruption and glory and power. As we have borne the image of Adam, so shall we bear the image of the risen Christ. As we have experienced the natural, so shall we experience the spiritual. We shall be raised incorruptible or we shall be changed at His coming. But to what? Paul's statement leaves us with a rather negative understanding as to what we shall not be. But what shall we be?

John, as Paul, had seen the risen Christ, yet neither could tell what He was like. It was enough to know that He was real, that He had conquered death, and that those who remain faithful to Him shall also overcome death. But what lies beyond?

We only know that ". . . if He shall be revealed, we shall get to be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is." He became as we are that we might become as He is.

The seed is planted in our hearts. It sprouts and grows and buds here and now. But in eternity in His presence it shall blossom into full glory, incorruptible, undefiled and unfading. (Cf. I Peter 1:4)

3. The result of the hope . . . v. 3

(3) "And everyone having this hope resting upon his is purifying himself just as that one is pure."

Whoever lives in the awareness of this future glory portrays in his moral conduct a purity corresponding to the hope. As our eternal lives begin here and now, so does our reflection of the image of God in Christ. (Cf. Rom. 8:29) Not even the Apostles could boast that they had already attained this image perfectly. (Cf. Phil. 3:13) But the hope set upon us by Divine Sonship and the promise of even richer blessings in the future life causes us to consider all else as loss. (Cf. Phil. 3:7) Moral purity becomes our constant goal because we are God's sons.

This is in striking opposition to the gnostic idea that one who was begotten of God could, perhaps should, live a life of debauchery in order to demonstrate that his spirit was not to be touched by physical behavior. Divine Sonship that is real rather than imaginary, that results from total commitment to the Incarnate Word, always produces an increasingly purer manner of life.

E. *Questions for Review*

1. Neither I John 3:1 nor John 3:16 can be taken as a measure of

how much God loves us. They are rather intended to set forth the

2. Eternal life, here tested as divine sonship, results from the same _____.
3. Not just Calvary, but the entire _____ brought God's love to bear upon our need.
4. The contemporary countrymen of Jesus rejected Him because they could not accept a _____ as God's Son.
5. The gnostic could accept the humanity of Jesus without rejecting His _____.
6. How does the modern "pseudo-intellectual" rejection of the deity of Jesus follow the same pattern as the Jews and the gnostics?
7. What is John's constant reaction to the awareness that he is a son of God?
8. How is this amazement contrasted to the modern philosophy of the "fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man?"
9. Brotherhood results from common _____.
10. To become a child of God one must _____ (John 1:12)
11. When does eternal life begin?
12. When do we begin to be the sons of God?
13. What light does I Cor. 15:35-ff throw on I John 3:2?
14. How does the awareness of present sonship and future glory affect the lives of the children of God?
15. Is one a child of God because he is righteous, or is righteousness the result of divine sonship?

CHAPTER IX

FURTHER APPLICATION OF THE FIRST TEST

I John 3:4-10

A. The Text

"Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. (5) And ye know that he was manifested to take away sins; and in him is no sin. (6) Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him. (7) My little children,