

Sermon 23, Children of God, 1 John 3:1

Proposition: Look with me at the sort of love God bestowed on us!

- I. The Source of Love: The Father
- II. The Sort of Love
 - A. A Given Love
 - B. An Adopting Love
 - C. A Transforming Love
 - D. An Estranging Love
 - 1. The World Didn't Recognize Christ
 - 2. The World Doesn't Recognize Christians

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, today's sermon is a visual sermon. It's a "looking" sermon. We are told in the first word of our text to "behold." And that is what we will attempt to do. We want to spend the bulk of this sermon contemplating the love that the Father has given to us. Will you do that with me? Will you just look at this love? If there was ever a time in your life when you knew you were loved, think about that time — and then apply it to your relationship with God, in which you realize that God has given you His love. Let's look together at the love our Heavenly Father has placed upon us as His free gift.

I. The Source of Love: The Father

But before we look at the love, we need to look at the lover. The lover is the Father. God is our Father, and what does a good father do? He loves his children. Remember, earthly fatherhood is the halting, inadequate metaphor that presents the transcendent, overwhelming love of God to us. There is not a father here who does not love his children and want the best for them. How much more, then, is God better than the best, most loving imaginable earthly Father?

I've shared with you before the illustration my pastor gave. The father is sitting at the dinner table with the family and he says, "Kids, I love you so much that I'm going to take you on a cruise. We are going to spend time out at sea on this huge boat and have a fabulous time."

The kids say "Yay! Thanks, Dad! You're the best."

And then the dad says, "But right now, kids, you need to eat your broccoli."

Immediately the kids wail, "Dad, I thought you loved us!"

Brothers and sisters, isn't this how we so often are? God tells us that He is a loving Father, and then some trial comes into our life and we say "What? I thought you loved me!" But the one who loves is our Father. That means that not only did He beget us and give us His own life; it also means that He sees the big picture we don't see. It means that His masculinity is overwhelming, that He is the fountain not only of life but also of authority, discipline, and

command. He is no feminized deity, no goddess of wimpiness and teacups. He is God and Father. He is the ultimate pattern of manliness, of fatherhood, of love and loveliness.

In other words, the source of this love is not some second-rate deity. The source of this love is the God who is Father. The source of this love is the great and terrible God, the one who repays the wicked to his face and feels anger every day. We make a terrible mistake when we recreate God in our own image. He is rather the original, the one of whom we are the image. We are not Him. But we are like Him.

II. The Sort of Love

Well, this lover who is not sister or nursemaid but Father — what kind of love has He bestowed upon us?

A. A Given Love

The first thing to notice about it is that it is a given love. It is not an earned love. It is not a worked-for love. It is a gift, a gratuitous dispensation, a bonus. God did not have to give it; He did not owe it to you or even to Himself. He gave it.

Can you freely receive this freely given love? Can you contemplate the sheer wantonness of it? God's reason to love you is that He loves you. It is the ultimate gift.

B. An Adopting Love

And what does this love do? It adopts you. It calls you God's child. That's right: God has freely bestowed upon you a love that changes your identity. We were born children of the devil; we are adopted as children of God. Everything God has, He left to you when His Son died. That means the wealth, the righteousness, the joy, the home in Heaven, the fulfillment on earth, the creativity and the potency — they are all yours, for you are God's heir. The estate has not yet been handed over to you; you are still under 21. But when you come of age at death, the keys will be given to you, and the inheritance will be yours in its fullness. Already you are enjoying an allowance larger than you could possibly spend; in a few short years, you will have the whole thing. That's the sort of love that God has bestowed upon you. It is a love that took an enemy and made him into a friend, nay, into a child. It is a love that lavished itself upon the unlovely, and called him by a new name: "child."

C. A Transforming Love

But not only is the love of God an adopting love, a love that calls you "child." It is a transforming love, a love that *makes you* into a child. In other words, the change wrought in you by conversion is not merely a legal change of status before God. It is also, very much so, an ethical and even ontological change of nature within you. Before, you were not a child of God in the redemptive sense. Oh, you were a creature of God, but you were a creature on the outs with God, eager to stand against Him. Now you are His child, like Him in the doing of righteousness, like Him in love and joy and peace, like Him with respect to every ethical category and every moral habit. The Holy Spirit stamps the image of Christ on you, and you are recognizable as a child of God because you have passed from death to life and your character has been transformed

by the blessing of adoption and the even greater blessing (if such is possible!) of having the Holy Spirit in your heart.

D. An Estranging Love

And that, my friends, is why this love of the Father's is also an estranging love. It is a love that changes you into something unrecognizable. Granted, that something unrecognizable is you as you were really meant to be. It is, indeed, the *real* you, to use a hackneyed category that finds genuine meaning only in Jesus.

1. The World Didn't Recognize Christ

From whom does the Father's love estrange you? From the world. The reason for this is not far to seek. The world does not recognize the existence of the Father's love, and it is radically unwilling to see or acknowledge His beloved. According to the world, if God is real then all human beings have an equal claim on Him. The world has no truck with this notion of dividing humanity between God's beloved, on the one side, and the Devil's seed, on the other. There is nothing more prideful, hateful, and dangerous than this idea that "We are the chosen ones and others are somehow out." You can ask any representative of the world, anyone who thinks in a worldly way, whether Christian exclusivism is a positive thing or a negative one, a blessing or a curse. We all know what they would say. Of course the world thinks that Christian exclusivism is a negative thing! Yet the world is every bit as exclusive. The estrangement between us and it after we become Christians is ultimately on its side, for it is willfully shutting its eyes to the reality of the glory of Jesus Christ. The world doesn't want to recognize Jesus because to recognize Him means to bow before Him in worship and admit that one was wrong. That's why the Pharisees didn't recognize Jesus as God's Messiah, why Pilate didn't worship Him and order Him released, why the establishment in His own day did not acknowledge Him.

2. The World Doesn't Recognize Christians

But John makes the further point that the world is estranged from us. Our fanatical, dangerous, cult ideas make us suspect in the eyes of the world. Allow me to read you a paragraph from a recent issue of the *New Yorker* magazine.

Last year, the advocacy organization NARAL Pro-Choice America conducted an undercover investigation of forty-five crisis pregnancy centers in California, finding that C.P.C. employees very often presented misleading information, claiming that "having an abortion was linked to an increased risk of breast cancer, infertility, miscarriage, and/or the made-up 'post-abortion depression' that results in suicide." Amy Bryant, a gynecologist at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine who has written about the medical ethics of C.P.C.s, told me that the centers, which are ideologically driven, violate the Hippocratic oath. "They do not have the well-being of the woman seeking care from them as their primary interest," she said.¹

¹ <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/11/18/the-new-front-line-of-the-anti-abortion-movement>

The world does not recognize us! Dr. Bryant appears to genuinely believe that you can have the best interest of someone at heart even when you are actively engaged in murdering her child. NARAL seems to think that warning people about the risks of abortion is “misleading.” (Notice how they didn’t dare to call those claims “false.”) I could go on, but you all are Christians and you know exactly what John is talking about when he says “The world does not recognize us.”

Now, we can say, what about countries where the establishment is Christian — you know, the WASPs and the Church of England and all that? Is John telling us that even in those places, and in devout eras of history, the world did not recognize Christians? Two considerations help us answer that question. Number one, the world that’s under discussion is the world created by human beings — the cultural norms, institutions, and plausibility structures that allow us to think that we can live without God. That world, the world we’re not supposed to love, is the world that does not know Jesus and that does not recognize Christians. So if you’re talking about times when the establishment has been devout, then perhaps the establishment in those eras wasn’t part of the world in that sense. But secondly, the form and amount of non-recognition by the world can vary. John is speaking absolutely but is not intending to deny that in one sense, the world’s non-recognition is relative. At times the establishment does largely recognize Christians; at other times, it does not. But the world in the sense of the man-made anti-God system never has recognized Christ and His people and never will until that day when every knee is forced to bow and every tongue to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Brothers and sisters, when the world doesn’t recognize you, don’t bog down or give up! Instead, realize that this is exactly what happened to Christ and what He warned would happen to us. Don’t worry about the world’s non-recognition. You have something far more valuable: A Heavenly Father who loves you. The world is not enough for you; you were made to know and love God Himself.

So receive the gift of your Father’s love. Bask in it, for it is a transforming love, an adopting love, and thus an estranging love. The world will not know you — but you will know the Father, and that is enough, infinitely more than enough and to spare. So look at Him, and at His love. He is yours, and His love is yours. Amen.