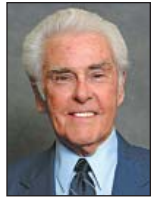


Adopted into God's family

The first epistle of John was written with two basic purposes — leading the Christian churches to reject the heresy of the Nicolaitans



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who had left the church, and to teach the believers to love God and to love the brotherhood devoted to Jesus. Such love by the Father of all his children was to be lived by the fellowship when God adopted them into his eternal family.

In his love, God the Father makes us his children (1 John 3:1-4). The lesson title describes this action of God as “adoption” but this term is not used in the Greek text by John. Only Paul uses the term adoption in his letters but he was able to do so “because both word and practice were familiar in the Graeco-Roman world” (A Theological Word Book of the Bible, p. 16). The theology of adoption is paralleled, however, in John 1:12 and in our text for this lesson (1 John 3:1-3).

Adoption symbolized for Paul and for John God's love and grace in accepting believers as his children, intimate members of his family. In our culture adoption is a civil matter, but in the New Testament adoption is accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit, giving believers power to overcome fleshly temptations and to live their lives in the Spirit (Romans 8:14-15).

To be adopted into a family gave the child whose parents may have died or who had been given to another family the opportunity to experience the love of God for them. It also gave them a future hope that they will ultimately, in the resurrection, be like Jesus, the Son of God.

One of the most difficult things for many of us to do is to love unconditionally. Especially within

families, our ability to love freely can be impacted by the hurts and disappointments we experience. Our tendency is to need to have love returned to us. The surprise is to discover God's love is more forgiving regardless of what we have done. When he adopts us into his family, our sins are forgiven.

In his love, God removes our sin (1 John 3:4-8). This section raises serious concerns for how we deal with sin before conversion and also after we have committed our lives to Christ. John had earlier declared, “If we claim to be without sin (which the heretics were doing), we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9). But in our text, John concludes that “no one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.”

Our problem is that the Greek words for sin and sinning describe two different situations and seem to contradict each other. If we claim to be sinless, we deceive ourselves. Yet we know that as Christians we do sin.

In David Smith's commentary on First John in *The Expositors Greek Testament*, he points out that in 1:8-10, John declares that there is indwelling sin in the believer. “The sinful principle (amartia) remains and it manifests its presence by lapses from holiness — occasional sins, definite, isolated acts of sin.” What Jesus has done for us is to take away the continuing force of sin with a different Greek construction of the term. “The believer may fall into sin but he will not walk in it,” because he may not “make sin his business” (pp. 184-185).

Lloyd John Ogilvie does a good job of interpreting this variation in Greek terms. In 3:9, John declares that “no one who is born of God will

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continue to sin.” This term for sin is a linear present active indicative, meaning constant, consistent and compulsive action “in contrast to the occasional sinful acts we all perform at some time in our Christian life.” When we sin this occasional way, “we have Christ to stand beside us to help us confess what has happened and to assure us of forgiveness” (When God First Thought of You, pp. 95-96).

In his love, God implants a new nature in his children (1 John 3:9-10). John uses a symbol from nature to illustrate Christian growth for the believer. “The germ of the divine life has been planted in our souls, and it grows — a gradual process and subject to occasional retardation, yet sure, attaining at last to full fruition” (Smith, p. 185).

Anyone who has planted seeds of any kind of growing plants recognizes how weather conditions and certain other influences can affect the growth of the plant. When the seeds of God's love are planted in our hearts, we are responsible for maintaining their healthy growth by loving one's neighbor and by doing what is right by God's leadership.

Since we are adopted by our Father, what qualities of relationship should exist? Let me suggest some based on New Testament teachings: authentic love, shared joy, mutual respect, expressed forgiveness, accepted grace and continuing growth (John C. Howell, *Equality and Submission in Marriage*, pp. 89-107).

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