

1 John 3:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

Analysis

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. John's exclamation "Behold" (idete) is a command to observe, consider deeply, and marvel. "What manner of love" (potapēn agapēn) expresses astonishment at the quality and magnitude of divine love. This isn't sentimental affection but covenant love demonstrated through adoption. "Hath bestowed" (dedōken) in perfect tense indicates a completed gift with lasting effects—God gave us this love, and it remains permanently.

"That we should be called the sons of God" (hina tekna theou klēthōmen) uses tekna (children) rather than huioi (sons with inheritance rights), though both concepts appear in Scripture. To be called God's children is not merely honorific title but actual reality—we are truly His children through regeneration and adoption. Some manuscripts add "and we are," emphasizing that the title reflects reality, not pretense. This is breathtaking: finite, sinful creatures adopted into God's family with full rights and privileges.

The consequence follows: "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." The world's rejection of believers mirrors its rejection of Christ. We shouldn't expect recognition or acceptance from a world system opposed to God. Yet this rejection confirms our identity—those truly belonging to God will be misunderstood and opposed by those who don't know Him. Our adoption as God's

children simultaneously brings greatest blessing and guarantees conflict with the world.

Historical Context

In the Roman world, adoption carried significant legal and social weight. An adopted son received full inheritance rights, took the adopter's name, and gained complete legal standing as a son—all previous debts and obligations were erased. Paul uses this imagery extensively (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:5, Ephesians 1:5). For John's readers, who understood Roman adoption law, being called God's children meant complete legal transformation.

Jewish readers would recall Israel's adoption as God's son (Exodus 4:22, Hosea 11:1). However, John's theology goes beyond national identity—individual believers are personally adopted through faith in Christ. The Gnostics claimed elite spiritual status through secret knowledge, creating hierarchy among believers. John democratizes sonship—all who believe are God's children, regardless of spiritual gifts or mystical experiences.

The world's rejection was very real for John's readers. Christians faced social ostracism, economic discrimination, and periodic persecution. John reframes this suffering not as evidence against their faith but as confirmation of their true identity. They were misunderstood and rejected because they belonged to God, whom the world had rejected in Christ.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How should meditating on our adoption as God's children shape our identity and daily decisions?
2. Why does the world's rejection of believers actually confirm rather than challenge their status as God's children?
3. How can believers maintain both humility (we were enemies) and confidence (we are His children)?

Interlinear Text

”Ιδετε ποταπὴν ἀγάπην δέδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ πατὴρ
Behold what manner of love hath bestowed upon us the Father
G1492 G4217 G26 G1325 G2254 G3588 G3962

ἵνα τέκνα Θεοῦ κληθῶμεν διὰ τοῦτο ὁ κόσμος
that the sons of God we should be called therefore the world
G2443 G5043 G2316 G2564 G1223 G5124 G3588 G2889

οὐκ ἔγνω ἡμᾶς ὅτι οὐκ ἔγνω αὐτόν
not it knew us because not it knew him
G3756 G1097 G2248 G3754 G3756 G1097 G846

Additional Cross-References

John 1:12 (References God): But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Galatians 3:26 (References God): For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 6:18 (Parallel theme): And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

John 17:25 (Parallel theme): O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.

John 3:16 (Love): For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Revelation 21:7 (References God): He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

Romans 5:8 (Love): But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Galatians 3:29 (Parallel theme): And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

John 16:3 (Parallel theme): And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.

Romans 8:32 (Parallel theme): He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?