

John 1:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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:

Analysis

This verse unveils the stunning privilege offered to all who receive Christ: they are given 'power to become the sons of God' (ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι). The word 'power' (ἐξουσία/exousia) means authority, right, or privilege—not merely ability but legitimate status. This is adoption language: those who receive Christ are granted the legal right and authority to be called and to become God's children. The verb 'become' (γενέσθαι/genesthai) indicates a real transformation—not merely being declared sons but actually becoming sons through spiritual rebirth. The phrase 'as many as received him' (ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν) uses the aorist tense of λαμβάνω (lambanō), meaning to take, accept, or receive. This is the human response in salvation—actively receiving Christ as He offers Himself. The parallel phrase 'even to them that believe on his name' (τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ) defines what receiving means: believing 'into' His name, trusting in His person and work. The preposition εἰς (eis, 'into') suggests movement toward and union with Christ, not mere intellectual assent but personal commitment and identification. The 'name' represents Christ's full identity and character—who He is and what He has done. Believing on His name means trusting Christ Himself, not merely accepting facts about Him. This verse reveals that sonship is neither natural (by physical birth) nor earned (by works) but received as a gift through faith in Christ. It demolishes all human pride and religious achievement—becoming God's child depends entirely on receiving Christ, which is the definition of saving faith.

Historical Context

This verse appears in John's prologue (1:1-18), immediately after explaining that 'his own received him not' (1:11)—Israel, to whom Christ came, largely rejected Him. The contrast is striking: those who were 'his own' by covenant privilege refused Him, but 'as many as received him'—whether Jew or Gentile—were given the right to become God's children. This democratized salvation, removing ethnic and religious privilege as prerequisites. In first-century Judaism, being a 'son of Abraham' or 'son of the covenant' conferred religious status. Jews were God's 'chosen people,' separated from Gentile 'dogs.' The notion that sonship came not through Abrahamic descent but through receiving Christ was revolutionary and offensive. Jesus later told religious leaders, 'If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham... Ye are of your father the devil' (John 8:39, 44), demonstrating that biological descent meant nothing without faith. The early church wrestled with the inclusion of Gentiles as full 'sons of God' without requiring circumcision or Torah observance (Acts 15, Galatians). Paul extensively develops this theme: believers are adopted as sons (Galatians 4:4-7, Romans 8:15-17), heirs with Christ, recipients of the Spirit of adoption. The concept of becoming God's children through faith in Christ became foundational to Christian identity, transcending all ethnic, social, and cultural divisions (Galatians 3:26-28). Throughout church history, this verse has provided assurance to believers—our status as God's children doesn't depend on our performance, lineage, or religious achievements but solely on receiving Christ by faith.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between having the 'power' (authority/right) to become God's children and merely being able to become His children?

2. How does 'receiving' Christ differ from merely believing facts about Him, and what does it mean to believe 'into' His name?
3. What does this verse teach about the basis of becoming God's children—is it natural birth, moral achievement, religious ritual, or something else?
4. How does the offer of sonship to 'as many as received him' (regardless of background) challenge religious or ethnic pride?

Interlinear Text

ὅσοι	δὲ	ἔλαβον	αὐτοῦ	ἔδωκεν	αὐτοῦ	ἐξουσίαν
as many as	But	received	him	gave he	him	power
G3745	G1161	G2983	G846	G1325	G846	G1849
τέκνα	θεοῦ	γενέσθαι	τοῖς	πιστεύουσιν	εἰς	τὸ
the sons	of God	to become	G3588	even to them that believe	on	G3588
G5043	G2316	G1096		G4100	G1519	
ὄνομα	αὐτοῦ					
name	him					
G3686	G846					

Additional Cross-References

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

Romans 8:14 (References God): For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

1 John 3:1 (References God): 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.

Galatians 4:6 (References God): And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

John 3:18 (Faith): He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Matthew 10:40 (Parallel theme): He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

Colossians 2:6 (Parallel theme): As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

Isaiah 56:5 (Parallel theme): Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.

John 20:31 (Faith): But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

Hosea 1:10 (References God): Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.