

I AM MY FATHER'S CHILD

by Steve Zeisler

Scott O'Grady was little known until a couple of days ago. Many have commented about the testimony this young flyer gave upon returning from Bosnia where he had been shot down. "The first thing I want to do," he said, his voice cracking with emotion, "is to thank God. If it wasn't for God's love for me, and my love for God, I wouldn't have gotten through it. He's the one who delivered me here, and I know that in my heart." Scott O'Grady was someone whose faith was not known to many until he had opportunity to display it in public.

The subject of making what is hidden clear is what we want to focus on in our text. The Greek word *phaneroo* shows up a number of times in this passage. It means to manifest, to take what is obscure and make it obvious, to display it as it is, to bring it out into the open.

We are near the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. If you've ever been to Israel and seen the site in the Judean wilderness where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, you know there is no more desolate place imaginable. When you stare at these dusty, dry hills, you can observe nothing of value there. So it was believed for centuries, until in 1948 a Bedouin shepherd boy threw a rock down a crevasse which led to the discovery of a cave, in which were pots that had preserved the word of God for centuries. These scrolls have given new enthusiasm to the study of the Old Testament by Jews and Christians ever since.

You and I are similar. We are like uncut diamonds, which look like any other rock. There is nothing attractive, apparently nothing of value about them, until someone cuts the diamond and manifests the extraordinary beauty and value that has been in there all the time.

"We walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7)

Listen to the opening verses of 1 John 3: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." The world doesn't encourage our identity as children of God, does it? We aren't regularly clapped on the back and warmly greeted as royal children, beloved of our heavenly Father. Our identity is not very often discoverable even by ourselves as we look in the mirror. We haven't yet been manifested, this word *phaneroo* that is used in verse 2: "...What we will be has not yet been made known." But when he appears (*phaneroo*), then we will be like him, for we will see him just as he is. Called children of God, we are that, but we don't appear as such yet.

This passage is about how to center our gaze on Jesus Christ, who has appeared and who will appear, how to draw self understanding from him, to walk by faith, not by sight so that we can act with certainty about our adoption as children of God, that he is *Abba*, our Father. We can live that way even though we don't appear as such yet, even though the diamond remains uncut.

The appearing of Jesus

Let's look at the text. I want to begin reading in 1 John 2:28, which is a bridge between chapters 2 and 3. John mentions in 2:18-29 a "last hour;" antichrists had arisen (the antichrist to come will immediately precede the last hour). References to the last and ultimate things leads to further discussion here of the return and visible display of Christ. Let's read 2:28-3:10:

And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

Twice in this passage Jesus is described as appearing in the future (2:28 and 3:2), and twice he is described as having appeared already (3:5 and 3:8) to take away sins and to destroy the devil's work. The unveiling of Jesus, both that which is to come and that which has already occurred, the display of him as he is---his nature, his heart, his power, his authority, his beauty made clear to us---has important implications for how we live. The antichrists (see Discovery Paper 4436), the devil as he is mentioned in this passage, and those who are like Cain (see Discovery Paper 4437) all attempt to make us order our lives around some set of lies, to make another voice more important than Jesus, to obscure him again, to devalue him, to set him aside, to replace him with some other option that wants to take center stage. So what John is doing is highlighting the display, the phanerosis, of Jesus for us.

Choose intimacy with him now

Let's look at the implications that flow from his appearance to come, from the fact that someday we will no longer look through a dark glass at him. His power, dominion, and beauty will no longer be in any degree hidden, his glory no longer dimmed. The first implication is found in 2:28: "...continue [or abide] in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed...." Because Christ is coming, John says, we ought to remain in him, rest in him, choose intimacy with him as a daily experience now. We ought to listen to him now. The word abide has the idea of ongoing intimacy. Jesus used it in John 15 when he said the branches should abide in the vine, draw their life from the vine, rest and receive from the vine. So abiding in him is a choice we should make to be attentive, at rest, peaceful, and appreciative; not caught up with all our doing and going and thinking and creating, focused on ourselves.

The elders of this church met yesterday to pray for the church, as we do now and then. As a part of the time of prayer we each spent an hour alone. We were in a very beautiful setting. I was sitting under a gorgeous tree on a sunny morning with the word of God, but it was not easy to slow down enough mentally to merely enjoy God's love, to appreciate that God would attend to me and that I might attend to him. John says that the Lord will appear again; and knowing that, we should rest in him.

The other possibility is that we will be ashamed rather than confident when he comes. I don't think John means here that we will be ashamed of sins in particular. We won't be ashamed that we yelled at our wretched neighbor, lied to our boss, or had lustful thoughts. When the Lord appears, all of those will have long since been dealt with; he came to take away sins. But there is a sense of regret we will feel at lost opportunity if we do not abide in him. Have you ever received a gift from someone, forgotten to send them a thank-you note, and encountered them some time later? You probably thought, "Oh no, what have I done? I ought to have

expressed my thanks. I didn't give the relationship the attention it deserved." It was an opportunity you missed to express appreciation, to value the relationship. These lead to feelings of regret.

We have call-waiting on our home phone. Recently, I was talking to someone on the phone, and another call clicked in. I got busy on the second phone call, then realized twenty minutes had gone by, and I had to click back and talk to my friend who was waiting on the first line. I felt ashamed that I had been so thoughtless.

That is what John is talking about here. We will either abide in him---take time daily, frequently, and lovingly to rest---or we will see him and all of the missed opportunities will occur to us: "Oh, Lord---I clicked off and never clicked back, and you were waiting there the whole time!" He is going to appear, to be displayed for who he is, and that ought to make us enthusiastic about being intimate with him.

We will be like him

Another implication of his appearance to come is the one I commented on at the outset. It's the extraordinary, powerful teaching about our identity as children of God that John engages in here: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us...." Actually, older translations probably render this a little better than the New International Version: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us...." Look at it, be staggered by it---the depth, the quality, the everlasting, the commitment of heart that he has made to us! We are to be called, "child of God!" And we are children of God---it's not just a name that we're borrowing on a temporary basis. It's true of us! What love is this? Look at it carefully, it deserves all of our attention.

As I've already mentioned, John is wise enough to recognize that this is difficult business. It's hard to believe of ourselves that we are royal children, diamonds in the rough. It's hard to believe the infinite value that God has given us, because it never gets reinforced by the world. The world didn't know Christ, and it's not going to know us. They rejected him, treated him as a criminal, spat upon him, killed him. Why should they treat us any differently? But even we don't see ourselves as we are. The evidence of our performance, the person who gazes back at us from the mirror, is not particularly upbuilding to us most of the time.

We don't see ourselves as we will be because Jesus hasn't appeared yet. But at his appearance we will discover ourselves in the same way that the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. You can kind of think of yourself as a Judean wilderness hillside right now with this great treasure inside, but no one has found it out yet. But when he comes, you will see him and be like him. You will continue to have your personality, your history, probably your sense of humor, your outlook on life, everything that makes you unique and wonderful and interesting, all the creativity God put into making you. And at the same time you're going to be like Christ. You will have the character and life of Jesus with your personality in the midst of it. That is what the cut diamond is going to look like.

We live in an age in which fathering is under much discussion, particularly the absence of fathers for young people today. Fathers have been absent on some level in every generation, by being withdrawn, inadequate, or whatever. There is no way to change the way you were fathered, to make it better than it was. But the Father whom John is focused on here is the greatest of fathers: the Father who loved us so much that we should be called children of God, and who makes it so.

A recent biography of Bill Clinton has on its first page this statement about him: "It is central to understand the man he would become that he began life in Hope, Arkansas with no father." This biographer tries to explain a good deal about the man Bill Clinton became by saying he had no father. Many of us struggle with having had either absent or inadequate fathers. But John has focused us on the greatest of all Father's Day celebrations, the appreciation we can have that we have been made by an act of grace into children of God, that we are like Jesus Christ, and that someday we'll see it as it is. It doesn't matter that the world doesn't get it or even that we don't get it yet, because we're not done. The unveiling hasn't taken place, but it will.

John goes on, therefore, to draw a conclusion from that. Verse 3 says, "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." Because our hope is focused on something that is real, because we are children of God and someday that will be clear, we therefore purify ourselves right now. If you are married, you can probably remember the time when you were engaged. It may have been good or terrible; engagements

have all sorts of track records. But in general, for the vast majority of people, one of the things that engagement does is change your behavior. Because you had committed yourself to be married to your betrothed, you changed the way you thought and acted around members of the opposite sex. The day was coming when you would be married, and current behavior changed accordingly. John is making exactly the same argument. "Someday I'm going to be a diamond, visible for who I am. So I should start acting that way now."

My son's football coach has a wise policy. At the football banquet at the end of the season, there were various awards and commendations given out. But near the end the coach appointed the two captains, who were juniors, for the next year. Suddenly, the responsibility to lead, to get teammates to focus on football anticipating the year to come, became real for these two. Already they were thinking of next year, and that would alter their behavior. Being given a designation regarding something important to come, knowing for sure that it will happen, should change our behavior in the present. That's what John argues for: Because we have this hope, we purify ourselves now. We start choosing to live lives that are consistent with what will happen on the day that Jesus is revealed.

We cannot keep on sinning

Let's turn now to examine the verses in which the word phaneroo appears in past tense, beginning with verse 4. He says twice here that Jesus appeared already on a mission to take away sins and to destroy the works of the devil. These terms are a declaration of war. Jesus appeared as God incarnate on this earth to make a statement about the ruler of this age, as the Bible calls him, the devil; to win believers to himself; to forgive their sins. He came to take away sins so that we are free to reject the evil one who enslaved us because of our guilt and our failure. He came to banish violence and hatred and misery and lies.

As we follow the Savior who destroys the works of the devil our lives will be changed. Verse 6:

"No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him."

It's very important to make a distinction that we have made a number of times in studying 1 John about what the phrases "keeps on sinning" and "continues to sin" mean. John is not talking about people who fail. He is not talking times when we are, to use Paul's phrase, "caught in a trespass" (Galatians 6:1). There are so many times when we blow it, fall apart, or fall short. These are serious issues, and the Bible speaks to them at length in other places. The Lord intends to change those weaknesses in us; he doesn't ignore them as if they were of no consequence. But that isn't what John is talking about here. What he is saying is that we cannot defend our sin anymore.

The one who goes on sinning is the one who sins, in the Old Testament parlance, with a stiff neck. It's the one who says, "I have the right to do whatever I choose. I'm above the standards. There is no law that applies to me, no restrictions that I need to pay attention to." We will frequently see lawlessness in the world among people who just say, "The God of the Bible be damned. I don't care. It's all fiction anyway. This book compels me not at all. The ideas in it are interesting for history's sake, but for no other reason." Such people don't recognize any authority in God's person or in his words.

But there are also lawless people who are essentially hypocrites, and that is probably a problem nearer to most of us. Hypocrites will on some level say, "In general this is good advice, and it has usefulness. People ought to believe this---but not me. There are pockets of sin that I will permit myself, and neither God nor anyone else can do anything about it. I can live a double life with my money, my fantasies, my anger, my pride." Deciding that everybody else should keep the rules but I am permitted not to is lawlessness. And such a person does not know God.

In verse 7 John says, "Little children, don't be deceived. There are liars out there. The devil is a very religious individual. There are a great many people who will give you permission to be lawless and somehow remain in the circle of approved behavior, who will give you the right to hate your brother, exalt your pride, and live a sinful life with no consequences."

The evidence of whose child we are

In verses 9 and 10, we are told that the way we live our life in the long run is going to announce who our father is. Verse 10: "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother." But the alternative is marvelous. First John 3:1: "How great is the love the Father lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" We are children of God because he says so and our paternity is declared by our behavior.

He says on the one hand, how great is the love the Father has lavished on us! His clear expectation is that his readers, including us today, are going to be able to rejoice to hear of God's love for them. It is such good news---the wonder of it, how much we appreciate his love lavished on us, how enthusiastically we wait for the day when what is inside can be displayed, how much we want to be like Christ! The idea that someday we will see him as he is and be like him as he is, is such marvelous news that our hearts begin to beat faster just at the thought of it. John declares that we are children of God, and he expects his hearers to rejoice.

But on the other hand, there are people who are looking for a way to exalt themselves. They reject the fatherhood of God, they want to create themselves in their own image. And for such people the possibility that they could be like Christ someday is not good news at all. It's boring, useless, restricting. And these people don't know him.

In closing I would urge us to appreciate how much we're loved: We're called children of God, and such we are. Someday it will be obvious. Next week is Father's Day, and this is a good time to have these themes in mind. I hope you will honor your biological father and say thanks to him, if that's possible and appropriate, or perhaps to someone else who cared for you as a father. That's a very good thing to do. But our heavenly Father is the one who deserves our thanks in infinite terms---the one who has lavished his love upon us and made us his children, changing us from the inside. Someday we and everyone else will be able to see that we are like Jesus Christ, adopted as his children. We cry, "Abba, Father, Daddy," to the one who loves us. I propose to you that during this week preceding Father's Day you make some place for gratitude to your Father---perhaps times for prayer, a note left in a journal, or a word of appreciation spoken to a friend.

"...We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18.)

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1 John 3:1-10
Eighth Message
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