

Oct. 21, 2012

How to Become a Child of God

John 1:9-13

BI: No one can cure his own spiritual blindness or make himself a child of God. Salvation is a sovereign gift that comes by grace alone.

Introduction:

If you have been a Christian for any number of years then you understand that salvation is nothing less than an unmerited gift of God that He bestows on sinners purely by the impulse of His grace. In fact, you may have even memorized Paul's words in Ephesians 2:8-9 that say, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not as a result of works so that no one may boast."

This is the gospel of the N.T. This is the gospel of Paul. And it is the gospel of the N.T. and the gospel of Paul because it was the gospel of Jesus Christ. The apostle John makes this clear at the very beginning of His account of the life and ministry of Jesus. He begins in chapter one by explaining that Jesus is none other than Creator God. He is the $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$ (word) of God that brought all things into being and sustains everything that exists.

On the other hand, the logos is not simply a cosmic force that caused all things to burst into existence, but a very personal Being who has entered the world of men as a real human for the purpose of reconciling sinners to Himself. He is, and John describes Him, the Life who is manifest in the world the Light of God. In other words, we see and understand the glory of Almighty of God by looking at Jesus.

Last time we learned (beginning in verse 6) that John the Baptist was sent from God to bear witness about Jesus, that He is the true Light of God. The purpose of John the Baptist's ministry was to call all men to believe that Jesus is none other than the very Son of God so that by believing they might have life in His name.

In verse 9, then, the apostle continues to unfold truth about this Light. In doing so he reveals three important realities that we need to know. First, he tells us more about the glory of Light. Second, he reveals something about the depravity of man. And finally, he reveals something of the sovereignty of God. Let's begin by reading these verses together.

Read vs. 9-13

I. The Glory of Light:

1. In verse 9 John continues speaking of Jesus as the Light. In fact, He calls him the "true light." We need to remember that some people thought that perhaps John the Baptist was the Light. In other words, they thought he might be the promised Messiah. But he wasn't. Verse 7 clearly says that John the Baptist came as a witness to the Light. Jesus, however, was the true light. He really was the promised Messiah.

2. Now, the next phrase in this verse has given translators fits for centuries. What does John mean when he says, “which coming into the world enlightens every man”? Well, it’s important to remember that John is still in the process of identifying the *λογος*. He is the Creator (the Word). He is Life. He is Light. And now, the really important thing he wants to communicate is that the *λογος* came into the world as a human being. Not only that, but He came into the world at a certain time; namely, during the ministry of John the Baptist.

3. So here, I think, is what the apostle is saying: “John the Baptist was not the Light. He was only sent to bear witness to the light. Nevertheless, the true Light, which shines upon every man, was even then (i.e. during the days of JB) coming into the world” (cf. Boice, p. 58).

4. You see, the timing was critical. If it is true that the Messiah has come, then John needs to establish that He came at just the right time. He had to have come during the time that the promised “forerunner” was there to introduce Him to the world. And that is precisely when He came.

5. The ESV, I think, nails this when it translates the verse to say, “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” In other words, He was coming into the world at the same time His witness, John the Baptist, was there to announce Him. Everything was going precisely on schedule.

6. The word for “world” here is *cosmos*. We won’t take time to look at this here, but this is a word that can be translated in a lot of different ways. Suffice it to say that here John is saying that the Light came into a world of sinners. The Light which lived in unpolluted holiness and unhindered fellowship with the other members of the Godhead for all eternity gave up His rights, privileges, and fellowship to enter a world of sinful people. Wow! Can we even begin to imagine?

7. And what does the Light do when it enters a world of sinners? It shines its holy, soul-piercing rays upon everyone. That’s what the apostle means when he says this Light “enlightens every man.” This is not about giving some kind of special knowledge of God. He’s not suggesting, as Bill Gothard supposes, that the Light somehow quickens human conscience. It’s not about that. This is about the glorious, Almighty God entering a dark, dark world and exposing that darkness for what it is.

8. It’s about the glory of infinite holiness immersing itself in a cauldron of wickedness, vileness, and sin. And that amazing thing is that the Light did it willingly.

9. If you’re trying to imagine this in your mind then the question that should probably come to mind next is something like, “How did the darkness respond to this glorious light?” That’s a good question. And as the apostle answers it, we learn something about human depravity.

II. The Depravity of Man:

1. Read v. 10.

2. The apostle begins with a general view of things. How did a world of sinners respond to the appearance of Light Personified? They didn’t recognize Him. It’s like they didn’t even see Him.

The word for “know” here (γινωσκω) doesn’t speak of intellectual knowledge so much as being in right relation to someone.

3. When He arrived they should have run to Him, and blessed Him, and worshipped Him! After all, He is the one who made them! He is the One who gave us life! They should have run to Him in exuberant joy! After all, when you’re lost in the dark and someone comes along and turns on the light, you rejoice, right?

4. Well, that depends entirely on what you were doing in the darkness in the first place. Sinners don’t want the light to be turned on. People who are engaging in sinful behavior don’t want to be found out. We don’t like being exposed for who we really are. So when the Light came to the world, they wanted nothing to do with Him.

5. But then John moves from the general to the specific. Because, it wasn’t just the Gentiles who wanted nothing to do with Jesus, it was the Jews as well. (Read 11).

6. The term “His own” means “belonging to Him.” Perhaps “his own property” or “His own family.” It describes the land of the people of Israel as being the home and family of God.

7. Just read the O.T. and you will see again, and again, and again how God claims Israel as His own. He is their God and they are His people. They existed in covenant relationship for century after century though they never saw Him face to face. But they knew that one day He was going to come in the Person of the Messiah. In fact, all their institutions, the sacrifices, the priesthood, the feast days, all of it pointed to the coming of this covenant-keeping God to earth. But when He actually arrived, they rejected Him.

9. The term “receive” (v. 11) means “to take to one’s side,” “to welcome.” The word is used of welcoming to a home. We have a tradition in our family that whenever someone has been gone for a while, we create a big sign on the picture window in the front of our house to say, “Welcome Home! We missed you!” Not the case when Jesus came to His own family. His reception was primarily rejection.

10. The irony is that throughout the whole history of their existence the Jews had been in training to know and receive Him. But when He arrived, they rejected Him. Turn with me to Matt. 21:33-39 (Read).

11. Behold the supreme demonstration of the wickedness of the sinful human heart. This is depravity. This is spiritual blindness. They only people who can’t see light are the blind. And in the case of sinful humans it is a willful blindness. Why? Because by nature humans love their sin and hate their God. (Read 3:19-20).

12. Do you want to know why scientists teach evolution? It’s not because the empirical evidence proves that it’s true (it doesn’t). It’s because they are willing to believe anything - no matter how absurd - so long as gets the notion of God out of the way. Because, if God exists, we’re all in big trouble.

10. This is Roman’s 1, right? God reveals Himself clearly through what He has made, but sinful men suppress the truth in unrighteousness and God gives them over to a depraved mind that will believe anything so long as it keeps God at bay.

11. But this text isn't just speaking about God revealing Himself through creation. Here God shines His glory on mankind personally. He comes to earth in Person so that men and women could see Him up close and personal. But when they did, they hated Him. Why? Because His light exposes us for who we really are.

12. In 2 Corinthians 4:3–4 Paul writes, “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has *blinded the minds* of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

13. But you know, we need to be careful about being too hard on the Jews for their spiritual blindness. The spiritual dynamics that were at play in the days when Jesus walked the earth are the same spiritual dynamics at play in the hearts of young people who grow up in the church.

14. Many of you young men and women have grown up right here at Calvary Bible Church, but that doesn't mean you are a child of God. Being religious didn't make the Jews children of God. When their Messiah arrived He exposed their sin, so they hated Him because they loved their sin.

15. I suspect there are some in this room or hearing my voice right now who have grown up in a religious environment and who kind of enjoy hanging out with the people of God. But truth be told, you love your sin and you're fearful that God is going to make you give it up. And week after week the Light of the glory of Christ is set before you, but you never really respond. You never welcome him into your life; into the deepest recesses of your soul. You're afraid that He is not going to like what He finds there, so you are careful to keep Him at arms length and never let Him get too close.

16. Can I just speak honestly to you for a minute? If you are keeping Jesus at a “safe” distance, you're blind to the grace He wants to pour into your life. You have no need to be afraid of Him. Yes, He will address you sin, but it's your sin that is killing you! He came to give you life. He came to give you Himself. He came to make you a child of God.

17. We've seen the glory of the Light. We've seen the blindness of human depravity. Finally. John reveals God's sovereign grace.

III. God's Sovereign Grace:

1. The nature of human depravity is that we are wired to reject Jesus. We are wired to prefer our blindness over the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ. So the question then becomes, how can anyone be saved?

2. Well, first of all, clearly not everyone rejects Jesus forever. Some have a change of heart and embrace Him fully. (Read v. 12).

3. Again, the word “received” means “to take hold of,” “to obtain,” or “to grasp.” The apostle wants us to know that we must “become” children of God. No one is by nature a child of God. Only by “receiving” Christ do we gain the right to become “children of God.” But how does one “receive” Christ?

4. The answer is in the word “believe.” The word “believe” should not simply be understood as intellectual. It indicates an active commitment to a person. It involves more than simply

accepting certain facts about Jesus.

5. What does it mean to “believe.” The reformers understood belief to involve three things, and they identified them with three Latin terms: Notitia, Assensus, and Fiducia.

A. Notitia: To know with the intellect or the mind. This is about knowing the truth in a factual way. One might say, “I believe the facts about Jesus life, death, and resurrection.

B. Assensus - Acceptance of the truths from the heart. This involves the emotions, affections, feelings, and desires. It’s not just, “I believe the facts about Jesus, but I love what I have learned about Jesus. My desire is to know Him, to live for Him, to submit to Him, and to serve Him.

C. Fiducia - This is the act of faith or the decision to act on what I know and love about Jesus. It involves action, and behavior. It asks, what practical difference has Christ made in your life?

6. This is what it means to believe. Remember, James said, “The demons believe, and they are terrified.” But that is not saving belief. That is not a reflection of a heart that belongs to a child of God. You may say, well how do I get that kind of heart? I can’t make myself love Christ. My heart is sinful and I feel helpless to change it! That’s good. And you’re on the right track, because this kind of heart can be obtained only by miracle. God has to do it for you.

7. The good news is, this is exactly what God promised to do. In Ezekiel 36, God said, “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances” (Eze. 36:26-27).

8. In the N.T. the terminology is different. Here in John this same spiritual event is spoken of as being born again. Jesus will explain that to Nicodemus in chapter 3, but here the apostle John explains it using the same term. Look at v. 12-13. (Read 12-13).

9. Notice the three ways John says you cannot become a child of God:

A. It’s not about your Blood birth: lit. In other words, it’s not about father and mother; racial, or ethnic heritage.

B. It’s not a will of the Flesh birth: in other words, it’s not something that comes about by fanning up your fleshly desire or emotion. A spiritual campfire experience is not the same as the New Birth.

C. It’s not even a will of Man birth: In other words, it’s not something you can make happen by personal ambition, determination, or man-made religious system.

10. The only way to become a child of God is to be born of God. In fact, this became John’s favorite term for those who are truly children of God.

1 John 3:9 “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”

1 John 4:7 “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and

everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”

1 John 5:1 “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him.”

1 John 5:4 “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”

1 John 5:18 “We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.”

11. You see, beloved, becoming a child of God is not something you cannot do on your own. You did nothing to cause yourself to be born physically. In the same way, spiritual birth takes place by the actions of another... by the sovereign grace of another.

12. You may say, “Well, if I can’t do anything to make it happen, what hope do I have?” You are right when you say that you can’t “do anything” to make it happen. Salvation is by God’s grace alone. But you can choose to place yourself under the means of grace. You can read your Bible. You can come to church and hear the word of God explained. You can ask someone to begin meeting with you to help you understand the gospel better. And most importantly, you can pray expressing your desire that God would indeed give you a new heart.

13. And if this is your desire, then let me assure you that God is already at work in your soul, drawing you to Himself. Trust Him, seek Him, ask Him to come and make you a genuine child of God.

BI: No one can cure his own spiritual blindness or make himself a child of God. Salvation is a sovereign gift that comes by grace alone.

Key Scriptures:

V. 9

Not that JB was not a light, but that Christ is the perfect Light in whose radiance all other lights seem dim.

Enlightens: to shed light upon, bring light, instruct.

The best translation of this verse should be something like, “John was not the Light. He was only sent to bear witness to the light. Nevertheless, the true light, which shines upon every man, was even then (i.e. during the days of JB) coming into the world” (cf. Boice, p. 58).

Every Man: i.e. both Jews and Gentiles. Remember, John was writing at the end of the apostolic age. There were already many Gentile churches. The Jews had though that the Light of God was exclusively for them.

What does the Light of God do when it shines on every man? It exposes the works of darkness.

This is why people hate him or seek to reinvent Him.

V. 10

The λογος is the light.

He was in the world

The world was made through Him

Know: (γινωσκω) not intellectual knowledge but to be in right relation to. They did not even recognize Him. This shows that men are **spiritually blind**. **Only blind people cannot see the Light.**

Why are men spiritually blind? Because they don't want to see Jesus. They don't want to “acknowledge” Him, because they love their sin (**cf. 3:19**). Men and women are so in love with their sins that they do not want anyone to dissuade them from them. **Behold the Depravity of man!**

Cf. 2 Cor. 4:3-4, “the God of this world has blinded ...”

If JB had not come, no one would have even noticed Jesus.

V. 11

His own: one's own, belonging to Him, personal. Perhaps "his own property, or home (his intimates)." It describes the land of the people of Israel as being the home and family of God. Moreover, the people and all their institutions existed only for Him (cf. Matt. 21:33ff).

Receive: to take to one's side, to welcome. His reception was primarily rejection. They gave Him no reception. The word is used of welcoming to a home (cf. 14:3 "I go to prepare a place for you..."). Even those whose whole history had been a training to know and receive Him, rejected Him. (growing up Christian). This is the supreme demonstration of the wickedness of the heart of man. (cf. Isa. 1:2-3).

V. 12

Received: to take hold of, obtain, to grasp.

Become: children are not by nature "children of God." We must "become" children of God. Only by "receiving" Christ do we gain the right to become "children of God."

Believe: indicates an active commitment to a person. It involves more than simply accepting certain facts about Jesus. It means "an acceptance of Jesus and of what He claims to be and a dedication of one's life to Him.

His name: refers to the totality of Christ's being. You cannot separate his deity from his humanity, or His being Savior from His being Lord.

V. 13

Blood: lit. "bloods" perhaps of father and mother; racial, or ethnic heritage.

Flesh: personal desire or emotions

Man: personal ambition, determination, or man-made religious system.

The following phrases emphasize that no human agency is or can be responsible for such a birth.

Born: to give birth, to bear, pass, to be born.

We become children of God only by means of the new birth.

Key Terms

Born of God:

The phrase "born of God" is a favorite of the apostle John when he speaks of salvation. People who have come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ have become "children of God," so John likes to refer to them as ones who are "born of God." It's a synonym for salvation.

1 John 3:9 "No one who is **born of God** practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is **born of God**."

1 John 4:7 "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is **born of God** and knows God."

1 John 5:1 "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is **born of God**, and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him."

1 John 5:4 “For whatever is **born of God** overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”

1 John 5:18 “We know that no one who is **born of God** sins; but He who was **born of God** keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.”

Exegetical Outline

John 1:1–5

There was the true Light
which, coming into the world,
enlightens every man.

¹⁰ He was in the world,
and the world was made through Him,
and the world did not know Him.

¹¹ He came to His own,
and those who were His own
did not receive Him.

¹² But as many as received Him,
to them He gave the right
to become children of God,
even to those

born, who believe in His name, ¹³ who were

of man, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will

but of God.

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