
Children of God

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 14 April 2024

Acts 3:12-19a • 1 John 3:1-7 • Luke 24:36b-48



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

We'll begin today with a pop quiz. I hope you're all prepared!

This is a multiple-choice question.

What is a Christian?

- A. Someone who believes in God.
- B. Someone who goes to church.
- C. A member of a radical sect.
- D. A good person.
- E. A child of God.
- F. All of the above.

Let's look at these one by one. "Someone who believes in God." Yes, that is certainly required of a Christian. But what does "belief in God" mean? First, it must be belief that there is a God. Usually it means a belief in God as God is revealed in the Bible. Some people have trouble believing in those parts of the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, that seem to show us a cruel and judgmental God. God's judgment of his people in those times long ago does not sit well with some people, who take a more modern view of punishment. Such a view is actually a judgment of God. Can God be judged? Can one be a Christian and judge God?

Of course, belief in God is not entirely formed by the Bible. God reveals himself to us in different ways — through prayer, through observance of the physical world, and sometimes through God's own actions as they impact on our lives, such as when we give thanks for recovery from illness or a great benefit received. Perhaps the personal experience of God is the most powerful, in terms of making us believe. Perhaps a Christian is one who seeks to know God.

What about going to church? Do you have to go to church to be a Christian? I would say no, but it helps! It is important, since God designed us to live in community and in Communion with Jesus Christ. Admittedly there are some who attend church for the outward show of being a Christian — we think of the Pharisees praying on the street corners in order to be seen. But you have to have a pretty closed mind to attend church regularly and not be drawn in by God to true worship. God has a way of working in us, if we make even the merest approach towards him.

A member of a radical sect? Well, the Pharisees and the Romans thought so, back when Jesus was gathering disciples. And the idea of radicalism persists today. Some people describe God's love for us as radical or reckless. What they usually mean is that God's love for us is so great that we cannot even imagine the scale of it — "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ," as Paul puts it in Ephesians (3:18). His love is radical in the sense that nothing will stop it, and it is freely available to all who turn to Christ. No other religion preached the love of its gods for its people, rather than demanding obedience. Only God — the Christian God — is love.

A good person? A Christian may certainly be a good person. But we are not perfect. We are all sinners, as is often said. But Jesus took away our sins when he died on the cross. We can, and do, sin again. But if we live in union with Christ, as our 1 John passage tells us today, we do not continue to sin. John tells us that if we live in Christ, we will not habitually sin, because God gives us the strength to resist temptation.

And we are children of God. To be a child of God is to know the unending love of Jesus. Christ's love lives in us and gives us the power and the desire to live righteously. That is important — it is the fairness of God that he does not only desire us to live righteously, but also gives us the strength and inclination to do so. If we accept Christ in our lives, living as we should is not difficult. Our Father in heaven has given us his Spirit as our guide. Still, we sin from time to time, but we also repent, through our Great High Priest, Jesus, who intercedes for us. The sinner who repents is alive in Christ; the sinner who does not repent does not know Christ.

We have not yet been perfected as God's children. As John tells us, we must wait for Christ to come again before we shall be made like him. This does not mean that we will be gods. It means that we will be pure and sinless as he is. Paul says that we will be conformed to the image of Jesus (Romans 8:29). We shall see Jesus as he really is, and sin will be no more.

So, is the answer all of the above? Christians believe in God, go to church, belong to a radical sect, are good people, and are children of God? Or perhaps I'll take a step back and say that a Christian is one who tries to follow Christ. For God rewards effort. If we try to follow Christ, try and fail, we may be forgiven. But if we do not try, we do not have Christ in us. What is definitely true is that we are children of God. Our Father loves us and wants all the best for us — and God's best is unimaginably good. Thanks be to God. Amen.