

Who Are Children of God?

Romans 8:14

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Dear ones, would you look at Job 31:15. It runs like this, "Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?" And the "one" is the Creator. "Did not the Creator, who made me in the womb, make him? And did not the Creator fashion us in the womb?" All of us are creatures. Even if you believe in evolution, you know that some being somewhere must have made the first single cell amoeba that eventually ended up to be us. Somebody must have started it somewhere. So all of us here, I believe know that we're creatures. We were created by some Being or some power. And so it wasn't that dear, happy old dad that gave out all the cigars when you were born that really made you and it wasn't that dear mum that is so proud of you that made you. It was some Being or power that originally made the mother of mothers of mothers. And so we are all creatures.

But down through the centuries, loved ones, two aspirations have continually haunted us human beings. One of the aspirations was this: we all sensed that somehow it was possible to be one with your Creator. There was a tremendous religious drive in us that made us sense that it was possible to experience oneness deep down inside with the person or the power that had made us originally. You get it running through all Eastern religions where they talk about our being absorbed into the power behind the universe. You get it even in such mind binders as yoga and Confucianism. You get that emphasis that it is possible to be one with our Creator. We all have a kind of feeling, "Yeah, yeah. It's possible. It's possible somewhere." The other aspiration that has haunted us down through the centuries has been the elixir of life one. You know how many stories have been told in myth and in reality down through the history of mankind about people who were looking for the elixir of life, the aqua vitae that would enable you to live forever and would enable you to overcome the limitations of this physical and mental life. Those two aspirations have continually haunted us creatures.

Now, of course we here who know that the Creator is the father of Jesus understand why those two aspirations are present in all people. Because actually God planned to satisfy them. You and I have often talked about how God has made available to us the Holy Spirit which is the life that runs through him and his Son and makes them the kind of people they are. And that God has made that Holy Spirit available to us. So you remember on the first day that a Christian sermon was ever preached, the people came up to Peter and they said, "What shall we do?" And he said, "Be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." And that was the great offer that God made to us.

In other words, that we did not need to remain creatures like animals. Things that were made by God were apart from him, but by receiving this spiritual, eternal life that he could give to us, we could become one with him and we could actually overcome the limitations of this life and we could live forever. And that's I think what we've so often shared. That something can happen to you that can change your state. At the moment, if you have not received this Holy Spirit, you are a creature. You are like a little animal. Really, you're just like a little animal. But that there is something that can happen inside us that changes our state. Instead of animals, instead of creatures, we can become children of the person who made us and we can look upon him as our loving Father and we can know him as that.

Now what I sense God wants us to clarify this morning is, who are children of God? Who are children of God? Because all of us are creatures but some of us are children of God because we have received this Holy Spirit. Now who are children of God? There have been lots of different answers given. John Calvin gave this answer. He said, "Children of God are those human beings whom God designated would become his children and he designated them that before he ever made the world." In other words, John Calvin taught that some of us creatures were predestined by God before he ever made the world, to be born of his Spirit and to become his children. I mean, it doesn't matter what you do here on this earth, you cannot change that. That predestination is fixed. And so some of us are born just to be ordinary human beings and creatures -- and others of us are born creatures to become the children of God. He also said that you can never cease to be a child of God. God has predestined you to be his child. Someday you're going to make a decision and you're going to receive the Spirit of Jesus into yourself and once you've done that, you can never lose that Spirit. So those are the children of God.

Now I doubt if there is one of us, except some wild theological student maybe who has just discovered predestination, I doubt if there is one of us here this morning who believes John Calvin's predestination. I doubt if there's one of us believes that God has set the number of the elect before the world was created and so he's created some of us to be born and just die out after 70 years, whatever we're going to do and he's created some of the rest of us to live forever. I doubt if any of us believe that. But I think a number of us believe Calvin's doctrine that you could never cease to be a child of God. In other words, many of us I think here believe in eternal security. That once you're saved, you're always saved whatever you do.

Now, do you see that Calvin was a little more humble than us when he taught that? Because he had one great safety factor, he said, "Yeah. If you're a child of God, you can never cease to be a child of God but, nobody knows they're a child of God until they die." And so that had the tremendous effect that there was humility. Even in people who believed in eternal security, there was a sense of humility. They sensed, "Yeah, well, if we're of the elect, we're never going to lose our salvation, but we cannot know that for sure until we meet Jesus face-to-face so meanwhile we have to keep on obeying and believing and loving until life ends." Of course, what some of us have done, we have taken the doctrine of eternal security and we have tied it, not simply to the fact that you can know you're a child of God, but to a very shallow definition of belief. In other words, we have said, "Oh who are the children of God? Children of God are those who have believed that Jesus has died so that God could give us the Holy Spirit. Once you believe that in your head, that constitutes you're a child of God and you can never cease to be a child of God for the rest of your life."

And so loved ones, there is a great body of us who are involved in a dead mental assent to the proposition that God has given Jesus so that we could receive the Holy Spirit and we believe that if we hold that dead mental assent, it does not matter what we do in this life, we are the children of God forever. Now loved ones, that's the tragedy. Do you see that that just won't stand examination at the bar of Holy Scripture when you begin to look at the verse that we're studying today? You cannot take that position. Those of us here this morning who hold eternal security -- and I know there are many dear ones who do -- and that's all right. I don't see it that way but I think many of us do. It's safe, as long as you have a real humility about your own relationship to Jesus and a real sense that it's not simply a mental assent to the proposition that Jesus died for you that makes you a child of God, but that you do have to receive his Spirit.

But loved ones, I feel there are many of us who have been brought up in churches that have taught strongly eternal security and combined it with a shallow mental assent to a proposition that has produced a great body of people who say, "Oh, I'm a child of God. I don't act like a child of God, yeah, I know that. Certainly I get angry with my wife, but we're all like that. But I'm a child of God and once saved, I'm always saved." And so there is a great body of people who do not act like children of God at all but they have an arrogance about them that simply drives people away from the Father. And loved ones, that's one belief. Some of us believe you're a child of God if you accept the mental proposition that God has given Jesus to die for our sins. That belief, purely intellectual, constitutes us children of God and we're children of God forever.

It's a bit like this, I tell you that there is a plague of yellow fever spreading in this auditorium and I have a vaccination here on this stage and if you come to me, I'll give you the vaccination and you'll be saved. It's like you sitting in your seat and saying, "Boy, I believe pastor has that vaccination and I believe that he'd give it to us if we came to him. I believe that and that makes me well, that belief, whether I come and get the vaccination or not." Now it's that kind of purely intellectual assent you see, that we combined with the doctrine of eternal security, and it has produced, really a group of monsters, honestly. It has not produced dear ones like Calvin himself. It has produced a group of monsters who have purely a mental assent to John 3:16. They have no reality in their lives but they keep saying, "I'm saved so I'm always saved." And loved ones, maybe you'll think about that. That's one possible answer.

Another possible answer is given by many of us who reacted against that mental assent. We said, "That's right. You shouldn't just believe that God is willing to give you the Holy Spirit just because Jesus has died for you. You shouldn't just believe it, you should go and receive it." But we have reacted against the intellectual emphasis with an emotional emphasis and we have said, "You must feel it inside. You must feel the Spirit moving inside you." And we have gone over into an emotionalism that made the children of God, those who were experiencing revelations, and healings, and tongues and all kinds of other experiences. And we've said, as long as you're experiencing lots of external signs like that then you're a child of God. We, of course have created our own arrogant group, a group of people who believe that because they have certain emotional signs within them, they are the children of God.

Then there are others of us dear ones, who know we're right. All the children of God are those that belong to Campus Church. But you know it. We think, we think that, we think that that started and ended in Rome and that there are many brothers and sisters in Rome that are far humbler than we who belong to Campus Church, or Fourth Baptist, or First Baptist or Central Lutheran. Loved ones, there are those of us who believe that the children of God are those who keep company with other people who seem to be children of God. And of course, it's not worth even examining.

Now loved ones, who are children of God? Well, let's look at God's answer. It's just very simple and very plain. It's Romans 8:14. The Father is just so straightforward and simple you know. "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." That's it. It's not some tricky little interpretation of the word "belief". It's not getting yourself into some logical position that proves that you're a child of God and you're a child of God forever whatever you do. The Father says, "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are my sons. Those who day-by-day live by the guidance of my Spirit, they're the children of God. You can argue yourselves into categories if you want but at the end of the day, those who are led by my Spirit are my children."

Loved ones, I would ask us all to allow the Holy Spirit to search our hearts as we look at some of

these marks of the Spirit of God. Because I think many of us are just downright arrogant. Honestly, I think we're just arrogant and we will not listen to God. And do you see that those are the children, the sons and the daughters of God who are led by the Spirit of God? Now let's look at some of the marks of the Spirit of God in Jesus' own life. He was the son of God. Found it there in John 13:21, "When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.' The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was lying close to the breast of Jesus; so Simon Peter beckoned to him and said, 'Tell us who it is of whom he speaks.' So lying thus, close to the breast of Jesus, he said to him, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it.' So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'What you are going to do, do quickly.' Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the money box, Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the feast'; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel, he immediately went out; and it was night."

So Jesus knew that Judas was going straight out to betray him. But his mind was governed by the Father's Spirit and his mind was more concerned to bring about what God wanted than to protect himself. So that's a mark of those who are led by the Spirit of God. So the question I'm putting to you is, not do you believe that those who are the children of God should use their minds to bring about God's plans day-by-day rather than to protect themselves, but I'm asking you, do you do that? Do you live like that? Don't you see that the lie about the missed assignment is the opposite? Don't you see that? That when you lie about a missed assignment or a missed appointment, it's doing the opposite of Jesus? Don't you see that you're using your mind to manipulate yourself out of a difficult situation by tearing down one of God's special loves: truth. Do you see loved ones that the whole universe looks upon you when it comes to that moment? And all the angels look at you and they can see whether you're led by the Spirit of God at that moment or not.

Oh, you remember that poignant moment in "A Man for All Seasons" when Moore said, "There comes a time in every man's life when he holds his life in his hands and a decision is to be made for truth or against it and if he opens his fingers even a little, his life will slip through." And we so often think that men like Moore were a little foolish in dying for just truth, but loved ones that's the Spirit that leads the children of God. And do you see what I'm saying? And it's a fairly immediate thing. Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

Now, you may sit there this morning and say, "Well, Pastor I did not see that that's what I was doing." But loved ones, I push you on it a little, don't you see that you don't become a child of God by listening to 1,000 sermons which will deal with every possible place where you can look like a child of God? You become a child of God by saying to the Holy Spirit, "Holy Spirit, I am obviously not letting you run my life. I use my mind to protect myself and defend myself and get my own way. Now, Holy Spirit I see that if I am not led by you, then I am not a child of God, whatever I believe and so, Holy Spirit, I commit myself to you." And loved ones, then the Holy Spirit will begin to produce in you overall these signs, you see.

Because I have a feeling that a number of us listen on Sunday morning and we say, "That's new light for me. Ah, I see that, I see that. I must practice that next week." And all you're involved in doing is practicing an Irish accent to try to pretend you're an Irish person. Or practicing a mark of a son of God to try to pretend you're a son of God. And what the Holy Spirit wants you to do, of course, is to see, "Look, for a number of Sundays I've had a lot of these things coming up." Now

there has to come a time when I admit that some of these should be beginning to come naturally to me. "Now Holy Spirit, is there some way in which I am separating my Monday through Saturday life from this Sunday life I'm living? Holy Spirit, will you come in? And I want you to lead my life."

Now loved ones, that's the children of God. For those who are led by the Spirit of God, they're the sons of God. Just let's look at one more. Matthew 8:20, "And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.'" And he might have added, "And he isn't worried." Because that was Jesus' attitude to material things and he was the son of God. And those of us who are sons and daughters of God must be led by that same Spirit.

Now, I agree with you. I think you can get over enthusiastic over Dayton's white sale, or blue sale, or daffodil sale, or spring sale, or post spring sale, or pre spring sale. But loved ones, do you see that if you're a child of God, you will have a freedom about material things and a freedom from material possessions and you certainly will not all the time be preoccupied with getting enough provisions. And when it comes to deciding what job you're going to do in life or what you're going to do after you graduate you certainly will be free of that attitude that plagues so many people, "What job will give me the most money?" And loved ones, do you see that if you're a child of God, you're led by that Spirit.

What I'm asking you to be honest with yourself about is, are you led by that Spirit? Just let's be sensible, let's be down to earth and honest. Let's not keep up appearances, are you led by that Spirit? Am I led by that Spirit? Are we led day-by-day by the Spirit of God that has a contempt for material possessions? Uses them? I'm for the older brothers and sisters who have experienced the Depression, uses them and takes care of them and is not silly about them but has a contempt for them as far as our own happiness is concerned. So it gets down to how dear and precious the stereo is, how dear and precious that stereo is. How dear and precious that new davenport is. How dear and precious the car is when the friend dents it. Now loved ones, do you see that it's a Spirit of God within you that leads you automatically in the same way as Jesus, automatically into a complete contempt for that whole business? And a real delight and a joy that our Father is a millionaire that owns the whole universe and he'll give me whatever I need and thank you Lord. Thank you.

Now what I'd ask you to do is, would you decide if you're led day-by-day by the Spirit of God? And if you aren't, don't have a whole post mortem and go into depression and start popping pills. Take the easier way; that's the hard way that Satan suggests. Take the easy way, face the issue. Father, I have thought that I was a child of God. I have persuaded myself in all kinds of intellectual beliefs but I want to be your child and Holy Spirit, I know that those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. So Holy Spirit I want you to lead my life. I want you to take it over and I want you to begin to show me the way the Father wants me to act. And loved ones, as soon as you do that, there'll come within you an assurance that is deeper than any doctrine of predestination, of falling from grace, of eternal security, of "do I believe this verse?", or "do I believe that verse?" There will come within you a deep witness of the Spirit that you are the Father's child because of your day-to-day life. So will you be just really honest with God about it, loved ones? I'd be honest myself about it. And just let's deal straight with God.

Let us pray. Father, we know that we have a certain attitude to our own dads and mums. Father, we know that we don't need to be taught that attitude. We have it because they've loved us and taken care of us for years. When we go home, it's just natural to throw our arms around them. It's

natural to have a whole attitude of trust in them. Father, we see that that's what happens with any father, with any child. Father, we see that if we really have given you our lives and if we're really willing to let your Spirit govern us, then we'll feel the same way about you.

There'll be a naturalness about our day-to-day life that comes from within us. So Father, if you see that we have been trying to behave like children of God even though we were just intellectual believers, or if you've seen that we were trying to behave like your children even though we were just emotional people, or if you've seen that we've tried to believe we were children of God and we've been governed by a herd instinct and a group reinforcement principal. Father, we would ask you to expose that to us now. Help us to be downright honest with you; real with you at this moment.

Father, we want your Spirit to govern us. That's what you made us for. And we want you Holy Spirit, to come in and sort out this mess that you can probably see. And we ask you, Holy Spirit to begin to give us light now. And show us where we are, using our minds not to bring about God's will in his world but using our minds to defend ourselves day after day, to make our way comfortable. Will you show us where we're too attached to our physical possessions? Show us Holy Spirit what you want to do in us. Show us how you want to make us appear as God's children. Thank you. That is so simple, Holy Spirit. Thank you it's so simple and at the down-to-earth level of our lives. We're glad of that. We would receive you now and tell you, you can run our lives from now on and you can make us the kind of children that our Father will be pleased with when he sees us playing and working in his world. For the glory of his first, and dearest, and only begotten Son, our Saviour Jesus. Amen.