

# I Am A Child (Part 1b)

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[ 0 : 00 ] We are going to turn back to 1 John and this evening we are continuing our study over our evening services on the Christians identity. We introduced this a few weeks ago and as we said that our aim is to look at some of the key concepts and terms that are used in the New Testament to describe our identity as followers of Jesus and there's lots of different ways that the New Testament does that. Our focus is on the words of verse 1 of 1 John chapter 3 where it says see what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God and so we are and our title and our topic this evening is the fact that as Christians our identity is such that we can say I am a child. Now tonight is part two of this topic because we started it last Sunday morning but we weren't able to finish it and the reason we didn't finish it it's not just because I take too long with my sermons it's also because we really wanted to take our time because of all the things that we're going to look at in terms of our identity as Christians is this I think is the most important topic the fact that we recognize it as Christians we are

God's children. When we introduced this series we highlighted two controversial claims and one crucial diagram that are foundational to this study that we'll keep coming back to. The controversial claims are one that it's possible for your understanding of your identity to be wrong and as we've been saying the reason that's controversial is because that's that's the very opposite of what the world around us thinks we live in a culture today more than any other time before whereby our own sense of identity is in many people's eyes infallible in terms of understanding who we are and we're saying we don't actually agree with that we think it's possible for our own understanding of identity to be wrong and the second controversial claim is that not only do we think it's possible for your understanding of your identity to be wrong we actually think it's highly likely that our understanding of identity will be wrong and that's especially true as Christians because a biblical understanding of our identity is not something that comes naturally to us and it's actually something that we have to work hard to learn and understand because the truths that the New Testament reveals are actually far far more amazing than we ever imagined and the reason why all of this is important and the reason why we can so easily get our identity wrong is because of what we've tried to portray in this diagram we're highlighting the fact that that for as Christians if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian I'm talking to everyone and there's these three aspects that make up our identity and what God thinks is the priority and that then needs to shape what we think of ourselves and what other people think of us and it's so important that the arrows in that diagram are pointing in the right direction because so often we can get it the wrong way around sometimes we think that what we think shapes our identity that's the important thing and everything else has to fit around that possibly even more like what other people think can shape our identity and that can work positively or negatively but all of that's the wrong way around and not only can it leave us with an inaccurate understanding of ourselves it can leave us with an inaccurate understanding of God and a very very clear example of where that happens is on the subject we're thinking about tonight we're going to be thinking about God as our father and yet for many people their experience of a father has been bad and for people in that circumstance that can often have a very damaging effect on their understanding of their own identity but also of what they understand God to be like because people who've had a father who's cruel and unkind may struggle with the whole idea of God being a perfect father and that's to get the arrows the wrong way around instead we have to make sure that we're not basing it on a positive or negative experience of other people we've got to make sure we're grounding our identity on what scripture reveals to us and so we need to make sure we think about this and as we're considering our identity as God's children this diagram gives us three questions we're asking what does God think we're asking what should you think and we're asking what do we want others to think and as we said last week the does and the should and the want are all very important we looked at this one last week and we highlighted the fact that in the gospel

God makes you his child and because of that the love that God has for you is the love of a perfect father as John reveals to us in this verse and we said last week that that love is full of affection God wants you to know how much he loves you that love is what gives you a sense of belonging with him you are his child you belong with him that love is grounded on the deep deep covenant commitment of God and that that love is full of delight God is absolutely delighted to have you in his family to God you are a reason to smile and that a b c d of the love of God for us is so important to remember because they're all so easy to date and it's incredibly easy for us to feel like there is no way God would want to think or feel any of these things towards us that's why the does is so important because that is what God really does think tonight we're going to look at these second two questions what should you think and what do we want others to think and that's taking us to these two parts of the diagram so starting over here with this question what should you think again the should is really really important because we often we often don't think of ourselves as

God's children and and part of the reason we will do that is because we struggle to think of ourselves in those terms and if you just kind of stop and think about it a wee bit you think well Jesus is God's child the son of God are we in the same category does he think of us in the same way and so he's like no there's no way he thinks that and yet we really should think this way and that's why the should is so crucial and the fact that God is our father and that we are his children is that should have that should that should be the dominant influence on how we think about God and how we think about ourselves that's true for everyone here is a Christian that's true for everyone here who still didn't become a Christian and this should shape our thinking and this is highlighted in a famous paragraph that was written last century by a theologian called

J.I. Packer in his book knowing God and I'm sure some of you would have read that book and some of you would have seen this paragraph and it's a very very important paragraph on this whole subject I'm going to read it all out to you Packer wrote you sum up the whole of the New Testament teaching in a single phrase if you speak of it as the revelation of the fatherhood of the holy creator in the same way you sum up the whole of the New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy father if you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child and having God as his father if this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all now I read that paragraph for the first time about 15 years after I had become a Christian so I became a Christian I was about 14 I read this paragraph probably when I was about 29 years old for the first time and as I read it I thought that's exactly what I'm like and and I've never forgotten reading that paragraph because I thought that's that is exactly what I'm like I realized that I didn't tend to think of God as my father I kind of knew that that was true I knew that that was true but I didn't think of God in those terms and even though

[ 9 : 35 ] I realized at that moment that even though I had been a Christian for 15 years when it says here he doesn't understand it very well I thought that's actually me and I didn't understand it very well now that didn't mean that I wasn't a Christian it wasn't that I didn't have the identity as God's child it was that I didn't understand what my identity really was and that's why it's so so crucial because this paragraph is correct it really is correct in what it's saying that that you know when Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's prayer what's the first word he tells us to pray our father it's the first thing he wants us to think about and so this paragraph is is correct and if you read that paragraph you think oh man I've never really thought in this way before don't worry it does not mean at all that you're not a Christian and but it means that there's something amazing that God wants to teach you from his word tonight and what what this paragraph reminds us of is something that the New Testament teaches us the fact that that this truth the fact that God is our father needs to shape the way we think it needs to shape and control our worship our prayers and our whole outlook on life so when you pray what do you feel like what do you feel like when you pray do you sometimes feel like you're back in school and you're kind of raising your hand in class and you're kind of hoping that maybe the teacher won't be annoyed with what you've got to say or do you sometimes feel like you're just like this tiny speck in a massive crowd maybe hoping that that God might get your attention maybe you are praying thinking I don't really even know if God is listening to me at all I don't even know if he's there or do you sometimes feel when you're praying like you're you're like an employee reporting for duty and it's like okay yeah I know God you're gonna be annoyed if I don't do this I'm gonna do this I'm gonna make sure that I fulfill my duty by praying as you expect do you feel like that or do you feel like a child climbing onto their father's lap whispering into his ear as he holds you safe and secure where you're always always welcome theologically only the last of these is correct and so that's how we should pray when you read the Bible do you feel like you know you're reading a textbook you're picking up this book and you think oh man everybody else understands this better than I do do you feel like you're you're listing it reading a whole list of do's and don'ts that are just like a job description that you have to comply with or do you feel like you're you're you're doing something to make sure that you don't feel guilty about not reading the Bible or or that you're you're just kind of reading it knowing that God's probably gonna just be able to fed up with you because of your failings and weakness or do you pick up your Bible and think this is my father's voice and he has placed these words in my hands to guide me to instruct me to encourage me and to comfort me only the last of these is correct as you go through your day-to-day life as you go into Monday morning tomorrow do you think that God is kind of watching you from afar maybe not paying much attention but ready to note down your mistakes do you think that God is like a like a frustrated football coach just telling you what to do and

yet they keep on stuffing it up do you feel like he's just keeping your arms length rolling his eyes at your failures or do you feel as though you are stepping into every single day of your life every situation that you face waking up every morning going to work every day coming home at night or or or being at home during the day if you're if you're no longer working with God right by your side at every moment always holding your hand always ready to help always patient always always sticking with you only the last of these is correct and as you come to church do you feel like you're reporting for duty do you feel like you're fulfilling an obligation are you doing it out of guilt or out of pressure do you come feeling like an outsider or like a letdown do you feel like you've just you come here just to be made to feel bad for all your failures or are you coming to spend time with your father because he's calling you to him coming to be nourished and built up and refreshed by him to come and be with brothers and sisters who are in the same family as you who God has united together for eternity coming to be filled with the joy and peace of everything that the gospel offers only the last of these is correct all the rest of it all those feelings that we can have they are all theologically wrong because God is your father

God is your father and the more we think about that the more we will grow in a key word that John uses it's the word confidence he says now little children abide in him so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming and this is one of several places in the New Testament where it's made very clear that that the New Testament expects us to have confidence lots of other examples John later on speaks about us having confidence before God don't read that for us later in chapter four says the same thing Hebrews we are to draw near with confidence to draw near with confidence to draw near the throne of grace and Ephesians speaks about having boldness and access with confidence now sometimes we can struggle with this concept often we feel like we lack confidence and especially that can be true in terms of our faith and I know that for many people who who struggle with the next step in their Christian faith whether that's the next step of coming along on a Thursday evening or professing faith and becoming a member or whether it's having confidence to to to become more involved in the life of the church or even to tell the people you know closest to you that that you are actually a believer so often the reason we can't take that next step is because of this word confidence we struggle with it and it's especially to in our island culture because we cannot have a wee bit of an aversion to being overly forward or expectant in any way but we've got to remember that biblical confidence is not arrogance biblical confidence is not about being overly forward or anything like that at all and you know we can actually see that when we look at the world around us I can see I can think of people I know who are doctors or teachers or engineers and they are very very humble people but they're confident in what they're doing and you know the truth is really that that arrogance is actually usually a sign of a lack of confidence and you're trying to kind of mask it by putting on this this front now how do we get confidence where does confidence come from well confidence in many ways is the ability to say I know how this works confidence is the ability to say

I know how this works now you can do all of you here who who are still working or you or who have had jobs prior to your retirement you were able to do those jobs because you knew how stuff worked you knew how things worked and that gave you confidence now that can actually apply to all sorts of different aspects of life and I'll give you an embarrassing example and so we ran out of gas at the in one of the bottles at the man's for the cook at you know said oh one of the bottles of gas is empty will you be able to go and get a new one no problem I will go and get gas no bother I will take the old one off I'll go into town get the new one take it back plug it in that fit the fitting on get the cooker going no problem I know how it works there's also there is a next return partial in our car and if you know says when you drop that off I'd be like well can you not do it because I don't know what to do and I'm the kind of person that you know if I bought shoes

I mean I don't know I would never survive without my wife if I bought shoes and they didn't fit I would just keep them because I don't know what to do to send them back and I don't know how that works I don't want to do it and even now it sends a shiver down my spine I've got no confidence to do that because I don't know how it works and and that can be true of so many different things you can think of your own examples using an iPad some of you will be like I'm never going to do that and yet for some of you it's the easiest thing in the world for some it might be buying a plane ticket or a ticket for the train for some it might be cooking seafood and making sure you don't poison everyone some is maybe changing the oil in your car some the thought of giving someone an injection whatever it may be for some people they're totally straightforward for others they're a huge ordeal and the difference is whether you know how things work when you know how something works it gives you confidence so how do things work with God well first and foremost he is your perfect father and you can come to him as his child and that's true for everyone here if you've been if you're a Christian if you've been a Christian for many years you can come to him as his child if you're taking that step tonight or you're maybe not sure where you can you still can't come because if you come to him it's in that moment that he takes you into his family adopts you as his child and loves you forever more that is how it works and God wants that truth to fill you with confidence so that you can approach him with confidence you can talk to him with confidence you can expect things from him with confidence and you can trust him even when things are not going the way you wanted or hoped they would go you can trust him with confidence that is how it works letting his children down is something that God never ever ever does he will love you and care for you and hold you and protect you forever and so we can come to him with a confidence that that's amazing but it's also true that our identity as God's children means that God has certain expectations of us as well and these these expectations make sense they're not unreasonable expectations he expects us to listen to him and we do that with respect with humility with a recognition that God has our best interest in view that we want to listen to what he's saying to us in his word God also expects us to learn from him and that means something crucial it means that he recognizes our weaknesses and he expects mistakes he knows that we've got to learn a father is always ready for their children's mistakes a bad father's ready to pounce and criticize but a good father is ready to pick their children up to comfort them to help them heal and to help them grow and it also means that God recognizes our potential he wants us to learn because by learning from him we can be instruments in his hands to accomplish amazing things so he wants us to listen to him he wants us to learn to him to learn from him but he also expects us to lean on him

[ 23 : 04 ] I think about being a father myself I don't like it if I imagine that my children won't listen to me I don't like it if I imagine that my children refuse to learn from me but I hate it most of all if I imagine that my children felt they couldn't lean on me that they couldn't come to me for help to support them to encourage them and if that is true of a very average father like me how much more is it true of God he wants us to listen to him learn from him and lean on him and we desperately need all three how should you think of yourself and of God every single day you need to think he's my father I'm his child but last of all and briefly what do we want others to think because our identity as God's children whether you have been a Christian a long time or whether you are just becoming a Christian right now our identity as God's children needs to shape how other people see us and again you know as we keep saying we don't want the arrows to go the wrong way we don't want it to be that you know we're so anxious about what other people think that shapes how we feel about ourselves we want these arrows going the other way that our identity is visible and clear and seen by others and that's why the want is so important often in life we are plagued by the question what do other people think what do they think or what will they think and that's a that's a question that plays everyone especially in an island culture when everyone knows everyone but maybe instead of thinking oh what do they think maybe we'll be better asking ourselves what do we want them to think because the first one what do they think we are under their control whereas if we ask the question what do we want them to think that is something that is much much more in our hands and these verses are teaching us that what we really want is for people to look at us and to think they have got God as their father they are a family of brothers and sisters together they have something utterly amazing in their lives and you think well how do we do that how does that happen well

John helps us to see how that happens how other people's opinions are shaped and he tells us about that in verse 29 of chapter 2 if you know that he is righteous you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him he speaks about the same thing later on in 310 by this it is evident who are the children of God whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God nor is the one who does not love his brother so all of this is saying that a key part of how we are identified as God's family is this word here righteousness and you think oh my goodness that sounds like a scary word and that sounds like the kind of thing that only a super Christian could do so what does it mean when the bible talks about righteousness well it's actually very simple it basically means doing what is right practicing righteousness means doing what's right and turning away from stuff that's wrong and of course that's what everybody craves our whole nation might be secular and it might be pretty uninteresting christianity but everybody everybody wants people to do what's right we want relationships where people are treated right we want schools where our children are taught what is right we want employers who will pay people what is right and oh we want leaders who will stand up for what is right and of course what these verses are reminding us of is the fact that that craving for what's right and good is what lies at the heart of who our father is he is a holy righteous father and what that means is that

God has a standard whereby he always and only ever does what's right you and I are a mixture of right and wrong I can look back in my life I can even look back at the last week and I can see some things that I've got right I can see many things that I've got wrong with God you only have that impeccable standard of righteousness of holiness of goodness and and the logic is very simple if that's what God is like then the more we can be like that the better in other words if that's what our father displays then we as his children should be like him too now that's you know always a battle for us and and john's let it if you read it it always has this balance where there's really direct claims to say that we should practice righteousness we must turn away sin from sin but then you'll also say but if you do sin you have an advocate and if your heart does condemn you

God is bigger than your heart and there's that always that balance where it's like yes pursue the highest standard but you're not doomed if you muck up along the way and that's what this is to shape our lives as Christians that's why it's so important for us to regulate our moral conduct by God's standards and that applies in many many parts of life it means choosing patience over grumpiness it means choosing forgiveness over bitterness it means choosing generosity over greed it means choosing gentleness over pushiness and a thousand more things as well in terms of shaping our moral behavior but it also extends to other parts of life because when we think about righteousness we think about God doing things to the highest and best standard and we want that that level of righteousness to apply every to every part of our Christian lives as well let me give you some examples joy we want our joy as Christians to be at that standard just overflowing with happiness at everything that God has done for us trust we want it to be at that level where we just are always saying Lord I trust you I trust you totally peace we want our peace and God wants our peace to be at that level where no matter what this week might bring we're like it's okay I have peace God is in control and more than anything else we want love to always be aspiring to that level where we show love to one another and to the community around us to the level that God wants and God's level of love is this it's unconditional it's unrelenting it's undeserving and yet it keeps on being poured out that's what we want our lives to be characterised by that's what John emphasizes here in terms of the importance of loving one another and you know if we do that we are going to stand out but we're going to stand out in such a good way and so many of you already do so many of you already stand out in such a good way and I am so thankful because over the last few months so so many people have said to me they've come and visited our congregation and they have said to me how warm and welcoming and kind everybody is that is standing out in a good way and we just want to keep on cultivating that more and more and more because the opposite is through if we blend in with the unrighteousness of the world around us then we are just contravening contradicting our true identity what do we want people to think what do we want them to think of us we want them to be able to see that we're God's children that we lean on him as our father that we love one another as a family and that that is where our confidence lies and you know if you do that you are not being a super holy mega christian you're just being yourself because you're

God's child and so this statement I am God's child is absolutely central to your identity as Christians and I want I want that to shape I want that to shape the way you think from the moment you wake up to the moment you go to bed God is your father you are his child but as we close maybe for some of you the hardest word in this statement is this one maybe some of you think I don't know if I can say that and maybe for some of you you feel you need to change that word to you I wish I was God's child or I want to be God's child or I'm not quite sure if I'm God's child if that's you what do you do what should you do you pray and you know you actually only need to pray one word what word do you say father when you pray to God saying father he never ever ever rejects that prayer and even if you're praying that for the first time he's taking you into his family as his child now he probably won't answer that prayer with a bolt of lightning instead he will quietly lead you on and raise you up as his child amen