

What it Means to be a Child of God

I was recently watching TV and saw a short scene about a couple's experience while riding in the car that was eerily similar to my own experiences. The wife was driving when the husband yelled out, "Watch out for that car!" She avoided the car and growled back that she had seen the car coming and that the husband was overreacting. He did not like her response but said he sealed his lips. They continued to drive along for a few seconds, when she began to stare off into space, upset by his reaction. He then yelled out, "Red light!" She slammed on the brakes and said in a sheepish tone and with a look of embarrassment on her face, "I saw that red light."

We all do that, do we not? No matter if we are a husband, wife, child or parent driving the car, we do not like to be told that we are driving poorly. We defend ourselves and try to make ourselves look better than we are. In the process we end up making ourselves look foolish. Why do we do that? It is because we live in the belief that we are orphans without realizing it.

My wife and I recently finished an intensive course of study called "Sonship." The course asks you to examine your life to find the things that are keeping you from God and that hinder you from experiencing the joy of being a child of God. Sonship starts off by saying that when we do not live as God intends, we are living like we believe we are orphans again. This statement was hard for me to accept. The idea that I could be living like an orphan was not one that I wanted to believe. The study then tied this concept into our language and attitudes, looking at how we interact with others. When we complain, defend ourselves, gossip, blame shift, when we seek the approval of others, when we withdraw from interactions with others and so on, we are acting like orphans. We are forgetting what it means to be a child of God.

What does it mean to be a child of God? It all has to do with justification. When we are justified, we are not just made righteous with a stamp that says, "Child, you never sinned." We are given the righteousness of Christ. What that means is we not only have a clean slate on our behalf before God, but we have Christ's reputation as well. We have all the righteousness and reputation that God has credited to Christ because of the work he has done here on earth. Furthermore, we share in his inheritance. We can never be more important to God than we already are because of what he has done for us and given to us through justification. When we sin, we can confess it and not be afraid, as we already have his righteousness (I John 1:9). We can stand in the faith that he delights in us (Zephaniah 3:17), because our Father already has all the reason that he needs to accept us, because of what Christ has done for us.

We defend ourselves when accused because we do not understand the benefit that we have in Christ of having his reputation which is so much better than we could ever earn for ourselves.¹ We complain about circumstances because we do not believe God already sees us as precious

¹ I am not saying we should never defend ourselves. We should not have that be our first reaction when accused. We should first give thought to if they are saying something that is true.

children to him, and he has the best in mind for us in our circumstances. We do not forgive other Christians because we do not see that they are standing before God fully justified, just as we are, and He loves them every bit as much as he does us. We gossip when we are trying to make ourselves look better to others, forgetting that we look the best we ever could in Christ before God. We blame shift because we forget that, before God, there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

One application from the concept of justification that all of us should remember in our lives is that no matter what happens with other Christians, God sees them as more precious and more perfect than we ever will. He delights in them more than we ever will because we do not look at them from his viewpoint. It would behoove all of us to ask God to help us see our brothers and sisters through his eyes so that we would be more gracious to them.

What does it mean to be a justified follower of Christ? One thing we can say is that God did not call us to a life of rules and duty; he called us to a life of relationship. When we are living as orphans, we tend to think of our relationship with God as being one of duty. We need to remember that the analogies comparing us to soldier of Christ are far outnumbered by the statements of faith referring to us as children of God.

Although we live with the knowledge of our justified relationship with God, I am not denying that there are dry times when we have to hang on like soldiers and do what is right simply because we know it is right; we do our duties as Christians. But if we seek to live as children of God in a relationship of joy with him, the dry times will be fewer and farther between. I myself went through some very dry times in Thailand that I could not understand. I would read my Bible, I would pray and I would fast, but the dryness would remain. I can now say with some certainty that one reason is because I thought I had to be good enough to get God's approval as well as that of others. I had forgotten that I already had God's approval and love. I did not have to do anything to increase it, nor do I have the ability to increase it. He will never stop loving me (John 6:37-40)! When I was in the dry times and tried to increase my Bible reading to increase his love for me, it did nothing. I also had an attitude of self condemnation that I carried for years! I condemned myself for doubting the existence of God. It was the confession of that self condemnation that brought me out of that dry time.

If you still doubt that you are living like an orphan to some extent, I challenge you to a self test for a week. Try to make it through an entire week without criticizing anyone, complaining, blame shifting, defending yourself and so on. Think about why you do the things you do and see if there is a lack of trust in God's acceptance of you.

We can know about the application of justification in our lives, but if we do not think about these things in relationship to real life occurrences, then we will not realize the work of Christ in our lives. Justification should not be an abstract issue that is thought about and forgotten shortly after. It should be pondered and applied to our lives daily. As we experience the freedom from sin and its effects, we will have the power to have faith that expresses itself through love. It is the only thing that matters (Galatians 5:6).