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Review.

The Lord Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name." (*Matt.6:9*). The doctrine of the Fatherhood of God is present in the O.T. Its presence, however, is limited. In *Deut.32:6* the Israelites are asked the question, "Is not He your Father who has bought you?" *Isa.63:16* says, "For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us. You, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is Your name." *Isa.64:8* says, "But now, O Lord, You are our Father." In *Deut.14:1* Moses said to the Israelites, "You are the sons of the Lord your God."

The doctrine of the Fatherhood of God takes a decided turn with Jesus. "**Father**" was His favorite term for addressing God. Jesus used the name "**Father**" approximately **65** times in the first three gospels and over **100** times in the gospel of John. The expression "Abba! Father!" was first used by Jesus in *Mk.14:36*. In *Rom.8:15* and *Gal.4:6* the believer in Christ who is adopted into the family of God is given the privilege to call God "Abba! Father!". We are told that there is no evidence in pre-Christian Jewish writings that the Jews addressed God as "**Abba**". "**Abba**" is a term of peculiar intimacy. "**Abba**" was the term little children used when they addressed their fathers.

In *Jn.13:33* Jesus called His disciples "little children." It is the Greek word **teknion** and it is derived from **teknon** which means "**children**". **Teknion** became a favorite term of endearment for the apostle John. In *1John* he addressed the believers as **teknion** seven times. ([read] *1Jn.2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21.*) In Paul letters God is described as "**Father**" over **40** times. Jesus taught His disciples to address God as "**Father**". This was not merely one of the ways by which the disciples should address

God. **“Father”** was the primary way by which the disciples should address God. It must be noted that Jesus was careful to make a separation between Himself and His disciples in their address to God. This distinction is clearly emphasized in *Jn.20:17*. The risen Lord told Mary to “go to My brethren and say to them, “I ascend to My Father and your Father, and my God and your God”.”

How Great A Love.

In our last study we saw that sinners who are forgiven in Christ unto salvation become the sons and daughters of God by adoption. **David Jackman** wrote, *“Adoption is a legal action by which a person takes into his family a child who is not his own, who has no rights within that family, in order to give that child all the privileges of his own children.”* God legally adopts sinners forgiven in Christ into His household and they receive all the rights and privileges of full-fledged children. Adoption is the gracious manifestation of great divine love to the sinner. It is literally a love that is out of this world. John wrote, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are.... Beloved, now we are the children of God. ” (*1Jn.3:1-2*).

John is literally blown away by this gracious manifestation of divine love. I want us to take some time this morning to examine in some detail what John said with the prayer that the truths revealed by John would grip our hearts as it did John. The verb **“see”** or **“behold”** is a command. John is seeking to rouse his readers to do something. He wants to rouse them to direct their attention to something and contemplate it, reflect upon it. That something is the love God our Father has manifested to us. John wants you to give more than a fleeting contemplation to the Father’s love. He wants you to contemplate the Father’s love for you until the reality of it sinks down into the depths of your being. He wants you to contemplate the Father’s love for you until you are so startled and amazed and astonished, you are left breathless.

Have you ever taken the time to prayerfully meditate upon, to reflect upon the Father's love for you in Christ? It is Paul's prayer that you as a Christian, "being rooted and ground in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the Lord of Christ which surpasses knowledge." (*Eph.3:17-19*). This prayer is not fanciful because it comes to us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Do you pray this prayer? Do you pursue the goals of this prayer?

"How great" is one Greek word that actually meant "*of what country*". It is a word that expresses astonishment, amazement, admiration. This word is found several times in the N.T. But I want us to note two examples, one now and the other later on. The first example is in *Matt.8:27*. There is a serious storm raging in the sea. Jesus' disciples are sure they are about to die. But Jesus is asleep. They quickly woke up Jesus with the cry, "Save us, Lord, we are perishing!" Jesus got up and calmed the raging sea with a rebuke. And *vs.27* says His disciples "were amazed, and said, "What kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

Our word is translated, "what kind of". "*What kind of man is this?*" Who really is this man? Where did this man come from? This man is in a category different from anything we have come across before. The implication from John's use of this same word is : what kind of love is this? Where did this kind of love come from? It is a love that is so amazing and astonishing, it is in a category of its own. It is a love that is utterly different from anything we have come across and / or experienced before. It is a love in which God takes all the initiative and God achieves the result He desires.

Let me attempt to illustrate this love : would you love a young man who raped and murdered your daughter? Would you forgive him and adopt him into your family with all the rights and privileges of a son? Would love a young woman who seduced, betrayed and murdered your son? Would you forgive her and adopt her into your family with all the rights and privileges of a daughter?

Picture for a moment a judge sitting in judgment of a young man who has raped and murdered his daughter. The young man is found guilty and duly sentenced. But then the judge proceeds to pardon the young man and legally adopt him into his family. The judge then escorts the young man to his own car and drives the young man to his own home. When they arrive at the judge's home, the judge opens the door, stands inside the doorway and extends his hands to the young man and says, "*welcome home*". What would you think of this judge?

Now understand this : as a sinner in the eyes of God you are far, far, far worse than the rapist / murderer and the seductress / murderer. The problem with us is that we see ourselves as every criminal sees himself or herself. Do you know that the jails across this world are filled with only innocent people? They all see themselves as innocent not-so-bad people. But the law sees them for what they truly are : criminals. Take a good look at yourself from God's perspective and from the perspective of His Law. Look at yourself as God looks at you. See yourself as God sees you.

ISam.16:7 says, "man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus made it clear that the sins committed in the heart are just as bad as the sins that are actually committed. In the N.T. the sins of anger and hate are seen as violations of the sixth commandment, "You shall not murder." (*Exod.20:13; Matt.5:21-22; 1Jn.3:15*). Lust is seen as adultery. (*Exod.20:14; Matt.5:27-28*). In *Lk.16:15* Jesus said to the Pharisees, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, **but God knows your hearts**; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God." Note the word "**detestable**". It also means "**abomination**". It was originally used to describe something that was offensive because of its smell.

Jn.2:25 says Jesus knows what is in man. No one has to tell Him. In *Mk.7:21-22* Jesus said, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting, and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness."

If you see yourself as God sees you, you would not discover a not-so-bad person. If, as a sinner, you see yourself as God sees you, you will be completely horrified and repulsed. If, as a sinner, you see the dark depravities in your heart that God sees, I assure you that you wouldn't love yourself. When Job got a true glimpse of his own heart, note how he responded to God. In *Job 40:4* he said to God, "Behold, I am vile." In *Job 42:6*, he said, "I abhor myself, and I repent in dust and ashes." Ezra said, "O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens." (*Ezra 9:6*).

When a sinner gets even a little glimpse of how God sees him, the inevitable question is always asked : Why would God love a person like me? That person whom you wouldn't love, that person whom you would abhor and despise and want to run away from, that person whom you believe God would not love, that's the person God loved, forgave and adopted into His family with all the rights and privileges of sonship.

Do you know your own heart? Do you see your heart as God sees it? Do you know even a little of the dark depravities that live within your heart? Even as a redeemed, blood-washed, forgiven, justified sinner, do you know and understand the dark depravities of the remaining sin that dwells in you? Or do you see yourself as a not-so-bad person?

Commentators have struggled to capture John's meaning here. Why? God is the Judge. And God has done something that has never been done before. He has done something that is completely outside of the pale of human experience and understanding. He has done something we would not do. Here is love that is in a category that is unknown to us.

One man translated, "See what glorious, measureless love the Father has bestowed on us." **Hiebert** noted that this love "*is amazing indeed when we remember the personal destitution of those He loves.*" **Stott** wrote, "*The Father's love is so unearthly, so foreign to this world, that [John] wonders from what*

country it may come from.” Ross said the love of God in Christ for sinners is foreign to this world; it is not flower that has blossomed in the cold climate of this world.

Daniel Akin wrote, *“God’s love is foreign to humankind in that we cannot understand the magnitude of such love. It astonishes, amazes, and creates wonder within those who properly reflect upon it.”* **Burdick** wrote, *“God loves the sinner, not because He is drawn to him by his loveliness, but because, in spite of man’s unloveliness, God sets His mind and will on seeking man’s highest good. This is what is amazing about God’s love.”*

Now Brethren, the John who wrote the verse we are studying is the John who walked with Jesus for three years and witnessed all of Jesus’ astounding miracles. This is the John who was Jesus’ closest friend on this earth. He is described as the disciple whom Jesus loved. (*Jn.13:23; 19:26*). But in his old age what continued to astonish and amaze John? Remembering how Lazarus was raised from the dead? Remembering how Jesus walked on the water? Remembering how Jesus calmed the raging storm? The answer is an emphatic **“NO!”** to all these questions. In his old age the one thing that never ceased to astonish John, to overwhelm John, to astound John was the Father’s love in making him a child of God. The one thing that John could not fully comprehend was the Father’s love in making him a child of God. This astounding, incomprehensible gracious love greatly humbled John’s heart.

Here is something you need to think carefully about : as a Christian what astonishes you, astounds you, overwhelms you? As you grow older in Christ, what astounds you and overwhelms you? As you grow older in Christ, what does your mind focus upon, meditate upon, reflect upon?

But I want you to note that John’s astonishment is not limited to the fact that the Father made one depraved sinner into a child of God. Note the words **“us”** and **“we”** in *1Jn.3:1-2*. John astonishment extends to the fact that the Father made us, a countless number of depraved sinners, into children of God. To love and forgive and adopt one

depraved, lawless, desperately wicked, detestable sinner in this manner is one thing. But to love and forgive and adopt a countless number of depraved, lawless, desperately wicked, detestable sinners, well, that is beyond all comprehension.

The sentence John actually wrote is : “See how great a love He has bestowed on us, the Father.” The position in which John put the words, “**the Father**”, further emphasizes God’s Fatherly character, the intimacy of the relationship the Father has established with us, and John’s astonishment that God the Father would bestow such love upon us.

Take note now of the verb “has bestowed”. It may be also translated “**has lavished**”. The verb speaks of the gracious lavish bestowal of an unearned gift. The gift is graciously and freely given and, once given, it cannot be withdrawn. The verb is perfect tense and this emphasizes the permanence of the gift given and the result achieved. The gift given is “*so great a love*” and the result achieved is that we are the children of God. The gift of “*so great love*” cannot be withdrawn. Our status as the children of God cannot be changed. We have been moved from being the children of the devil to being the children of God. There is no going back. The process is irreversible. Let this grip your soul : this process by which you became a child of God is irreversible.

To be loved so graciously, unconditionally and limitlessly is often very difficult for us to grasp. There is no love in this world, expressed and practiced, that is purely gracious and / or unconditional and / or limitless. As children we learned that parental love is a mixture of grace and earning. We learned time and again that conditions applied and that there were limits. When we come to God our Heavenly Father and His dealings with us, we bring along this experiential baggage. And so, we find it difficult to comprehend and accept this lavish bestowal of the Father’s love upon us.

The result is that we are always trying to be good enough to persuade God that we are worthy of His love and / or to keep loving us. When we do this, we pervert the grace of God into a religion of works. God’s so great love for us is not conditioned by whether

we are good or bad. We are bad. He lavished His love on us when we were totally bad and made us His children. Let it grip your soul that God's love for you is gracious, unconditional and limitless. You cannot do anything to earn it. You cannot do anything to enhance it. You cannot do anything that will decrease it. You cannot do anything that will cause God to withdraw it. But at the same time, I urge you to flee from the devil's licentious whisper that God's love is indulgent. Real love, whether divine or human, is never indulgent. This is why **Heb.12:6** says, "Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives."

Now I want you to note one more point as we close this study of **1Jn.3:1-2**. The disciples asked the question concerning Jesus, "What kind of man is this?" From John's command we can ask the question, "**What kind of love is this?**" Jesus, who is in a category all by Himself, brought to us the Father's love that is in a category all by itself. And we who received this unique "**so great love**" are called to live a quality of life that is in a category all by itself.

Turn to **2Pet.3:11**. The context of Peter's statement is the Lord's second coming, the Lord's patience towards sinners so that they could come to repentance, and the destruction of all things that belong to this old fallen creation. In view of these things Peter wrote, "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness." Our word is translated "**what sort of**".

The word "ought" is the Greek verb **dei** that is often translated "**must**". The root idea in the verb is, "*it is binding*". This verb does not leave us with options because it sets before us that which is divinely necessary. For example, **Jn.3:7** says "You must be born again." The new birth is not optional. When Jesus spoke of the fulfillment of prophecies, He used the verb "**must**". (cf. **Matt.24:6; 26:54**). The fulfillment of Biblical prophecy is not optional. When Jesus spoke of His sufferings and death, He used the verb "**must**". (cf. **Mk.8:31**). The things He had to suffer and the death He had to die were not optional. When the Scriptures spoke of Jesus' resurrection, the word

“**must**” was used. (*Jn.20:9*). Jesus’ resurrection was not optional. Peter is saying to us that holy conduct and godliness are binding upon us. They are divine necessities that are not optional for the Christian.

The word “holy” emphasizes the separation from evil and the dedication to God that must mark our daily conduct and activities. The words “conduct” and “godliness” are in the plural. The literal idea is : **what sort of people must you be in acts of holy conduct and in acts of godliness.** The plural points to the different forms and directions in which your new moral character in Christ must display itself. “What sort of” points to the fact that your holy conduct, your godly actions, your Biblically-based choices, your God-glorifying decisions must draw from the watching world an exclamation of puzzled astonishment and admiration.

The question that the disciples asked concerning Jesus must now be asked concerning you : What kind of man is this? What kind of woman is this? What kind of young man is this? What kind of young woman is this? The “**what sort of**” love the Father lavishly and irreversibly bestowed on us is not an indulgent love. This “**what sort of**” love requires that we live a “**what sort of**” quality of life. So the question is : you who have experienced the “what sort of” quality of love from our Heavenly Father, you who bear the name and status that you are a child of God, what sort of life are you living before this watching world?

Before you were saved you were described as a son of disobedience. (*Eph.2:2*). You were described as sons of disobedience who were facing the wrath of God. (*Eph.5:6*.) When the Lord saved you and made you His children, you became the children of obedience. (*1Pet.1:14*). As the children of God, is your life saying that you are the children of obedience? By your obedience to Heavenly Father and His revealed word, are you living that godly quality of life that is a puzzle to people? Are you living that godly quality of life that astonishes people?

Or are you living that quality of life that says you are no different to the world, that says you are still conformed to this world, that says you are still a friend of this world, that says that you still love this world? Paul's command is, "do not be conformed to this world." (*Rom.12:2*). Why, we must be daily conformed to Christ because that is the great goal of our sanctification and final glorification. (*Rom.8:29-30*). Peter says, "as the children of obedience, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours...." (*1Pet.1:14*). James warns that friendship with the world is enmity against God. (*Jas.4:4*).

And John said, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (*1Jn.2:15*). Note carefully the expression, "the love of the Father." If the love of the Father is in you, you would not love the world. But if the love of the Father is **not** in you, then you are not a child of God. Let us take heed to these truths. Let us examine our hearts in the light of them. Let us seek God and assure our hearts that we are truly the children of our Father who is in heaven.