

How to Become God's—John 1:9–13

During a family holiday in Florida, my father was hospitalized for tests to determine the cause of some chest pains. About the time that we were scheduled to fly back to Minnesota he was about to be transferred from the cardiac care unit into a regular unit of the hospital to undergo some further tests. I visited him early that day before getting a ride to the West Palm Beach airport. After checking in we had about 30-40 minutes before the scheduled departure time so I thought I would call the hospital to see if my dad had been transferred and to say good-bye to him. I called the hospital and asked to speak to Charles Anderson. A moment later the operator said that he was still in the cardiac care unit but asked me if I was a member of the family. When I said “yes” she didn’t wait for any further explanation but said, “I’ll put you right through.”

Being a member of the family made all the difference! I could get through when others couldn’t. I had privileges as a member of the family that other people didn’t have. The same goes for being a member of the family of God! When you send an urgent prayer heavenward, the switchboard operator of heaven first asks the question, “Are you a member of the family?” All we need to do is say “yes” and we have instant communication access to God himself.

God dearly desires that each of us be a member of the family of God. He wants us to take advantage of the grand privilege of being a part of the family of God. That’s why these words in John 1:9-13 were given to us:

The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

In this passage God explains the realities of becoming a member of his eternal family. In these five verses there is revelation from God that is nothing short of spectacular. It is the boiled down essence of what history is all about, what the Christian message is all about, what God’s relationship to the world is all about and how we can have life as it ought to be. So if there ever were verses that we ought to give diligent attention to, these must be the ones.

God’s teaching in these verses can be summarized in four basic statements that express the very essence of our life and destiny. Verse 9 tells us that Jesus Christ is the true light. The word “true” that is used here means genuine. It’s the opposite of counterfeit. It’s the difference between a genuine \$100 bill and a counterfeit \$100 bill. The counterfeit bill may have many things that appear to be in

common with the genuine bill and at first glance may look like the real thing, but it’s really worthless. Jesus Christ is the genuine light, the true light.

People look to many counterfeit lights to light up their lives – manmade religions, all kinds of self-help, chemicals, you name it. At first glance they look great, like the real thing, but they are only counterfeits and not the true light.

Have you ever been outside on a dark stormy night when you can see almost nothing at all? Whether it’s in the north woods of Minnesota or down in the swamps of the south, it’s frightening when you literally cannot see your hand in front of your face. And then without warning there is a flash of lightening like a brilliant sheet across the sky. Everything is lit up like high noon on a July day. Suddenly every detail of everything around you can be vividly seen and for that instant, at least, the dark-

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ness is completely gone. Jesus is that kind of brilliant light who suddenly and sometimes unexpectedly flashes in our lives and dissipates the darkness until we can see life and eternity in vivid and lucid detail.

It was William Barclay who wrote of Jesus Christ:

His coming dissipated the shadows of doubt.

His coming dissipated the shadows of despair.

His coming dissipated the shadows of death.

This is God's truth. Jesus Christ is the true light. In verse 9 John says that Jesus is "the true light that gives light to every man." Jesus is not a limited light, but a universal light. There are no darkneses that he cannot penetrate. There are no men or women who are exceptions. There are no problems that are too difficult, no depressions that are too severe or doubts too disturbing. Jesus Christ is the true, brilliant and universal light that gives light to every man and every woman.

It is with that in mind that John moves on to the second statement. Jesus Christ came to his world but his world did not recognize him. Verse 10 says, "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him." The world owes its life to Jesus Christ. Long before his incarnation the Son of God created the world; and long after the creation he continues to sustain the world. John 1:3 says that "Through him all things were made; and without him nothing was made that has been made." Everything we know as far as the created world is concerned is attributable to and sustained by Jesus Christ.

Look up into the heavens. The planets and the stars have a defined course that is predictable centuries in advance because they were created by Jesus Christ who keeps their clock absolutely on time. Jesus Christ created the seasons that are repeated one after the other. It is Jesus Christ that sees to it that our world functions on its axis as it ought. It is Jesus Christ who created the tiny seed with the potential to become the mature plant that would reproduce again and again. It is Jesus Christ who invented the water and recycles it. It is Jesus Christ who makes the world work.

It is also Jesus Christ who created human life. He designed the heart that beats in each of our

chests. It is Jesus Christ who gives us intelligence, knowledge and the awareness of right and wrong. If it were not for Jesus Christ there would be no world and no life. If it were not for Jesus Christ the world would come to a quick and cataclysmic end.

But this world, his own world, didn't recognize him. Imagine that. The Creator and Sustainer steps out of eternity into time; steps from heaven onto earth. Steps from the realm of the Creator into the lives of the created and was unrecognized. And it's not like he didn't give any hints. Who else but the Creator and Sustainer could have stilled the storm or miraculously multiplied food? Who but Jesus Christ — the Son of God, the Creator and the Sustainer — could have stood outside Lazarus's tomb and said, "Lazarus, come forth" - and he did? And they didn't recognize him.

We could condemn that ancient generation as ludicrous if our own generation were not equally guilty! He has preserved us from nuclear holocaust, he makes every heartbeat a possibility, he provides our seasons, our water and our food, yet the vast majority of our generation fails to recognize who Jesus Christ is.

George M. Cohan was the leading songwriter of America in the early 1900s. His compositions included such old-time favorites as "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy," "Give My Regards to Broadway" and "You're a Grand Old Flag." He wrote the songs that were played on the radio and hummed in the streets.

Cohan also wrote the song "Over There" that became the most popular patriotic song of World War I. It was sung by millions across the nation as America sent its sons and its daughters over there, into the European theater of war. Cohan was a national hero. The war came to an end and George Cohan became an old man. After a few short years of peace, America went to another overseas war - a war far greater than the first one - that eventually drew us both to the Pacific and to the Atlantic and once again American sons were over there. Again, the people marched in the streets singing Cohan's song.

One day in New York City Cohan was in his apartment when he heard his song being sung by marchers in the street. He watched out his win-

dows and finally walked down the stairs to the sidewalk as thousands of new recruits who were being sent to Europe marched by singing “Over There.” To his surprise and dismay, a young recruit stepped from the parade and critically asked George Cohan, “What’s the matter, old man, why aren’t you singing? Don’t you know the words?”

How sad that those singing the song didn’t recognize the composer. But, how much more tragic when the creatures of the world don’t recognize the Creator. Jesus Christ came to his world but his world didn’t recognize him. That’s not you, is it? You recognize him, don’t you, as your Creator, Savior and Lord?

A third statement ties right in with the second statement. In verse 11 the evangelist writes, “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” Jesus was not born in Greece, Egypt, Persia or Africa, he was born in Palestine - because God had chosen the Jews as his people and Palestine as his home. Now that’s not to say that other peoples or places were unimportant, but these were his special people. But Jesus’ own people didn’t recognize him; they didn’t welcome him.

We would expect the doors to be flung open wide, the banquet table to be spread in extravagance, the trumpets to blare a welcome and the people to enfold him in an embrace. Instead, they rejected him. The king of the land sought to kill him as an infant. The religious leaders sought to discredit him. The people finally banded together into a mob and shouted, “Crucify him!” His own people should have adored and accepted him, but instead he was hated and rejected.

There is a danger that we repeat this blunder in our own lives. Jesus Christ also comes to us. We forget that our children are his children, our car is his car, our time is his time, our jobs are really his jobs and our money is his money. How frighteningly absurd for us to think that we are too busy for him, or that we have too little money for him, or too little time for him, or too little room for him. We are to welcome him as the rightful resident and king of our homes, our lives and our possessions!

Life, career, family, finances and time fit together only when we understand that we are stewards of that which belongs to him and to him alone. Life fits together only with him. Please, please – when Jesus Christ comes to you, welcome him as the undisputed Lord of your life!

Thinking of Jesus, the true light, coming from heaven and not being recognized or welcomed in his own world would seem the most tragic of stories were it not for the exciting news of verses 12-13. “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” Not all the people failed to recognize Jesus Christ and not all rejected him. Some people received and some believed, and they were reborn into the family of God!

There’s a couplet of terms used here — receiving and believing. Receiving means an acceptance of Jesus Christ — who he is and what he did. Believing is an attestation of allegiance. Just as we put our hands over our hearts and pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, so we pledge, instead, our allegiance to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of life.

When we receive and believe, at that moment we are empowered and reborn—empowered to become a member of the family of God with all the privileges and responsibilities that go along with being a member of the family of God. It is as if God takes the pen from his pocket

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and signs adoption papers for us to be adopted into his family. It’s an irreversible adoption so that whenever we call heaven or seek any privileges and are asked the question, “Are you a member of the family?” we can confidently say, “Yes — because of Jesus Christ I am!”

Rebirth into God’s family is revolutionary. It’s not a flesh and blood physical rebirth. It’s not even one that comes by human volition, but it is a birth that comes from God himself. And when God is the one making the changes, life becomes totally

different! We are revolutionized! Instead of sinners — we become saints. Instead of those going to destruction — we are marching to victory. Instead of being a member of sin's family — we are members of God's family. Instead of having hell as our permanent address — we have heaven as our permanent address. All of the changes are so drastic, so significant, that life is totally changed.

That's the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ: that Jesus Christ is the true light, that he came into his own world and his own world didn't recognize him, that he came to his own people and his own people didn't welcome him. But some did and those some who believed on him and received him, they were reborn into the family of God.

But these verses do more than tell the way it was way back then. It's still the same here and now. These verses are not just for an ancient people in a different land with a different language. They are

for us in our land, in our time, with our language. Like a brilliant streak of lightening, Jesus Christ, the true light, has flashed into our lives. Do you know who he is? He is the Creator. Do you recognize him? Do you know what he's done? He's come to you. Do you welcome him? Do you know what he's offering? Membership in his family. Will you receive him and believe in him?

Let me extend to you the offer that God makes in John 1:12-13 so that you too can become a member of the family of God. If you would like to accept that offer, simply tell him in your own words that you know that you are a sinner who lives in the darkness of unsolved problems. Tell him that you will receive Jesus Christ and pledge your allegiance to him — as your only Savior and Lord. With that prayer God guarantees that you will be reborn into his family and into the brilliant light of Jesus Christ.

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