
Beware of Identity Theft!



Message by **Pastor Tom**, Interim Lead Pastor
Sunday Sermon for **May 27, 2012**
Scripture Passage **1 John 3:1-10**
Vancouver Chinese Baptist Church Vancouver, Canada



Several weeks ago I received a renewal notice for the insurance policy on our house. Along with the renewal notice, the insurance company told me about several new kinds of insurance they thought I should have.

They wanted to know if they could sign me up for a new product addressing identity theft. You may have seen this on television recently. It happens when someone has their identity stolen: credit cards, social insurance number, etc., and it creates absolute havoc in their personal lives as well a financial hassle. Well, I did not sign up for identity theft but I did think as I was studying 1st John, and what it means to be a child of God.

John 1:12 – to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right [authority] to become children of God, children not born of natural descent, nor of human decision, nor of a husband's will, but born of God.

Being a child of God is not just a theological idea. It is a relationship and an identity that is to be sustain and support us in the rough and tumble of life.

1st John 3:1

1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that

we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

I have a sense that when John wrote those words, his face started to beam, his hand started to write faster, his pen stretched for more words before it needed ink. What he wrote gave him fresh excitement and joy.

We will seek to put the tremendous truths in this passage in a practical context that speaks to our lives and struggles. As always, this leaves so much behind. The depth of what lies here is simply amazing!

WHEN YOU ARE FACING AN EMOTIONAL STRUGGLE, DON'T FORGET WHO YOU ARE – YOU ARE A LOVED CHILD OF GOD.

One of the things that we want in our self-health today is a sense of acceptance. We want this for our family, friends and if we are parents, we want this for our children. We want them to grow up feeling emotionally good and, and there is everything right with that.

So we are taught that we need to reinforce every positive act in the lives of children and others, compliment what is good. So I

had to learn when our kids came home from kindergarten and 1st grade, bringing all their mysterious crafts and strange pictures, I was not supposed to ask what is that? But rather say tell me about it. I was not supposed to crush their fragile little psyches.

We need that also as adults. Little by little we want to cultivate lives and hearts that are strong in understanding and accepting who we are. Most of us grow better in sunshine than in the shadows. Someone said, Compliments are better manure than criticism! [now there's a one-liner for you!]

As Christians, we want people to know that the real source of self-acceptance really comes from the heart of God, not just from what other people say, or the latest fashion, or all the externals.

We are made in the image of God, and so God is the one who truly accepts us. It is his love that says, you are OK, you are loved.

We are to declare and practise the message of encouragement and acceptance in the circle of community.

So one of the ways we can reinforce that is that we can affirm each other in that. We can sing together about it. We can confirm the work and grace of God in each others' lives. We are to establish an ethos of acceptance rather than one of condemnation. We are creating an environment of grace rather than one of condemnation and guilt. We are not to make people perform for acceptance.

1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Great = a word that has the sense, from outside, not of this world, belongs to another world.

We need to say to one another, you can know today who you are. You are a child of God and you are loved. We must reinforce that at every opportunity we get. These are the words that form the womb of our mutual acceptance.

But perhaps that only goes so far, and then along comes life with all its challenge and tensions!

There are times and occasions in lives when we have to stand alone in some personal darkness, even in the midst of

the worship we do not hear the singing. For a while we stand in silence and alone, and it is at this moment in the silence, we are faced with a solemn question - do I still know that I am a child of God when I am alone? Do I still know that I am loved and accepted by God when I am by myself? In the long dark night of the soul, am I still a child of God?

When I was a small boy, I vaguely recall getting some disease which left me paralysed and I had to learn to walk all over again.

Some years ago, I faced a different and hidden kind of paralysis, much more crippling. I faced the paralysis of the dark night of the soul when I was trapped in clinical depression. For a long time I lived in a long dark tunnel and there was no light at the end of it, not even a train coming. Some days I think I would have been quite happy to have been hit by a train.

Christians who say that if you are truly a Christian and filled with the Spirit, you will never be depressed. Simply do not know what they are talking about.

If you know or live with someone who is in that darkness, please don't tell them just to snap out of it. They would love to but they cannot. They do not know how and even if they did, they do not have the

energy. Just love them and be patient with them.

I would not have made it through those dark days without the unwavering love and deep patience of Harriet. But even that would only carry me so far. Going to church would only take me so far. Reading the Bible would only take me so far.

There was a part of the road that I would have to walk alone and find out if the love of God really could reach down and touch me when there were no songs to sing. There were times in which I wondered if it ever would, but eventually it did.

Then one day I felt an overwhelming sense of the love of God, the unshakable knowledge that I was his child, and nothing could ever ever change that. That comes back and gently washes over me from time to time. It came again one day. We were singing a hymn, and it washed over me again, a wave of God's accepting grace. I felt tears running down my face. I used to be embarrassed at that, not any more. Here was the song.

Oh the mercy of God – the glory of grace

That you chose to redeem us to forgive and restore.

And you call us your children chosen in him

To be holy and blameless to the glory of God.

To the praise of his glorious grace

To the praise of his glory and power

To him be all glory honour and praise

Forever and ever and ever amen.

That is a moment of acceptance of the deepest kind we can come to as children of God.

There are times to sing and worship. When we speak to one another, we affirm the reality of the love of God in community. We affirm the family of God in fellowship.

There is a great, an enormous power of the love of God to be discovered and found in community and in fellowship to be sung about and embraced. We need to do that more and more.

But there are moments when the voices die down and become silent and we need to listen to the silence of our own hearts and discover afresh the love of God for ourselves.

There is a different dimension of the love of God to be sought when the music has died down and we are alone. Perhaps in the

shadow of a tragedy, or after a death of a loved one and everyone has gone home, or in the darkness of depression, to risk asking God in the silence, do you still love me? Am I still your child? And we wait in hushed silence for an answer.

Sometimes there is a need to stand alone in the silence, and hear it only from the voice of God. I have a sense that comes the loudest in times of pain in our lives.

Perhaps some of you today are walking in that kind of silence, and you need to hear God say, know who you are, you are greatly loved, you are my child.

Romans 8

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Perhaps today you are in pain. Life is not fair. The screaming you hear is all happening on the inside. You really do not hear the music of worship. You need something that lies beyond community, and you need to hear God say to you, I want you

to know that you are loved. I want you to know that you are a child of God. This whisper from heaven is what you have been needing and waiting to hear.

If that is where you are, I have prayed for you this past week, that right now, the heavens above you just open and a shaft of the light of the love of God shine down and break into your life, dispelling whatever gloom and darkness is inside you.

Can you just lift up your face towards heaven and let the light of God shine down and know that you are a child of God, loved and accepted?

Can you hear the voice of God say, You are my child - loved by the great love of the Father? Don't forget who you are.

WHEN YOU ARE FACING A MORAL CHALLENGE, ACT LIKE THE CHILD OF GOD YOU WILL BECOME!

What makes people moral beings?

Nietzsche declared that God is dead and we have killed him. So then, what will make us moral beings?

That is a very valid question.

Nietzsche went on to challenge people who thought that they could have Christian morality without the Christian faith. He said "when one gives up the

Christian faith, one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one's feet." There really is not much reason or ground for morality when you do away with God.

For some people, morality comes from **GUILT**. God or someone else is going to get them.

For others it is **FEAR**. Perhaps it is the fear of getting caught. You have to ask, are we moral beings only because of fear? What if we knew we could get away with something, would we be just as moral?

For many people, it is perhaps the residue of conscience, somewhere imbedded within us we somehow know that lies are wrong, truth is better.

For others it is the inbred sense of duty and responsibility to others.

Some moral teaching, some value education tries to help people see and understand the results of their actions. Think and look ahead: this is called Teleology. The Bible does not disagree with this: what we sow we reap. Part of the high moral cost of the existentialism of our society is that we are seeing the results of demanding immediate gratification. We want it now! Blamires, credit cards and pre-marital sex come from the same source, wanting instant

gratification, we do not want to wait.

When society fails to let people experience that, it does them a grave injustice.

These things may encourage some moral behaviour in some circumstances, but they do not necessarily make us moral people.

But there will come a moment in our lives when none of these will be sufficient. They will not do the job. Parents are not around to monitor us. We are away from home. We wonder about the direction the crowd is taking, good or bad, and we are at the place where we will have to stand on our own moral feet. There will come a moment when wonder if we should go in the same direction as everyone else. There will come a moment when we are in a situation we have never faced before. There will come a moment when we will have to think and choose for ourselves. Guilt, fear, duty, parental values will not take us any further on the road. We are on our own standing at a moral cross-roads.

What will help us in this new uncharted ethical territory?

In a challenging way, the Bible links holiness with hope, eschatology [the teaching related to the return of Jesus] and ethics are linked together.

John says,

But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Eschatology shapes ethics. Hope shapes holiness.

The normal thinking is the present shapes the future. Here we see morality work in the reverse direction. We have to transpose the normal ethical flow. Now the future shapes and motivates the present.

Our moral stand, our personal choice is stimulated and motivated by nothing less than the reality of the person of the risen and exalted and returning Jesus.

John says, we will see him as he is, and we realize in a moment of worship and wonder, we will be like him. Hope and holiness join hands. Eschatology and identity are fused into one.

It is the glimpse of a risen and exalted Jesus in that way that stimulates and motivates not only worship, but also our personal moral choices. What the crowd chooses to do is not our business. What the crowd wishes is not our wish.

There are times in which our moral fibre is strengthened by one another. But there will be times when we are by ourselves. We will stand alone before the audience of One, that is a moment to reveal what is truly inside us. Character is what a person is when no one is looking.

Strong moral choices come in a moment when we stand alone. We do not listen to the roar of the crowd. We do not mindlessly follow everyone else. We find our place to stand and we are willing to stand alone, whenever we get to this point, I believe we have arrived at a place of enormous, enormous moral strength and personal conviction.

One of the great stories in the Old Testament is the story of Joseph. This young man who is hated by his brothers, sold into slavery. Then in Potiphar's house, he is invited by the wife, come to bed with me. No one will know. No one will see. There was no one to impress. No one to monitor. He declines and says "how could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

Joseph knows that there is an audience, an invisible audience of one. He plays to the audience of One, the only audience that is important - God!

When we choose right in that lonely unseen moment, when there is no one to see, no one to witness, no one to applaud, we have silently but powerfully connected eschatology to ethics. We have connected hope to holiness. And we have taken a gigantic step of growth.

When those moments come and stand before us, may we not miss them, may we step boldly into them facing their challenge. Remember who you are, you are a child of God, remember whose you are!

WHEN YOU FACE A SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE, BE THE CHILD OF GOD YOU REALLY ARE.

8 He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

9 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed [sperma] remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.

10 This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

How often have you heard yourself say, I just couldn't help it! We all understand that, and we all agree. We are sinners together. No one's perfect. So we sympathize with each other and make one another feel better. Nothing has changed but we feel better.

I think if John was here and we gave him that excuse, he would shake his head. He might say to us, who do you think you are kidding? Let me tell you about **INCARNATION AND IDENTITY.**

First of all, Jesus appeared in the world for a purpose, to untie the works of the devil. All that the devil is trying to do is to tie you up in knots. He makes sure you are all tangled up and you just stay there. Well, Jesus came to untie you. He came to set you free, so do not play this victim game with me, or with him!

In his earthly ministry, Jesus went toe to toe with Satan and faced him down. He challenged and confronted the grip that Satan had taken over the world.

Jesus met him face to face in the wilderness over issues of ambition, power and materialism and said to him, you are going to have to let go.

That conflict came to a final showdown on the cross. Jesus did not come to glory in spite of the cross. He came to glory and

to victory **IN** and **THROUGH** the cross. God reveals evil for what it really is. He drags it out in the daylight and nails it to the cross.

But still people are tied up in knots, in addictive lifestyles, drugs, alcohol, pornography, materialism.

How can we change?

We can change because Jesus has loosened the grip that Satan has had over our lives. That is one of the most powerful truths for us. Jesus has come to set us free, to untie all the ways in which the devil tangles us up in knots.

We have been set free from a life of habitual, deliberate, conscious, premeditated sinning, and here's how. God has impregnated you with his seed and he has planted a whole new nature in you. When you became born again, God implanted the seed of his spirit in you and gave you a whole new identity.

Can we grasp that?

John gives us a truly breathtaking picture of what a Christian really is. It is more than someone who is trying to keep the golden rule. It is more than a sinner who is forgiven (although that is true).

A Christian is more than someone who is going somewhere, heaven. A Christian is nothing less than someone who is given a whole new identity.

For all of us who are parents, one of the most amazing things to happen was when we discovered as husband and wife that we were going to have a baby. Do you remember when your wife told you she was pregnant? Someone said it changes your whole lifestyle. What that really means is, you will have no life and no style.

But in a silent moment, in the darkness of the womb for a period of 9 months, all of the potential of human life is being created. The entire imprint of a person is being formed. DNA, fingerprints, hair, family likeness, all packed into this genetic miracle.

David uses this picture in the Psalms: Psalm 139

14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

16 your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

He wonders at the way in which God sees and intimately knows him in his mother's womb. This is the foundation of our human identity. This is the sacred stamp within us.

John dares to use the same picture, the same metaphor, and says, God implants his Spirit into the womb of our humanity. He impregnates our humanity with the seed [the sperm] of God. Once again the Word enters and impregnates flesh just like the Incarnation. He gives birth to a new identity.

9 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed [sperma] remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.

Just as there is a genetic code that determines our lives as people, so now there is a spiritual DNA, the seed of God from the Holy Spirit which stimulates our lives before God. It is unnatural for this new identity born of the Spirit to be involved with continued, premeditated, habitual sinning. There is a new code written deep within us. Listen to the heartbeat of the Spirit inside the womb of your life.

Your identity as a Christian comes from nothing less than an act of incarnation. Once again the word entering flesh, your flesh! A spiritual DNA is silently but powerfully shaping our lives.

Hold that thought in your mind. Let its depth take your breath away.

When we get there, even for a flickering moment, we have taken a step beyond the norm. We have entered into a moment of personal understanding and insight from which we can never retreat and for which we will now be responsible.

But John says, you cannot go on sinning, you are born of God.

But why do we still sin? In all of us that there are days and times when this new identity becomes so impoverished, so weakened, so anemic, that it actually forgets the reality and power of its new nature and actually goes back to acting like its old self.

So we must continually nurture and feed this seed of God imbedded with us. We must feed this new nature, that is why we are encouraged to read God's Word, so that we can grow in grace. That's why we are called to desire the sincere milk of the Word so that we will cherish this divine nature within us.

Incarnation and Identity, do you know in the depth of your soul? Do you know in the most intimate place within you, who you are as a child of God?

This week in one way or another

❖ Something will happen that will try to eclipse the warmth and the light of God's love. Don't let that steal your identity as a child of God.

❖ You will face a moral situation, small or large, in which you will have to make a stand. No one may ever see what you do. Let hope stimulate your choice. Remember who you are.

And remember, God has impregnated your life with his seed.

You are a child of God. Don't let anything or anyone steal your identity, and don't live any less than you truly are.