

How is it possible for a person to be a child of God, and at the same time not a child of God?

John 1:11-13: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive 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."

This passage seems to equate being "born of God" with becoming a "child of God." According to this passage, we don't become children of God until we receive Christ and believe on His name. Most Christian evangelicals conclude from this that only Christians are God's children. How can we reconcile this with other teachings in the Bible that seem to indicate that God is the Father of everyone?

When the Apostle Paul addressed the pagan Athenians on Mars Hill he told them that they are all God's children/offspring. Read Acts 17:28-29: *"...for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man."*

When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, Jesus instructed them to refer to God as "our Father." The Fatherhood of God is something that Jesus seemingly took for granted, not something that one acquires as a special favor. In His parables, He pictured God as a loving Father who watches over His children, loves to give good gifts to them, and welcomes them back into the family when they repent and return home. This is beautifully pictured in the story of the Prodigal Son. When the son took his inheritance and left home, he did not cease to be his father's child. He falsely believed that he had sinned so greatly that there was no chance of restoration to his former status. When he returned home, he only hoped that his father would grant him a secondary status as a servant. Instead, he was welcomed back and restored to the place that he had in the beginning as his father's true son.

In my view, the Christian "new birth" should be viewed as a restoration of sorts, to our former status as children of God. How is it possible for a person to be at the same time a child of God and not a child of God? To understand, we need to differentiate between "objective truth" and "subjective experience." The objective truth of the matter is that we are all God's children and that God is never far from any of us, and that we all possess the divine spiritual nature, and are made from God's own spiritual DNA, so to speak. Subjectively speaking, however, in our human experience, we have lost touch with who we really are. Sometimes we feel that God does not even exist or that He is a million miles away, when all the time He never actually left us and He never ceased to love us.

When interpreting Scripture, we need to keep in mind that the exact terminology used in a particular passage can be misunderstood due to confusing semantics. Sometimes the salvation experience is viewed as an "adoption" process, sometimes as a "new birth," and at other times as a "homecoming." On the surface, these descriptions have contradictory elements. The objective

truth of the matter may be best understood by seeking interpretations that harmonize all of the relevant Scriptures.