

Session 3 — Can I Really Become Part of God's Family?

John 1:6–13 — Receiving the Light and Becoming God's Children

Main question: *Where do I belong, and can God truly accept me as one of His children?*

Big idea: John the Baptist came to point people toward Jesus, the true Light. Although many rejected Jesus, everyone who receives Him and trusts in His name receives a new identity as a child of God.

Memory verse: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.” (John 1:12 NASB95)

Session goals

- John the Baptist was a witness to the Light, not the Light himself.
- Jesus is the true Light who reveals God and exposes the human heart.
- Jesus came first to His own people, yet many did not receive Him.
- Receiving Jesus means personally trusting and welcoming Him.
- Becoming a child of God is a gift rather than a human achievement.
- Spiritual birth comes from God, not ancestry, effort or religious status.
- Believers receive a new identity and become members of God's covenant family.

Opening question: “Where do people usually look for their identity and sense of belonging?”

Brief recap of Session 2

The chiasmus of John 1: A chiasmus is a literary structure in which ideas appear in a mirrored pattern. The opening and closing ideas correspond, and the pattern directs attention toward the center.

A simplified outline of John 1:1–18 moves from:

- the eternal Word,
- to creation and light,
- to witness and human response,
- and then back through witness, revelation and the eternal Son.

John 1:12–13 stands near the center of this structure. Therefore, the prologue does not only answer, “Who is Jesus?” It also asks, “How will people respond to Him?” The central invitation is to receive the Word and become children of God.

Genesis 1 and John 1: Genesis begins with creation: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1, NASB95). John begins with the One through whom creation came: “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1, NASB95).

Both passages emphasize:

- the beginning,
- God's Word,
- creation,
- life,
- light,
- and darkness.

Genesis describes the beginning of the physical creation. John presents Jesus as the One who brings new creation and spiritual life.

Jesus as the Word: Jesus is the eternal λόγος *logos* (“Word”).

In the Old Testament, God's Word:

- creates,
- reveals,
- commands,
- judges,
- saves,
- and accomplishes God's purposes.

Jesus does not merely speak God's message. He perfectly embodies and reveals God's character, will and saving purpose.

Historical context

John the Baptist (Yokhanan the Immerser) was a Jewish prophet who ministered in the wilderness of Judea shortly before Jesus began His public ministry.

He called Israel to repentance and baptized people in the Jordan River. His ministry created widespread interest because many Jewish people were waiting for God to fulfill His promises of restoration.

John's clothing, wilderness setting and message recalled the prophets, especially Elijah. Malachi had promised that an Elijah-like messenger would prepare the people for the coming of the LORD.

John the Apostle's audience: Yokhanan wrote for readers who included both Jews and Gentiles.

Jewish readers would recognize:

- prophetic promises about a coming messenger,
- Israel's calling as God's son,
- the importance of ancestry,
- and the hope of national restoration.

Gentile readers would need to understand that entry into God's family did not depend on Jewish ancestry. Both groups needed to hear that spiritual birth comes from God through trusting Jesus.

Why distinguish the two Johns?: The writer repeatedly clarifies that John the Baptist was not the Messiah, the Light or the final object of faith.

John the Baptist had followers, and some continued identifying with his ministry even after Jesus' resurrection. Acts 18:24–28 and Acts 19:1–7 show that some people knew John's baptism but did not yet understand the completed work of Jesus.

Therefore, the Gospel makes the distinction clear:

- John was the witness.
- Jesus was the Light.
- John pointed away from himself.
- Jesus was the One in whom people must trust.

Textual context:

1. John 1:1–5 introduces the eternal Word as Creator, Life and Light. The Light exists eternally.
2. John 1:6–8 introduces a human witness sent to testify about that Light. A witness announces the Light. The Light then enters the world.
3. John 1:9–11 describes the tragedy of human rejection. Many reject the Light.
4. John 1:12–13 describes the promise given to those who receive Jesus. Some receive the Light. Those who receive Him become God's children.
5. John 1:14 then explains that the eternal Word became flesh. The Word becomes flesh and lives among humanity.

John 1:6–8 — A witness to the Light

John 1:6 — “There came a man sent from God”

John the Baptist did not appoint himself. God sent him for a specific purpose.

The phrase “sent from God” places John in the line of Israel's prophets. Like Moses, Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah, John received a commission from God.

Simple point: God prepares people to hear His message.

John's role was important, but it remained secondary. He was a servant pointing toward Someone greater.

John 1:7 — “He came as a witness”

The Greek word for witness is *μαρτυρία* *martyria* (“testimony” or “witness”). A witness does not invent the truth. A witness reports what he has seen and knows.

John's purpose was to testify about the Light so that people might believe through his testimony. The phrase “through him” means through John's witness, not through John as the source of salvation.

Simple point: God uses human testimony to direct people toward Jesus. A believer cannot create faith in another person. However, a believer can faithfully explain who Jesus is and what He has done.

John 1:8 — “He was not the Light”

John was a lamp, but Jesus was the Light.

Later, Jesus described John as “the lamp that was burning and was shining” (John 5:35, NASB95). A lamp carries light, but it does not produce the light by itself.

Simple point: Faithful witnesses point away from themselves and toward Jesus.

Teachers, pastors and ministry leaders may help people, but none should take the place that belongs to Christ.

Old Testament background for the witness

Isaiah 40:1–5 — Prepare the way of the LORD

Isaiah announced that a voice would cry in the wilderness: “Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness” (Isaiah 40:3, NASB95). In its original context, Isaiah spoke comfort to Israel and promised that God would restore His people after judgment and exile.

The Gospel applies this promise to John the Baptist. John prepared people for the arrival of Jesus.

The striking implication is that the One whose way John prepared was the LORD coming to rescue His people.

Simple point: John's ministry announced that Israel's God was acting to save and restore.

Malachi 3:1 — The messenger before the LORD

Malachi promised: “Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me” (Malachi 3:1, NASB95).

John fulfilled the messenger role. Jesus came as the Lord whom the people were called to seek.

Malachi 4:5–6 — An Elijah-like prophet

Malachi promised that Elijah would come before the great day of the LORD.

John was not Elijah returned through reincarnation. Rather, he came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17).

Like Elijah, John:

- confronted sin,
- called for repentance,
- challenged corrupt rulers,
- and turned people back toward covenant faithfulness.

John 1:9 — The true Light enters the world

“The true Light”: Jesus is not merely one light among many. He is the true Light.

In *John*, “true” often means ultimate, complete and genuine. Jesus is the reality toward which earlier signs and symbols pointed. Other sources may offer partial knowledge. Jesus reveals God fully and faithfully.

“Enlightens every man”: This phrase has been interpreted in several ways. At minimum, it teaches that the coming of Jesus brings divine light into the human world.

His light:

- reveals God,
- exposes sin,
- clarifies truth,
- offers life,
- and calls every kind of person to respond.

It does not mean that every person is automatically saved. The following verses show that many reject Him.

Simple point: Jesus brings enough light to make a real response necessary.

People cannot treat Jesus as irrelevant. His coming reveals both God’s character and the condition of the human heart.

Old Testament background for the Light

Genesis 1:3–5 — Light in the darkness

God’s first recorded command in creation is: “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3, NASB95).

The physical light of Genesis prepares readers for the spiritual meaning of light throughout Scripture.

John presents Jesus as the Light of the new creation.

Psalm 27:1 — The LORD is light and salvation

David declared: “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” (Psalm 27:1, NASB95).

Light is connected with God’s presence, rescue and protection.

Isaiah 9:1–2 — Light for people in darkness

Isaiah promised that people walking in darkness would see a great light.

Matthew 4:12–16 applies this passage to Jesus’ ministry in Galilee.

Isaiah 49:6 — Light to the nations

God’s Servant would become: “a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6, NASB95).

Jesus brings Israel’s promised salvation to all nations.

John 1:10 — The Creator was not recognized

“He was in the world”: The eternal Word entered the world He had made. The Creator entered His own creation.

This is one of the great mysteries of the Gospel: the One through whom the world was made lived among ordinary human beings.

“The world was made through Him”: This repeats the truth of John 1:3. Jesus is not part of creation. He is the divine agent through whom creation came into existence.

“The world did not know Him”: To “know” here means more than recognizing someone’s face. It means recognizing Jesus’ true identity and responding appropriately. The world depended upon Him for its existence yet failed to recognize its Creator.

Simple point: People can benefit from God’s gifts while failing to recognize God Himself. A person may enjoy life, beauty, relationships and creation without acknowledging the One who gives them.

John 1:11 — Rejected by His own

“He came to His own”: The first phrase can refer to Jesus coming to His own place or possessions—the world and particularly the land of Israel.

“Those who were His own”: The Messiah’s own people, native-born Israel.

Jesus came:

- as Israel’s Messiah,
- in fulfillment of Israel’s Scriptures,
- within Israel’s covenant story,
- and among the descendants of Abraham.

“Those who were His own did not receive Him”: This is a general description, not a statement that every Jewish person rejected Jesus.

Jesus’ first disciples, His mother, the apostles and thousands of early believers were Jewish.

The point is that Israel’s leadership and much of the nation did not recognize Him as Messiah. This rejection also reflects the wider human response to God.

Simple point: Religious familiarity does not guarantee genuine trust. People may know biblical language, attend worship and understand traditions without personally receiving Jesus.

Old Testament background for “His own”

Exodus 4:22 — Israel as God’s son

God told Pharaoh: “Israel is My son, My firstborn” (Exodus 4:22, NASB95).

Israel had a special covenant relationship with God. The nation was called to know Him, serve Him and represent Him among the nations.

Deuteronomy 7:6–8 — God’s treasured people

God chose Israel because of His love and covenant faithfulness, not because Israel was larger or more deserving than other nations.

Isaiah 1:2–3 — God’s people fail to recognize Him

Isaiah described the tragedy of covenant unfaithfulness: “An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master’s manger, but Israel does not know” (Isaiah 1:3, NASB95).

John 1:10–11 echoes this pattern. The Creator came among His creatures, and Israel’s Messiah came among His people, but many failed to recognize Him.

John 1:12 — Receiving Jesus

“But as many as received Him”: The word “but” introduces hope after the tragedy of rejection. Not everyone rejected Jesus. Some received Him. To receive Jesus means:

- to welcome Him for who He truly is,
- to accept His rightful authority,
- to trust His promises,
- and to depend upon Him for life.

Receiving Jesus is not merely inviting a religious idea into one’s life. It means entrusting oneself to the person of Jesus.

“Who believe in His name”: In the Bible, a person’s name represents identity, character, authority and reputation. Believing in Jesus’ name means trusting who He is:

- the eternal Word,
- the Son of God,
- the Messiah,
- the Creator,
- the Light,
- and the giver of life.

As discussed in Session 1, “believe” means more than acknowledging facts. It means relying upon Jesus and placing one’s confidence in Him.

Simple point: Receiving Jesus and believing in His name describe the same trusting response.

“He gave the right”: The Greek word ἐξουσία *exousia* can mean “right,” (NASB95, NIV) “authority,” “power” (KJV) or “privilege.” People do not seize membership in God’s family. Jesus grants it.

Here “power” does not primarily mean emotional strength or miraculous ability. It means the God-given authority or privilege to become His children.

“To become children of God”: John says “children,” not “sons,” because the emphasis is on spiritual birth and family identity. By nature, all people are God’s creatures. However, John uses “children of God” for those who receive covenant life through Jesus.

Simple point: The Gospel gives believers a new identity, not merely a new set of ideas.

Old Testament background for God’s children

Exodus 4:22–23 — Israel, God’s firstborn son

Israel was called God’s son because of God’s covenant choice and redemptive action. God rescued Israel from slavery and brought the nation into a special relationship with Himself.

Hosea 1:10 — “Sons of the living God”

Hosea announced judgment, but he also promised restoration: “It will be said to them, ‘You are the sons of the living God’” (Hosea 1:10, NASB95). God would restore those who had been alienated.

Paul applies this language to God’s calling of both Jews and Gentiles in Romans 9:24–26.

Hosea 11:1 — “Out of Egypt I called My son”

Hosea looked back to Israel’s exodus. Matthew 2:15 applies this passage to Jesus because Jesus represents Israel and fulfills Israel’s calling faithfully.

Through union with the faithful Son, believers enter God’s family.

John 1:13 — Born from God

John describes three ways this birth does not happen before stating its true source.

“Not of blood”: The KJV says “not of blood,” while many modern translations say “not of bloods” or express the idea as natural descent. The phrase refers to physical ancestry or family lineage.

No one becomes God’s child merely because:

- their parents believe,
- they come from a religious family,
- they belong to a particular ethnic group,
- or they inherit a religious tradition.

For John's Jewish audience, this challenged confidence in descent from Abraham. For Gentile readers, it meant they did not need Israelite ancestry to join God's family.

“Nor of the will of the flesh”: Spiritual birth does not result from normal human reproduction or natural human capacity. A person cannot produce spiritual life by self-improvement.

“Nor of the will of man”: Spiritual birth does not come through another person's decision, authority or planning. Parents cannot believe for their children.

Religious leaders cannot create spiritual life in their followers.

“But of God”: God is the source of new birth. This anticipates Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3: “You must be born again” (John 3:7, NASB95).

Simple point: Becoming God's child is a miracle of grace initiated by God and received through trust.

Old Testament background for new birth

The exact phrase “born again” is not prominent in the Old Testament, but the prophets repeatedly promised that God would transform His people from within.

Deuteronomy 30:6 — A circumcised heart

Moses promised that God would circumcise His people's hearts so they could love Him fully. The outward covenant sign pointed toward an inward work of God.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 — The new covenant

God promised to:

- make a new covenant,
- place His Torah within His people,
- write it on their hearts,
- forgive their iniquity,
- and remember their sin no more.

New-covenant life involves inward transformation based on God's Law and empowered by restored relationship.

Ezekiel 36:25–27 — A new heart and Spirit

God promised:

- cleansing from impurity,
- a new heart,
- a new spirit,
- the removal of the heart of stone,
- and the presence of His Spirit.

John's teaching about birth from God develops this prophetic hope. God does not merely command people to act differently. He gives them new life so they can walk with Him.

Parallel passage: Romans 8:14–17: Paul explains that those led by God's Spirit are sons and children of God.

Simple points:

- God does not return believers to slavery and fear.
- The Spirit enables believers to cry, “Abba! Father!”
- The Spirit confirms that believers belong to God.
- God's children are also heirs.
- Belonging to God includes both present assurance and future hope.

“Abba” is an Aramaic family term used in prayer. It expresses genuine closeness, although modern scholarship cautions against earlier teachings that it is akin to the English child expression “Daddy.”

OK, what now?

People often live as though they must earn God's acceptance. Paul teaches that believers approach God as adopted children, not terrified slaves.

Parallel passage: Galatians 3:26–29

Simple points:

- People become children of God through faith in Messiah Jesus.
- Baptism publicly identifies believers with Messiah.
- Ethnic, social and gender distinctions do not determine access to God.
- All believers belong to Messiah.
- Those who belong to Messiah share in the promises given to Abraham.

Paul does not teach that all personal distinctions disappear. Rather, none of these distinctions gives one group superior access to salvation or family membership.

Parallel passage: Galatians 4:4–7

Simple points:

- God sent His Son at the appointed time.
- Jesus was born under the Torah.
- He redeemed those under condemnation.
- Believers receive adoption as sons.
- God sends the Spirit of His Son into their hearts.

- Believers are no longer slaves but children and heirs.

The term “sons” in this legal context emphasizes inheritance rights. In the ancient world, sons normally held the recognized position of heirs. Paul applies this full inheritance status to every believer, both male and female.

Parallel passage: 1 Peter 1:22–25

Simple points

- New birth produces sincere love for other believers.
- Believers are born through imperishable seed.
- Human life and glory fade like grass.
- God’s Word remains forever.
- The message of the Gospel produces enduring life.

This passage connects new birth with the enduring Word of God. The new life God gives does not rest on temporary human strength.

Parallel passage: 1 John 3:1–3

Simple points

- Becoming God’s child displays the greatness of His love.
- The world may not understand believers because it did not recognize Jesus.
- Believers are already God’s children.
- Their future condition has not yet been fully revealed.
- The hope of seeing Jesus produces a desire for purity.

John joins present identity with future transformation.

A believer does not obey in order to earn sonship. A believer seeks holiness because God has already brought that person into His family.

Key words

- **Witness:** Greek μαρτυρία *martyria*, (“testimony”). A witness gives truthful evidence about someone or something. John the Baptist’s role was to direct attention toward Jesus.
- **Light:** Greek φῶς *phōs* (“light”). Light represents God’s revelation, holiness, truth, life and salvation. Jesus does not merely carry light. He is the true Light.
- **World:** Greek κόσμος *kosmos* (“world”). John uses this word in several ways: the created world, the human race, or humanity organized in resistance to God. The immediate context determines the emphasis.
- **Receive:** Greek λαμβάνω *lambanō* (“receive,” “take” or “welcome”). Here it describes welcoming Jesus with trust rather than rejecting Him.
- **Believe:** Greek πιστεύω (*pisteuō*, “believe,” “trust” or “rely upon”). Biblical belief is active reliance on Jesus, not mere intellectual acknowledgment.
- **Name:** Greek ὄνομα *onoma* (“name”)
- A name represents the person’s identity, character and authority.
- **Children:** Greek: τέκνα *tekna* (“children”). The term emphasizes birth, relationship and family identity.
- **Born:** Greek: γεννάω *gennaō* (“give birth to” or “beget”). John uses birth as a picture of life that originates from God rather than human effort.

Main truths

- **Jesus is the Light, and His followers are witnesses:** Believers should point people toward Jesus rather than drawing attention to themselves.
- **People respond to Jesus differently:** Some reject Him. Others receive Him. Exposure to biblical truth does not automatically produce trust.
- **Religious background cannot create spiritual life:** Family heritage, attendance of services and religious education may be valuable, but none can replace personal trust in Jesus.
- **Salvation gives a new identity:** A believer is not merely forgiven. That person becomes a member of God’s family.
- **New birth comes from God:** Spiritual life cannot be manufactured through willpower, ancestry or human authority.
- **God’s family includes Jews and Gentiles:** Everyone who receives Jesus enters the family through the same trusting response.

Everyday-life connections

- **Fear of rejection:** People may fear that God will reject them because others have rejected them. John 1:12 teaches that Jesus grants family membership to everyone who receives Him.

- **Pressure to prove personal worth:** Modern life often teaches people to build identity through performance, appearance, success or approval. The Gospel gives an identity that is received rather than achieved.
- **Dependence on family background:** Some people assume they belong to God because their parents or grandparents believed. Others assume they cannot belong because they lacked a religious upbringing. John corrects both assumptions. New birth comes from God.
- **Loneliness:** A believer enters a new family and receives God as Father. This does not eliminate every experience of loneliness, but it gives a permanent place of belonging.
- **Fear of God:** Romans 8 teaches that believers need not approach God with the fear of slaves awaiting punishment. They may approach Him as children who trust their Father.

Discussion questions

Observation

1. What words or ideas are repeated in John 1:6–13?
2. How does John distinguish John the Baptist from Jesus?
3. What different responses to the Light appear in the passage?
4. What does Jesus give those who receive Him?
5. According to verse 13, where does new birth come from?

Understanding

1. Why was John the Baptist called a witness rather than the Light?
2. What does it mean that Jesus came to “His own”?
3. Why does John emphasize that many did not recognize or receive Jesus?
4. How are “receiving” Jesus and “believing in His name” connected?
5. What does “His name” tell us about the object of biblical faith?
6. Why can ancestry or religious background not make someone a child of God?
7. How does John’s teaching fulfill the promises of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36?

Application

1. What has most shaped your identity: family, work, failure, success, relationships or faith?
2. Do you usually approach God as a loving Father, a distant authority or an angry judge?
3. Have you relied on religious knowledge without personally trusting Jesus?
4. In what area are you still trying to earn God’s acceptance?
5. How would your choices change if you consistently remembered that you belong to God?
6. Who helped point you toward Jesus without drawing attention to themselves?
7. How can your words and actions serve as a witness to the Light this week?
8. Is there a past rejection that still makes it difficult for you to receive God’s love?
9. How should being members of one spiritual family affect the way believers treat one another?
10. What is one false label about yourself that must give way to the identity “child of God”?

Optional group exercise

Give each participant two pieces of paper. On the first, ask them to complete: “I often define myself by...”

Examples might include:

- my job,
- my past,
- my family,
- my mistakes,
- my achievements,
- my reputation,
- or other people’s opinions.

On the second, ask them to write: “Through trusting Jesus, God gives me the right to become His child.”

Invite participants to keep the second statement somewhere they will see it during the week.

Prayer focus

- Thank God for sending witnesses who point people toward Jesus.
- Confess the tendency to build identity on achievement, ancestry or approval.
- Thank God that family membership is granted through Jesus.
- Ask God to deepen trust in Jesus.
- Pray for assurance that believers truly belong to Him.
- Ask for courage to serve as faithful witnesses without drawing attention away from Christ.

Practical action for the week

- Each day, read John 1:12–13 aloud.
- Then pray: “Father, help me live today as someone who belongs to You. Teach me to trust Jesus and to point others toward His light.”
- Also identify one person who may feel rejected, overlooked or alone. Show that person practical kindness without demanding anything in return.

Looking ahead

The next session studies John 1:14–18 and asks: “What is God really like?”

The eternal Word did not remain distant. He became flesh and lived among humanity. Jesus reveals God’s glory and shows how grace and truth belong together.