

## !! EXCLAMATION POINTS !!

Yes, this is a meditation about the punctuation marks we use to emphasize a sentence, word or thought that excites us. I consider myself to be an exclamation point kind of person – that is, I use a lot of them in my writing, even using two of them at times for special emphasis. My cousin Louise, who writes long letters to me every week, frequently uses 7 or 8 of them to express what is in her heart! I get the point!

How well I remember the role that exclamation points played in my spiritual life! Early in my Christian journey I was reading the King James version of the Bible. Though its language was lofty and outdated, I preferred it to other versions I occasionally read. All that changed in 1972 when a friend gave me a copy of the freshly published New International Version of the New Testament, wanting to know what I thought of it. Briefly stated, I loved it! The NIV committee, who had made their translation from the original languages, had been careful to preserve the dignity of the Bible while modernizing the text. When I noticed that the NIV also used exclamation points, my cup of joy overflowed! How I related to it, making it my new main Bible!

Here is an example from one of my favorite verses. It consists of two sentences, each with an exclamation point at the end. I can't imagine them any other way!

1 John 3:1 – *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God [exclamation point]! And that is what we are [exclamation point]!*

Do you agree with me that the appropriate punctuation was used for these thoughts?

Again, *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 love of God is a vast, unending subject that had John in awe. He was writing to those who had believed that God SO loved the world that he gave his one and only Son Jesus, to those who, like John, were part of God's faith family, hoping they would share his awe. We could paraphrase 1 John 3:1 like this: God our heavenly Father really, REALLY loves us, generously drenching us with love, even calling us his children [exclamation point]!

While I was thinking about these things, a new idea came to my mind. I wondered what would happen if we saw each other as exclamation points, dearly loved by God and important to us. When I discussed this idea with my son George, he said: "That is how God sees us." I readily agreed, for I had also been meditating on this truth from Romans 8 – *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*

If God does not condemn his children, why are we so quick to condemn each other? Would that change if we saw ourselves and each other as exclamation points? Let's try this as an experiment and see what happens! Each of us is important to and loved by God, a good thought with which to begin our challenge! Enjoy! Amen.