

Lent Course 2016 – I John 3

John, (there are 4 representations of John in this church.) “the apostle of love” = *agape*. Not sexual love, nor brotherly love but self-giving unselfish love translated as “charity” in the older versions of scripture. The same thought in the O.T. is in the Hebrew word “*hesed*” translated as “steadfast love” or “loving kindness”. “*Do justly, love mercy (hesed) and walk humbly with your God*”. Micah 6 v.8

John is the “intense apostle” in his demand for love of the brethren and condemnation of heresy. As was said last week, John’s language comes over as being too strong, and his comments on leaving and staying, too definite.

Outline of Chapter 3 – Fellowship's Characteristics

Verses 1 – 2:- We are God's children now

Verses 3 – 18:- The characteristics of a child of God – verses 3 – 9 in Righteousness

verses 10 – 18 in love

Verses 19 – 24:- The confidence of a child of God

We begin with the closing words from last week:-

“So to the last 2 verses rounding off chapter 2

V 29 – we can be confident that we belong – born of God and His forever.

V 28 IS THIS NOT WHAT WE WANT? It is a truly glorious position to be in during life and when facing death”

Chapter 3 The closing words of Chapter 2 are the key to Chapter 3. Everything follows from the fact that “*we are God's children now*” (verse 2). Compare with the Gospel of John 1 verse 12. “*But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God*”. And the words of Our Lord Himself in John 20 verse 17 “*. . . go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*”

“Born of Him” – “We are God's children now”

This principle, that - “*you are not your own, you were bought with a price.*” 1 Corinthians 6, v.v20 is common to all the writers of the New Testament scriptures. The foundation of this thinking is way back in the book of Exodus, chapter 19 and verses 5 – 6; God says “*. . . for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*”. c.f. Titus chapter 2, verse 14 and 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 9

“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”. Romans chapter 5; verse 8. and - *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Romans 6, verse 23

We now belong to God in Christ! “*. . . .We have been united with Him in a death like His, we will be united with Him in a resurrection like His*”. (Romans chapter 6; verse 5). We are then “*dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*” (Romans chapter 6; verse 11)

c.f. Romans chapter 12, verses 1 – 2 and Ephesians chapter 4, verse 1.

This attitude, this way of looking at life, is totally alien to post-modern thinking. Totally alien to a world of 'selfies' and the selfish outlook that goes with it.

But, this attitude is where we as Christians must begin.

What 'rights' can we demand? The 'right' to sit at the top table? - No 'right' at all! - But what a privilege to be called to the 'Marriage Supper of the Lamb', to sit and eat in the kingdom of God, of which Holy Communion is but a foretaste.

The 'right' to claim a robe of righteousness - a 'Wedding Garment'? - No 'right' at all, but what a privilege!

The 'right' of eternal life in the paradise of God? - No 'right' at all, but what a privilege to be able to "*claim the crown through Christ my own*"

(a line from Charles Wesley's hymn "*And can it be, that I should gain . . .*")

All these things are ours 'in Christ'. *Once we were no people, but now we are God's people, once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy.* (1 Peter chapter 2; verse 10.)

- Because God has freely done this for us it follows that we "are not our own" we "were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6 v.20) - **therefore** everything else follows. c.f. Romans 12, v.1. Galatians 5, v.1. Ephesians 5, v.1. The word "therefore" is even implied in Exodus 20, the 10 Commandments: "*I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage*" therefore "*thou shalt have no other gods but Me*"

It may be easier to follow the argument in this 3rd chapter of the 1st Epistle of John, if we tabulate the characteristics of a child of God and their consequences:-

1. Righteousness. 3: 3 – 9

Characteristics

- a. Purifies himself as He is pure (3)
- b. Does not sin as a prevailing habit (6)
- c. Does righteousness (7)
- d. Does not do sin (8)
- e. Does not practice sin (9)
- f. Cannot sin (9)

Consequences

- a. Is not lawless (4, 5)
- b. Proves abiding and in knowledge of Him (6)
- c. Is righteous and imitates Christ (7)
- d. Is not of the devil and has entered into the victory Christ gives (8)
- e. Is begotten of God (9)
- f. Proves being born of God (9)

2. Love. 3: 10 – 18

Characteristics

- a. Brother love (10)
- b. Unlike Cain (11, 12)
- c. Hated by world (13) c.f. John 15 v.18
- d. Brother love (14)
- e. No hate (15)
- f. Lays down life for brethren (16)
- g. Shares goods (17, 18)

Consequences

- a. Origin is of God (10)
- b. Will not lead to murder (11, 12)
- c. Not to be surprised (13)
- d. Proof of having passed from death to life (15)
- e. Not a murderer and has life (15)
- f. Knows love in its essence (16)
- g. Love of God dwells in him (17, 18)

Verses 19 – 24: The confidence of a child of God

Verse 19 “By this” - John is referring again to his main theme of “Love for the brethren”. The New Commandment of the Lord Jesus was to love. So often if we examine our hearts we know that we have fallen short of what God requires.

Verse 20 is an encouragement to believers – God is greater than our hearts! If we have forgiveness in Him then we can have total confidence before our God our Father.

Verse 22 – The secret of answered prayer.

Verse 23 is a reiteration of the commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ – believe in His Name and love one another.

Verse 24, the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer gives us the assurance and confidence we need to live for Him. The Holy Spirit “*bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*”. Romans 8, v. 16. (look up and read!)

How can we, or should we, be responsible for each other?

John 13 vv. 3 – 15 – How practical is “washing one another's feet”? What exactly did Jesus mean by that anyway?

Was it just an expression of the need for humility? Or was it a symbol of something deeper, something spiritual? If we are cleansed by baptism into Christ, then the part of us (our “feet”) that is in contact with the world, may need continual cleansing. Christianity is not a religion of individuals! It is a fellowship, with God and with each other. Can we then as an act of fellowship, wash one another's spiritual feet in prayer, confession and reconciliation?

1 John chapter 3: Questions for groups

- 1] In our individualistic “me” generation, how can we promote Christian community?
- 2] Looking at the characteristics of a “Child of God”, how far are we called to be counter cultural?
- 3] After week 1 we were asked: *If fellowship is not “tea and cucumber sandwiches at the back of church” what is it? Do you believe that (your church's name) Church is a true fellowship according to 1 John?*
 - a) What is the cement of fellowship across (*your*) congregations and b) how could your church build on it?