

Righteousness and Love.

1 John 3

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There is variety in divine love as expressed in the scriptures. In John 3 we have God's love to the world, shown in the gift of His only begotten Son; in Eph. 5 Christ's love to the church, for which He gave Himself; and in 1 John 3 the Father's love to His children begotten of Him. And there is variety also in the scriptures in the truth concerning ourselves: in the epistles of Paul we are members of Christ's body, linked to Him Who is upon the throne; in Peter's epistles we are strangers and pilgrims passing through the world to our inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading; while in John's inspired writings we are children of God, brought into relationship with Him. This is what is so sweetly expressed here, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God." We are not yet displayed as such to the world; for that we wait. It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we *know* what we shall be, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Wondrous thought! "Predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son."

Meanwhile we are unknown by the world, even as He was unknown. We wait for the display of our sonship, but not for the consciousness of it. "Now are we children of God," of this we are assured. Faith can always say, "we know;" faith deals with divine certainties. Conformity as seeing Him reminds one of 2 Cor. 3: 18, "we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

This however is moral, and now we find His image stamped upon us in measure as we gaze upon Him there in glory. 1 John 3: 2 is future, goes beyond the moral aspect, and includes the body, for this shall be changed and fashioned like unto His own body of glory. And this when we see Him.

Now our apostle begins to be practical, and what more practical epistle than this? "Every one that hath this hope on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." Practical exhortations follow in a very similar way in chaps. 1 and 2. First, we are told that the Eternal Life which was with the Father has been manifested unto us, and we are called unto fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, and this in the light, even as God is in the light. Then, after the added word as to the provision grace has made in case of sin, the Spirit begins to be practical, and says, "Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." So here, we are told of our hope, and then are reminded of the purity that becomes us in view of it. How can I hold the hope without purifying myself? Is it possible to cherish the thought that I am soon to be like Him without having the desire to be like Him morally in measure now? Remark, Christ is the standard of purity, even as He is pure. Christ is always God's standard; God sets no other before His saints. In chap. 2 we are to walk *even as* He walked. In chap. 3: 16 His is the standard of love, and here He is the standard of purity. In fact, if I want to know how to display the divine nature of which I am a partaker, I must look at Him in Whom it is perfectly seen.

And if I purify myself even as He is pure, I must not practise sin, and sin is here presented in a solemn light, it is lawlessness.* What a serious consideration for the Christian! We are sanctified to obedience we are called to do the will of God, but when we sin, we commit lawlessness, that is, we work out our own will. Moreover, two important reasons are given why we should not sin. "He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him is no sin." If I really believe that my sins caused His

manifestation and death, I shall hate sin, and, on the other hand, knowing that sin is contrary to His nature (and we are partakers of that nature), I see the inconsistency of such a course. It is not he that professes, but he that practises, that is really born of God. "Little children, let no one deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous." Righteousness practical righteousness, is what God expects to see displayed in those who profess to be born of Him. "If ye know that He is righteous, yet know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him." It is only by actions that we demonstrate to which family we belong: "in this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil." The Lord ruled in John 8 that we are the children of him whose works we do. The Jews in that chapter boasted that they had Abraham to their father; but the Lord, while admitting them to be Abraham's seed, disowned them as children of the man who rejoiced to see His day and who saw it and was glad. "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham; and subsequently, He plainly said, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do."

*It is generally accepted that the A. V. is very faulty on ver. 4, and should run "and sin is lawlessness."

But a second text is added in our chapter. "He that doeth not righteousness is not of God, *neither he that loveth not his brother.*" Here we get a rapid transition from righteousness to love. Is it possible we may be mistaken as to the first test? We may, because of our imperfect discernment, mistake at times moral uprightness for the righteousness which is the result of being born of God; but we can scarcely err as to love. Find a man merely morally upright, and does he love the brethren?

Far from it. But the man born of God does; he that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him. Love becomes a proof to others (vers. 10), and a proof to myself (ver. 9). To what extent are we to love? "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren", and this because they are brethren. Yet lest we get merely sentimental in our expressions, the apostle adds, "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, shut up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in Him?" For we may never have opportunity to demonstrate our love by the laying down of life, but in the other way opportunity occurs every day. Do we embrace it? (Gal. 2: 10). It is striking to observe how love to the brethren and hatred from the world are connected here. "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you, etc." The same thing is observed in the Lord's own teaching in John 15. In ver. 17 He commands His own to love one another, and proceeds in ver. 18, to speak of hatred from the outside world. All the love we find in the present world is that which we show the one to the other. From the world which gave the Lord only a cross, we expect nothing but hatred, rejection, and scorn; in the holy circle of the family of God we expect to find love, and that after a divine pattern. The order however is divine, righteousness first, then love. W. W. F.