

Truth for Today

The Bible explained

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Life in the family of God - Family with the Son

Last week we began a new series entitled, 'Life in the family of God'. It's a brief outline of John's first epistle and I trust it will interest you sufficiently so that you will further study this short, but vital book of the Bible. John was an old man when he wrote this epistle, the last living Apostle of Jesus Christ! He had witnessed the surge of opposition against Christianity and this fatherly epistle is for the encouragement and assurance of the family of God. How much poorer we would have been had John not been spared to write this letter which is absolutely relevant for us in our present day and generation when there are so many who would deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who came as a man into the world.

The epistle can be divided into two main sections:

1. The family with the Father (1 John 1:1-3:24); and
2. The family and the world (1 John 4:1-5:21).

It may be helpful to say at the very start that when John contrasts the Father and the world, he is not meaning the created earth on which we live but rather the 'world of people'. In using the expression 'the world', time and again, John is speaking about the systems of men which are so often in opposition to God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Our four talks are entitled, Life in the family of God. I wonder if I should just stop for a moment and ask you directly, are you in the family of God? I trust you can say with assurance, the assurance of the Scriptures, that you are in the family of God. John reminds us in his Gospel that *"He [that is Jesus] came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he the power [or authority] to become the children of God"* (see John 1:11-12).

Well, last week we began with the first talk which looked at 1 John 1 and was titled, "Family with the Father". Our talk today which will be a look at 1 John 2 is titled, "Family with the Son". The third talk will be titled, "Children in the family" and will be a look at 1 John 3. These three talks cover the first part of the epistle. The final talk will look at both 1 John 4 and 1 John 5, and under the title of "Confidence and assurance in the family" will consider our present experience as Christians in an increasingly hostile world. We're not surprised that the world hates Christians, but it does in an irrational way. Christians, who generally are kind and good people, are often despised and even hated. Why? Jesus told His disciples, *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you"* (see John 15:18-19).

Our chapter begins, *"My little children"*, (1 John 2:1) and with what affection the aged Apostle (*"whom Jesus loved"* see John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7 21:20) writes to his children in the faith. This term, *"little children"* encompasses all the believers in the family of God regardless of age or maturity. Further down in the chapter we get a different word used on two occasions when the Apostle addresses the very young in the faith as "little children" or "bairns". This special word is used in 1 John 2:13 (where it is in contrast to the fathers and the young men) and in 1 John 2:18 where John addresses the very young in the faith especially.

Although 1 John 2:18-27 are particularly addressed to the babes in Christ, John again uses the general word for all children in 1 John 2:28 to show that no matter how long we have been on the Christian pathway, we all need to heed the lessons of what was being said to the youngest believers. I suppose we need to say that there are many Christians who have been saved for many years but because they have not applied themselves to the study of the Scriptures, they remain babes. As we'll see in 1 John 2, in the family of God there should be growth and development. First babes, then young men and finally fathers. (Of course this does not exclude sisters, we could just as easily say babes, young women and mothers). How we need to pray for ourselves and for our Christian friends that there might be spiritual growth and development in our lives! Yes, we need to pray for those who are ill, and bereaved, and troubled by one thing or another, but chiefly our prayers should be that as children of God, we *"grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"* (see 2 Peter 3:18).

As children, dear children, we have been brought into the family of God. Does that not thrill you! We have eternal life, bringing us into the fellowship of the Father and of the Son, and this is made a reality to us by the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer. The knowledge of God as our Father, and of the Son, Jesus Christ, as our Saviour and Lord is the present blessing of each child of God in this present dispensation, the day of God's grace or the Spirit's day when He, the Holy Spirit, is calling out a people for Christ from the world who rejected and crucified Him.

But we are not sinless. 1 John 1 closes with the warning that, *"If we say we have not sinned, we make him (that is God) a liar, and his word is not in us"* (1 John 1:10). And yet John writes "these things" that we might not sin! (1 John 2:1) So although we cannot, and never will be able to, claim that we are sinless, it is expected of us (as children of God), not to sin habitually. This is what John means as he goes on to explain that if we do sin, *"we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"* (1 John 2:1). The fellowship of God who "is light" and who also is *"in the light"* demands holiness. There cannot be any enjoyment of this divine fellowship if we persist in habitual sinning. However, when we fail and a sin is committed, we have an Advocate - who takes up our case, and fellowship with our God is restored, but this should never give us cause to live careless sinful lives.

John tells us that, as the children of God in His family, we have an advocate with the Father - who is none other than *"Jesus Christ the righteous"* (See 1 John 2:1). In a moment, we will return to this tremendous thought and see how blessed we are as the children of God. But John also brings before us the fact that the One who is our Advocate with the Father, is also the propitiation for our sins. We will come back to this thought, too, and consider what that means. Also in 1 John 2:8, the Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of as *"the true light"* who now *"shineth."* How could we ever be overcomers if we didn't have His light to walk in! Finally, in his address to the little children, John brings before them (and us) the Christ, the One who is the Son. What we think of Christ is indeed the test! The Lord asked His disciples, *"But whom say ye that I am?"*, and by Divine revelation Peter replied, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (see Matthew 16:15-16). Perhaps these four ways in which our Lord is brought before us in this second chapter will serve as an outline for the remainder of our study together.

Let us now think about the advocate and who He is! The word John uses here is the same Greek word that the Lord Jesus used when He spoke to His disciples about the coming *"Comforter"*, the Holy Spirit (see John 14:16-17). The word, I understand, is *'paraklētōs'* and means - "one called alongside to help". Listen to the tender words of Jesus when He says to His disciples, *"Let not your heart be troubled ..."* (John 14:1). Although He was going away, (leaving this world by way of the cross, for that is the true meaning and force of His thrice repeated words in John's Gospel - "lifted up") the Holy Spirit was coming as the Comforter. And we shouldn't miss the fact that the Lord says that He (the Holy Spirit) would be "another" Comforter (that is another of the same kind as He Himself had been to them) and that He would abide with them for ever. Well might we say with the Apostle Paul, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings ..."* (see Ephesians 1:3).

How blessed indeed! We have a divine person (the Holy Spirit) indwelling us down here as our Comforter, Helper and Advocate and a Divine Person (the Lord Jesus Christ) in heaven, representing us before the Father, as our comforter, helper and advocate. What provision God has made for His dear children!

John was there, at Bethany, and with the other disciples saw Christ ascending into heaven with His hands outstretched in blessing (see Luke 24:50-52). He wants us to lay hold on this glorious fact, that there is a Man in heaven (Christ Jesus) who takes up our cause when we sin and restores the fellowship we have with our Father. He is not an advocate for the unsaved person in the world! He is an Advocate for the child of God, those who by birth have a relationship with the Father.

Before we leave this wonderful subject, let us also note that our Advocate is *"Jesus Christ, the righteous"*. Perhaps we may have thought that John would have emphasised His care or His love or His compassion, but why His righteousness? Well *"God is light, and in him is no darkness at all"* (see 1 John 1:5). Sadly, I don't think that we could say that there is absolute righteousness in every human court room, with judges, lawyers and advocates often bargaining to achieve the best possible outcome for their particular position. Our heavenly Advocate is righteous! The matter of our sins is raised before a holy God and dealt with in absolute righteousness. The question of our sins being righteously dealt with gives us great confidence that they are forgiven - forever! No re-trials!!

Now in 1 John 2:2, John brings before us the fact that the One who is the advocate for the children of God when they sin, is also the propitiation for their sins. But more than that, He is the propitiation for the whole world. What does this mean? If we look carefully in our Bibles, I think we get this word 'propitiation' mentioned six times in the New Testament. Although it's not found in the Old Testament, the word atonement has a similar meaning.

I will give you the references to assist you in your further study of propitiation. It's always good to compare Scripture with Scripture to help us understand the truth of God. We have propitiation mentioned twice here in John's epistle, in 1 John 2:2 and in 1 John 4:10. Twice it is mentioned in Hebrews, in Hebrews 2:17 where the word is translated "reconciliation" in the King James Version, and in Hebrews 9:5 where the word is translated "mercy-seat" in the King

James Version. Very interestingly we find it in Luke's Gospel in the parable Jesus told about the Pharisee and the publican who went up into the temple to pray (see Luke 8:9-14). You'll remember the Pharisee had lofty thoughts concerning himself and even belittled the publican in his prayer. On the other hand, the publican wouldn't so much as look heavenwards but smote his breast and said, "*God be merciful to me a sinner*" (Luke 8:13). The publican was intelligent as to the "mercy-seat" and the fact that God was propitiated when the blood was sprinkled on it by the high priest, thus providing atonement for the people.

The last reference I can find is in Romans 3:25. In the Roman epistle, Paul sets out the teaching of the Gospel of the grace of God in an orderly way. He begins by showing that all (whether Gentile or Jew) are guilty before God and in Romans 3:23 we read emphatically, "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*" However, the Gospel is 'good news' and there is justification and redemption available in Christ Jesus, "*Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood...*" (Romans 3:25).

Perhaps the easiest way to think of propitiation is what Jesus Christ's sacrificial death and the shedding of His blood means to God, a holy God who cannot look upon sin. How is it possible for a holy God to forgive sins which are an offence to Him? The answer, of course, is because of the cross of Calvary. There at the cross, His Son offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice and as a result God is propitiated and can freely forgive all who look to Jesus for salvation. Please don't confuse 'propitiation' and 'substitution'. We must be very careful to present a faithful Gospel at all times! The good news is that because Jesus died and shed His blood, all can be saved. However, only those who ask for His forgiveness can have the salvation God offers. Sadly although all can be saved - not all are saved. We read a solemn warning in Hebrews 2:3, "*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...?*" and the answer is we will **not** escape. Jesus said, "*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him*", John 3:36.

Now let us think for a moment about the Lord Jesus as "*the true light*" as He is described in 1 John 2:8. Life, light and love are characteristic words of John to describe God and those who are His children. In John 8:12 Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*" Here and elsewhere light is contrasted with darkness, and although it is certainly true in the natural sphere that light dispels darkness, we need to understand that the Lord is speaking of spiritual and moral darkness. We read, "*In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not*" (John 1:4-5). The Queen quoted from these verses in her Christmas message just a few weeks ago. How we thank God for a monarch who quotes from the Bible and we believe knows personally the One of whom the Bible speaks as her Saviour.

In the face of our Lord Jesus Christ shone all the glory of God. He was "*the brightness of God's glory, the express image of His person*" (Hebrews 1:3). He was the revelation to His own of the Father; to Philip He said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Indeed there is no greater revelation of God than the revelation we have in the Son - our Lord Jesus Christ.

You can see just how closely connected the light of God is with the life of God. If we claim to have divine life as children of God, then there needs to be evidence in the lives we live. Jesus said, "*As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world*" (John 9:5) but He also said to His disciples, "*Ye are the light of the world*" and furthermore, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (see Matthew 5:14-16). And so the point is that we are to walk, "even as he walked". The light of God which shone in Christ when He was in the world should now be seen shining out of our lives. Just as the moon reflects the sun's light in the darkness - so the church should reflect the light of Christ, the Son. This is summed up beautifully in the children's hymn:

*Jesus bids us shine with a clear, pure light,
Like a little candle burning in the night.
In this world of darkness, so we must shine -
You in your small corner, and I in mine.*

Susan B Warner (1819-1885)

And so finally in the second part of the chapter, 1 John 2:12-29, we have the aged Apostle's address to those who were at different stages in the Christian experience. The fathers who have "*known him that is from the beginning*", (1 John 2:13) the young men who have "*overcome the wicked one*" (1 John 2:13) and the babes or bairns who have "*known the Father*" (1 John 2:13).

Clearly, there is nothing greater than the knowledge of Him "*who was from the beginning*" and that takes us back to 1 John 1:1. The knowledge of Christ is what every Christian should be looking to gain. In Philippians 3:-14, Paul says, "*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ... that I may know him...*". Those who were

mature in the faith would not be shaken in their thoughts of Christ despite what was being taught in the schools of men. I suppose some of those fathers to whom John writes may well have had living memories of Jesus of Nazareth, but certainly all were sure as to who He is!

John warns us, *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world”* (1 John 2:15). It has been said, that the world is opposed to the Father; that the devil is opposed to Christ; and that the flesh is opposed to the Spirit. If we learn that in our Christian experience, we will be overcomers!

It is interesting that John writes far more to the babes than to the young men or the fathers. What a lesson for any who seek to teach and pastor the flock of God. The young and immature believers are the most vulnerable to Satan's lies and yet the babes have an “unction” or “anointing” from the Holy One (as we read in 1 John 2:20) knowing instinctively the Father and have the capacity to know “all things”. The youngest child in God's family has the potential to understand the things of God, which the natural man cannot grasp as they are spiritually discerned.

Like Peter, our desire is that you *“grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (see 2 Peter 3:18).

May God bless you all.

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