

1 John 3:1-12 (William Woldridge Fereday) 140950

Righteousness: March 2013, Love and Righteousness (3:1-12)

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 Ephesians 5, Christ's love to the church, for which He gave Himself; in 1 John 3, the Father's love to His children begotten of Him. 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: "See what love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God" (1 John 3:1 JND). We are not yet displayed as such to the world; for that we wait. It does 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.

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 us of 2 Corinthians 3:18: "We all, looking on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit" (JND).

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

Now John begins to be practical. "Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). We are told that the eternal life which was with the Father has been manifested unto us. 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 we 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? Notice that 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 chapter 2 we are to walk even as He walked. In chapter 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.

Proof of Purity by Practice

If I purify myself even as He is pure, I must not practice 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 and 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 practices that is really born of God. "Little children, let no one deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous" (1 John 3:7). Practical righteousness is what God expects to see displayed in those who profess to be 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" (John 8:39,44).

But a second test 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. We may find a man merely morally upright, but does he love the brethren? The man born of God does: "Every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him" (1 John 5:1). 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, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in Him?" (1 John 3:17). We may never have opportunity to demonstrate our love by the laying down of life, but in the other way opportunity occurs every day.

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." The same thing is observed in the Lord's own teaching in John 15. In verse 17 He commands His own to love one another, and He proceeds in verse 18 to speak of hatred from the outside world. All the love we find in the present world is that which we show to one another. 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, and then love.

