

# 1 John 2.20-29 & 3.1-3

## The Family of God [2.12-27]

Whilst *warning* the spiritual infants in God's family of the dangers of the 'seducers' (v.26), John also describes the spiritual resources God has provided to *resist* them.<sup>1</sup>

- **Anointing. v.20:** Whilst the spirit of the anti-anointed one (antichrist) was abroad in the world (v.18), the believers had received a true anointing from Christ, the Holy One (cf. Mark 1.24; Acts 2.27; 3.14). The word 'unction' (translated 'anointing', v.27) refers to the *effect* of anointing with lotion or oil and speaks of the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10.38; 2 Corinthians 1.21-22). Apparently, false teachers claimed a special anointing with oil as an initiation rite into their secret cults. This brought a person into the 'illuminati' (those who had the light). But these believers needed no anointing from any heretic – they had the illumination of the Spirit. Thus they 'knew (*oida*) all things'. This does not, of course, suggest they were *omniscient*, but that they possessed a spiritual *scent*. They were able to recognise error; their spiritual *taste* rejecting what was anti-truth and anti-Christ (EW Rogers). In addition, the indwelling Spirit gives every believer the capacity and potential to grasp the deepest of spiritual truth as contained in the word of God. *MacDonald: The Christian can see more on his knees than the worldling can see on his tiptoes.* Another reading is 'you all know it' indicating they all knew God's truth, as having been anointed by the Spirit. There is therefore no need to depend on the false teaching of the 'enlightened' few.
- **Adhering. v.21:** John was not writing to impart some new interpretation of the truth – but confirm what they *already* knew because of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The particular truth in view appears to be that 'Jesus is the Christ', the Son of God (vv.22-23). Even the spiritual infants in God's family appreciate this truth else they could not be saved. The teaching of the false teachers was 'lies' which spring from the devil (John 8.44), rather than the truth which finds its source in a God who *cannot* lie (Titus 1.2). **v.24:** The original apostolic message they heard, and which was 'from the beginning' must 'abide' in them – they were not to have 'itching ears' (2 Timothy 4.3-4)! *Ironside: If it's new, it's not true, and if it's true, it's not new.* Believers should determine to persevere in the word of God. It should have free course (find a home) in their daily operation and activities – permanently living in their minds and wills. If the truth remained operative in them as a living reality, then they would continue to enjoy the reality of their personal relationship with the Father through the Son (John 14.23). Furthermore, those who once professed but now denied the original apostolic message were apostate and not 'abiding in the Son'. **v.25:** Such a personal relationship with God is the very essence of 'eternal life' – a promise which is ours in Christ (cf. 5.11-12; John 17.3).
- **Abiding. v.26:** 'These things' may refer to the entire epistle, or more particularly that which was written to the spiritual infants (vv.18-25). These false teachers were antichrist in character and still seeking to lead them astray through deception. **v.27:** In a final and summary statement, John repeats his former teaching for the sake of emphasis. The anointing they had all received (v.20) abode with them – once the Spirit has been given (upon conversion), He is never removed (cp. Psalm 51.11). This permanent residence of the indwelling Spirit gave ongoing protection against the error of the 'seducers'. They did not need their 'additional' truth but were taught divine truth *intuitively* by the Spirit and *verbally* by Spirit-gifted teachers. 'Teacheth you of (*peri*) all things' suggests the potential of the believer's anointing with the Spirit. *Leckie: The Spirit of God, as an anointing, is His power operating in heart and life. If we are not giving the Spirit of God His rightful place and are not allowing Him to operate in power through the word on our hearts and minds, then we are open to error. It all depends on what we are feeding, and the level of my communion. If we are out of touch with God, the Spirit is grieved and we do not enjoy His presence and power as an anointing. It is, therefore, a matter of being right with God so that the ungrieved Spirit, as the anointing, can move in power in our hearts. It is one thing to have the Spirit personally but it is another thing to be in that condition in which the Spirit of God can, as the Spirit of truth, teach us all things, as He would desire.* They must continue in those things they had been taught, and thus 'abide in Him' i.e. the enjoyment of communion with Christ.

**v.28:** The final two verses of the chapter are both a summary exhortation *and* foundation for the second moral test that follows (cp.1.5-2.2; 3.1-10). In this section, The word 'now' suggests a section break and summary of those things John has discussed. Addressing the whole family of God once again (*teknion*), John commands his hearers to 'abide in Him'. This involves walking as He walked (2.6), abiding in the truth (2.24) and keeping His commandments (3.24; John 15.7) which include loving one another (4.12, 16). The command implies responsibility to cleave to Christ, enjoying communion *with* Him and finding satisfaction *in* Him – and thus developing a vital personal fellowship with Christ. Those who do not abide in Christ betray their true loyalties – they are merely professors (cf. 2.6) and will 'shrink away in shame' (averted face, cf. Matthew 22.12) from His glorious presence at His coming (Parousia). Christ will 'appear'

<sup>1</sup> See the last set of notes (4) for vv.22-23.

(*phaneroo*), a word which John has already used in relation to the incarnation (1.2) and which usually refers to His future manifestation to the world at His coming in great power and glory (Colossians 3.4). At this time, true believers will 'have confidence' (lit. 'freedom of speech') or assurance before Him, with no fear of impending judgment (cp. 4.17). It must be said that some commentators see the Judgment Seat of Christ here, with genuine believers displaying sorrow and shame for their lack of faithfulness and devotion to Christ in life on earth. *Leckie* and *EW Rogers* believe the apostles are in view. John did not want to feel ashamed of these believers 'as a schoolmaster would be ashamed of his failing pupils'. In this case the 'we' is apostolic, but it has not been used in this way since 1.5. **v.29:** This verse appears to lay the foundation for what will follow. For the *first* time John speaks of being 'born' of God (x10 from 2.29, cf. 4.7; 5.1) and the evidence that accompanies new birth such as 'doing righteousness' (through to 3.10). Since believers 'know' (*oida*, intuitively) that God is righteous (just in character and conduct), then it logically follows, and we 'know' (*ginosko*, by observation) that those born into His family must bear likeness to Him. Thus, every true believer 'doeth [the] righteousness' – the *present continuous* tense suggesting what is characteristic or habitual. *Leckie: The child of God might fail but his bent is to do righteousness. An unregenerate man can act righteously on occasions, but to do so is not the character, or bent, of his life.* Cf. Matthew 5.6. The definite article points to the 'particular' righteousness that characterises God the Father and is passed on to His children as a family characteristic (Hiebert).

### The Purifying Hope of His Coming [3.1-3]

Chapter three begins the second major section of the epistle (3.1-4.21) emphasising 'living in divine love' (rather than 'walking in divine light') – an obligation which is ours in response to the *gospel* and the *example* of the Lord Jesus. Those who experience and enjoy the blessing of divine love will be affected: *morally* (3.1-10), *devotionally* (3.11-24) and *doctrinally* (4.1-6). In this 'moral' section (3.1-10), it is *doing* (habitually) righteousness which distinguishes the children of God from the children of the devil. **v.1:** The first mention of being 'born of God' (2.29) causes John to marvel at the wonder of divine love which has brought us into the family of God. 'Behold' is a plural imperative. Look at the *kind* of love (quality) God has permanently 'gifted' (quantity) us! 'What manner' (*potapos*) conveys surprise mingled with wonder and astonishment at some other-worldly, unexplainable and incomparable phenomenon (cf. Matthew 8.27; Luke 1.29; 2 Peter 3.11). We enjoy the honour of having been made (by God) 'children (*teknon*) of God' – we are members of His family. We have been *born* into the *family* of God and thus enjoy the *life* of God. However, Paul's writings emphasise the *dignity* and *status* of being *placed* into the family as 'sons' (*huios*), cf. Galatians 3.26; Ephesians 1.5. The RV adds, 'and such we are!' Not merely children in name, but reality. As those who belong to the family of God, the world 'knoweth us not' as such – it cannot intellectually grasp (recognise or understand) who we are and to whom we belong. The world has never known God, and thus cannot recognise His children. Neither should we be surprised – they even failed to recognise the origin and character of God's Son too (John 1.10-11; 16.3; 17.25). *Wuest: Children of God could just as well have come to earth from a foreign planet so far as the people of the world are concerned. They are strangers to them.*

**v.2:** John contrasts the present with the future. We are children of God now; it has not yet been 'fully disclosed' (primarily to the world) what we shall be. But we 'know' (*oida*) intuitively and unquestioningly that when Christ 'appears' (openly manifested) we shall be 'like Him'. The One who is *now* hidden (Acts 1.9) *shall* be manifested and we with Him! Then the world's reproach and lack of understanding will be rolled away as we appear in glory with Him (Romans 8.17-22). 'We shall be *like* Him' – not just at His manifestation, but at the rapture. This is not complete identity for we shall not become as God (omniscient). We shall be 'like' Christ *morally* (a process which has begun but will reach fulness then, 2 Corinthians 3.18) and *physically* (Philippians 3.21). This is the culmination of God's eternal purpose being ultimate conformity to the image of His Son (Romans 8.29). God has no higher thought than His own Son – and we shall be like Him – He the Firstborn among many brethren. In the context, Christ is righteous (2.29), pure (3.3) and without sin (3.5). *Some native converts were translating First John. When they came upon the statement, 'we shall be like him,' the scribe laid down his pen and exclaimed, 'No! it is too much; let us write, 'We shall kiss His feet.' But, it is not 'too much' for the love of God.* We shall see Him, not as He was on the cross, nor as He will be when He sits on the Great White Throne, but as He is now, at God's right hand. We shall behold His essential and eternal glory (John 17.5, 24). **v.3:** Every person that actively treasures this hope (of His coming and being like Him), as a sure possession, firmly resting on the foundation of the person of Christ for its fulfilment, 'purifieth himself as He is pure'. The verb 'purify' is used of external, ceremonial cleansing (John 11.55) and inward purification (1 Peter 1.22). The more we are consumed with thoughts of Christ and his coming, the more it will have a purifying effect on my life now – but it involves *habitual*, personal exercise and effort, washing in the water of the word and renouncing defiling attitudes, actions, activities and associations. See 1 Timothy 5.22. Christ is pure (absolute statement) and *remained* such even in His experience as a man on earth – the word *hagnos* referring to purity *maintained* amidst defilement. He is therefore the pattern of our purity and standard of our conduct. *Stott: Since he is pure, and when we see him we will be like him in his purity, we must ensure that the process of purification is begun now and purify ourselves.*