

## The Epistles of John part 4

Our passage this week was 1 John 3: 1 - 15

John starts this section with an exhortation that we should behold (study, look at) the amazing love that the Father has lavished on us. The word 'lavished' implies generosity, unconditional giving, grace. The love of God is often misunderstood by the world and we hear this when statements are made such as: 'If God was a loving God, why is there so much misery in the world, why are so many children dying of hunger every day? If God was a loving God, he would help me with this or that problem". We saw that these ideas are rooted in a pagan concept of a god - that our god or gods exist to serve us. We also discussed how the misery in the world comes from man's greed and fallen nature and the devil doing his destructive work. Dave made a comment that there is in fact enough food in the world to feed everyone, but corruption and human self-interest, prevents this from happening.

God showed his love toward us supremely by sending His Son to take our punishment, to be our atoning sacrifice, overcoming sin and satan, extending toward us forgiveness and cleansing, and ultimately making us one with Him again. In that way He addresses the biggest problem that mankind has - a problem against which all other problems pale into insignificance - that we are slaves to sin and satan, estranged from our Maker, living in darkness. The result of His love is clear from the second verse of our passage - 'now we are children of God!' **See Romans 8:16**. This was the first important point for our study - the fact that the moment we put our trust in Jesus Christ as our only saviour and Lord, we are, here and now, children of God, born of Him, set apart for Him.

Verse 2 then goes on to say that what we will be, is not known, except that when we see Him, we will be like Him. This clearly sets up a linear idea with a starting point and an end. This was another important point for our study later on - the issue of starting at a specific point and moving toward an end. The '**beginning**' is quite aptly described as '**being born of God**' - see 1 John 2:29 and 1 John 3:9 and also John 3: 1 - 21. The '**end**' is '**being like Him**'. Let us now look at the process that takes place '**in between**'...

### Read 2 Corinthians 3: 12 - 18

Verses 3 to 13 of our passage contains some interesting concepts: purifying ourselves, defining sin, not continuing to sin, the source of sin vs the source of righteousness, that Jesus came to destroy the devils work, and something interesting about Cain. Wrestling with this section became the focus of our study.

First of all, it is important to note that our actions are not actually actions, or things that we **do**. They are **manifestations** of what is inside of us, in our hearts. Spend some time to reflect on this statement, as it is vital for our understanding of what follows...The passage makes it clear in no uncertain terms, that the devil produces sinful behaviour and Jesus produces righteousness. In this sense, what the passage is saying is that Jesus cannot sin. At all, ever. **Also read John 8: 41 - 45.**

It was clear that everyone felt slightly uneasy when considering verses 3 - 13 because all of us are thinking: O dear, but I do still sin...am I thus not a child of God? How does it work...We thank God for Lynore who always answers honestly on behalf of all of us! It is

vital to look at the Greek text behind this section and what it says about "**continuing to sin, does not continue to sin, cannot go on sinning**". The tenses that are used are the 'linear present active indicative' and the 'present active infinitive', correctly translated in a 'continuous, habitual' sense in all of the translations we looked at. This idea of 'continuing to sin' has several deeper dimensions, which need to be explored.

We looked at the story of Cain (Genesis 4: 3 - 10) as a starting point. It is interesting to see that Cain hated Abel in the same way and for the same reason as Jesus was hated. (**John 7:7 and John 15: 17 - 18**). The hatred was as a result of being told that their deeds were evil. This particular attitude in Cain (and the world) comes out when being convicted of sin. We see the result of this clearly when God comes to Cain and gently speaks words of encouragement to him to get him to do what is right. However, he goes and does the exact opposite, thus **continuing** the sinful path which culminates in the murder of his brother Abel.

A second and very important aspect of the issue of **continuous sin** is illustrated by the **repetition** or **recurring** of certain sinful behaviours. We have all seen this in ourselves and others - certain sins just keep on coming back. This is often something that gets Christians down. However it is crystal clear from our passage that Jesus came to destroy the work of the devil, and we cannot say that there are certain sins that are stronger than His power...and we read in 1 John 1: 9 that not only does He 1. forgive us our sin, but he also 2. cleanses us from all unrighteousness, not just some. So now what?

There is a lovely clue for us in v 4, which clearly defines sin. (Read also Psalm 51: 1 - 9). To illustrate the point, I gave the example of a room in a house in which we used to live, which had mould on the wall. Every week we would duly take the cleaning materials and clean the wall. For a week or so, it looked good, but then it would appear again. Essentially this would go on forever, until... well, Des gave us the answer: "until you get rid of the root problem in the wall which is causing the mould in the first place". How often have we brought an action (like a temper outburst) to God for forgiveness, without realising that that action is merely the result, the manifestation of a whole heap of anger, bitterness or resentment deep down in our hearts. This is where it is so important to see that it is God alone who can search our hearts, then to convict us by the Holy Spirit of the root problem, and our 'confession' is just to agree with Him! Otherwise, we are just bringing the surface problem, but the deeper cause of the sin is never dealt with. Subsequently, the surface sin recurs and recurs...Take for example physical abuse in a relationship. The husband assaults his wife, then feels very sorry, asks God's forgiveness, etc. However, the next week it all happens again...The root cause of a heart filled with anger, resentment or whatever, is never brought before God, and so is never truly dealt with, and the sinful behaviour continues...

Something else that is exceedingly important as regards a clear definition of sin in v 4, is to acknowledge sin by its name, and not by some euphemism, a better-sounding name. Hatred must be called hatred, not "I just don't like that person very much" or "no, we just have a personality clash". Anger must be called anger and not "a momentary lapse of reason". Sin is not just a "bad choice" (I hear that a lot in NZ), but a transgression of God's commandments. David says "against you, you only have I sinned"

The same is true of blaming someone else or a situation for our sin. As long as we do not believe that we are to blame for our behaviour, the sin and root cause of it, stays and

festers in our hearts. It is tragic for me to see how many Christians flock to psychologists because they say "No, it is not your fault, it is the other person's fault" and so the sin in the person's own heart gets to remain, they are not set free, the devil chuckles, and the sinful behaviour continues...Note carefully the question that God asks of Cain in Genesis 4:10 "What have you done" and not "Why have you done this". Upon being asked "Why" Cain would have launched into a whole long story...

Rebecca had a lovely testimony in this regard which we missed out on last night, but here it is:

*"Last night during the study, Werner asked whether anyone would be willing to share an experience relating to our discussion. Our discussion, of course, was about acknowledging and taking full responsibility for something amiss in our heart. Although I didn't actually share it last night, I will share it here. For myself, as I was growing up, my dad tended to be very angry. Hearing angry outbursts was not unusual and even spilling a glass of water at the dinner table was something to carefully avoid. I cannot say that I wasn't hurt by this, but despite that, I "followed in my father's footsteps". I, too, would respond very angrily to things that frustrated me and, for years, I excused myself for it given that I'd grown up with it being modeled for me. One day, my little son walked through the house in his muddy boots and I launched into an angry tirade about the mess that he'd made. God, in His great mercy and love, allowed me to see the situation from my son's perspective. I saw myself as I must have looked--10 feet tall, dark and frightening--and He convicted me that this problem was not my father's at all but my own. From that moment of acknowledgment and confession ("Yes, You are right, dear God."), God began His work in my heart. I cannot say that I never have an urge to respond angrily to a frustration anymore, but the hold that it has on me has certainly changed. It would have been easy for me to go on excusing my actions for a lifetime. After all, it is commonly said that what we learn in early childhood becomes an integral part of us. But, in the hands of God, these things do not need to remain. When I gave this thing up to the Lord, He was able to fill that place in my heart with Himself and that is something I rejoice in. God also proven His faithfulness and lovingkindness to me in this. It is not nice or comfortable to take full responsibility for something nasty in our hearts, but we can take these things to Him with full confidence that He desires to do this "good work in [us and] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Phil 1:6 NIV)*

Dear friends, our passage certainly also speaks of a change in the way the child of God responds when convicted by God. This response itself illustrates whether we are children of God or not. When studying this passage we can easily get stuck on the idea of us being good and bringing forth visible, good fruit as the only proof that we are His children. However, it is clear from the example of Cain, that another mark of a true child of God is how they respond when convicted of sin. The world and Cain become angry, hateful. The child of God is repentant and grieved that they have pierced their Lord once again. The world and Cain continue down their road and anger gives birth to actual murder. The child of God repents (goes the other way, does not continue down the path). This is very important, as it gives us a glorious hope. Far from causing us to be depressed, these instances of God showing us a recurring sin, and its root, is cause for gratitude to God, for when we bring that to Him, he will forgive and cleanse it away, just as He promised. In this sense "doing what is right" in verse 10 of our passage, is displaying the above "attitude".

Have a blessed week dear friends.

Werner

**PS. Remember our shared lunch together on Sunday 31 October at Pete's house.**