

Wednesday 1 December

Our passage for this week was the last two Epistles of John (2 John verses 1 - 13 and 3 John verses 1 - 14)

Having read these two letters, we were immediately struck by the deeply felt, genuine love that John expresses to those to whom he is writing. One comes away with a real sense that this love is much more than just human love. And rightly so, because two words are repeated throughout the passage - **Truth** (10 times) and **Love**.

In the first verse of both 2 John and 3 John, we actually have a specific form of the Greek word for truth (Aletheia) being used in a peculiar way. Literally, John is saying "...whom I truly love..." So, not only do we have the meaning that he loves them 'in the truth' but he also wants to say that he 'truly' loves them. It is peculiar that John reiterates this idea that he loves them 'truly' or 'in truth'. He could as well simply have said 'whom I love' and have left it at that. However, he wants to leave us in no doubt that this love is different.

This sets the stage for our study of these two letters, because we are going to look at what the difference is between human love, charity, concern, comfort and this 'true' love that John speaks of, which has a mysterious quality. We are reminded immediately of **John 14:6: 'Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.** This gives us a clue for the rest of the study. In John's greeting he also states: "grace, mercy and peace from God the Father..." There is great significance in the order in which these three words appear. Grace first, because He first loved us out of His boundless grace, then mercy which is what we joyfully receive when we are forgiven, then peace, because we are reconciled with God and at peace with Him. Right there in three words we have the progress of salvation! In the greeting in 3 John, he adds that it is good to hear that Gaius's soul is getting along well. This is another clue to our study. Yes, he prays that it may go well with Gaius in other ways, but he is interested in his soul getting along well. (Many of you rag me about always asking how your heart is, but here John does it as well!). In verse 7 of 2 John, he warns about deceivers and in particular those who do not continue in Christ. This is another important clue for our study. Let us now see how all these clues fit together.

We looked at two documents (included below) and I asked the group to study the two documents carefully and then answer some questions about them afterwards. (Perhaps those who are outside of the study group, can read these two documents now, before continuing)

Having read both documents, I then asked for some ideas as to the origin of the documents, and we had several ideas. Some said that both were government documents or the vision statements of a political party. Others felt that they were from some social programme and others again thought that they might be from a humanitarian aid organisation. Some indicated that the statements might be of some church organisation. I want to reiterate here that both documents are available in the public domain and is not used here for any other purpose than to illustrate a point, relevant to our study. Eventually, I did reveal that document 1 is part of the United Nations Manifesto, and document 2 is the "What we believe" section from a mainline New Zealand church. The point is this: everyone thought that there was not much difference between the two documents. Both had humanitarian goals, to be reached by way of human strategies and human effort. They speak of a human love and concern and neither makes any mention of God at all.

Much is made of the issue of church unity these days. The World Council of Churches states clearly what their aim is, and I quote: **"The World Council of Churches (WCC) is the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement, a movement whose goal is Christian unity."** It is not difficult to tell from this statement what the goal of the WCC is: unity. Now, Document 2 (from the mainline Christian denomination) is what is commonly found these days in the mission statements of many churches. However, it differs very little from the secular, humanistic statements found in the

world, such as document 1. Now, how are we to understand this and how does it relate to our study this week?

First of all the statements below both differ greatly from what John is writing about in his letter in the sense that the love he expresses is not human love. It is 'true love' or 'love in the truth'. That truth is Jesus Christ Himself. Outside of Christ, this love that John expresses, does not exist. It falls flat and reverts to mere human 'love'. The gospel of Jesus Christ and everything that is meant by that, is inextricably linked to our ability to truly love. Take Christ out of it, and it re-sets to mere human love. Document 2 is interesting because even though it comes from a church, Christ is not mentioned anywhere as the actual solution to those stated problems. Here is where the warning signs should come on for us. You see, the 'unity' that the World Council of Churches seeks to establish is simply setting the lowest common denominator where all churches and faiths can meet. That lowest common denominator is "showing love, care and compassion to all mankind". It is immediately clear that as long as religion is defined in these terms, we can all be one... Woohoo! look, there is unity...but hang on...is that real unity? All we have done is redefine Christianity in those 'loving' terms and suddenly we are united in a common cause...the good of all mankind. How wonderfully noble.

There is one big problem though. In order for the recipe above to work, the work of Christ has to be redefined as: 'being kind, helpful, loving, comforting and so on and so forth'. However, this was not the work of Christ. Christ came to bring us to the Father and so our work, as co-workers with Christ, is to bring people to God! Furthermore, John states clearly that this true love does not, cannot exist outside of Jesus Christ. Human love does not have that precious, genuine quality - the very presence of God - in it. So, for the sake of meeting at the WCC's lowest common denominator, the church is gradually letting go of that which is the very reason for it's existence, as can be seen by statements such as the one below. Beloved friends, we must get rid of the idea that without Christ we are actually able to love, comfort or care at all. Without Christ, love is weak, poor, powerless. That is what John is drawing our attention to in these two letters, in the strongest possible terms.

Often, it is said that Christians are to love, not in word only, but in deed...However, look carefully at what 1 John 3: 18 actually exhorts us to do: "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions **and in truth**". Sadly, that last bit just falls through the cracks, and yet it is the most important part of the whole statement. Friends, if we make the goal of Christianity to "love all mankind, be friendly, and tolerant" there is no need for Christ. We can do all that without Him and so He departs, and we are left with but a poor substitute. If we truly want to show God's love in the world we must genuinely do what Jesus did, and lead people to Him. That is true love for your fellow human being and because you are then fulfilling His actual purpose, Christ will be with you and in you, and bless what you are doing.

Have a blessed week dear friends

In Him

Werner

Document 1

WE THE PEOPLE HEREBY DETERMINE:

- to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and
- to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and
- to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from

treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and
•to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

AND FOR THESE ENDS

- to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and
- to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and
- to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and
- to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

HAVE RESOLVED TO COMBINE OUR EFFORTS TO ACCOMPLISH THESE AIMS

Document 2

What we believe

Family violence

Nurturing and supporting families is the best way to improve the health of our society. An important aspect of this is having a zero tolerance to violent behaviour. We believe in, and will advocate for, the importance of individuals taking action to stamp out acts of violence committed by family members against their partners and children. We aim to create a culture within our society where violence is unacceptable.

Caring for the environment

We support the Government's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, and we advocate for the ordering of our lives – as individuals and organisations - around sound principals of sustainability. We urge the Government to reiterate NZ's anti-nuclear stance by condemning international plans to use nuclear power as a means of mitigating greenhouse emissions. We also urge the Government to hasten its development of strategies for the treatment and reduction of emissions caused by our agricultural sector, which causes most of NZ's emissions.

Youth suicide

Every suicide is one too many. We will advocate for much-needed funding to strengthen the mental health system so that it can better support young people. The Government's recent (May 2007) \$23.1m commitment over the next four years doesn't go far enough. Adolescent mental health is a really complex area to work in and needs more resources committed to it.

Getting older

We support the right of older Kiwis to stay in their own homes as long as possible through "ageing in place" and urge the Government to make this a reality rather than just a policy objective. In particular, intervention is required to implement universal building design principals that will minimise the cost of building adaptation to meet the needs of those with disabilities. We also call for further resources to be committed to improving the status, training and pay for aged care workers.

Cultural diversity

Immigration and diversity contribute to the richness of our country. We endorse the strategy to attract skilled migrants to New Zealand. We urge the Government to strengthen its commitment to re-settling migrants - especially in the area of access to employment. Increased focus is needed on strategies to help migrants obtain work that is appropriate to their skills and experience.