

## *See How the Father Loves Us*

### *Studies in 1 John*

#### **John Writes What He Knows**

Most believers are drawn to John's writings. Why do you think this is so?

His goal in 1 John is to have us,

*"See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us" (3:1).*

The Father's love rings a bell deep within every one for we were structured to explore and revel in its. To be fathered by God is to have him take responsibility for our lives in their entirety. We immediately have a home and a goal. It means we have a significant mission in this present life.

But John's message is unsettling for those who do not know the grip of Father's love or those who presume on that love. Many settle 'easily' into life patterns with just a casual nod of satisfaction that God loves them but ignore the implications of that love, particularly in the Church.

*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death (3:14).*

His insistence that there is no way we can claim to know the love of God if we refuse to love (as God loves) is unsettling. It stands against every attempted justification for retaining anger, un-forgiveness and rejection of others, particularly those in the Body of Christ.

So John is a poet but not a sentimental poet. He is one for whom the love of God has impacted deeply, unsettling him in all his old ways whilst securing him in the Father. Out of this he was free to love all people freely.

#### **Beloved Disciple**

John was a member of the 'inner three' (Peter James and John). It seems highly probable that he is the disciple spoken of as the 'one whom Jesus loved' (John 23:23). So does this turn Christ's election of these three including John into a thing of exclusivity or favouritism? When we are insecure in the Father's love election appears as favouritism. Our flesh longs to be exclusively loved, to be made much of over and above others. But such favouritism would be to defy the fullness of grace and truth that filled Jesus. It would be to simply reflect the way sinners love with partiality. John and his mother struggled with the desire for an exclusive love right up to the end of Christ's earthly ministry (Matthew 20:20ff). But for John to be the 'beloved disciple' was not a status or privilege reserved for favourites or those with a certain 'blessable' personalities.

The impact of God's love upon John had been deeply transforming. He had been an impetuous Galilean fisherman, named 'son of thunder' by Jesus. This name may have reflected John's propensity to look upon Jesus ministry in fleshly terms (get rid of the opposition by whatever means, Mark 9:54), or to his later role in thundering out the Gospel of love to the nations. The John of Mark 9:54 is vastly different to the John who wrote this first Epistle. The cross and Pentecost had changed all that.

#### **Understanding a Unique Writer**

John's writing is different to the other Gospel writers. The Apostolic truth is the same but his style is different. He wrote more theologically and less chronologically. He was led to look at the significance of events in the revelation of Jesus as God's Son.

So it is that he reveals the primary relationship between Jesus of Nazareth and God the Father. His letters continue in this theme. The love of the Father for the Son is the love which the Son has spread abroad in our hearts by the Spirit.

Are these differences in John simply a reflection of his different personality? No doubt the personalities of the disciples come out in their writings. However, the personality does not determine the content any more than our personality determines what we read in the Gospel. It was the Spirit inspiring the writers that ensured the content of their Gospels. Nothing was generated by their personal ability to 'see' into the truth of God. None were 'more spiritual' than the other. As they were shown so they wrote. The rich texture of John's writings can be attributed solely to the rich beauty of the Triune God, and His desire to use John to reveal it. As a sinful man John had no resources in his flesh to write the words he did. It is impossible, Jesus said, for a sinful man to see the things of God (John 3:3).

How then did John see what he wrote? He received the revelation Christ brought. He was the 'Word of Life' full of the grace and truth of the Father. When John saw Jesus he saw the Father as Jesus had promised. The same Spirit who helped John see these things is the same Spirit in us today revealing the same Christ.

There is no hidden 'key' to understanding John (even Revelation). His simple testimony is "*See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us.*" For John it was something abundantly clear. It needed no special knowledge or insight. His assumption is that Father's love is clear. Jesus had claimed the same reality. This puts paid to our pitiful cries that we are 'trying' to discover the love of God but we are left confused by God's word. The literal translation of 'bestowed upon us' is 'imported' to us. Father's love has been imported to us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The content, substance of that love, the means by which we are gripped and changed is clear, *'that we should be called children of God'*. Note that the Father's love is objective and established outside of us. Father's love is real therefore we can receive it. It does not become real because we accept it. Father has declared that we are his children *'and such we are'*, John proclaims. What then would stop us *'seeing'* this love?

To answer that we must go to the one place where God demonstrates and seals his love, the cross. Here we must ask, 'What did God in Christ overcome on the cross that I might see his true and glorious love?' The answer is clear. In the cross God took responsibility for my sin and guilt, thus removing its grip on me. In the cross therefore, God took from the evil one every weapon by which he can hold us captive in ignorance, fear and guilty shame. When we submit to the truth of the cross then the true nature of the Father who secured all this for us comes blazing through. John had received this love and knew it to be solid and true.

### **John's Letter is for Us**

John is about the Light and Love of God, the reality and the impact of the reality of his Fathering. He wrote into a time when many gave assent to the general thought that God is love but then disengaged that love from the Christ of the cross and manufactured their own 'theology' of love. Inevitably these 'theologies' were deficient as they produced no radical transformation. It left people at the mercy of their anger, fears, shame and bitterness. John insists that all believers must deal with and confess Christ come in our flesh. If this Jesus, earthed in our flesh, is as good as he claims and as for us as he reveals then Bethel beware! Believe or perish.

### **Implications for us**

- All are dependent upon the Word and Spirit to comprehend God's truth
- The Word and the Spirit have been freely poured out
- Nobody starts ahead or behind anybody else because of personality, sin or ability.