

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH  
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

**COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION!**  
ON  
**THE EPISTLES OF JOHN**

Lesson Plan for Thursday – March 13, 2014

**CONVERSATION #6 – “Children of God”**

**I JOHN 2:28 – 3:10**

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**Our objectives for this session:**

- to share ideas, attitudes, and experiences relating to the message proclaimed by John; and, in doing so, strengthen our SAKLC fellowship;
- to consider John’s teaching about the second coming of Christ and its implication for us
- to distinguish between committing sin and remaining in sin
- to contrast Jesus’ life with our lives; fathom what He has really done for us; and, put that into words that can be appreciated and understood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**AN OPENING PASTORAL PRAYER -**

**FACILITATOR’S OVERVIEW OF TODAY’S CONVERSATION:**

This study begins with what is commonly accepted in biblical scholarship to be the **main body** of John’s first letter, running from 2:28 – 4:19. This passage “*hangs together*” as a unit; the structure of the writing is clear not only in the original Greek, but in many English translations. The unit is bracketed fore and aft by two significant statements. In the opening statement we read (**I John 2:28**) – “*that . . . we can have confidence . . . at his coming;*” and, in the concluding statement are the words (**I John 4:17**) - “*that we may have confidence in the day of judgment.*”

Participants in this study will recall that in previous passages, John dealt with the divisive influences that existed in the early church; in particular, two heretical concepts about Jesus that were misleading people. On one hand, there was the excessive legalism from the Judaizers who failed to acknowledge Jesus’ divinity. On the other hand, there was the excessive spiritualism from the Gnostics who refused to acknowledge Jesus’ humanity. Both represented a fundamental misunderstanding of Jesus and sin.

At this point in his letter, John turns away from dwelling any further on the heresies and begins to describe what it means to live in the light of God's love. He has described how God's love differs from the world's love; he has also described how Jesus and his message of truth differ from the antichrists and their message of lies.

Primary motivation for this assertion is John's belief that Christians are now living in the "last days." Jesus gave us His Spirit as a guide, and the Spirit is making the distinction between Light and dark very clear as the "end" approaches. Great emphasis is placed on "right" conduct, offered to God in the power of the Holy Spirit, in response to the love of God demonstrated in Jesus Christ.

The message from the Spirit, through the Word of God, is clear. We are to live or "abide" in the family of God as children. The whole point of having eternal life is to enter into the closest of relationships with God. In **John 17:3**, Jesus is quoted as saying: **"This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent."** Abiding in God's family, loving one another, walking as Jesus walked, living in the light, knowing the truth, are all outward manifestations of the indwelling of God's Spirit.

There are really two promises contained in the following opening passage:

- a) Because of God's love, believers can be called God's children; and,
- b) For the future, they will see Jesus as He really is, and become like him!

#### **A) THE SCRIPTURAL RECORD – I JOHN 2:28-3:3**

<sup>28</sup> ***And now, little children, remain in relationship to Jesus, so that when he appears we can have confidence and not be ashamed in front of him when he comes.*** <sup>29</sup> ***If you know that he is righteous, you also know that every person who practices righteousness is born from him.*** <sup>1</sup> ***See what kind of love the Father has given to us in that we should be called God's children, and that is what we are! Because the world didn't recognize him, it doesn't recognize us.*** <sup>2</sup> ***Dear friends, now we are God's children, and it hasn't yet appeared what we will be. We know that when he appears we will be like him because we'll see him as he is.*** <sup>3</sup> ***And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure.*** [COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE]

<sup>28</sup> ***And now, little children, abide*** (live, remain <sup>[a]</sup> permanently) ***in Him, so that when He is made visible, we may have and enjoy perfect confidence*** (boldness, assurance) ***and not be ashamed and shrink from Him at His coming.*** <sup>29</sup> ***If you know*** (perceive and are sure) ***that He*** [Christ] ***is*** [absolutely] ***righteous*** [conforming to the Father's will in purpose, thought, and action], ***you may also know*** (be sure) ***that everyone who does righteously*** [and is therefore in like manner conformed to the divine will] ***is born*** (begotten) ***of Him*** <sup>[b]</sup> [God]. ***3 See what*** <sup>[c]</sup> [an incredible] ***quality of love the Father has given*** (shown, bestowed on) ***us, that we should*** [be permitted to] ***be named and called and counted the children of God! And so we are! The reason that the world does not know*** (recognize, acknowledge) ***us is that it does not know*** (recognize, acknowledge) ***Him.*** <sup>2</sup> ***Beloved, we are*** [even here and] ***now God's children; it is not yet disclosed*** (made clear) ***what we shall be*** [hereafter], ***but we know that when He comes and is***

*manifested, we shall* [<sup>d</sup>as God's children] *resemble and be like Him, for we shall see Him* [<sup>e</sup>just as He [really] is. <sup>3</sup> *And everyone who has this hope [resting] on Him cleanses* (purifies) *himself just as He is pure* (chaste, undefiled, guiltless). [THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE]

#### A REVIEW OF THE SCRIPTURAL TEXT:

1) I JOHN 2:28 introduces the picture of meeting (“*abiding in*”) Jesus face-to-face with complete confidence. Up to this point, John has been writing about making the right choices by avoiding a close relationship with the systems of the world, and the common temptations and corrupting influences found in society. But, now he makes his argument personal by placing the reader in the picture, eye-to-eye with Jesus.

a) “*Abiding in Christ*” – as a theme, is perhaps best expressed in John 15:4 – “*Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch can’t produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can’t produce fruit unless you remain in me.*” When Christ returns to earth, those who have “abided in him” and have acted righteously will have great joy in greeting their Lord!

b) Conversely, those who do not abide in Christ – will be bitterly ashamed –  
Matthew 22:12 - *He said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ But he was speechless*

Revelation 6:15-17 - *Then the kings of the earth, the officials and the generals, the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in caves and in the rocks of the mountains. <sup>16</sup> They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the Lamb’s wrath! <sup>17</sup> The great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”*

2) I JOHN 2:29 drives the message home even more. We know Jesus is righteous, so how will we measure up? The idea of being “*born from Him*” reintroduces the idea of being in His family. This idea of close fellowship with Jesus and other believers has been a theme from the beginning of the epistle; now, however, it becomes very intimate as the reader is asked to make a personal assessment, as if facing Jesus directly. John wants to break through the distractions of the world and grab the reader's attention with this picture of Jesus re-entering the world physically.

a) God’s righteousness is spoken of at various places in the Bible;  
Psalms 11:7 - *“because the LORD is righteous! He loves righteous deeds. Those whose heart is right will see God’s face”*

b) The idea that Christ is righteous; and, that therefore, righteous demands are made on His people, is spoken of in the Gospels:

**Matthew 5:20 - I say to you that unless your righteousness is greater than the righteousness of the legal experts and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**

**Matthew 5:45 - so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous.**

**Matthew 5:48 - Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete**

**Luke 6:35f – “Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend expecting nothing in return. If you do, you will have a great reward. You will be acting the way children of the Most High act, for he is kind to ungrateful and wicked people. <sup>36</sup> Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate. <sup>37</sup> “Don’t judge, and you won’t be judged. Don’t condemn, and you won’t be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. <sup>38</sup> Give, and it will be given to you. A good portion—packed down, firmly shaken, and overflowing—will fall into your lap. The portion you give will determine the portion you receive in return.”**

**3) WHAT EXACTLY WILL THIS ‘EXPERIENCE’ BE LIKE?** John has already pointed out that it involves a Christ like walk (refer back to 2:6 –“**The one who claims to remain in him ought to live in the same way as he lived**”). But, John has said very little more about its character. Starting at this point in the letter, love really becomes a controlling and overriding theme.

**4) OBEDIENCE** - John repeatedly emphasizes that the key to this close fellowship, this membership in God’s family, is obedience to His commands. The Apostle expresses this idea as walking or being in the light. He says that each of us has sufficient spiritual discernment to determine which direction we are facing and to what degree we are walking toward that light. To wit ... refer back to **2:7-11** - “**Dear friends, I’m not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the message you heard. <sup>8</sup> On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light already shines. <sup>9</sup> The one who claims to be in the light while hating a brother or sister is in the darkness even now. <sup>10</sup> The person loving a brother and sister stays in the light, and there is nothing in the light that causes a person to stumble. <sup>11</sup> But the person who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and lives in the darkness, and doesn’t know where to go because the darkness blinds the eyes.**”)

5) **ST. PAUL**, writing at a time much earlier than John, also pictured the children of God as recipients of God's amazing love; he wrote that at Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming they will to the fullest extent experience this great love of the Father and Son:

- a) **Colossians 3:4** - *When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.*
- b) **2 Corinthians 5:8-8** *We are confident, and we would prefer to leave the body and to be at home with the Lord.*
- c) **Philippians 1:23** - *But I don't know what I prefer. I'm torn between the two because I want to leave this life and be with Christ, which is far better.*

6) John's point is clearly that In light of this future, the recipients of his letter should seek to live pure lives now!

### **FOR GROUP CONVERSATION:**

- a) Consider the example of facing a very bright light. When you are facing it, what do you see?
- b) Now – in your mind - turn completely around and face away from the light. What do you see facing this way?
- c) No matter how far away from the light you may be; and, no matter how slowly you may be approaching the light, every believer can tell which way she/he is facing.
- d) What are you going to say to Jesus when you come face-to-face with Him? What if you are facing the wrong way?

### **B) THE SCRIPTURAL RECORD – I JOHN 3:4-10**

*<sup>4</sup> Every person who practices sin commits an act of rebellion, and sin is rebellion. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared to take away sins, and there is no sin in him. <sup>6</sup> Every person who remains in relationship to him does not sin. Any person who sins has not seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, make sure no one deceives you. The person who practices righteousness is righteous, in the same way that Jesus is righteous. <sup>8</sup> The person who practices sin belongs to the devil, because the devil has been sinning since the beginning. God's Son appeared for this purpose: to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> Those born from God don't practice sin because God's DNA remains in them. They can't sin because they are born from God. <sup>10</sup> This is how God's children and the devil's children are apparent: everyone who doesn't practice righteousness is not from God, including the person who doesn't love a brother or sister. [COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE]*

<sup>4</sup> **Everyone who commits** (practices) **sin is guilty of lawlessness; for** [that is what] **sin is, lawlessness** (the breaking, violating of God's law by transgression or neglect—being unrestrained and unregulated by His commands and His will).

<sup>5</sup> **You know that He appeared in visible form and became Man to take away** [upon Himself] **sins, and in Him there is no sin** [essentially and forever].

<sup>6</sup> **No one who abides in Him** [who lives and remains in communion with and in obedience to Him—deliberately, knowingly, and habitually] **commits** (practices) **sin. No one who** [habitually] **sins has either seen or known Him** [recognized, perceived, or understood Him, or has had an experiential acquaintance with Him].

<sup>7</sup> **Boys (lads), let no one deceive and lead you astray. He who practices righteousness** [who is upright, conforming to the divine will in purpose, thought, and action, living a consistently conscientious life] **is righteous, even as He is righteous.**

<sup>8</sup> [But] **he who commits sin** [who practices evil-doing] **is of the devil** [takes his character from the evil one], **for the devil has sinned** (violated the divine law) **from the beginning. The reason the Son of God was made manifest** (visible) **was to undo** (destroy, loosen, and dissolve) **the works the devil** [has done].

<sup>9</sup> **No one born** (begotten) **of God** [deliberately, knowingly, and habitually] **practices sin, for God's nature abides in him** [His principle of life, the divine sperm, remains permanently within him]; **and he cannot practice sinning because he is born** (begotten) **of God.**

<sup>10</sup> **By this it is made clear who take their nature from God and are His children and who take their nature from the devil and are his children: no one who does not practice righteousness** [who does not conform to God's will in purpose, thought, and action] **is of God; neither is anyone who does not love his brother** (his fellow believer in Christ). [THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE]

#### **REVIEW OF THE SCRIPTURAL TEXT:**

- 1) **I JOHN 3:4**, uses the word ἀνομία **anōmia**, best translated as "**lawlessness.**" Seen in proper context, the word "**Sin**" as used here, stands in opposition to purity; sin is very serious! The use of the Greek word translated "**lawlessness**" carries with it a connotation of ongoing wickedness.
  - a) There is a difference in John's mind between committing a sin and remaining in sin. Even the most faithful believer sometimes commits a sin, but he/she does not cherish a particular form of sin and choose to commit it repeatedly.
  - b) A believer who commits a sin repents, confesses, and is forgiven. A person who remains in sin, by contrast, is not sorry for what she/he is doing. . Thus, this person never confesses and never receives forgiveness. Such a person is against

God; rejects God's Law; is in flagrant opposition to God; no matter what religious claims he/she makes.

- c) **Matthew 7:23** – *“Then I’ll tell them, ‘I’ve never known you. Get away from me, you people who do wrong.’”*
  - d) **Matthew 13:41** – *“The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of offense [persons by whom others are drawn into error or sin] and all who do iniquity and act wickedly,*
  - e) **II Thessalonians 2:7** - *For the mystery of lawlessness* (that hidden principle of rebellion against constituted authority) *is already at work in the world,* [but it is] *restrained only until he who restrains is taken out of the way.*
- 2) **I JOHN 3:5-6** contrasts Jesus’ life with ours:
- a) Jesus’ purpose in being revealed was to remove sin from us. He did not come to have fellowship with us, but to make it possible for us to have fellowship with Him.
  - b) Facilitator’s expanded comment: Under the O.T. system of sacrifice, a lamb without blemish was offered as a sacrifice for sin. In the N.T. Jesus is known as the ‘*Lamb of God*’ who takes away the sin of the world (Gospel of John 1:29). Because he lived a perfect life and sacrificed himself for our sins, we have complete assurance of forgiveness. We can look to Jesus’ death for us and know we need never suffer eternal death.
  - c) John further points to the fact that because Christ was Himself completely without sin he stands in total opposition to all sin. No sin is too small to be acceptable or excusable to Jesus. The one and only way for us to achieve this level of perfection is to abide (*live*) fully in Christ. That means to walk every step of our lives in complete obedience. Those who abide in the Son do not habitually sin, for the sinful way of life of worldly people is not their life-style. Neither do they listen to false teachers who say that to sin is normal; that God is unconcerned about immorality.
  - d) But, John has already said that we cannot live a totally righteous life, as Jesus did (refer back to 1:8, 10). Here, then, he is making the point that if we are true believers, we will at least try, and the way to try is to get close to Jesus.
  - e) John has also already made the point that fellowship with Jesus is fellowship with other believers (1:7). Jesus is in midst of His church, so that's where the believer has the best possibility of being next to Jesus and living without sin.

- 3) **I JOHN 3:7-10** We all have areas where temptation is strong and habits are hard to conquer
- a) Although sin is what all human beings now commit, and although we are responsible to God for it, the origin of sin can be traced to the devil, as Genesis 3 teaches.
  - b) In his triumph over death through resurrection and ascension, Jesus Christ defeated the devil once and for all – (refer to St. Paul in **Colossians 2:15** - <sup>15</sup>[God] ***disarmed the principalities and powers that were ranged against us and made a bold display and public example of them, in triumphing over them in Him and in it*** [the cross]).
  - c) This victory makes the final victory at the end of the age a sure fact. As Christians abide in Christ they have his power through the Spirit to overcome the devil in their own lives.

### **FOR GROUP CONVERSATION:**

1. What does a Christian have to look forward to in the Second Coming of Christ and how should this affect his/her present life?
2. By becoming man what did the Son of God achieve and do for us? In your answer pay particular attention to verses 5 and 8, and avoid 'religious jargon' if possible.
3. What is the relationship between that which is stated in I John, about being a child of God, and what Paul teaches in Romans 8:12-17?

THE FOCUS OF NEXT WEEK'S STUDY: I John 3:11-24 **"Love and Confidence"**