

Sunday 26th January 2025

Family Likeness

Call to worship: This is how we **know** what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." (1 John 3:16)

Hymn StF 322 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
in a believer's ear !
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,
and drives away our fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole,
and calms the troubled breast ;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary, rest.

Dear name — the rock on which I build,
my shield and hiding-place,
my never-failing treasury, filled
with boundless stores of grace !

Jesus ! My Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
my Prophet, Priest, and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought ;
but when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought.

Till then I would thy **love** proclaim
with every fleeting breath ;
and may the music of thy name
refresh my soul in death.

John Newton (1725–1807)

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come before You in awe and wonder,
lifting up Your holy name. You are the Creator
of all things, the One who formed us with love
and care, and who knows every detail of our
lives. You are our refuge, our strength, our
provider, and our sustainer. Abba, Father, You
are perfect in all Your ways, full of compassion,
mercy, and unfailing love.

We adore You, Lord, for calling us Your
children, for embracing us as Your own, and
for never leaving us nor forsaking us.
Your faithfulness stretches beyond the
heavens, and Your grace knows no bounds.

Introduction

One of my favourite books of the bible in John's first letter. It was written to encourage believers who were going through challenging times and had some people denying the divinity of Jesus. One of the study booklets I have used on 1 John is entitled "How to be sure!" I have nicknamed the letter the "We know, you know" letter because John in those 5 short chapters, John uses the word "know" 45 times. He wants us to know God's love for us, He wants us to

Lord Jesus, our Saviour,

We praise You for the sacrifice You made, for
stepping down from glory to walk among us, to
carry our burdens, and to redeem us with Your
precious blood. You are the Good Shepherd
who seeks the lost, the Lamb of God who takes
away the sins of the world, and the King who
reigns in victory.

Your love is overwhelming, Your power
unmatched, and Your name is above every
name. We bow before You, Jesus, in gratitude
for the cross and the empty tomb that declare
Your triumph over sin and death. .

Amen

know our identity as children of God even though we are also sinners. He wants us to know forgiveness and purity. He wants us to know eternal life and much more.

Chapter 3 begins with the affirmation of God's lavish love for us that we should be called "children of God", or part of God's family. He longs for us to develop "family likeness" that we are becoming like him. I have been party to many conversations where people talk about family likeness- it may be facial features that are reflected in many members of the family, or build, or character or behaviour.

It's a highly personal letter, and wherever John says "we" – that includes you, wherever he says "you" he means "you". Please insert your own name! The letter will transform you if you open your heart to God's word, seeking to live out our identity as his beloved children.

Hymn StF 390 My God! I know I feel thee mine

My God ! I **know**, I feel thee mine,
and will not quit my claim,
till all I have is lost in thine
and all renewed I am.

I hold thee with a trembling hand,
but will not let thee go,
till steadfastly by faith I stand
and all thy goodness **know**.

When shall I see the welcome hour
that plants my God in me —
spirit of health, and life, and power,
and perfect liberty ?

Jesus, thine all-victorious **love**
shed in my heart abroad ;

then shall my feet no longer rove,
rooted and fixed in God.

O that in me the sacred fire
might now begin to glow,
burn up the dross of base desire,
and make the mountains flow !

O that it now from heaven might fall,
and all my sins consume !

Come, Holy Ghost, for thee I call,
spirit of burning, come !

Refining fire, go through my heart,
illuminate my soul ;
scatter thy life through every part,
and sanctify the whole.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788) StF 390

Reading 1 John 2:28 – 3:10 God's children and sin

²⁸ And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. ²⁹ If you **know** that he is righteous, you **know** that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

3 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not **know** us is that it did not **know** him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made **known**. But we **know** that when Christ appears,^[a] we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

⁴ Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵ But you **know** that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. ⁶ No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or **known** him.

⁷ Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. ⁸ The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. ⁹ No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. ¹⁰ This is how we **know** who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

First Part of the Message

John begins Chapter three with these amazing words:

¹ ***See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!***

At this point John gets so excited that he is exclaiming: ***AND THAT IS WHAT WE ARE!***

It's not ordinary love, but lavish - abundant, undeserved and overwhelming. This love that makes us children of God not based on merit but grace – abundant grace. Do you know that you are someone who is profoundly loved by the creator of the universe? Are you living in a way that reflects this knowledge?

John goes on in v2: ² ***Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*** How amazing ***we shall be like him*** Are we growing in Christlikeness? Even if we are having a great day in living in a Christlike way – non Christians may not recognise that Christlikeness.

John has already referred to that failure to recognise so that we are not depressed about it:

^{1b} ***The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*** Even Jesus was not recognised as the Son of God by many in the world – hence he was crucified.

John and God both want us to have the assurance that we are growing in Christlikeness and John says: ³ ***All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.***

A short detour back to Chapter 1 of this letter. I remember one night reading my bible by candlelight after the generator had been closed down at 9pm in rural Zimbabwe and I saw with clarity the implication of verse 9 of chapter one ⁹ ***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*** I had known and preached many times about the forgiveness of sins on the condition of confessing our sins. Because it is so profound that we are forgiven our sins on confession, I tend to be so overwhelmed at the generosity of God that I had failed to really notice the final 6 words of that verse ***and purify us from all unrighteousness.*** That night, as the implication of these words struck home, I was even more overwhelmed that as I had confessed all the known (to me) sins, I was not only forgiven all that sin, but that for at least that moment I was cleansed from all unrighteousness – I was pure. How amazing is that! It probably wasn't long before some resentment reared its head, or I was angry with someone, or I wanted something someone else had (covet) etc etc and the purity had gone. But for those moments my access to the father was not hindered by sin, because Jesus had dealt with that and had purified me from even those things that I had not realised were sinful in my life – I was purified. The following day the Holy Spirit would remind me of other things that need confessing, I would confess them and again know the purifying effect of

forgiveness. As we do this day after day we are growing in Christlikeness until as verse 2 says ***2But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.***

May this hope motivate us to live in a way that reflects our destiny. ³ *All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.*

John then goes on to show the contrast between sin and righteousness

4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. 5 But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. 6 No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

John stresses the seriousness of sin ⁶ *No one who lives in him keeps on sinning.*

He longs for us to be increasingly free from habitual sin

John then contrasts the Children of God with the Children of the Devil

Children of God – practice righteousness and love

Children of the devil persist in sin and reject love

Think of a tree and its fruit: A good tree naturally bears good fruit. As children of God, the fruit of our lives should reflect his righteousness and love. Matthew records Jesus saying

16 By their fruit you will recognise them. Do people pick grapes from thorn-bushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

For Reflection: Examine your heart. Are there areas where sin persists? Seek the Spirit's help to grow in righteousness

Hymn 242 A new commandment, I give unto you

A new commandment I give unto you :

that you **love** one another as I have **loved** you,

that you **love** one another as I have **loved** you.

By this the world shall **know** that you are my disciples,
if you have **love** one for another.

By this the world shall **know** that you are my disciples,
if you have **love** one for another.

Anonymous

Reading 1 John 3:11-24 More on love and hatred

¹¹ For this is the message you heard from the beginning: we should love one another. ¹² Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We **know** that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you **know** that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

¹⁶ This is how we **know** what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

¹⁹ This is how we **know** that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: ²⁰ if our hearts condemn us, we **know** that God is greater than our hearts, and he **knows** everything. ²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we **know** that he lives in us: we **know** it by the Spirit he gave us.

Second part of the Message

In the first part we looked at

The lavish Love of God and The call to Purity and Righteousness

Now the third section The Command to love one another

In my Bible the heading is **More on love and hatred**

¹¹ For this is the message you heard from the beginning: we should love one another.

John gives the example of Cain whose jealousy of his brother Abel led him to murder him – hatred leads to destruction, but love builds up and reflects God's heart ----

Love in action

¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth

John shows that true love is sacrificial as Jesus lays down his life

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters

And that is must be a practical love – sharing our resources with those in need and standing with others in their struggles

. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

Assurance and Confidence - in this final section of Ch 3-there are 5 knows!!

¹⁹ This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence:

Confidence before God even when our hearts condemn us , God's love reassures us

we know that God is greater than our hearts

God is greater than our feelings and knows everything

and he knows everything

Obedience brings Assurance - keeping God's commands, especially to love, strengthens our assurance. This is not about earning our salvation

we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.

The role of the Holy Spirit

²⁴ The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us.

²⁰ *if our hearts condemn us, ,.* ²¹ *Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us,* ²³ *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.*

Trust in God's promises, not your feelings

Rest in the assurance that you are His child

1 John 3 reminds us of the incredible privilege of being God's children. His love calls us to purity, righteousness and love in action

As we live out these truths we reflect his love in a world that desperately needs him

For reflection. Ask: How can I show love more tangibly in my relationships and community?

Hymn StF 489 All I once held dear

All I once held dear, built my life upon,
all this world reveres, and wars to own,
all I once thought gain I have counted loss;
spent and worthless now, compared to this.

*Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you,
there is no greater thing.*

*You're my all, you're the best,
you're my joy, my righteousness,
and I love you, Lord.*

Now my heart's desire is to **know** you more,
to be found in you and **known** as yours.
To possess by faith what I could not earn,
all-surpassing gift of righteousness.

Oh, to **know** the power of your risen life,
and to **know** you in your sufferings.
To become like you in your death, my Lord,
so with you to live and never die.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Prayers

For World Leaders and Peacemakers:

Gracious God, we lift before You all world leaders and those entrusted with the responsibility of guiding nations. Grant them wisdom, compassion, and courage to make decisions that foster justice, peace, and the common good. Inspire peacemakers across the globe to persevere in their work, sowing seeds of reconciliation and harmony. May Your Spirit guide their efforts to build a world where all can thrive in safety and dignity.

Lord, in Your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

For Those Suffering War & Natural Disasters:

Loving Father, we bring before You those enduring the ravages of war and the devastation of natural disasters. Comfort the grieving, heal the wounded, and provide

shelter to the displaced. Strengthen the hands and hearts of all who offer aid and support. May Your presence bring hope to the hopeless, and may peace and restoration come to their lands.

Lord, in Your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

For the Children of God Called to Love:

Merciful God, remind us of Your boundless and lavish love poured out for all Your children. May we receive it with open hearts and reflect it in our lives by loving one another as You have loved us. Help us to be vessels of Your grace, showing kindness, forgiveness, and compassion in a world in desperate need of Your light.

Lord, in Your mercy, **Hear our prayer.** Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Hymn StF 503 Love divine, all loves excelling

Love divine, all **loves** excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded **love** thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit
Into every troubled breast!
Let us all in Thee inherit,
Let us find Thy promised rest.
Take away the **love** of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.

Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect **love**.

Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, **love**, and praise!

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Blessing Father God Thank you for the love that has made us your children. Help us to live in purity. righteousness and love, reflecting your heart to the world. Empower us by your Holy Spirit to walk in confidence and obedience. In Jesus names. Amen