

Three reasons to pursue righteousness

1 John 2:28-3:10

Friends it's often the case isn't it,
that when you join a new group or organization
or even when you move to a new culture
you soon find yourself asking questions about the habits of your new friends.

I heard one Japanese visitor to this country
ask why Australians greet one another with a question
that they don't expect an answer to! It's true isn't it?
When we greet one another we ask "How are you?",
but we don't actually expect to receive a full answer!
And this habit of ours was very perplexing to my Japanese friend,
"Why can't you just say *Hello?*" was the question she was asking.

And you yourself may have experienced something like this after joining a group;
you may have had these questions ... after joining the church.

As a young Christian, there was one question that I asked for quite some time.
I understood that our salvation was by grace;
that through the death of Jesus
God had done everything that was needed to cancel out my sins.
But the question I was left with was this:
If salvation is by grace, then why bother being good?
If my good behaviour is *not* the ticket that God requires for eternal life,
then why am I even bothering?
I could see that other Christians were concerned about obeying the Bible,
but I didn't know *why*.

I remember attending a Christian conference for young people
where the speaker was talking at great length and with great enthusiasm
about God's wonderful grace,
how it's not our works but God's work that makes the difference.
And so I cornered him after one of his talks and I asked
"So why bother being good?"
and I remember his gaze kinda lifted up and he looked off into the distance
and with a hesitating voice he simply said "It's just the proper response".
And I thought "That's a rubbish answer".

And I still think it's a rubbish answer!
Thank goodness we have the Bible
and we don't have to rely on preachers for our understanding of God.
If you are only relying on me for your knowledge of God,
let me be the first to tell you, you are shortchanging yourself.

My preaching ministry will never cover all that God's book has to say to us;
we must be reading the Bible for ourselves.

And it's in 1 John that we find an answer to this question
that was overlooked by that preacher almost 20 years ago

So why pursue righteousness?

Why pursue right living even though it's God's actions that save us?

Well, John has three reasons, and the first is introduced in Ch 2:28

And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

John reminds us of an important fact which we should never forget:

Jesus *will* return one day.

At some point in the future, there will come a moment in the day,
it may be 6:45pm on a Tuesday, or 7:33am on a Wednesday – we don't know,
when Jesus will return and life on this planet as we know it will be over.

When Jesus appears a number of different things will happen.

Notice how John wants us to be confident and unashamed at Christ's coming;

Now why might confidence and shame be issues when Jesus returns?

Because his return will signal the beginning of God's judgment upon us.

What do you do when you receive notice that the landlord is issuing an inspection?

You run around getting the household in order, don't you?

You clean up so that you can stand in confidence that you'll pass inspection,
so that you'll dodge the shame of having a messy house.

What do you do at work

when you see on your calendar that performance reviews are approaching?

You go over your targets and KPI's to see that everything is in order.

I think I was in this job here only 3 or 4 weeks

when the Bishop made a surprise visit one Sunday morning.

"Surprise! I'm here to see how the new boy is doing!"

Now, my sermon was well prepared, and so I could preach with confidence.

Can we stand with confidence when Jesus returns?

Can we stand without the slightest trace of shame? Of course we can,
provided we remain in Jesus, provided we retain our trust in his work for us.

And as we successfully pass God's final and irreversible judgment,

Something else will happen too: seeing Jesus, we will be transformed.

Have a listen from ch 3 verse 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 we are now, is not how we will be in the future.

In the future, we will be like Jesus.
We will perfectly love others as Jesus did,
we will be in perfect relationship with God the Father as Jesus is,
Our bodies will be death resistant and decay proof, as Christ's body is.

Why? Well, the reason given here is that in seeing Jesus, we will become like him.
In 2 Corinthians Paul speaks of us reflecting something of Christ,
and I think the same kind of idea is being presented here.
When we see Jesus after his return, we'll take on and reflect his nature.

We've just had the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year.
Don't you hate getting up in the dark?
When the sun finally rises above the horizon
it comes straight into our lounge room at eye level,
and we have no blinds so it makes eating breakfast very uncomfortable.
And we've managed to make matters worse by hanging a mirror in that room
so now we can blind ourselves from lots of different angles.
The other morning I walked into the room
and got a beam of light straight into my eyes, and I thought
"Where's that coming from? It's that stupid mirror", and so I turned the other
way and *bang!* I got hit again straight from the sun itself.
It's like we've got two suns in that room,
because the mirror is doing a great job of reflecting the true sun,
and so it will be when Jesus himself comes into full view:
We will see him and be like him.

And so this is what's in store for us in the future: judgment and Christlikeness.
But what does this have to do with being righteous in there here and now?
John explains in v3: All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.
While we have this glorious future ahead of us,
it's not a matter of doing nothing in the meantime.
John is calling us to anticipate this future by purifying ourselves from sin,
by seeking to be like Christ *now* ahead of his return.

It's like those pre-school children who take the induction tour of their Kindergarten,
And then as the tour ends they purchase their uniform from the school shop.
If they're keen, what do they do when they get home?
They want to put on the uniform!
They're still some months away from attending
but they start anticipating what's in store,
and so it is with those of us who know what's in *our* future.
We choose righteousness now, in anticipation of what is yet to come.

But we also look behind us.
After asking us to think forward to Christ's second appearance,
John now asks us to think back to the first time Jesus walked on earth.

Verse 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.
 When Jesus appears in the future it will be to judge,
 when he appeared the first time, it was *to take away sin*.
 This is the past event that John wants us to never forget:
 Jesus appeared to take away our sins.

How does Jesus do this? Well in the words that follow,
 John uses the language of being us being in Christ,
 From the second half of verse 5
 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.

When we place our belief and trust in Jesus,
 When we say I believe in and submit to Jesus as my Lord,
 and I believe and trust that he will take away my sin,
 then the Bible speaks of us being *unified with Christ*.
 We form this connection with him, this partnership.
 What was ours becomes his, and what is his becomes ours.
 And so our sin becomes his, and he takes it away.

If you pay your rates, you and your local council form a relationship.
 The time I love this relationship most is during council clean up
 You put out your junk, and the council just ... takes it away!
 What do they take it? I've got no idea, I really don't care, I just know it's gone!

Sometimes you put out stuff that's a little bold, don't you?
 Last time we put out an old enamel bath tab. Will they take it or leave it?
 They took it. Gone. And so it is with our spiritual junk, with our moral junk,
 with all our sins and failings and wrongdoing.
 No matter how ugly, no matter how embarrassing, Jesus takes it away.

Now as wonderful as council clean up time is,
 there is the potential for a very big problem.
 Because junk is attractive, isn't it?
 During our last council clean up, we got rid of a lot of stuff,
 but we also brought home three tricycles that others were throwing out.
 And one week later I'm thinking to myself.
 "Why??? You get rid of your old stuff, and you go out and get more?
 It makes no sense!"

And so it is with our sin.
 Christ takes it away, but we manage to go out and find more of it!
 Christ forgives me for my impurity,
 But now I think I'll go out and sleep with someone else.
 Jesus forgives me for my anger,

But I'll still rip into that shop assistant who short-changed me.
I know Jesus can overlook my greed
But now I'll stop giving just to build up my own nest egg.

Friends, this makes no sense! No one who lives in him, keeps on sinning!

Thank goodness the council comes around again six months later;
It's another chance to get rid of our stuff once we come to our senses,
and so thank goodness Jesus is continually taking away our sin.

But John does want us to change our habits;
to begin resisting the urge to keep collecting junk.
Christ has removed our sins, let's not go back to them.

John has pointed us to the future, he's reminded us of the past,
but there's also a present reality that leads us to pursue righteousness.
This reality comes to fore in verses 9-10,
but there have been references all the way through today's Bible passage,
because throughout the passage John has referred to us as God's children.
Hear again Ch 3 verse 1: See what great love the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God! And that is what we *are*!
And one characteristic of children is that they're like their parents, is it not?

Somehow I am always shocked when someone says "Gosh, Theo looks like his Dad!"
Apparently it's the back of our heads that looks the same.
I wouldn't know, I haven't seen the back of my head in quite a while.
But it's not only the back of the head;
it's furrowed brow that we both express, it's the stocky build.
But why am I shocked, when we share the same DNA?
In fact it would be more of a shock if we looked different, wouldn't it?
If a child looks very different to a father
that's when you might ask some questions!

And if each one of us is a child of our Father in heaven,
then we'll also look like him,
because he's put his own DNA *within us*!
Cast your eyes to verse 9
No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's *seed* remains in them;
God himself lives in us! He has placed his seed within us!

And so what is this DNA, this *seed*, this divine presence within the Christian?
Verse 9 continues they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.

I believe this is a reference to the Holy Spirit.
In John's Gospel to be born again means to be born of the Holy Spirit,
It's to receive God himself, God the Holy Spirit, as he dwells within us.

And it's the Spirit who leads us to pursue righteousness,
because God himself is righteous.
It's the Spirit who will lead us to continually repent of our Sin,
who will provoke us to take up righteousness again after we fail,
and, by leading us to repent and choose righteousness,
will ensure that we don't go on sinning
This is life in God's family: we say no to sin and yes to righteousness

My wife used to work for a firm that is run by two Italians, a brother and a sister.
Have you ever spent time with Italian families? They know how to do family;
they stick together and they all work to the same end.
The mother of these two siblings was a 90 year old Italian Nona,
and even in her 90s she would make a hot lunch each and every day
for the children (they were in their 60s and still going home for lunch!),
but she still did it because families work together, they have the same goal,
and cooking lunch was her contribution.
And so it is with God's family –
pursuing righteousness is what we're all doing; it's there in our DNA.

There is an alternative family we could flirt with joining,
that's the family mentioned in verse 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.
The Devil has his own household, and, in the opposite kind of way,
his children also take after him. Look back at verse 8 The one who does what is
sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

I guess the point is for us to have some clarity as to which family we belong to,
and then to embrace the genes that God has passed to us.

I remember when the penny dropped as to why we pursue righteousness.
It wasn't because of some great sermon I heard,
it was because of a girl's comment in a Bible study that I was attending.
She was sharing something that she had learnt somewhere else,
and it was the simple idea
that the reason we pursue righteousness is because of our identity.
I thought "That's it. I'm good not in order to get to heaven,
but because I'm already going there!
Not because of who I feel I need to be, but because of who I already am!

And who are we?
We are people cleaned of sin,
who are members of God's family,
and who are going to be with Christ.
Does it make sense to pursue anything else apart from righteousness?
I don't think so! Let me lead us in prayer.