'A matter of having fellowship':
Ethics in the Johannine epistles
Dirk G. van der Merwe

1. Introduction

The Johannine epistles teach ethics that is almost frankly simple (cf. Van der Watt 1999, 491; Schnackenburg 1967, 316) and yet intriguing.\textsuperscript{782} While its simplicity lies in its resemblance to the Fourth Gospel with regard to the 'new commandment' that Jesus gave to his disciples, namely to 'love one another' (John 13:34; 15:12, 17) -- a command that is repeated in the first two Epistles (1 John 3:11, 18, 23; 4:7, 11, 21; 2 John 5) and implied in 3 John (compare 3:10; 4:7 with 3 John 6, 11) as the \textit{sine qua non} of their ethics -- an element of intrigue is introduced through the mode in which the Elder\textsuperscript{783} describes it and the various aspects that he inquires in it.

The first part of the above heading indicates the ethos of the ethics in the Johannine epistles as a matter of \textit{koinōnia} (fellowship) within a family. It is from this perspective that Johannine ethics will be approached. Already in the \textit{prooemium} and verses 1:6, 7 of 1 John, the Elder tries to explain the close relationship between \textit{koinōnia} among believers, and between the group of believers and God, which encompasses a matter of spirituality. The one relationship determines and constitutes the other.

\textsuperscript{782} A lack of general social awareness outside the circle of the Johannine community led some interpreters to doubt whether one can speak of 'ethics in the Johannine epistles' at all; see Klauck 1991a, 277-80.

\textsuperscript{783} Probably the most extreme critic on ethics in the Johannine Epistles is Sanders 1975, 100, who sees Johannine ethics as weak and morally bankrupt. A Johannine Christian, he says, on seeing a wounded traveller would ask: 'Are you saved, brother?' instead of giving aid. In this chapter an attempt is made to disprove this allegation by proving how strongly ethics figures in the Johannine epistles.
To introduce this research, it is necessary to refer to the methodology used. Although the three epistles are closely related, 3 John will be dealt with separately from 1 and 2 John, owing to its more personal character. The two specific existential historical situations in 3 John provide grounds for the decision to discuss 3 John separately. Some of the vocabulary of 2 John is much more like that of 1 John. In the case of the first two epistles, 1 John will be used as the main source in the discussion of Johannine ethics and 2 John will be incorporated where appropriate or necessary. This discussion will be done from the perspective of the symbolic narrative of ‘family metaphoric’, which constitutes the setting for the interpretation of 1 and 2 John. In order to facilitate an inter-textual understanding of this ‘metaphoric’, we will look at the customs in first-century Mediterranean family life to provide us with a socio-historical framework against which the ethics of 1 and 2 John will be balanced.

2. Ethics in 1 and 2 John

First and Second John depict a community torn apart (2:18) by doctrinal and ethical differences. First John was addressed to a group that formed part of this community, which included a circle of house churches that had been rent asunder by a schism (Painter 2002, 84). According to Culpepper (1998, 48), serious differences of opinion had precipitated a schism by the time 1 John was written. The deception was already a reality; it had already caused a rift in the community (Kenney 2000b, 101). It seems as if those who had detached themselves from the group were threatening to encourage others to follow their example. Second John addresses a house church that had close ties with the Elder and the Johannine community. In content this epistle resembles 1 John, as it makes concise reference to some of the same concerns. In an attempt to encourage, instruct and exhort his adherents to maintain a specific form of conduct in these circumstances and to institutionalise a social pattern of fellowship, the Elder employs a vocabulary that conveys images of family life.

The group who separated itself from the Johannine community (τῶν πλατωνίων, 1:8; 2:26; 3:7; 2 John 7) and threatened to draw others from the community claimed a form of spiritual illumination. Through this spiritual illumination, they claimed to have attained a state beyond ordinary Christian morality in which they had no more sin and have already attained moral need to continue to resist sin. This result, in their chief ethical error, appears to be a spiritual pride that led them to despise ordinary Christians who did not claim to have attained the same level of spiritual illumination. Therefore, the Elder warns his adherents against claiming to be without sin (1 John 1:8-2:2). He denounces those who claim to know God, but disobey His commandments (1:6-7; 2:4-6; 5:2-3), or who claim to love God, but do not love their brothers (and sisters) (2:7-11; 3:10-13a, 23; 4:7-11, 20-21). He also cautions against loving the world and warns against its power and tempations (2:15-17; 4:4-6; 5:19). Against those who claimed to be children of God (2:19), the adherents of the Elder (community of orthodox believers, 2:24; cf. also 1:1; 3:11; 2 John 5f.) formed a group on their own.

In the ancient Mediterranean world, society consists of groups. Being part of a group was important and a matter of convention. The in-group of the Johannine community, and how the common life is lived within this group, are what matters to the Elder, and this is the focus of used by the first Christians imply equality: family metaphors were used to describe relationships between people; see Lassen 1997, 114.

784 See Strecker’s 1996, 253f; cf. also Painter 2002, 331-336 comparison between 2 and 3 John, in which he focuses on the similarities between these two epistles. Also, see Klauck 1991b, 109f; Thomas 2004, 38 for a comparison between 1, 2, and 3 John.

785 The use of the present-tense verb πλατωνίων (deceive) is significant here to emphasise the ongoing or immediate nature of the deception; cf. Danker 2000, 821.

786 A predominant function of the Roman family, which was strictly hierarchical, cf. Dixon 1991, 19.40.41, was to evoke images of authority, while the family metaphors

787 At the beginning of the Christian era, the Roman family had a remarkably strong impact on society – as the ideal and as a metaphor. The family ideal was used for the creation of metaphors outside the family sphere. However, there was no uniform model of family life. Van Henten and Brenner 2000, 2 refer to the ‘growing awareness that a single model or concept of “family” obtains no more for antiquity than it does for contemporary life.’ See also Van der Watt 1999, 492; Esler 1997, 123; Loubert and Van Henten 1996, 121; Malina & Neyrey 1993a, 26-27 and De Vaux 1973, 20ff., who point out the differences between families in different societies and the diversity of types of family across the Mediterranean in the first century AD. In the light of this cultural diversity in the ancient Mediterranean world, it made good sense to work from a general perspective. In using the word ‘family’, the wide diversity of family forms across the Mediterranean was acknowledged.

788 Malina 1982, 1986, 1993; 1996, 64; also Esler 2000, 147; Robbins 1996, 101 points out how important group identity, real kinship and fictive kinship relations were in the first-century Mediterranean world – it fully determined the identities of individuals. Since they were group oriented, they were socially minded, attuned to the values, attitudes and beliefs of their in-groups. Because these people were strongly embedded in a group, their behaviour was controlled by strong social inhibitions along with a general lack of personal inhibition.
his doctrine and ethics (cf. Botha 2005, 395-6). By reminding his adherents of their fictive kinship, of their common identity (ἀδελφοί [2:9, 10; 3:10, 12(bis), 13, 15, 17; 4:20(bis), 21, 5:16], ἀλληλούς [1:7; 3:11, 14, 16, 23, 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5]), and the values, conduct and doctrine that set them apart from other groups (e.g. the deceivers) in their society, the Elder enforces their identity as a group, and serves to continue to regulate social (ethical) behaviour in this group.

To this end, the Elder uses this most intimate social phenomenon in the ancient world, namely ‘the family’ (Van der Watt 1999, 494), to describe the existential reality of being and living as Christians in such a group. In doing so, he uses a coherent network of metaphors, related to the social reality of first-century family life (Van der Watt 1999, 491; also Lassen 1997, 103; Moxnes 1997), to provide an understanding of fundamental Christian concepts. He applies widely accepted conventions from everyday life to what happens in the community, and uses generally accepted ideas about family life to explain what Christian life in the community comprises. Therefore, the relevant social and family conventions of that time have to be considered for better understanding. In using these complex metaphors, developed in the text itself (cf. Van der Watt 1999, 493), the Elder focuses only on specific central and widely accepted and relevant aspects (Van der Watt 1992, 272-9) that are important for his purpose. Through doing this, he tries to activate the social dynamic of the interrelatedness between a father and his child and between children mutually in the mind of his adherents. The household of God is the sphere where this Christian fellowship is constituted and experienced.

2.1.1. Family dynamics in the Johannine epistles

The Elder portrays the Christian life of fellowship in the Johannine community as existence in a family (Rusam 1993, 105ff.; Van der Watt 1999, 494ff.; Van der Merwe 2005, 443f) where God is ‘the Father’ (τὸν πατέρα, 3:1) and the head. The believers are ‘children of God’ (τέκνα θεοῦ, 3:1-2, 10; 5:2), ‘born from God’ (γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18). They confess that God is ‘Father’ (πατήρ, 1:2; 2:14-15, 22-24; 3:1; 2 John 4) and are referred to by the Elder as ‘brothers’ (ἀδελφοί and ‘sisters’, 3:13) to each other. Jesus is God’s ‘Son’ (Ιησοῦς ηστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:15), and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:2f). Thus the Elder brings God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and believers into a fellowship that is reminiscent of the fellowship that is enjoyed by an extended earthly family (cf. Tollefsen 1999, 88).

a) The position and function of the Father

In 1 John God, the Father, is depicted as light (ὁ θεός φῶς ἐστίν, 1:5), righteous (ὁ θεός δίκαιος ἐστίν, 1:9; 2:29) and love (ὁ θεός ἁγγίμη ἐστίν, 4:8, 16). The nature of the Father determines the new status and rules of conduct to which his newborn children have to conform. As the one who cannot be seen (4:12, 20), He knows everything (3:20). He creates κοινωνία, enabling them to be part of this new family (2:25; 3:14-15; 5:11-13), by giving them eternal life through his Son (1:2; 4:9; cf. also 4:11, 14). The Father takes care of his children and lives in and with them by way of the Spirit (3:24).

793 Esler 2000, 148; cf. also 145ff.; 1997, 121ff. points out that neither Greek nor Latin possessed a word that corresponded to our ‘family’—οἶκος in Greek and domus in Latin refer to the house and the household respectively. This concept also occurs in Galatians and 1 Thessalonians in the New Testament.
b) The position and function of Christ

Jesus is depicted as the Son of God (3:8; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12, 13, 20; 2 John 3) and is eternal life personified (1:1-2). He is righteous (2:1; cf. also 3:7) and pure (ἀρετή 3:3), because he is without sin (3:5). Therefore, he is also referred to in functional terms (Van der Watt 1999, 502) in relation to God’s children: he is the believer’s atoning sacrifice (λατρεύω 2:2; 4:10), therefore through his ‘blood’ people are cleansed from all sin (1:7). As advocate (παράκλητος 2:1), he restores broken κοινωνία. He gives God’s children understanding to know him who is true (5:20).

c) The position and function of the Spirit

This new existence of God’s children can be experienced in a concrete way by the Holy Spirit, who carries out the redemptive work of the Father and the Son (2:20). He also constitutes the presence of God (4:13; 3:24) and guides and educates his children (2:27) in the familia Dei. Other functions of the Spirit are those of teacher (2:27), empowerer (3:24 in the context of obedience; 4:13, in the context of love), confessor (4:2) and witness (5:7; cf. Kenney 2000a, 47). The Spirit becomes the guiding influence in the lives of God’s children (2:20-27; 5:7), influencing their conduct and sustaining the κοινωνία in the family. The Spirit will give God’s children knowledge (2:20). The Spirit witnesses to the truth (5:6a) and will guide God’s children in the truth (5:6; see also Von Wahlde 1990, 126ff.).

d) The position and function of the children of God

The adherents of the Elder are depicted as God’s children who abide (μενέων) in Him, and in whom He abides (3:24; 4:13, 16). When they became part of the familia Dei, major fundamental changes took place in their lives. They know the Father and do what pleases Him (3:22), therefore, they ought to walk as Jesus walked.

2.1.2. Ethics and ethos in the familia Dei

The ethos of the ethics in 1 and 2 John is a matter of having fellowship (κοινωνία) in the familia Dei. Fellowship between God’s children and corporate fellowship with God (1 John 3, 6, 7), constitute the character of existence in this family. Plutarch, a contemporary of the Elder,794 refers to this aspect when he accentuates the parent-child and the brother-brother relationships equally, and demonstrates how closely linked these two relationships were in first-century Mediterranean family life. This ‘mutual’ and ‘corporate’ fellowship is what the Elder tries to explain to his adherents when he talks about how life should be in the familia Dei.

However, the Elder does not always see eye to eye with Plutarch: Plutarch does not regard these relationships as functions of each other, as the Elder does. The Elder tried to prove that the one constitute the other and is dependent of the other. Whereas Plutarch does not simply subsume brotherhood under a patriarchal kinship system (cf. 482F, 483B-C), the Elder does. Because a believer is born (ἐκ αὐτοῦ γεγένησαν) into this familia Dei and has to take on the same ‘life’ as the Father, the believer is expected to conduct him/herself in a specific way: his/her conduct should be such that it does not harm (ἀμαρτία) the fellowship, but should strengthen (κοινωνία) it. It should be constituted through and characterised by love (ἀγάπη) (compare Van der Watt 1999, 491-511; Schulz 1987, 512-526; and Johnson 1993, 718-19; cf. also Brown 1982, 79ff.). These fundamental ethical aspects (κοινωνία, ἐκ αὐτοῦ γεγένησαν, ἀμαρτία, ἀγάπη) will now be discussed.

2.1.2.1. Ethics, a matter of κοινωνία795

The noun κοινωνία is a significant theological term in 1 John.796 It occurs twice in the prooemium (1.3[bis]) and two more times in the rest of chap-

794 Plutarch is favoured due to his contemporariness (50-120 AD) to the writings of 1 and 2 John and his ethics on family life. He was probably the most famous biographer (and historian) of the Ancient Mediterranean World in that time. He was, for many years, a priest at the famous oracle at Delphi and the author of a famous collection now known as Plutarch’s Lives. Plutarch’s other famous work is his Moralia, now known collectively as the Moralia (http://www.e-classics.com/plutarch.htm, 10 March 2006, 22h45).

795 Within scholarship two distinct and disparate views have developed concerning the message of 1 John. They have arisen as a consequence of two variant perceptions of the purpose of the epistle. The one comprises ‘salvation’ (5:13, τὸν καθὼς τὴν σωτηρία) and the other ‘fellowship’ (1:3, κοινωνία); see Derickson 1993, 89-105; cf. also Smalley 1984; Kenney 2000a. In fact, they complement one another. Both these themes are mentioned in the prologue to 1 John, where the Elder gives, as we may expect, a synopsis of his principal motifs. In this chapter the emphasis falls on the ‘fellowship’ perspective.

796 This is indicated by all the references to τῶν ἀδελφῶν αὐτοῦ, ἀλλήλων, plural personal pronouns, and verbs in plural. Although the formulas of immanence refer primarily to fellowship with God, fellowship with one another is also implied.
ter one (1:6, 7) to create a chiastic pattern. The function of the chiastic structure is to emphasise the interrelatedness and interdependency of the κοινωνία among believers and their corporate fellowship with God. The one kind of κοινωνία demands and constitutes the other. The Elder makes the primary reference: ‘we have fellowship with one another’ (κοινωνίαν ἔχουμεν μετ’ ἀλλήλων, 1:7), and this is dependent on ‘you may have fellowship with us’ (κοινωνίαν ἔχετε μεθ’ ἡμῶν, 1:3), which opens up κοινωνία with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (cf. Painter 2002, 128; Rusam 1993, 182; Westcott (1982, 11). Both these forms of κοινωνία, which reflect, influence and constitute each other, occur throughout the epistle in other formulas and related deeds and imaging.

a) Κοινωνία as a matter of ‘knowing’, ‘having’, ‘being in’, and ‘abiding in’

These formulas of immanence (Immanenzformeln, Schnackenburg 1992, 63-69; cf. also Lieu 1991, 31-48; Strecker 1996, 44) express the character of κοινωνία from various perspectives that explain the qualitative lifestyle of the children of God in the familia Dei. All these closely related formulas of immanence show the central significance of this concept (κοινωνία) in these two Johannine epistles, which have a strong connection with other leading concepts, especially that of ‘children of God’ (3:1-3), which has strong ethical implications (cf. Lieu 1991, 42).

797 According to Danker 2000, 552, the ‘Greek word κοινωνία lexicographically means ‘close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship’. The semantic meaning, according to Louw and Nida 1988, 446, relates to Danker’s definition, ‘an association involving close mutual relations and involvement – “close association, fellowship”. Founded on the above related definitions and based on the adjective meaning ‘common’ (κοινός), the noun κοινωνία then denotes the active participation or sharing in what one has in common with others: doing something together or sharing something Haas et al. 1972, 27. The nature of what is mutually shared moulds the character of the group. In this context it refers to the ‘new life’ (cf. 1:1, 2:22; 5:13 the believers share with Christ (and God) and with one another. This ‘new life’ in Christ creates and stimulates the desire for such fellowship and calls not for isolation, but for active participation with other believers in this ‘new life’.

798 ‘Knowing’ (γνωρίζω, 1 John 2:3, 4, 13, 14; 3:6; 4:8), ‘having’ (ἔχων, 1 John 2:23; 2 John 9; cf. also 5:12), ‘being in’ (ἐν, 2:5; 5:20) and ‘abiding in’ (μένων, 2:6, 24; 3:24; 4:13, 15, 16). Methodologically, within this purview, the formulas of immanence should also include the ‘abiding’ in other entities which are also closely connected with God, such as ‘truth’ (1:18; 2:4; 2 John 2); ‘his word’ (1:19; 2:14; cf. 2:24; 5:10); his ‘anointing’ (2:27); his ‘seed’ (3:19); eternal life’ (3:15); and ‘love’ (4:12, cf. 2:5); the Spirit (3:24; 4:13); God self (3:24[bis]) abiding in the believer and reciprocally the abiding of the believer in the Son (2:6, 24, 28, 3:5, 24). Mutual abiding is referred to in 4:13, 15, 16 and 2 John 9.

In the sphere of family life parents educate the children according to their own standards and beliefs. Therefore, ‘knowing the Father’ will lead the children of God to correct conduct (according to his character [cf. 1:5; 2:29; 4:8, 16] and will [2:17]). Such knowledge of God comes through the Son of God who gives believers understanding (5:20). ‘Knowing Jesus’ (2:3-5) is related to knowing and keeping his commands and his Word. Hence, knowledge of the Father and his Son constitutes the basis on which the individual family member and the family as an entity should live. To know God and his Son is also to know the Spirit of God (4:2) who is the Spirit of truth (5:6; cf. also 4:6). Know the truth implies knowing what kind of conduct is expected in the familia Dei.

The phrase ‘being (ἐν) in God’ semantically relates to ‘abide (μένων) in God’ (they are parallel in 2:5f.). The same applies in the case of ‘having’ (ἔχω) the Father or the Son (2:23; 5:12; 2 John 9). In 1 John, abiding is a reciprocal experience and a uniquely Johannine expression of personal fellowship. When the children of God obey his commands or live in love, they abide in God as God abides in them (3:24; 4:12-16).

By using these formulas the Elder encourages his adherents to get their relationship (κοινωνία) with God right. This will obviously strengthen their κοινωνία with the other members in the family. The child of God can only make these claims of immanence when these claims are justifiably matched by a life of obedience and love (2:5f.; cf. Lieu 1991, 41f.).

b) Κοινωνία as a matter of acting (περιποτείν) according to one’s immanency.

Throughout the epistles the Elder emphasises the need for the children of God to act according to their status and knowledge. The conduct of God’s children has to relate to the social conduct (rules and values) of the family into which they are born.

The Elder uses the verb περιποτείν (translated as ‘walk’ or ‘live’) as one of the etiquettes to describe such conduct in the familia Dei. In 1

799 ‘Having’ is virtually synonymous with ‘believing’. See the parallel between ‘believing in’ and ‘having the Son’ in 5:10, 12.

800 See 1 John 1:6, 7; 2:5-9, 10-16; 4:11; 2 John 6, 9; cf. also 1 John 2:29; 3:6, 9-10, 18; 4:7.

801 The verb περιποτείν occurs 5 times in 1 John (1:6, 7; 2:6[bis] and 2:11). In 1:6, 7 εν τῷ φωτί (στὸ φωτί) περιποτείνουμεν is directly linked with κοινωνία. This implies that when the Χριστός ἔλθε into the light, they have fellowship with God and with one another. When they walk as Jesus walked, they also walk in the light. In 2 John
John it is used five times in connection with ‘having fellowship’ with God and one another (1:6, 7; 2:11) and ‘imitating’ Christ (2:6). For ‘living’ in the light the Elder suggests actions that correspond to God’s actions (cf. Schnackenburg 1967, 312). In 2:6 he states that the lifestyle of believers should correspond with that of Jesus: καθώς ἐκεῖνος περιπατήσας καὶ αὐτῶν [ἵνα] περιπατεῖν. This happens when believers act according to God’s commandments (2:3, 4; 2 John 6). They should ‘obey’ (πραγματεύονται) the commandments (2:3, 4; 3:22, 24; 5:2, 3; in 2 John 6, ἵνα περιπατήσωμεν κατὰ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ) or God’s word (2:5). According to Van der Watt (1999, 504f.), the verb πραγματεύονται indicates ‘an obedient orientation towards the will of God the Father’ (5:1-5).

c) Κοινωνία, a matter of imitatio Christi: ‘ought to walk just as (καθώς) he walked’ (2:6) 803

According to Plutarch, older brothers should not behave in a fatherly fashion towards younger brothers, but should treat them in a way that is characterised by comradeship and consideration. Younger brothers should treat the older ones not as rivals, but as models, with respect and obedience (486F-87B). In such a group situation a dyadic personality is one that constantly needs another person to know who he/she is. Such a person perceives him/herself as always interrelated to others (Malina & Neyrey 1993b, 73-74). Thus, within the framework of the identity and behaviour of the other members of the group, the most important and prominent members (the father and eldest brother), individual members find their self-definition (Van der Watt 1999, 501).

This is probably what the Elder had in mind in his two ‘ought to’ (ὑπέρέλει, 2:6; 3:16) references to Christ. According to the Elder, Christ, the Son of God, is the template for the conduct of believers. Through their active participation or sharing in the way Jesus lived they have a ‘common’ (κοινώς) ground which not only moulds the character of the children of God, but also constitutes the κοινωνία in the family. Therefore, the Elder has pointed out that ethics in 1 and 2 John is not a matter of a set of rules; it is an existential way of living that is established by the attitude and behaviour of Jesus, the Son of God. This ‘way of living’ can only actualise in believers through the Spirit. Through the existential guidance of Jesus and the spiritual guidance of the Spirit, the believer, as a child of God, finds his/her own way to please Him (3:22; cf. Van der Watt 1999, 506).

In his portrayal of Jesus in relation to the Father, the Elder, in 1 John, points out the following acting qualities in Jesus’ life to which believers must conform.

1) In 1:5 God is depicted as the light (ὁ θεός φῶς ἐστιν) in whom there is no darkness. In Jesus there is also no sin (3:5). Therefore, the same must be true of God’s children. This implies that they must ‘walk in the light’ as Jesus ‘walked in the light’ and ‘purify themselves, just as he is pure’ (3:3).

2) God (1:9, 2:29) 806 and Jesus (2:1; 3:7) are both depicted as being ‘righteous’ (ὁ θεός δίκαιος ἐστιν, 1:9; 2:29; Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς δίκαιος, 2:1). Jesus has shown that righteousness is a quality of God (2:1). A person is known by his/her deeds. Only through faith in Jesus (5:1), through birth from God (2:29; 5:1), can a person act according to the example of Jesus. Such behaviour lies in the familial bond (Van der Watt 1999, 506).

3) In 4:8, 16 God is depicted as love (ὁ θεός ἀγάπης ἐστιν). According to 3:16, Jesus shows that what love is by laying down his life for humankind (3:16; cf. also 4:9, 10, 14). Therefore, believers ‘ought to’ lay down their lives for one another. In this way the love of Christ (and God; cf. 4:9-14) will be continued through believers into the lives of other believers. Jesus acts in love (3:16). Believers are exhorted to love (3:16; 4:12). Thus the familia Dei is a family of love, the sphere where God’s love is communicated, shared and experienced.

It is frequently attested in the New Testament tradition that the example of Jesus must lead to imitation. 807 The indicative of the Jesus

803 The obligations of the children of God in the family are spelled out in all three Johannine epistles and in each case contribute to an understanding of the behaviour of these children, which is associated with walking. 1 John 1:6 speaks of the right conduct as walking in the light, whereas 2 John 6 specifies the commandments as the sphere of walking, and 3 John 3 identifies trust as the sphere of behaviour. Kenny 2000a, 117. See also, κοινωνία (2:6; 3:3, 7; cf. also 3:23; 4:17) in the comparison of the believer’s life with the life of Jesus.


805 Scholars are divided regarding whether the verb ἔστιν refers to God or to Jesus. See Brown 1982, 382 for a discussion on the different opinions. In this chapter Painter’s point of view 2002, 214f. is accepted. His arguments that ‘God’ is implied are convincing.

806 Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:15; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Timothy 6:12-13; 1 Peter 2:21-24; Hebrews 13:13-14. Also see Schnackenburg 1992, 182. The most important ancient rhe-
event 'ought to' (οὐχὶ ἔχει) effect the imperative of Christian life (cf. 1 John 4:11; 5:12-13). In comparing Christian behaviour with that of Jesus, part of the Elder's rhetoric is to motivate God's children to live in the familia Dei as Jesus did.

The above-mentioned familia Dei qualities in Jesus' life are also discussed by the Elder in relation to the lives of the children of God. These qualities will now be discussed under the headings: 'live in righteousness', 'live in the light', and 'live in love'.

2.1.2.2. Live in righteousness: 'everyone who does right has been born of him' (2:29)

To become a member of the familia Dei, a person has to be born into it. This happens through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God (4:15; 5:5). Through such a rebirth through God they have been legitimised to be children of God with everything that it involves, especially on the social level. In the new birth and implanting of the divine seed, the Elder clearly sees something more than a new relationship. It means, according to Ladd (1998, 664), that a new dynamic, a new power, has entered the human personality, which is confirmed by a change of conduct. The new birth will reorient the person's thinking and conduct. When a person accepts this new way of life, new rules and new values replace previous traditions, rules and values. The child of God has to take on the same life as the Father, which must be evident in the conduct of the family. This 'family life' then implies specific ethical conduct as spelled out in 2:29 by the Elder as 'everyone who does right has been born of him'. Similar statements also occur in 3:9, 10; 4:7; 5:1-2. From these verses it is clear that to be born into a particular identity constitutes a particular ethical way of acting (cf. 3:1-2). This is integral to the Johannine reflection on ethics. Such people will act right (2:29; 3:7): do the will of God (2:17) or walk as Jesus did (2:6; 3:3, 16).

2.1.2.3. Live in the Light: 'if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another' (1:7) and 'with him' (1:6)

This statement is made in a context where the Elder talks about sin (1:5-2:2). According to the context it infers that sin in the familia Dei does not only hamper fellowship with God, but also with fellow family members. This implies that believers who sin will not enjoy the honour of the Father and the familia Dei.

Honour was, according to Malina (1993, 31ff.; also Malina & Neyrey 1993a, 25), the primary good in the ancient Mediterranean world. This is the positive value of a person in his or her own eyes, together with the positive appreciation and acceptance of that person by his/her social group. What is honourable is what people (in the group or family) consider valuable and worthy (cf. Malina & Neyrey 1993a, 26). To maintain that honour is the responsibility of all the members of the family (Malina & Neyrey 1993b, 76).

808 The verb ὠφείλειν with an ethical obligation also occurs in 1 John 2:6; 4:11; 3 John 8; John 13:14.

809 All this is a matter of doing the will of God the Father (2:17). Ethics in the familia Dei is determined by what the Father of the family requires. Therefore, the conduct of all the members of the family should reflect the character of the family as it is personified in the head of the family; cf. Van der Walt 1999, 506.

810 The following scholars basically use the same structural division for 1 John, based on the three above-mentioned characteristics about God. Cf. Malatessa 1978, xvff.; Culpepper 1998, 269; and Tollefsen 1999, 84; Von Wahlde 1990; Kim 1998; Kenney 2000a and Painter 2002. Also see Brown 1982, 764 for a list of scholars who made a three part division of 1 John in relation to these characteristics. According to Tollefsen 1999, 88, 'the epistle is a commentary concerning three significant choices of conduct (my addition) in life: walking in the light – walking in darkness, works of righteousness – works of unrighteousness, and a love that produces life – or a hate that produces death'.

811 It should be noted that all five of the words in which the phrase ἔχει τὸν Θεόν is used, occur in contexts where the clause ἐν τούτῳ γίνεται (born from God) is also used (2:29; 3:1, 2, 9, 10; 5:1, 2, 4, 18, 19; cf. also 4:7). Not only are believers 'born of God' or called 'children of God': they are simply 'of God' (ἐν τούτῳ γίνεται, 4:1, 4, 6; cf. 4:3, 6) because 'God's seed abides in them' (3:9). These phrases point to divine origin; cf. Lieu 1991, 39.
For the Elder God's character, to which his children must conform, is the manifestation of the honour of God and the familia Dei. Therefore, he is outspoken about sinful acts that disturb the fellowship in the familia Dei. However, what if a member of the family fails and brings shame on the family? The Elder addresses this problem from two antithetical perspectives.

a) καὶ ἐὰν τὶς ἁμάρτῃ (But if anyone does sin, 2:1). In 1 John 1:8-9 the Elder infers that, even though they are part of the familia Dei, children of God do continue to sin. The strong social conventions did not succeed in eliminating disobedience in practice (Van der Watt 1999, 497). Even though there was strong social or religious pressure on people to obey their parents and live according to the traditions of the family, disobedient children were a reality. Where a father was disobeyed, he would be dishonoured or shamed, for his claim would not be acknowledged. He would suffer shame, which comprised the loss of honour, reputation and respect (Malina & Neyrey 1993a, 26, 27). Disobedience was regarded as reprehensible, because it destabilised relationships within the family and because it dishonoured the character of that family.

For the sake of the group, the individual who transgressed might be, on the one hand, ruthlessly ejected from the group (cf. Malina & Neyrey 1993b, 77). However, within the family, on the other hand, there was the chance that mistakes made could be corrected to restore the honour of the family. In 1 John something similar occurs. Through their confession of sin, regretfully acknowledging trespassing and again declaring loyalty to the will and commandments of the Father and the family, the believers are granted forgiveness and purification by the Father (1:9). The Father will also restore the relationship between Him and his children (cf. μαρτύρησα in 2:1; cf. also κοινωνία in 1:3, 6-7 in connection with the restoration of relationships) and the relationship between his children. When a child of God confesses his/her sin and when the Father forgives him/her, the normal order within the family is restored. Then the believer who has been unrighteous becomes righteous again (1:9). This infers that transgressions do not invalidate the existing relationship between God and his child. That is why personal confession (ομολογομένων, 1:9) and the advocacy (παράκλητος, 2:1) of Jesus can restore the strained relationship.

b) Πάντα γεγενημένον ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἁμαρτιῶν οὐ ποιεῖ (Those who have been born of God do not sin, 3:9). In 1 John 3:9 the Elder makes an antithetical statement (to the previous one in 2:1) that “Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them;” they cannot sin, because they have been born of God. This verse is constructed chaotically with the focal point in this verse on ὅτι σπέρμα αὐτῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς μένει (because God's seed abides in them). The reason why children of God cannot sin is ‘because God's seed abides in them’. This verse refers to their identity as part of the familia Dei, because God is their Father (they have been born of him, and his seed abides in them) and prescribes what their actions ought to be: not to sin.

In the ancient Mediterranean family, children owe honour to parents, and brother owes honour to brother (Plutarch, 479D) and parents are owed the greatest honour after the gods (479F). Therefore, obedient children remain completely focused on acting according to their identity. They do not even consider acting contrary to their identity and thus harming or dishonouring the family. This is what the Elder had

---

815 Although the noun ἁμάρτῃ (sin) has not specifically been defined in 1 John (cf. 1:9, 3:4), it seems to relate to the conventions of the day. The Elder also discusses sin in 3:4-10 (with an explication in 3:11-17) and 5:16-19. See Van der Merwe 2005a, 543-570 for a more thorough discussion on sin in the Johannine epistles.

816 The position of this announcement on sin in the letter (before his announcement that children of God ‘do not/cannot sin’) is a matter of rhetoric. The Elder emphasises in the unit, 1 John 1:5-2:2, that the children of God are not without sin and that they must acknowledge and confess it. These statements address the claims of the deceivers that they do not sin. The next unit where he contemplates on sin (3:7-10) is to exhort his adherents not to sin because it does not befit the children of God to continue to sin.

817 Jesus' role and function as παράκλητος have to be understood within the framework of the 'family court' (familia concilium). Such a court served as an organ of discipline that was constituted by the core unit of the family. Normally, the male head of the family conferred with other members before deciding how to react against a member of the family who had trespassed. The noun παράκλητος may suggest such a judicial situation. Jesus' advocacy is needed when a family member has sinned; he must then approach the Father (cf. Van der Watt 1999, 500). Plutarch also points out that when conflicts between brothers arise, it is preferable that they are solved internally, between those involved, and with justice as judge (483D, 4888-489D). If necessary, others can be present, as arbitrators or witnesses, but these ought to be friends which they have in common (483D, 490F-491A).

818 These 'children of God' are labelled 'they cannot sin'; if they obey his word (2:5), if they love one another (4:12) and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them (4:17), then in this person the love of God has reached perfection.

819 Cain is referred to in chapter 3 as one who betrayed his family by killing his brother (3:11-12). By doing this he illustrates that he did not belong to the familia Dei. According to the context of chapter 3, he is a ‘child of the devil’. The two brothers belonged to different 'spiritual' families and acted accordingly. Their natural love for one another as brothers was overpowered by their allegiance to their real 'fathers'. That is why Cain committed murder, and why people of the same earthly family can turn against one another. Van der Watt 1999, 504. This then implies that the spiritual fami-
in mind when he states that a child of God ‘does not/cannot sin’ (3:9; 5:18; cf. 2:29; 5:4). In hyperbolic language, the Elder seeks to promote right belief and proper conduct. He definitely does not believe that those under instruction are actually perfect; but sinlessness is what is expected of God’s children (Edwards 1996, 102).

The point the Elder wants to make is that a person who ‘carries God’s seed in him/her’ cannot continue to live in sin because a new principle of life has been implanted in that person (Strecker 1996, 100). There must be an obvious change in the person’s conduct. It involves a reorientation – an orientation towards God and an orientation away from Satan, the world and selfishness.

2.1.2.4. Live in Love: ‘let us love one another’ (1 John 2:10; 3:10, 11, 14, [18], 23; 4:7, 11, 12, 21; 5:1-3; 2 John 5).

In his Peri Philadelphia·s (‘On Brotherly Love’) Plutarch discusses how brothers in the family should treat one another.820 Plutarch regards brotherly love as an important element within kinship ethics. According to him, the fundamental and most important reason for brotherly love is based on nature, as they have the same biological origin: ‘Nature from one seed and one source has created two brothers, or three, or more, not for difference and opposition to each other, but that by being separate they might the more readily co-operate with one another’ (478E). Thus brothers should love one another out of respect for their common parents (480A-C). Moreover, love of brothers is proof of love of parents (480F). You do not love brothers, but are born into community with them, and thus under obligation to love them (482B).

In 1 John the community is also called to love one another (and God by implication, 2:15; 4:20; 5:20) as brothers and sisters belonging to the same family, the familia Dei. The reason given for this love in

1 John differs from that given by Plutarch. In 1 John the Elder grounds the obligation to ‘love one another’ in God: ‘God is love’ (4:8, 16), ‘love is from God’ (4:7) and ‘...since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another’ (4:11). The obligation is grounded in the loving act of God in Jesus (4:10; cf. also 4:9, 14) and is expressed in the love command (e¢nto¢). Therefore, according to Painter (2002, 101), must ‘those who bear the message of that love assert that acceptance of the message is the means by which the love of God becomes effective, creating community (koimnéia): 1 John 1:3, 6, 7. Community with God does not bypass community with believers, and that community is expressed in love for one another’.

In both 1 and 2 John, the object of the believer’s love is indicated as ἀλλήλους (one another). More important than the number of times ἀλλήλους is used, is the concentration of the command to ἀγαπάω μίαν ἄλληλον (love one another).822 This formulation, ἀγαπάως ἀλλήλους, is exclusive to the epistles (and the Gospel) of John. The mutuality is grounded in the love command, but the love command is itself grounded in the loving action of Jesus (Painter 2002, 100). In other cases, only in 1 John, the object of love is more closely referred to as τὸν ἄδελφον αὐτοῦ (translated and improvised in the NRSV in the plural as ‘their brothers and sisters’). Thus, the consistent use of the reciprocal pronoun ἄλληλος seems to be a conscious delimiting of the scope of love.823

820 Plutarch’s Frat. amor is particularly useful here since it was written in the first century A.D. and its author essentially offers a collection of stock morality covering both Greece and Rome on the subject of how brothers should treat one another. It is the only extended and systematic presentation of what Antiquity had to say about what Betz 1978, 232 calls, the ‘ethics’ of brotherly love. See Eder 1997, 127. Hierocles, a second-century Stoic, also devoted a part of his Elements of Ethics to conduct towards brothers (see the translation of his Anthologium 4.25.33 and 4.27.20 by Malherbe 1986, 93-96. Plutarch bemoaned the fact that during his day brotherly hatred was much more common than brotherly love (478C) and offered detailed and shrewd advice on how and why it might be encouraged.

821 This reciprocal pronoun is used 100 times in the New Testament. Of these occurrences, a great concentration is found in the Fourth Gospel (15x). 1 John uses the term 6x (1 John 1:7; 5:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12) and 2 John once (v. 5).

822 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5 (cf. also John 13:34[bis], 35:15, 12, 17).

823 Bultmann and others, Kuhl 1967, 196-207; Schnackenburg 1967, 183.328, endeavour to understand ἄλληλος to include the believer’s ‘neighbour’. According to him is the Christian commandment to love one’s neighbour ‘neither limited nor annulled by the Johannine commandment to “love one another”’. For him 1955, 82; 1971, 527f.; 1973, 28; cf. also Kuhl 1967, 104: ‘the world constantly has the possibility of being drawn into the circle of mutual love’. Others, like Peisker 1968, 205; cf. also Brown 1982, 527f.; Haenchen 1984, 118, have recognised clearly that the intention of the Johannine writers for Christian love was to be exclusive. Even Käsemann 1969, 59 states that ‘there is no indication in John that love for one’s brother would also include love toward one’s neighbour’. In analysing the situation in 1 John, the conflict situation in which early Christianity stood with Judaism, Hellenism (paganism) and Christian Gnosticism narrows the view, so that the Elder sees only his own Congregation; cf. also Klauck 1991a, 279. Even if we should follow the majority of scholars who think that the Elder means primarily ‘fellow Christians’, we still must, in reply to Sanders’ 1975, 100 comment, point out it is not suggested anywhere in the Johannine literature that a Johannine Christian would neglect a dying stranger. Other references: ἀδελφοί (2:9; 10: 3:12, 13, 15, 17, 4:20, 21; 5:16) and ἀδελφά (2:7; 4:17; ἄνθρωποι, 1 John 3:2; 3 John 1; also τέκνοι, 2:1, 12, 28, 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21; ἐκλεκτοί, 2 John 1; πλευρά, 3 John 14) that occur, are forms of address when the Elder speaks to his ad-
Two texts in 1 John cast some light on what is meant by existentially loving God the Father and fellow members within the *familia Dei* (cf. Schulz 1978, 524-527; also Brown 1987, 83-86; Van der Watt 1999, 508-510).

a) The first text is 1 John 2:15-17, where 'love for God' is described in terms of its antithetical, not to 'love the world or the things in the world'. Clearly, loving ὃ κόσμος stands in contrast to loving God, described here in terms of ethical conduct. Love of ὃ κόσμος refers to the desire (ἐπιθυμία) of the flesh, the desire (ἐπιθυμία) of the eyes and the pride of life (ἄλαξονεία τοῦ θησαυροῦ). Such characteristics are typical of the selfish person who seeks his/her own gain at the expense of others in the family. The phrase ἄλαξονεία τοῦ θησαυροῦ means 'the material possessions of this world, the physical resources, which one could use to help people in need' (Johnson 1993, 33; Danker 2000, 177; see also 3:17 where the noun θησαυρός is used). In 2:16 the Elder indicates that he knows people, likely the deceivers, who boast of 'the world's goods' (τοῦ θησαυροῦ). They boast of what they have, and do not share it with others who are in need (3:16, 17). They also deliberately 'shut off a feeling of compassion that the needy would instinctively arouse' (Brown 1982, 450).

Believers should not be enticed into such lust, desire, or pride, which will draw their attention away from the Father's will. Such an approach to life is self-centred: the thoughts, decisions and activities of everyday life are dominated by the cravings of a person's own flesh. Here the inference is that believers should live in a way that will not result in their priorities and orientation towards the family and fellowship within the family being adversely affected by the worldly things (cf. Van der Watt 1999, 510). Such a life endorses one's love for God.

b) The second text is 1 John 3:11-17. Here we find a description of two existent possibilities of living, with and without love (3:12-15), a description of what love is (3:16) and a practical implication (3:17; cf. Klauck 1989, 154).

A description of two existent possibilities of living (assassination or love): In 3:11 the 'love command' is stated: that we should love one another which is repeated in 3:23; 4:7, 11-12. With regard to love, two possible ways of existing (existentzensweisen), Klauck 1989, 160) are spelled out in verses 3:12-15. Cain is presented as an 'Übild und Symbolfigur des Bruderhasses, der sich steigert bis zum Brudermond' (Klauck 1989, 156). When one reads 3:8, it can be deduced that he was from the devil, and 3:10 states that he was a child of the devil. Therefore, his unethical conduct is that the slaughtering (σφόνθης) of his brother can be related to his kinship.

In 3:13, 14 reference is made to an 'alternative existenzweisen' (Klauck 1989, 160). In verse 12, Cain is compared to 'his brother' (bis), Abel, whose name is not mentioned, but who personifies another possible way of existence. In 3:13-17 the noun ἄνδρικος is used four times to become a terminus technicus (Klauck refers to it as a 'Leitworte') in this context, for this 'alternative existenzweisen', which is characterised by the Elder as 'righteous' (δικαίως).

The Elder is radical in his descriptions of these two possible ways of existing (σφόνθης versus δικαίως). In the admonitions, throughout the Epistles, there are no grey areas or middle ground: a person is either one or the other (Schnackenburg 1967, 316), either alive or dead. People who have love for one another have passed from death to life.

In the depth structure of the text, 'no love' is identical with hatred and death (Klauck 1989, 162). Whoever does not have love, abides in death (3:14). All those who hate a brother or sister are murderers (σφόνθης), and eternal love cannot abide in a murderer (3:15). This lebensraum in which love is actualised, is said to be a community that exists in opposition to the 'world'. What the Elder tries to point out is that if believers do not love the other members in the *familia Dei*, they are no better than murderers and children of the devil.

A description of what love is ('...we ought to lay down our lives for one another', 3:16b). In contrast with 2:16, love is here described in terms of action taken in response to the needy. The self-sacrificing action of Jesus is used by the Elder as an example of what such love comprises and has a twofold orientation. Firstly, it refers to God's love (4:9-
honest physical activity (see also 4:9, 10). ‘The Elder argues that compassion is not merely an emotional response, grief elicited by someone else’s grief. It is material relief, the concrete expression of mercy’ (Callahan 2005, 38). The double emphasis of the opening clause of 2 John 6 (τὰ περιπατήματα), as well as the last clause (τὰς ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατήσεις), reminds the reader that love is not just words or feelings, but involves actions (cf. 1 John 3:17, 18). Even the repetition of τὰ περιπατήματα… ἐν αὐτῷ… περιπατήσας stresses the practice (Painter 2002, 348f.).

Van der Watt (1999, 509) points out that this remark should be understood in the light of the ancient communal and familial way of thinking about property. Sharing common ownership of resources (κοινοφθορία) is seen as part of the natural cosmic order and is described as ‘friendship’ (φίλος), which is destroyed by the man seeking personal possession as referred to in 2:16. Esler (2000, 145) confirms this when he explains that a characteristic aspect of the centrality of the family in the Mediterranean cultures is a determination to share all available goods and benefits.

This indicates that love is not expressed through material necessities: it exists in them. To live is to love. We can therefore say that the Elder covers all the possible situations in which believers can aid one another and shows that Johannine fellowship is corporeal, carnal and fleshly (Callahan 2005, 38f.).

2.2. Ethics and those who are not part of the familia Dei

The main social value in the Mediterranean region, as has already been stated above, is honour. Accretions of honour of one family member add to the honour rating of the whole family. On the other hand, where one family member is shamed, the whole family is shamed (Esler 2000, 152). Where a father is disobeyed, he would be dishonoured or shamed, which comprises the loss of honour, reputation, and respect (Malina & Neyrey 1993a, 26-27). Disobedience was regarded as reprehensible, because it destabilised relationships and fellowship within the family, and because it dishonoured the character of that family.

828 Compare Deuteronomy 15:7; Mark 10:21; Luke 10:25-37; James 2:15-16; Didache 13.3-7 for probably what is meant by these ‘actions’.

829 According to Haas et al. 1972, 90 can ‘the world’s goods’ (τῶν ἰδίων τῶν κοινῶν) be understood as reference to ‘the ordinary things of life’. In 2:16 τῶν ἰδίων is used in a negative sense. For Schnackenburg 1989, 182 ἰδίων means in this context, as in 2:16 (and Mark 12:44; Luke 21:4; 15:12, 30), ‘livelihood’, ‘possessions’.

830 Foundationally is the exhortation for solidarity and approach of the poor anchored in the biblical tradition (cf. Deut 15:7-11; Jas 2:15-16).
Compliance with the rules in the *familia Dei* was crucial for the Christian fellowship, honour and the identity of this family, which can be regarded as introversion in its preoccupation with its own holiness (cf. Esler 1994, 90). Anything that should threaten this, like false doctrine or related behaviour, was severely frowned upon.\(^{831}\) In 1 John the condemnation of those who deny sinning, who do not keep the commandments, who love the world, who do not denounce a false doctrine, who do not love a brother, is extremely severe (cf. also 2 John 9-11). Therefore, those who had been guilty of these things and had caused a schism in the community are described by the Elder in the harshest terms.\(^{832}\)

Within the family, when any member misbehaved, there was a chance that the mistake could be corrected and the honour of the family restored (cf. Plutarch, 483D, 488B-489B, 490F-491A; 1 John 1:9). The harsh terms used by the Elder to describe these deceivers, provide a clear indication that he has already accepted that they will not be able to correct their mistakes and can no longer be part of the *familia Dei* (2:19). Therefore, he labelled them to be ejected from the Johannine community as in the Christian excommunication procedures described in 1 Corinthians 5:5, 13 and Romans 16:17; see also Matthew 18:15-18 (cf. Malina & Neyrey 1993b, 77). Consequently, he urges his adherents in 2 John 10-11: ‘Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person’.

### 3. Ethics in 3 John: The encouragement of fellowship

In 1 John the Elder discusses the interwovenness of ‘having fellowship with God’ and ‘having fellowship with one another’ and exhorts his adherents to comply to it; in 2 John he ‘forbids fellowship with false teachers’, and in 3 John he ‘encourages fellowship (hospitality)\(^{833}\) with Christian brothers’ (αδελφοίς, vv. 3, 5, 10; also called φίλοι in v. 15[s]). In order to encourage fellowship among Christian brothers in 3 John, he offers a stark contrast between two men who respond in opposite ways to travelling Christians\(^{834}\) who have been sent out by the Elder. In 3 John, the opposite ways in which they conduct themselves are used to illustrate ethics. The Elder points out that the way Gaius conducted himself demonstrated correct moral conduct. He expressed joy over Gaius’ persistent walk (present active participle, περιμετρώντα) in truth and over the manner in which he showed hospitality and support for travelling Christians who came to his church (vv. 5-8). However, he uses the example of Diotrephes, as indicated in the following diagram below, as a demonstration of conduct that is not moral (vv. 9-10).

---

\(^{831}\) This strong group sense and allegiance occur also elsewhere in the New Testament. In Revelation 3:15, neutrality is strongly condemned. In the synoptic Gospels Jesus remarks that: ‘Whoever is not against us is for us’ (Mark 9:40; cf. Matth 20:29). This text is not mentioned in any other biblical text. It is the result of a clear indication that he has already accepted that they will not be able to correct their mistakes and can no longer be part of the *familia Dei*. The text is not mentioned in any other biblical text. It is the result of a clear indication that he has already accepted that they will not be able to correct their mistakes and can no longer be part of the *familia Dei*.

\(^{832}\) These ‘deceivers’ are depicted and treated as existing outside the *familia Dei* (outside the group) and are (1) labelled according to the deeds they committed at the ethical level, on account of which they are called murderers (οὐδὲνομοί, see also 3:12, ἐνομοί) and who do not love a brother (4:20; also cf. 2:11; 3:15), and at the doctrinal level, on account of which they are depicted as deceivers (πλάσσω, 2 John 7; also 1 John 2:26; 3:7), antichrists (ἀντικριστός, 2:18; 22; 4:2; 2 John 8), liars (μέμνεσθαι, 2:22) and false prophets (μασκότωρ, 4:1). (2) These deceivers are also described within specific relationships: concerning the devil they are seen as ‘children of the devil’ (3:8, 10); in relation to God they are depicted as ‘not from God’ (3:10; 4:3, 6), ‘do not know Him’ (God) (3:1), and ‘do (not) have fellowship with Him’ (1:6); and finally they are seen as ‘to be in the world’ (4:5). (3) Metaphorically, in a reciprocal sense, it is said that they walk in the darkness, and do not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness (2:11). (4) In probably the harshest description it is said that they ‘do not have life’ (5:12; also 3:15) and ‘abide in death’ (3:14). In most of these references the harsh depictions of those ‘outside the family’ is contrasted with the characteristics of those ‘inside the family’ (group). Van der Merwe 2005, 550.


\(^{834}\) Scholars differ with regard to the way they refer to the people mentioned in verse 5 as τοὺς διακόνους καὶ τοὺς διάκονους. Johnson 1993, 171 refers to them as the Elder’s allies, not personally known by Gaius. Grayston 1984, 160 refers to them as ‘traveling missionaries’ who are strangers. Schnackenburg 1992, 290ff refers to them as ‘itinerant missionaries’ or ‘itinerant missionaries’. Culpepper 1998, 280 calls them ‘itinerant Johannean Christians’, and Achtemeier et al., Green and Thompson 2001, 551 describe them as ‘traveling prophets’, ‘emissaries’, and ‘itinerant teachers’. Whether they were Christian preachers, teachers, missionaries or simply Christians, is uncertain. The only thing that we can be certain of is that the Elder regarded them as brothers, and Gaius received them as strangers, Painter 2002, 371. In this chapter they will be referred to as ‘traveling Christians’.

According to the diagram, ‘walking in the truth’ is explained as ‘to love’ and ‘to support’. The statements next to A and B, relate to those mentioned in A' and B' respectively. This implies that ‘to love’ (A) is stated against ‘puts himself first’, ‘does not acknowledge authority’, and ‘spreads false charges’ (A'). The implication is that when a person acts according to A', there is no love present in that person. Such conduct results in the acts conducted in B', which contrasts with the act, ‘to support’, in B.

From this analysis it is evident that the ethos of the ethics in 3 John is defined as walking in the truth835 (ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ836 περιπατοῦντα, 3 John 3, 4). This phrase, in which Gaius is described as exemplary, is a matter not only of right doctrine, but equally and especially of right moral action:837 to support (προσπέμειν v. 6; λαμβάνειν, v. 7; ἑλπισμένειν, v. 8).

835 Family metaphor, especially evident in 1 and 2 John, such as ‘Father’, ‘Son of God’, ‘children of God’, ‘born of God’, ‘seed of God’, and ‘commandments’ does not feature in 3 John at all. Twice the Elder uses the noun ἀληθεία (vv. 2, 5, 11) as a form of address when he addresses Gaius and the adjective ἀληθινός (v. 1) having called him ‘beloved Gaius’. Three times he only refers to ‘God’ (vv. 6, 11[πίπτει] and twice (vv. 6, 10) ‘to church’.

836 The noun ἀληθεία occurs six times (vv. 1, 3[πίπτει], 4, 8, 12) and the adjective ἀληθινός once (v. 12) in the very short epistle of 3 John. This proves to be the intrinsic nature of the ethics. In 1 John 2:11 love is defined as ‘to walk in the light’, in 2 John 6 as ‘to walk according to his commandments’ and in 3 John 3, 6 as ‘to walk in the truth’.


Such action, which demonstrates affection and care for fellow Christians, is the realisation and outcome of ἀγάπη (v. 6; cf. 1 John 3:17f.); it is an activity carried out in the realm of truth (cf. Strecke 1996, 258). This ‘truth’, which has been practised and made concrete through ‘love’, is attested by the Christian strangers, who praise Gaius Christian way of life ‘before the church’ (v. 6).

Gaius’s ἀγάπη consists in προσπέμειν838 (v. 6), which comprises, assisting, outfitting, and sending forth these travelling Christians on their journeys (Strecke 1996, 259). The verbs λαμβάνειν (v. 7); ἑλπισμένειν (v. 8) complement this conduct, meaning to ‘welcome as guests’ (Haas et al. 1972, 153). By supporting these Christians who are ministering for Christ, Gaius has become a fellow worker of the truth. In his reference, ‘walking in the truth’ (v. 3), the Elder characterises this as ‘doing good’ (v. 11, ἔργα θεοῦ) which is from God. This verifies that moral virtue has its grounding in the character of God (see also Ps 136:1; cf. Painter 2002, 377).

In opposition to this, the way Diotrephes conducted himself is condemned by the Elder as having no Christian foundation. Both the adjectives πονηρός (v. 10) and κακός (v. 11) denote moral evil (Painter 2002, 377). He is held up as a model of how not to behave. His life and actions do not illustrate love. The description of Diotrephes’ negative conduct towards the travelling Christians, complement, from a negative perspective, what the Elder views as ‘walking in the truth’. With regard to the negative way in which these people were treated by Diotrephes, he emphasises the fact that such conduct does not demonstrate love, which puts others first, takes care of their needs, acknowledges authority, speaks the truth, welcomes travelling Christians and supports those who want to demonstrate Christian love through welcoming others.

Of those who live in truth (ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ περιπατοῦντες, v. 3) it can be said that they will practise love (v. 6) and good (v. 11); they are from God (v. 11). By contrast, those who do evil show that they have not seen God and have not recognised the truth (v. 11).

838 Danker 2000, 873 defines προσπέμειν lexicographically as ‘to assist someone in making a journey, send on one’s way with food, money, by arranging for companions, means of travel, etc.’ Louw and Nida 1988, 191, in conformity with Danker, define it semantically as ‘to send someone on in the direction in which he has already been moving, with the probable implication of providing help — “to send on one’s way”’. For greater clarity, compare his kind of conduct inter-textually with Didache 11.22 (where conduct towards ‘Travelling Teachers — Apostles — Prophets’ [Didache 11] and ‘Travelling Christians’ [Didache 12 is discussed].
4. Conclusion

The above investigation proves the ethos of the ethics of 1 and 2 John to be a matter of xouvnia. A network of metaphors are used by the Elder to describe this distinctiveness of Johannine ethics in the setting of ancient Mediterranean family life. Such family life, familiar to the adherents of the Elder, was adapted to the Lebensraum of the familia Dei. Relational imagery is conjured by the Elder in order to encourage his adherents to strive for family unity and xouvnia. Relational images and concepts are used to provide powerful bases of motivation that act to bind his adherents together by arousing in them a familial orientation. Such an orientation is rooted in the norms and ethics associated with the modes of relationship and constitute the cultural construct, family, to evoke lines of attitudes, emotion and conduct that are consistent with them. However, it is the presuppositions in dialectical discourse, concerning what is correct and incorrect conduct in family relationships that determine the quality of xouvnia and the meaning of ethical actions motivated by these terms (cf. also Adams 1983, 56).

In order to honour the familia Dei into which a person was born, (ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγένηται) he/she has to take on the same ‘life’ as the parent of the family (which, in the case of a Christian, is God the Father). Specific forms of conduct that relate to the believer’s nature and the identity of the family are expected. This must be ethical conduct that will not harm (ἀμαρτήσῃ) the fellowship. Such conduct is constituted through and characterised by love (ἀγάπη). It can be briefly summarised as abiding in Jesus and walking (περιπατεῖ) as he walked.

Ethics in the Johannine epistles culminates existentially when the Elder addresses two concrete opposite situations of ethical conduct in 3 John, ending with the emphatic and pregnant statement in verse 11: ‘Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God’ (ὁ ἀγαθοθείου ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν· ὁ κακοθείου οὐχ ἐφορεῖ τὸν θεόν). In order to encourage such ethical conduct in the Johannine community, the Elder rhetorically employs praise (of Gaius) and disapproval (of Diotrephes).

5. Works consulted


Callahan, AD 2005 A Love Supreme. Minneapolis.
Derickson, GW 1993 What is the Message of 1 John? BSac 150, 89-105.
Johnson, TF 1993 1, 2, and 3 John. Peabody.
Parsons, FL 1836 The Rhetoric of Aristotle. Cambridge.
Plutarch, Moralia. Helmbold WC (trans), Cambridge.
Smalley, SS 1984 1, 2, 3 John. Dallas.
Thomas, JC 2004 The Pentecostal Commentary on 1 John, 2 John, 3 John. Cleveland.
Tollefson, KD 1999 Certainty within the fellowship: Dialectical discourse in 1 John. BTS 29, 79-89.
——— 1999 Ethics in First John: A Literary and Socioscientific Perspective. CBQ 61, 491-511.