

The Apostle of Love

The worldwide Church has bestowed upon John the title "The Apostle of Love." However, his original title was very different. When Christ first selected John and his brother to be among the 12 apostles, Jesus had given them the name "The Sons of Thunder" in Mark 3:17. How did a Son of Thunder become an Apostle of Love?

We can see in the Gospels what young John's character had originally been like. First, John was very ambitious. This is shown to us in Mark 10:35-37 when he and his brother asked the Lord if they could sit on His right and left hand when He entered His glory. Secondly, John was intolerant of others. In Mark 9:38-40 he told Jesus that he had forbidden someone to cast out demons in Jesus' name because the man did not follow the apostles. John was sectarian and closed-minded, and thought this was pleasing to God! In a third account, John was so self-righteous that he wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans, Lk.9:52-55. Christ had accurately named him a "Son of Thunder."

YET JOHN CHANGED! As he followed Christ for three and a half years, he became very close to the Lord. Only John, James, and Peter were invited up on the mountain to see Christ transfigured in glory. They were also the only ones invited to see Jairus' daughter raised from the dead, and to remain near Christ when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Young John became a changed man as he spent these years close to Jesus. When he wrote his gospel about 50 years later, John was still captivated by the experiences he had with Christ. He wrote "and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." John also wrote that "when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is," 1 Jn.3:2. John had been transformed to become like Him as he saw the Lord- and John became the Apostle of Love as he saw that "God is Love," 1 Jn.4:8.

When ambitious young John had asked to sit on a throne with Christ, the Lord had taught him how true greatness could only be achieved by becoming the servant of all, Mk.10:43. As John saw the example of how Christ served and even washed the feet of the disciples (Jn.13:3-15), John was being changed. By the time of the Book of Acts we find that John never tried to be "Number One" in his actions, but always supported and served the other disciples.

When young John had been sectarian and closed minded in Mark 9:38-40, the Lord Jesus had lovingly corrected him. Through the words and example of Christ, John became very tolerant, patient, and loving towards others. His message of love is the strongest encouragement in the Bible for us not to be sectarian or denominationally exclusive.

Church history also records that John's ministry revealed the mighty love of God. When a young man backslid and left the church to become a leader of a band of murderous robbers up in the mountains, the aged Apostle went up into the mountains alone to be captured by the robbers- and brought their leader back to the Lord, and to the church!

When John had been a zealous young disciple, he had wanted to call down fire to judge the Samaritans. After maturing in the Lord, he had the opportunity to see this fulfilled in a proper, godly way. In Acts 8:14-18, Peter and John prayed and called down the fire of the Holy Spirit to bless the Samaritans!

Like John, we can have character flaws and faulty desires that need to be changed. However, Christ can take those weaknesses and transform them into His beauty and strength. Spend time with Him, and behold His glory and love. In the same way that Christ changed a Son of Thunder into an Apostle of Love, our Lord can equally change you!

-Article by Norman Holmes