

The 'righteousness of the children of God' according to the First Epistle of John

**Author:**Dirk G. van der Merwe¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology, College of Humanities, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Dirk van der Merwe, dirkvd7@gmail.com

Dates:

Received: 22 May 2023

Accepted: 28 Sept. 2023

Published: 30 Nov. 2023

How to cite this article:

Van der Merwe, D.G., 2023, 'The 'righteousness of the children of God' according to the First Epistle of John', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 44(1), a2904. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v44i1.2904>

Copyright:

© 2023. The Authors. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

The author of the First Epistle of John predominantly addresses the 'theological concept of righteousness' in two pericopes: pericope 1 (1:5–2:2) concerns the 'Righteousness of God', and pericope 2 (2:28–3:12) explores the 'Righteousness of God's children' from various perspectives. The adjective, *δικαιος*, occurs twice (1:9 and 2:1) and the noun, *ἀδικίας*, appears once (1:9) in the first pericope. In the second pericope, the adjective, *δικαιος*, occurs three times, the adjective *δικαια* once and the noun, *δικαιοσύνη*, also three times. This research starts with a discourse analysis to determine semantic networks to be used for the structuring of the reasoning and rhetoric in this research. Network A: The environment and foundation of righteousness: The glorious and measureless love of God in the *familia Dei*. Network B: The revelation of the righteousness of God in Jesus. Network C: A rhetorical strategy to alert God's children to live righteously: Contrasting statements. Network D: A rhetorical strategy to encourage God's children to live righteously: Parousia. Network E: Those who do what is right are righteous – they cannot sin anymore.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The theological concept of righteousness is explored from various perspectives, integrating semantic networks from biblical theologies, systematic discourses and Christian spiritualities to unfold the significance of the environment and foundation of righteousness, the love of God in the *familia Dei*, and the encouragement to live righteously.

Keywords: *δικαιος*; righteousness; *familia Dei*; Jesus; love of God; Parousia.

Introduction

The occurrence of the concept of *righteousness* in the pericope, 1:5–2:2,¹ concerns the righteousness of God, even though the adjective, *δικαιος*, occurs twice (1:9; 2:1) and the noun *ἀδικίας* (1:9) only once. Research on this pericope has pointed out that the presence of the strong fellowship motif (*κοινωνία*, 1:6, 7; also 1:3)² in 1 John has been used intelligently and successfully by the *Presbyter*³ to constitute the environment within which the Johannine divine righteousness concept could be interpreted and should be understood (cf. Network A). In this pericope (1:5–2:2), the *Presbyter* has pointed out five divine and human aspects that describe and constitute the righteousness of God from the perspective of communion: fellowship; three descriptions of the being and nature of God (*ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστίν*, 1:5 and *πιστὸς ἐστίν καὶ δικαίος*, 1:9); Jesus, the manifestation of the righteousness of God; confession of sin, forgiveness of sin and the purification from sin.⁴ Finally, the righteousness of God climaxes when 'living in the light'.

The (faithfulness and) righteousness of God, referred to in 1:9 (also cf. 2:29),⁵ relates to both the nature and the activities of God. Regarding the *nature* of God, the *Presbyter* refers to both

1. See my publication on the righteousness of God: *The 'righteousness of God' according to the First Epistle of John*. The reason for demarcation at 2:2 is because of the last relevant occurrence and reference to the divine righteousness (2:1) in the selected verses relevant and applicable for the investigation in mind. The adjective, *δικαια*, occurs also in 3:12 with specific reference to the deeds of Abel being righteous, as opposed to the deeds of his brother Cain. Then, in 5:17 (cf. 1:9) the noun *ἀδικία* occurs, stating that all wrongdoing is sin.

2. The *κοινωνία* concept is prescriptive for existence in the *familia Dei* and is constituted in/through love.

3. Various references and reasonings occur about the author of First John. For convenience sake it has been chosen to refer to this author as the 'Presbyter' because of the close relation between the three Johannine epistles.

4. Vitrano (1987:123) casts light on the concept of 'sin' (*ἁμαρτία*) in the first epistle of John. He points out how problematic it is to define sin. For him, 'The basic question is: How is 1 John 2:1 to be harmonised with 1 John 3:6 and 3:9?', 'How is this apparent paradox to be related to 1 John 5:16–17' and 'why does John claim a sinless perfection for the Christian believer in 3:1–10 but not in 1:7–2:2 or 5:16–17?'. According to the NT a person's being a Christian certainly does make a difference, and that difference is more than just acts of obedience versus acts of disobedience. It involves a whole orientation to life – an orientation to God and an orientation away from the devil and the world. Naturally, then, the actions growing out of that orientation must be seen and judged in the light of that orientation. A summary of a construct can be like this:

'World/children of the devil -- sin/lawlessness = sin that is mortal (no advocate).'

'Children of God -- unrighteousness/sin = sin that is not mortal (advocate- namely, Christ).'

5. Von Wahlde (2002:319) regards *δικαιος* in 2:29 to be enigmatic. To whom does it refer – to Jesus or to God? He claims that the antecedent of *δικαιος* in 2:29 is God the Father. His justification is founded on his examination of the structure of the pericope,

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

the faithfulness and righteousness of God in amalgamation with another divine attribute: 'God is Light' (1:5, 'ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστίν'). Later in First John, the Presbyter additionally refers to: 'God is Love' ('ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν', 4:8, 16). The two attributes (faithfulness and righteousness) of God are attached to the verb εἰμί and should be interpreted complementarily.

The (faithfulness and) righteousness of God, also evident in God's *activities*, validates sending his Son as propitiation (ἵλασμός) of sin (2:2). This Son of God, Jesus Christ the righteous (2:1), intercedes as 'intercessor' (παράκλητος),⁶ for believers, with the Father. This righteousness of God is continuously forgiving and purifying only those who themselves continuously confess their sins and walk as Jesus walked (2:6). God's ongoing action of sustained divine righteousness is emphasised by the Presbyter repeatedly using present tense verbs (Van der Merwe 2023).

The *objective* of this essay is to investigate the theological meaning of the 'righteousness of the children of God' according to 1 John 2:28–3:12.⁷ The *modus operandi* to achieve this will be: Firstly, to start with a *discourse analysis* of the Greek text⁸ in order to point out several relevant semantic networks so as to *determine* the structure of the reasoning and rhetoric of the Presbyter; secondly, to *outline* the environment and foundation of righteousness⁹; thirdly, to *indicate* how Jesus is connected to righteousness; fourthly, to *identify* how *contrasting statements* have been used as a rhetorical strategy to alert God's children to live righteously; fifthly, to *explain* how the *Parousia* of Jesus has been used as another rhetorical strategy to encourage the children of God to live righteously; and finally, to *confirm* that those who do right are righteous and do not sin anymore.

(footnote 5 continuous ...)
2:28–3:10 (2002:322). He is convinced that 2:29 should be read in relation to 2:28, 'rather than in relation to the remainder of v. 29 and 3:4, that one would suggest that δικαίος refers to Jesus rather than to the Father' (2002:338).

6. See the investigation of Lieu (2008:32) on the meaning of παράκλητος in 2:1.

7. A comparison of different English translations with the Greek text (NA27), signifies a uniformity among several English translations with slight variations in the title and demarcation of the pericope (2:28–3:10). The following analysis and comparison depict the reality:

- New International Version (NIV): 2:28–3:10 – The children of God
- New Kings James Version (NKJV): 2:28–3:3 – Children of God; 3:4–3:10 – Sin and the child of God
- New Revised Standard Version (NRSV): 2:29–3:10 – The children of God
- New American Standard Bible (NASB, Open Bible): 2:28–3:3 – Purity of life; 3:4–12 – Practice of righteousness
- English Standard Version (ESV): 2:28–3:10 – Children of God

The above-mentioned English Bible translations are nearly unanimous in the demarcation of this pericope (2:28–3:10). Only the Open Bible (NASB, 1985) includes 3:11–12 because of the occurrence of the adjective δικαία in 3:12, while the NRSV excludes 2:28. The Greek text (NA27) consists of no pericope indications, only paragraph indications. A new paragraph starts at 2:28. Chapter 3:11–12 constitutes a paragraph that relates closely with 2:28–3:10. Therefore, in this article I have opted the demarcation of the New American Standard Bible (and Greek text), 2:28–3:12, for the occurrences of the verb ἀγαπάω and the adverb δικαία in 3:11, 12. In the pericope, 1 John 2:28–3:12, the noun (δικαιοσύνην, 3x) and the adjective (δικαίος, 3x; δίκαια), together, appear seven times. This indicates that the concept of righteousness features decisively in this pericope. Closer research indicates that the Presbyter focusses here on the children of God who must live according to both the righteousness of Jesus (3:7; cf. 2:1, 6) and the Father (2:29; cf. 1:9).

8. This discourse analysis has four functions: (1) It will help us to identify the different semantic networks (semantically related words or phrases or concepts) that enhance better understanding and dynamic interaction between text and reader. (2) It will help us to determine the argument and rhetoric of the author. (3) It will assist us in constructing the bigger picture by means of semantic networks that created coherent mind maps. (4) It will also help us to relate what has already been read with what is still to be read (Van der Merwe 2015:3).

9. Cf. also Van der Merwe (2023) on how *fellowship* constitutes God's righteousness in the life of believers.

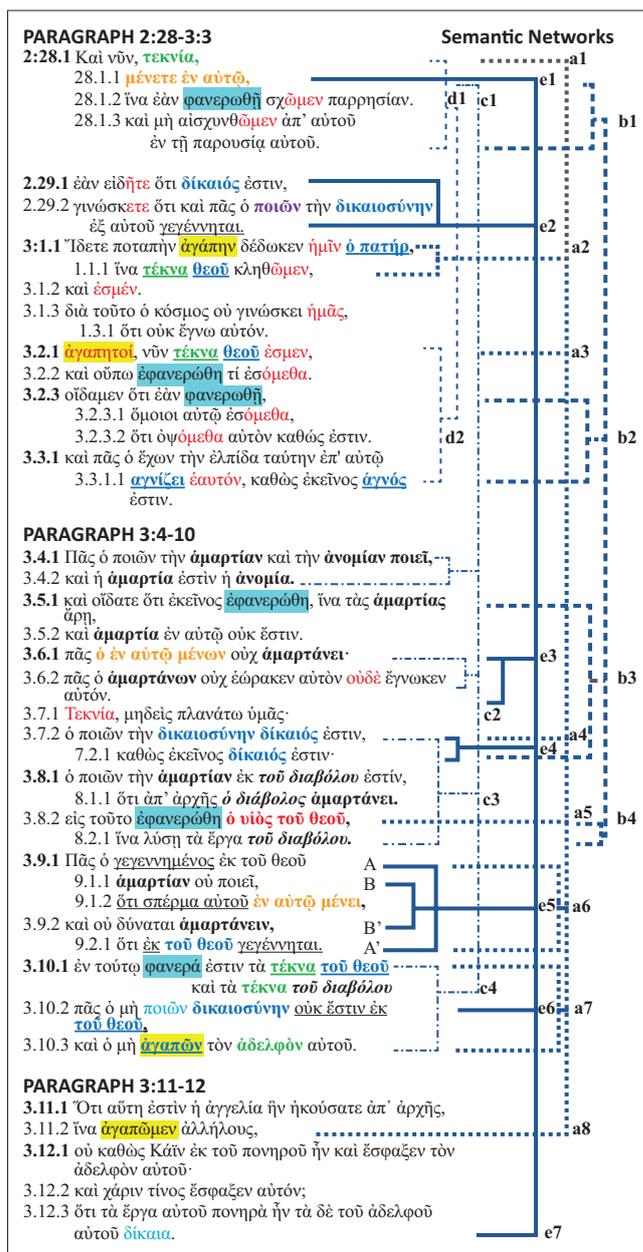


FIGURE 1: Discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis of 1 John 2:28–3:12

This section comprises two activities: compiling a discourse analysis and pointing out the various semantic networks that occur in the discourse.

Discourse analysis

For a discourse analysis of 1 John 2:28–3:12, please see Figure 1.

Semantic networks emerging from the discourse analyses

The following semantic networks are identified in the discourse analysis:

- Network A: The *familia Dei* the environment and foundation of righteousness.

- Network B: The *revelation* of the righteousness of God in Jesus.
- Network C: *Contrasting statements* as a rhetorical strategy to alert God's children to live righteously.
- Network D: The *Parousia* of Jesus as a rhetorical strategy to encourage the children of God to live righteously.
- Network E: Those who *do what is right* are righteous – they *cannot sin* anymore.

The *familia Dei* the environment and foundation of righteousness: (Network A)

The Presbyter depicts Christian life as the existence and experience of fellowship¹⁰ in a family (Van der Merwe 2005:443f), inferring a *familia Dei*. He refers to God as the Father (ὁ πατήρ, 3:1) of the family and Christian believers as 'children of God' (τέκνα θεοῦ, 3:1–2, 10; 5:2), 'born from God' (γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, 2:29; 3:9; also cf. 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18) and that 'God's seed abides in them' (σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει, 3:9).¹¹ As a response, they declare God as 'Father' (πατήρ, 3:1; also cf. 1:2; 2:1, 14–15, 22–24; 2 John 4) and are 'brother(s)' (ἀδελφόν, 3:9, 13) to each other.¹² Reference to Jesus as the 'Son of God' (υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, 3:8) occurs, to whom the children of God must amend their lives (2:6). The Spirit of God (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:2f) constitutes the Father's presence (3:24; 4:13) and directs and edifies God's children (2:27, αὐτοῦ χρῖσμα διδάσκει ὑμᾶς) in the *familia Dei*.¹³ In his application of family jargon, the Presbyter effects a 'fellowship like that of an extended earthly family' among the Father, Jesus the Son of God, the Holy Spirit and the children of God (cf. 1:3, 6, 7; Tollefson 1999:88; Van der Merwe 2005:443f.).

The Presbyter's use of domestic metaphors enhances fellowship in the Johannine community. In effect, it evoked effective primary 'actions, attitudes, and emotions'. These images embroil characteristic intellectual and emotional affections that exist within ancient families and have been applied to the Johannine community. These familial expectations are patterned in the interpersonal design of human circumstances. A 'child' perception, for example, implicates distinct 'rights, duties, privileges, attitudes, pitfalls, problems, etc.', which are related to the character of the family as determined by the father. Such connotations can establish 'expectations, attitudes, emotions, and actions' in God's children, affecting them to feel 'child-ish'. The same is applicable for 'life in the family' (Adams 1983:56;

10. 'Right' behaviour between members of the family manifests cohesiveness and corresponding loyalty towards one another (3:10; Van der Merwe 2009:96). These members are indicated 'to be of God' ('ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ', 3:10).

11. Both the conception and the birth of a believer are hinted at in 1:9. In this context, God 'acts both as father who gives the seed and the mother who gives birth. The conception is expressed by the collocation σπέρμα θεοῦ and the generation by the verb γεννάω which, when connected with the preposition ἐκ, is in the Greek reserved for the mother' (Geislerová 2021:11).

12. In this pericope, the Presbyter repetitively addresses his adherents as 'little children' (τεκνία, 2:28; 3:7; cf. 2:1, 12), and 'beloved' (ἀγαπητοί, 3:2; cf. 2:7; 3:21; 4:1, 7, 11; cf. 3 John 1, 2, 5, 11; Achtemeier, Green & Thompson 2001:546).

13. The 'Spirit of God' has not been overtly mentioned in this pericope (2:28–3:12), although implied (2:29; 3:9).

Van der Merwe 2009:96). Familial language¹⁴ seems to be used to reinforce communal boundaries (Parsenios 2014:94).¹⁵

In 1 John 3:1 (also 2:28), the Presbyter introduces the notion that believers are God's children to remind his adherents of the extraordinary love of God¹⁶ for them. The verse commences with the verb ἴδετε ('see' or 'behold') in the imperative mode to emphasise and to reflect upon the remarkable love God has granted God's children. No explicit references to love occur in the 1:5–2:2 pericope, nor to fellowship in the 2:28–3:12 pericope. However, it is evident from this context that love is essential to constitute fellowship where the righteousness of God is prevalent and experienced. Then consequently the children of God must live this accordingly.¹⁷ Hence, *righteousness* is embedded in *κοινωνία*, which subsequently is embedded in *love* (cf. 3:11, 12), within the confines of the *familia Dei*. Humanity is incapable to discern the immensity of this transcendent kind of love. Therefore, the Presbyter tried to express the mystery of this love, revealed in righteousness. Because of this, the Presbyter directs his adherents to live lives of righteousness, effected by loving God and loving one another (3:11; cf. Van der Merwe 2012:5-7).

This divine love nominates for believers the *en route* to be transformed, henceforth, to be termed 'children of God' (τέκνα θεοῦ; Akin 2001:133). They will then experience the righteousness of God, encouraging them to live accordingly, righteously. In fact, God bestows perpetual love on God's children (Akin 2001:133). This certainly has implications for living a life characterised by righteousness. The Presbyter, in 3:10, semantically associates the phrase 'to do righteousness' ('ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην') with love – to love fellow believers as God loves (cf. 3:11; Parsenios 2014:92).

The *revelation* of the righteousness of God in Jesus (Network B)

From the semantic network analysis, it is definite that Jesus plays a significant role in this pericope (cf. 2:28; 3:2–3, 5–7, 8).¹⁸

14. Malherbe views the use of fictive kinship language as a mechanism to compensate for any form of trauma in actual kinship relations experienced by converts to the *familia Dei*. He writes, 'Conversion was a disturbing experience that did not lead to a placid life in a safe harbor. The radical reorientation . . . required social, intellectual, and moral transformation that often resulted in confusion, bewilderment, and sometimes dejection' (1987:36–37).

15. Parsenios (2014:94–97) elaborates thoroughly on the *familia Dei*.

16. Already in 2:5, 10 the Presbyter elaborates on the *love of God* to prepare the readers to recognise love as the essence of fellowship in the *familia Dei*. Therefore, his declaration in 3:11, 'For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another'.

17. According to Geislerová (2021:12), the Presbyter uses three lexemes 'which unite the ontological and ethical notion of criterium to determine the status of the children of God: love, faith and righteousness'.

18. Von Wahlde (2002:323) argues that 'Within 2:28–3:10 there is a second, less pronounced structural feature consisting of four other statements that have Jesus rather than God as the focus. Not only do these elements focus on Jesus rather than the Father but in each of these there is a mention of the "manifestation" (or "revelation") of Jesus and of the importance of this manifestation for the believer. The first two statements, refer to the *future* manifestation of Jesus. The implicit topic is judgment. The last two statements refer to the *past* manifestation of Jesus (within history). The issue here is the removal of sin. These four statements are particularly noteworthy, for they are the only such references in the entirety of 1 John'.

^{3:5} 'καὶ οἶδατε ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ἐφανερώθη, ἵνα τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἄρῃ, καὶ ἀμαρτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν.' ^{3:8} 'εἰς τοῦτο ἐφανερώθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου.'

FIGURE 2: Lexeme.

The role of Jesus in 2:28

This pericope begins with an appeal to 'abide'¹⁹ in him'. According to the literary context the personal pronoun 'him' (αὐτῷ), absolutely, refers to Jesus. Moreover, this clause operates to connect the preceded section with the current one (cf. 2:27). The significance of God's children 'to abide' in Jesus is related to the future coming (παρουσία) of Jesus which is mentioned twice in 2:28: 'if he is revealed' and 'at his coming'. This happens so as to remind God's children about their future existence. If they abide in Jesus, constituting a permanent relationship with him, being righteous as he is righteous (3:7), they 'will have confidence (παρρησίαν) and not be put to shame before him at his coming' (cf. Von Wahlde 2002:335).

Another conspicuous lexeme in this verse is the verb, reveals (φανερώω), which occurs five times in this pericope (2:28; 3:2, 5, 8).²⁰ This verifies the event of Jesus' 'revelation' to be clearly a critical theme (see Figure 2).²¹

The role of Jesus in 3:2–3

The ensuing declarations about Jesus (3:2–3; Fn cf. Van der Merwe 2012:3–4) present him as *the* prototype for the Children of God. However, for God's children, aware of their existential status, this does not provide their conclusive status: 'It has not yet been revealed what we will be (3:2)'. Consequently, the Presbyter focusses on the future: the children of God 'must purify (ἀγνίζει) themselves, just as he [Jesus] is pure (ἄγνός)'. Here, their status parallels that of Jesus. The Presbyter unequivocally compares their behaviour with the behaviour of Jesus (Von Wahlde 2002:336).

In 1 John 3:3, the imitation of Christ (2:6), or living righteously, is concomitant with the Presbyter's statement of purification, (ἀγνίζει), Christian identity and hope. In 3:2 he underlines, that God's children already now can have confidence that 'when Christ appears/is revealed' (ἐὰν φανερωθῆ) they will be 'like him for we will see him as he is' (cf. Rm. 8:29; Col. 3:4).²² Thus, 1 John 3:2 affirms the eschatological promise that the children of God will be conformed to the image of God's Son because of both their present-day identity as children of God ('νῦν τέκνα θεοῦ ἐσμεν') and living in purity (ἀγνίζει ἑαυτόν, 3:3). In these two verses (3:2–3), the Presbyter verifies the close relation between eschatology and ethics. Hence, the

19.The verb 'μένω' is used in the imperative mode (μῆνετε).

20.This verb appears six times in this pericope, five of which refer to Jesus.

21.The lexeme 'reveal' occurs regularly in the Fourth Gospel and always refers to Jesus' revelation of himself (1:31; 21:1, 14; Brown 1982:166). Parsenios (2014:91) also points out that "reveal" has never been used in reference to the Father in the Johannine literature.

22.The verb, ἐφανερώθη ('he is revealed'), and associated pronoun, αὐτῷ ('him'), is vague. It refers possibly to 'Jesus'. Some scholars are convinced that this capability in 1 John 3:2 concerns 'Jesus' Parousia and Christ-likeness' (cf. Culy 2004:69; Leung 2018:127).

Presbyter's call that 'all who have this hope in him [Jesus] purify themselves, just as he [Jesus] is pure' (3:3; Leung 2018:126).

In 1:5, the Presbyter depicts 'God is light and in him there is no darkness at all' and 'in him [Jesus] there is no sin' (3:5). Consequently, corresponding conduct is expected from the *children* of God. This infers they must 'walk in the light' as Jesus 'walked in the light' and 'purify themselves, just as he is pure' (3:3). Accordingly, they will be 'righteous, just as (καθώς), he [Jesus] is righteous' (3:7; cf. Van der Merwe 2014:7–8).²³

The role of Jesus in 3:5–6

Already in 2:1, the Presbyter denotes Jesus as righteous (Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον). In advance he prepares the reader for his explicit statement in 3:5, that 'In him [Jesus] is no sin'. This orientation decodes the righteousness of Jesus from a soteriological perspective. By using the present tense, the Presbyter indicates that 'Christ always has been, is, and will be without sin'. Therefore, those Christians, whose sin has been forgiven, must sin no more. Christians must combat sin powerfully and attempt purposefully to live righteously. Characteristic of God's children is their liberation from the control and sovereignty of sin. Then claims from those living in sin, and simultaneously being children of God, would be irrelevant (Kistemaker & Hendriksen 2001:299).

This reasoning is verified by two exclamations: the first refers to the fact 'that he [Jesus] was revealed to take away sins' (3:5); the second is the exclamation that ensues in 3:8. The historic-salvific role of Jesus is consequently confirmed: he has abolished sin to empower a future life without sin.

A comparison occurs between the following two phrases: 'who abides in him' and 'one who sins' in 3:6. Accordingly, the linguistic context distinctly refers the personal pronoun 'him' (αὐτῷ) to Christ, and the phrase 'remaining in him' evokes the fundamental (Von Wahlde 2002:336) exhortation at the beginning of this pericope (2:28). Brown (1982:393–394) expounds: '[t]he logic of this statement flows from the preceding verse: there is no sin in Christ, and so those who abide in him should have no sin in them'. On the other hand, 'no one who sins has either seen him or known him', echoing the similar statement in 3:1 that 'it [the world] did not know him [God]'.²³

The role of Jesus in 3:7

Both God (1:9; 2:29) and Jesus (2:1; 3:7) are referred to as being 'righteous'. In 2:1, the Presbyter refers to Jesus exposing righteousness as a quality of God (2:1). Therefore, there is the reference in 3:7 that 'Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous'.

23.Geislerová (2021:15), states that the interrelatedness between 'ontology and ethics in the righteousness scheme' is legitimised as follow: The Levitical reference of, 'Be holy as I am holy', is decoded by Matthew into 'be perfect as God is perfect', by Luke 'be merciful as God is merciful'. In 1 John 3:3 the Presbyter decoded it into a discourse of purity. And all who have this hope in him (to see Jesus as he is at his Parousia) 'purify themselves, just as he is pure'. This is further complemented by the imperative verb μῆνετε in 2:28.

Therefore, already at the beginning of this pericope, in 2:28–29, the Presbyter encourages the children of God to act rightly, to expose the righteous character of God. Then, in 3:7 he relates (καθώς) their righteous living (ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην δίκαιός ἐστιν) with the righteous living (δίκαιός) of Jesus. The last statement in 3:7, ‘just as he [Jesus] is righteous’ (καθὼς ἐκεῖνος δίκαιός ἐστιν) is analogous to that of ‘just as he [Jesus] is pure’ (καθὼς ἐκεῖνος ἄγνός ἐστιν) in 3:3. Both statements highlight the nature of Jesus as the foundation of moral transformation. In 3:3, both the equivalent verb ἀγνίζει (‘purify’) and adjective ἄγνός (‘pure’) are *hapax legomena*. The fact is that Jesus’ purity provides firstly, an ethical paradigm and secondly, a powerful Christian impetus to be committed contrary to the attractions and offences in this adversative world (Leung 2018:127).

Hence, people are identified by their actions.²⁴ Merely birth from God (2:29; 5:1) and faith in Jesus (5:1) enable people to obey the Jesus paradigm of living righteously. Such conduct is nourished in the *familia Dei*.

The role of Jesus in 3:8

In 3:8, the Presbyter disturbs his comparison of ‘the one who does not sin’ with ‘the one who does’ with reference to the ‘Son of God’. Again, he refers to Jesus having been ‘revealed’. This time it is ‘to destroy the works of the devil’. The reference to Jesus as the ‘Son of God’ emphasises the contrast between Jesus and the one who is ‘of the devil’ (3:8a) or a ‘son/child’ of the devil (3:10). Thus, the Presbyter endeavours to emphasise Jesus’ role in enabling the children of God not to sin (Von Wahlde 2002:337), but to live in the light. ‘The one who does what is right according to God’s standard and who, therefore, acknowledges and accepts God’s authority is righteous in the same way that Jesus was’ (Jobes 2014:209, epub).

A rhetorical strategy for living righteously: *Contrasting parallel statements* (Network C)

In his rhetorical strategy to motivate his readers to live righteously to encounter ‘fellowship with us; and ... with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1:3)’, the Presbyter uses different figures of style. One rhetorical strategy of amplification is his usage of ‘contrasting parallel statements’. We will briefly focus on some ‘contrasting parallel statements’ occurring in this pericope.

Watson (1993:99–123) in his research on ‘Amplification techniques in 1 John’ made a useful contribution to ‘the interaction of rhetorical style and invention’ of the Elder. From his research he points out the relevance of the statements

24. Significant to mention is that the pursuit of holiness emerges as the central impetus of Leviticus 19:2. This also provides the reason behind a fundamental Old Testament text regarding the Judaic concept to imitate God. According to the Old Testament, the Israelites, as God’s people, had the ethical responsibility to expose the holiness of God in their daily conduct. Analogously, in this epistle of John the children of God must imitate their character and conduct according to Jesus’ example of purity (Leung 2018:126–127). Also cf. Proverbs 20:11. A person is what that person does: ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην δίκαιός ἐστιν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος δίκαιός ἐστιν (3:7). Living in righteousness is to live according to God’s expectations.

made by Longinus (1890) and Cicero (1954, 2010) about amplification. Longinus (*Subi.* 12.1) proclaims that ‘Amplification...is language which invests the subject with grandeur’, ‘a sort of weightier affirmation, designed to win credence in the course of speaking’. According to Cicero (*Part. Or.* 15.53) ‘Amplification...is arousing emotion’. It is ‘a sort of forcible method of arguing, argument being aimed at effecting proof, amplification at exercising influence’ (Cicero, *Part. Or.* 8.27). ‘Amplification is used to underscore and augment the argument of the rhetor, positively or negatively’ (Cicero, *De Or.* 3.26.104).

Watson then relates the varieties of amplification (denoted to by Longinus & Cicero) with similar occurrences in the New Testament because of varieties of subject matters. Some examples incorporate discussions of significant matters allied to ‘the heavenly and divine, the love of God, moral considerations, what is beneficial or detrimental to humankind, and love of close kin’. This occurs also in the First Epistle of John. Particular modes of amplification appear that ‘work both independently and in conjunction with each other’ (Watson 1993:115).²⁵

In this pericope (2:28–3:10), four sets of parallel contrasting statements (2:29b; 3:4a; 3:6a–6b; 3:7b–8a; 3:9a–10b) occur. Each pair amplifies satisfactory conduct (founded on Johannine custom) with unsatisfactory conduct among the secessionists (deviating from Johannine custom; Watson 1993:115; also Parsenius 2014:92).

Each pair begins with the Greek adjective πᾶς (all, every), coupled with a participle. This then constitutes a generalisation that partitions the world into two divergent groups. The objective behind this composition is to confront the members of the community with two unambiguous options. Then finally, the Presbyter invites them to make a choice (Parsenius 2014:92).

The first specific set (syntactical structure) occurs in 2:29, consisting of the statements, ‘Everyone acting justly...’ (2:29), which is paralleled and juxtaposed with ‘everyone committing sin...’ (3:4; Von Wahlde 2002:322). The second set consists of ‘Everyone remaining in him...’ (3:6a), which is contrasted with ‘everyone sinning...’ (3:6b). The third set consists of ‘The one acting justly...’ (3:7b), which contrasts with ‘the one committing sin...’ (3:8). The fourth set consists of ‘Everyone born of God...’ which contrasts with ‘everyone

25. Other relevant modes of amplification pointed out by Watson (1993) that occur frequently in this Johannine pericope (2:29–3:10) are: *Strong Words*: Strong words can be used to augment. Such words can be ‘ordinary words, synonyms, compounds, exaggerated words, or words used metaphorically’ (Cicero, *Part. Or.* 15.53; Quintilian 8.4.1–3 [as discussed by Leeman 1963]; Watson 1993:101). *Comparison*: Amplification can also be prompted by comparison. ‘Comparison as amplification seeks to raise from the lesser to the greater to raise the greater. Also, a parallel can be used to make something desirable: to exaggerate, to seem greater (e.g. 3:2)’ (Watson 1993:102). *Repetition*: ‘Several figures of speech and thought of a repetitive nature are used to amplify the message of 1 John’ (Cicero, *Part. Or.* 15.54; Watson 1993:103). *Synonymy*: Synonymy (*interpretatici*) is a figure of speech that ‘does not duplicate the same word by repeating it but replaces the word that has been used by another of the same meaning’. In 2:29, οἶδα and γινώσκω (‘know’) are paralleled and in 3:4, ἀμαρτία (‘sin’) and ἀνομία (‘lawlessness’) are paralleled; *Antithesis*: referring to the juxtaposition of contraries (cf. four sets of parallel contrasting statements; Cicero, *Part. Or.* 16.55; *Her.* 4.15.21; Watson 1993:115). All five, above-mentioned, types of amplification occur in 2:29–3:10.

not acting justly...’ (3:10c). In these, the Presbyter repetitively contrasts proper with improper conduct.

It is necessary to note that in three of the four sets the dominant issue comprises the question whether a person is ‘from God’, ‘born of God’, ‘a child of God’ or whether the person is ‘from the devil’, a ‘child of the devil’? Hence, the concern in these sets relates to the person’s parentage, with either God or the devil as possible options. This is a major thematic feature in this pericope (2:29–3:2; 3:4; 3:7–8; 3:9–10). The fourth set of contrasts has been shaped in a different way as the others. No mention of parentage occurs, although the focus remains on the conduct of a person and the importance of not sinning. Here the focal point consists of ‘abides in him’ (3:6).

A second rhetorical strategy for living righteously: References to the Parousia (Network D)

Parallelism: Twice, in this pericope (2:28; 3:2), the Presbyter refers to the Parousia of Jesus. Figure 3 expresses the close liaison between these verses.

His objective? This is a constructive rhetorical strategy of the Presbyter to motivate his readers to live righteously. This parallelism explicates the consequences emanating from a life of righteousness from two related perspectives on eschatology, articulated in idiosyncratic terminologies. One of the dominant elements in the structure of this pericope (2:28–3:12) is the stereotyped pattern of apocalyptic reasoning in which two groups are labelled, *coming* ‘from God’ or ‘from the devil’. This derivation arises from the activities of the two groups, activities construed as either good or evil (Von Walde 2002:324). The Presbyter uses a similar configuration to describe the situation in the Johannine community (Von Wahlde 2002:329) to which he related moral alternatives with either God or Satan. He amended it to include the role of Jesus to encourage God’s children to live righteously.

Revelation: In this pericope, the Presbyter uses the verb φανερώω as a *terminus technicus* in a triplet sense: as reference to Jesus’s incarnation in the past (1:2; 3:5, 8; 4:9), to expose the apostates in the present (2:19), and to explain expectations in the future (2:28; 3:2). An apparent future revelation is validated by the equation of Jesus’ revelation with his *Parousia* (Strecker 1996:79). The Presbyter depicts the two events (incarnation and *Parousia*) as a ‘single, all-embracing manifestation or epiphany of God’ on earth. With his incarnation God’s Son accomplished salvation (4:9, 10, 14) and ‘destroy the works of the devil’ (3:8). Jesus’ incarnation (ἐφανερώθη, 1:2)

continues the triplet because it revealed God’s righteousness (1:9), God’s redemptive involvement (3:5), and the love of God (4:9). At the *Parousia*, Christ’s appearance will be as Judge (Schnackenburg 1992:152). It will be an epiphany and extension (a different, though complementing act) of Christ’s and the righteousness of God (1:9; 2:1, 29). As a matter of fact, what ensues ‘today’ has ‘eternal’ consequences.

Prepare: In these two eschatological orientations,²⁶ the Presbyter encourages God’s children to ‘abide in Jesus’, ‘do what is right’, ‘purify themselves’ for the *Parousia* (2:28) and the *day of judgement* (2:28). This will cause them to ‘have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming’, and ‘to become like him, for they will [then] see him as he is’ (3:2).²⁷ These appeals have been related with Jesus, ‘the eternal life that was with the Father’ (1:2). On the day of judgement, Jesus, himself, will be the measuring stick (‘καθὼς ἐκεῖνος δίκαιός ἐστιν’, 2:7). Because of both the righteousness of God and the Son (2:1; 1:9 and 2:29), God’s judgement will be just:

3:3 ‘... αὐτῷ ἀρνίξει ἐαυτόν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος ἀγνός . ἐστιν’
3:7 ‘..... δίκαιός ἐστιν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος δίκαιός ἐστιν’

In 1 John, Jesus’ characterisation parallels that of the Father. For that reason, the Presbyter advocates God’s children to conform to be righteous to experience fellowship in the *familia Dei* ‘now’. This will prepare them for the *coming of Christ*.

Eschatological consequences: The righteousness of believers will bring forth two eschatological consequences: (1) To ‘have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming’ (2:28) and (2) to ‘be like him, for we will see him as he is’ (3:2). ‘Confidence’ (παρησίαν, 2:28; 4:17), denotes the responsive experience of the children of God as they move toward the ‘day of his [Jesus] coming’. This denotes the experience of a ‘good conscience, fearlessness, and confidence, when standing before the judge’ (Schnackenburg 1992:223). Only God’s children who ‘abided in Jesus’ (2:28), who ‘have lived as Jesus lived’ (2:6, 28; 3:3, 7; 4:17) could have developed lives of righteousness.

The exhortation to ‘abide in Jesus’ is a dynamic practice of continuous changing (present tense verb) to become like Jesus. The consequence ‘for we shall see him as he is’ (‘ὅτι ὁψόμεθα αὐτὸν καθὼς ἐστιν’) was for the adherents of the Elder not only a future expectation but also a present (vñv, now) existential experience. This infers that continuous reading of the text and subsequent responses to it by living righteously would already have generated an emergent ‘lived experience’ of the identity and character of Jesus in the children of God. This experience will culminate in the future such that they ‘shall be like him’ (‘ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα’, 3:2). The spiritualities embedded in these assurances will

26. According to Anderson (2013:2) ‘the Presbyter appeals to earlier futuristic themes to challenge their beliefs and actions; realised eschatology implies ethical faithfulness’.

27. A third exhortation occurs in 4:17, ‘ἀρνίξει ἐαυτόν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος ἀγνός ἐστιν’.

2:28 ‘And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he is revealed (ἐάν φανερωθῆ) we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming (παρουσία αὐτοῦ)’.

3:2 ‘Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be, has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed (ἐάν φανερωθῆ), we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.³ And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure’.

FIGURE 3: Parallelism.

strengthen their faith and certainly intensify their yearning to be with Christ.

Those who *do what is right* are righteous – They *cannot sin* anymore (Network E)

Two opposite groupings – To understand what is right

In 1 John 2:29, the Presbyter writes, 'If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who does righteousness has been born of Him'.²⁸ In this verse, the Presbyter uses a syntactical structure that he repeats in this pericope (2:29; 3:3, 4, 6, 9, 10). He pairs the Greek adjective, *πᾶς* (all, every) with a participle.²⁹ His objective is to partition the world into two opposite groupings. The motive behind this is to make the readers take cognisance of two severe options and to consequently understand what is right. He then invites them to make a choice (cf. 2:29; 3:3, 4, 6, 9, 10). This syntactical structure clearly relates to the rhetorical sententiae style (cf. Parsenius 2014:16–19).

To achieve this, the Presbyter compares the living of the *children of God* with *children of the devil* (3:10)!³⁰ Unbelievers continue to demonstrate that they have no fellowship with Christ. In fact, the Presbyter announces that those who persist in sin have neither 'seen him [*Jesus*] nor known him' (3:6). Also, 'Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God' (Jn 3 11). The verb *to see* (*εώρακεν*, in the perfect tense) should be interpreted in a spiritual sense. It parallels with the verb *to believe*. Hence, those, who delight in sin have no faith in Christ. Consequently, they do not know him personally. They are unbelievers (Kistemaker & Hendriksen 2001:299–300).

Jesus the model of righteousness

The Presbyter explains in 2:29 why faith in Jesus makes the difference: it is because 'he is righteous' (*δικαίος ἐστίν*), 'in him there is no sin' (*'ἁμαρτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἐστίν'*, 3:5).³¹ The reference to Jesus to be sinless is complemented by the approbative claims of the Presbyter that Jesus Christ was *δικαίος* (2:1, 29; 3:7), *ἅγιος* (2:20) and *ἀγνος* (3:3). This is why Jesus can liberate

28.If you know that he is righteous, you know that:

'everyone who **does righteousness** has been born of him' (2:29).

'Those who..... **have been born of God** do not sin, because **God's seed abides in them'** (3:9);

'They**cannot sin**, because they **have been born of God'** (3:9).

'*all who do not do what is right.... are ...not from.... God'* (3:10),

29.πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην – 2:29

πᾶς ὁ ἔχων ...τὴν ἐλπίδα ταύτην – 3:3

Πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν – 3:4

πᾶς ὁ ἁμαρτάνων – 3:6

Πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ – 3:9

πᾶς ὁ μὴ ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην – 3:10

30.Snodderly and Van der Merwe (2007:206) point out that 'the children of the devil' do not have Jesus as their Paraclete (2:1), therefore their sin cannot be forgiven (5:16, sin that leads to death). With this understanding in mind 3:6, 9 reveal that since God's children do not *hate* and *murder* others it can be said that in that sense they do not sin.

31.'The Son of God [he] was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil' (3:8). This is why Jesus could abolish sin.

sinners and when they abide in him they will be liberated from sin (Smalley 1984:157). Therefore, they, '...ought to walk just as he walked' (2:6).

In this pericope, the Presbyter explains an epitome, an image of the character of the children of God.³² He urges them to take on the perfect character of Jesus Christ, even though it seems impossible (Burge 2011:253).

Present tenses – A denotation of 'continuous, repeated activity'

A helpful solution in understanding this 'risky statement' is to concentrate on the verb tenses. Normally, in Greek, a present tense denotes 'continuous, repeated activity' (Burge 2011:253).³³ In verses 3:6, 9, the following four verbs occur in the present tense: οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει (present active indicative, 6a); ὁ ἁμαρτάνων (present active participle, 6b); ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ (present active indicative, 9a); οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν (present active infinitive, 9b). (1) In 3:6a and 5:18, the Presbyter states that God's children 'do not sin'. The use of the Greek verb in the present indicative is to alert them to abstain from ongoing sin. (2) In 3:6b, the translation of the present participle, 'the one who continues to sin' expresses the same idea, that is, the implication of an ongoing activity. (3) In 3:9a the Presbyter uses a different phrase combination, a noun for sin (*ἁμαρτίαν*) with a different verb *ποιεῖ* (present indicative), 'to practice sin'. (4) Finally, in 3:9b (cf. 3:9a) the Presbyter describes God's children as 'not able to sin'. Both verbs, οὐ δύναται ('cannot') ἁμαρτάνειν ('to sin') appear in the present tense. The Presbyter uses this interpretation to emphasise that continuous, habitual sin should be banned from the lives of God's children (Burge 2011:253). Righteousness should be the new mode of existence, 'to walk just as he [*Jesus*] walked' (2:6).³⁴

Righteousness – The mode of living in the *familia Dei*

The Presbyter explains that the σπέρμα (seed) of God makes believers children of God. Although he does not define this seed explicitly, according to the theological context of this pericope, it refers to the gospel (word) revived through the Spirit, through which believers became part of the *familia Dei*.

32.'Initially, we can dismiss the notion that John believes Christians can be sinless. In 1:8–2:1 (cf. 5:16–17) he has said just the opposite, and we must allow that he is not contradicting himself one chapter later' (Burge 2011:253).

33.Confer 2:16, 'ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν [present, active, infinitive] ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιπατήσῃ καὶ αὐτὸς [οὕτως] περιπατεῖν [present, active, infinitive]'; 2:28, 'μένετε [present, active, imperative] ἐν αὐτῷ'; 3:3, 'ἀνιζει [present active indicative] ἑαυτὸν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος ἀγνός ἐστιν'; 3:6, πᾶς ὁ ἐν αὐτῷ μένων [present active participle] οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει; 3:7, 'ὁ ποιῶν [present, active, participle] τὴν δικαιοσύνην δικαίος ἐστίν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος δικαίος ἐστίν; 3:8, 'ὁ ποιῶν [present, active, participle] τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν'; 3:9, 'Πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ [present, active, indicative]' ὅτι σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει [present, active, indicative], καὶ οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν [present, active, infinitive]'; 3:10, 'πᾶς ὁ μὴ ποιῶν [present, active, participle] δικαιοσύνην οὐκ ἐστίν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν [present, active, participle] τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ'; 3:12, 'ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν [present, active, subjunctive] ἀλλήλους'.

34.According to Dzurillová (2021:17) can the use of the *historic present* have a mimetic purpose, 'characterised by a close relationship'. Authors also use this *present* to 'transfer readers into' scenes of 'spectacular events', allowing them to experience these events (Dzurillová 2021:23).

Within Johannine convention, *word* and *Spirit* operate in combination to become a 'life-giving word'. The Presbyter regarded this *word* as the foundational message which they have heard from the beginning (3:11): that is, those 'who have been born of God'³⁵ have the 'seed' (σπέρμα)³⁶ of God abiding in them (3:9). In this verse the explanation moves from 'do not sin' (3:9), to 'they cannot sin' (3:9; Painter 2008:535f.). This implies that God's children take on God's character (their Father).

The Presbyter adds a new perspective which he already alluded to in 3:8. In 3:8, 9, he adopts the impossibility of the children of God to continue to sin. Already in 3:6, his reference about 'sinlessness' is founded on when people abide in God. They have 'been born of him (God)' (cf. 2:29) and consequently became children of God (3:1–2). In 3:9, the Presbyter turns the sequence around, namely, that the children of God became in a sense 'supernatural', 'because God's seed abides in them' (Schnackenburg 1992:174).

He repetitively refers to those who live in Christ and have continuous fellowship with him, while obeying the Word of God.³⁷ However, he is fully aware that God's children occasionally stumble into sin and when confessing their sins, God forgives and cleanses them.

This moves the Presbyter in 3:6, to discuss the condition of God's children, by referring to the fact that 'No one who abides³⁸ in him sins'. This declaration is a contrast to his assertion about Christ that 'in him there is no sin' (3:5). The present participle (μένων) postulates the person's 'ongoing' way of life. An adversative analogous assertion, 'no one who sins has either seen him or known him', also includes a present participle to define an opposite category of people.

These two interpretations 'imply a *state of being* rather than an *act*'. This relates to, and has consequences for, the Presbyter's communication in his references to 'sinlessness' (Painter 2008:531–532). The Presbyter uses this contrast to emphasise the fundamental transformation that is founded via abiding in Jesus (2:6; Van der Merwe 2011:3–4). Firstly, they share an identity as children of God. Secondly, he then refers to the implications of this extraordinary claim in the

35. 'The verb (γεννάω) "to beget" occurs 10 times in 1 John and 18 times in John. In 1 John, the dominant use is with the passive voice (γενένηται), with ἕξ to speak of those begotten of God, and only once in the active to refer to God as the begetter' (Painter 2008:498, epub).

36. The Presbyter refers to the σπέρμα of God as the agent of birth into the *familia Dei* (3:9). The σπέρμα can be interpreted as the word of God, creating new life (cf. Lk 8:11; Pt 1 1:23).

37. See the following passages: 1:3, 7; 2:3, 5, 23, 29; 3:3, 4, 9, 10, 15; 4:7; 5:1, 3, 4, 18.

38. The following two related references, 'begotten of God' and 'having the seed of God' reflect the 'abiding of God in God's children'. These references (3:6, 9) designate how the Presbyter deals with this theme:

3:6 ἵνα ὁ ἐν αὐτῷ μένων'

3:9 ἵνα ὁ ...γεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ

σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει'

The formal similarity at the beginning of these verses (ἵνα ὁ) constructs a parallelism. The phrase 'ἐν αὐτῷ μένων' (3:6a) equals the two phrases in 3:9, 'ὁ γεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ' (3:9a), and 'σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει' (3:9b). The accuracy of this evaluation and perception of equivalence is endorsed in 5:18. Therefore, the mutual abiding of God and God's children results in God's children 'ἀμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ ... οὐ δύναται ἀμαρτάνειν' (cf. Painter 2002:230).

previous verse (2:29), declaring that those born of God will live in 'righteousness' (δικαιοσύνη), that is in one of the divine characteristics.³⁹

For John, the moral anthropology of believers is grounded in their identity as children of God. This new familial identity entails a new mode of conduct, corresponding to the divine family ethos.⁴⁰ (Rhodes 2021:82–83)

Finally, a consideration is required to understand the sense of 'sin' for the children of God in as much as there is a difference between the pre- and post-experience of being born of God. The consequence of all sin committed prior to 'being born of God' is death (Rm 6:23). On the other hand, 'been born of God' (2:9) eradicates the penalty of death. 'Been born of God' does not abandon moral accountabilities at any stage (e.g. Mt 18:15–17; 1 Cor 11:29–32; Heb 12:4–13). Children of God are henceforth 'forgiven' (Jn 1 1:1–10) and 'sinless' (Jn 1 3:9; 5:18) because of their confession of sin (Jn 1 1:8–10; 5:16), 'ultimately resulting in their sanctification and perfection in purity' (Jn 1 3:3; Min 2017:89–90).

Conclusion

This research investigated the Presbyter's understanding of 'The righteousness of the children of God'. From the discourse analysis and semantic networks of 1 John 2:28–3:12 it became evident that the Presbyter explicated this *righteousness* from five different perspectives. He succeeded proficiently in explaining his understanding of the 'righteousness of God's children' in their relationship and affiliation with the righteousness of God and the Son of God.

The *first perspective* explains the 'environment' in which the righteousness of the children of God is constituted, namely the *familia Dei*, because of the various occurrences of the metaphor of family. It also justifies the foundation on which the righteousness is structured, namely the love of God and the corporate love for and fellowship with one another.

The *second perspective* expounds the revelation, the seeing and knowing (3:6) of 'Jesus as the axiom' in the constitution of the righteousness of God's children.

The *third perspective* points out a, 'comparison of contraries', rhetorical strategy employed by the Presbyter in this pericope to alert the readers about the radical distinction between having God as Father and living in righteousness, or the opposite when having the devil as father. In this rhetorical strategy, he uses several contrasting statements to convince these believers about this foundational difference between

39. God is light (1:5); God is love (4:8, 16); God is righteous (2:29); Jesus is righteous (2:1) and pure (3:3).

40. Although the phrase 'to do righteousness' (2:29; 3:7) is not that clear in this pericope, the Presbyter explains that 'to do righteousness' does not denote to live morally. It concerns something much greater. Likewise it denotes to *love as God loves* (3:11–23; 4:7–21, Parnisios 2014:92, 94–97).

sin and living righteously. This authorises him to invite them to act righteously.

The *fourth perspective* is complementary to the previous contrasting strategy. The Presbyter also incorporated two references of the approaching Parousia to encouragement to the children of God as a rhetorical strategy for living righteously. They must live righteously, that is abide in Jesus, purify themselves, and do what is right. This assures the children of God that at the Parousia they will 'have confidence and not be put to shame before him [Jesus] at his coming' (2:28) and 'they will be like him [Jesus], for we [they] will see him [Jesus] as he is' (3:2).

The *fifth perspective*, the Presbyter comforts God's children, namely, that when they do what is right, they are righteous and accordingly *cannot sin* anymore.

In conclusion, the objective of this essay was to investigate the righteousness of the children of God according to 1 John. The motive behind it was to get a more complete view of the righteousness of God according to 1 John. Therefore, the essence of this research deems to be an exhortation to the children of God 'to live righteously'. The five cohered perspectives discussed in this essay complement one another. Briefly, the Elder constructed via metaphors, the *familia Dei* as the environment in which this righteousness should be pieced together. He revealed Jesus as the axiom of righteousness. He made use of two rhetorical strategies, 'a comparison of contraries' and 'reference to the approaching Parousia' to achieve this purpose, to invite the readers to act accordingly, comforting them then that they 'cannot sin anymore'!

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that there are no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

Author's contributions

D.G.v.d.M. declared sole authorship of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human participants.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author, and the publisher.

References

- Achtemeier, P.J., Green, J.B. & Thompson, M.M., 2001, *Introducing the New Testament: Its literature and theology*, W.B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Adams, J., 1983, 'The familial image in rhetoric', *Communication Quarterly* 31(1), 56–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463378309369486>
- Akin, D.L., 2001, *1, 2, 3 John*, Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN.
- Anderson, P.N., 2013, 'The community that Raymond Brown left behind: Reflections on the Johannine dialectical situation', *Faculty Publications – College of Christian Studies* 275, pp. 2–38, viewed 07 April 2023, from <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ccs/275>.
- Anderson, P.N., 2017, 'Identity and congruence: The ethics of integrity in the Johannine Epistles', in R. Zimmermann & S. Joubert (eds.), *Biblical ethics and application (purview, validity, and relevance of Biblical texts in ethical discourse)*, pp. 331–351, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.
- Brown, R.E., 1982, *The Epistles of John*, Doubleday, New York, NY.
- Burge, G.M., 2011, *Letters of John*, The NIV Application Commentary, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, viewed 10 May 2023, from <https://www.perlego.com/book/559139/the-letters-of-john-pdf>.
- Cicero, M.T., 1954, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, transl. H. Caplan, Loeb Classical Library 403, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Cicero, M.T., 2010, *De Oratore*, Electronic reproduction, Cengage Gale, Farmington Hills, MI, viewed 30 March 2023, from <https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/4941479?lookfor=Cicero%20de%20orator&offset=5&max=30>.
- Culy, M.M., 2004, *I, II, III John: A handbook on the Greek text*, Baylor University Press, Waco, TX.
- Dzurillová, Z., 2021, 'The historical present tense in Vitsentzos Kornaros' Erotokritos: Narratological and philological insight', *Neograeca Bohemica* 21(1), 9–25. <https://doi.org/10.5817/NGB2021-1-1>
- Geislerová, E., 2021, 'Ethics vs. ontology: Who are the true children of God (1 John 2:29–3:10)?', *Communio Viatorum* 63(1), 6–16.
- Jobes, K.H., 2014, *1, 2, and 3 John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Kistemaker, S.J. & Hendriksen, W., 2001, *Exposition of James and the Epistles of John*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Leeman, A.D., 1963, *Quintilian: Oratoris ratio: The stylistic theories and practice of the Roman orators, historians, and philosophers*, 2 vols., Hakker, Amsterdam.
- Leung, M.M., 2018, 'Ethics and imitatio Christi in 1 John: A Jewish perspective', *Tyndale Bulletin* 69(1), 111–131. <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.27671>
- Lieu, J., 2008, *I, II, & III John. A commentary*, Westminster John Knox Press, London.
- Longinus, 1890, *On the sublime*, transl. H.L. Havell, Macmillan and Co., New York, NY, viewed 30 March 2023 from <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/17957/17957-h/17957-h.htm>.
- Malherbe, A., 1987, *Paul and the Thessalonians*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA.
- Min, R.K., 2017, 'Circular rhetoric and paradox in 1 John 3:9', *Neotestamentica* 51(1), 83–93. <https://doi.org/10.1353/neo.2017.0004>
- Painter, J., 2008, *1, 2, and 3 John*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 18, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, viewed 15 January 2023, from <https://itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewBook?id=0>.
- Parsenius, G., 2014, *First, second, and third John*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Rhodes, M.J., 2021, 'Becoming militants of reconciling love: 1 John 3:1–3 and the task of ethical formation', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 15(1), 79–100. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jtheointe.15.1.0079>
- Schnackenburg, R., 1992, *The Johannine epistles*, Cross Road, New York, NY.
- Smalley, S.S., 1984, *1, 2, 3 John*, Word Books, Dallas, TX.
- Snodderly, B. & Van der Merwe, D.G., 2007, 'Status degradation in First John: Social scientific and literary perspectives', *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 18(1), 179–213.
- Strecker, G., 1996, *The Johannine letters*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.
- Tollefson, K.D., 1999, 'Certainty within the fellowship: Dialectic discourse in 1 John', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 29(2), 79–89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014610799902900204>
- Van der Merwe, D.G., 2005, 'Understanding 'sin' in the Johannine epistles', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 26(2), 543–570. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v26i2.240>
- Van der Merwe, D.G., 2009, 'Family metaphors: A rhetorical tool in the epistle of 1 John', *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 20(1), 89–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10226486.2009.11879098>
- Van der Merwe, D.G., 2012, "'Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them" – Soteriology in 1 John', *HTS Theological Studies* 68(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i1.1099>

- Van der Merwe, D.G., 2014, 'Early Christian spirituality of "seeing the divine" in 1 John', *HTS Theological Studies* 71(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i1.2790>
- Van der Merwe, D.G., 2015, '1 John: Effects in biblical texts that constitute lived experiences in the contemplative reading of those texts', *In die Skriflig* 49(2), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i2.1930>
- Van der Merwe, D.G., 2023, 'The righteousness of God according to the first Epistle of John' in F.P. Viljoen & A. Coetsee (eds.), *A theology of the righteousness of God*, pp. in progress, to be published during 2023, Cambridge Publishers, Cambridge.
- Vitrano, S.P., 1987, 'The doctrine of sin in 1 John', *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25(1), 123–131.
- Von Wahlde, U.C., 2002, 'The stereotyped structure and the puzzling pronouns of 1 John 2:28–3:10', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64, 319–338.
- Watson, D.F., 1993, 'Amplification techniques in 1 John: The interaction of rhetorical style and invention', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 16(51), 99–123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X9301605105>
- Yarbrough, R.W., 2008, *1–3 John*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI.