

Back to Basics

Living For The Return of Christ

1 John 2:28-3:3

Introduction

In Chapter 2, John warns about false teachers and their counterfeit Jesus. The Gnostics taught that Jesus was a mere human enlightened by "the Christ spirit" from his baptism until his crucifixion. Then he died like everyone else and passed permanently from human history.

John insists that Jesus is the Christ! He is God's chosen Savior and King for all of humanity. Jesus came in the flesh, and his body in death paid for humanity's sins. Jesus also conquered death when His body was resurrected. John also says that he was an eye-witness to all of these things and that Jesus will return in His glorified body at the end of the age.

In verse 28, John writes about Jesus' return. "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him." (1 John 2:28-29 NKJV)

Notice the phrase "when he appears" occurs twice, once in 2:28 and again in 3:2. The word both times is *phaneroo*—which means "to make visible." It's not that Jesus is gone now, and hopefully, one day will come back. The resurrected Jesus is alive, present, and accessible through his Spirit. Only his bodily presence is not now visible to us—but the day is coming when he will return bodily to establish God's kingdom over the earth. Christians call this event the "Second Coming of Christ"—unfortunately, some Christians tend to obsess on speculations about when this event will occur. Jesus himself said we cannot know the time.

In Matthew 24:36, Jesus said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only." (Matthew 24:36 NKJV)

And He warned his disciples not to obsess on this in Acts 1:6,7, "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority." (Acts 1:6-7 NKJV)

John focuses instead on what will happen when Jesus returns and how we should live in light of his return. John says that when Jesus returns, we will be like him.

I. We Will Be Like Him

In Chapter 3, John writes, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us,

because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." (1 John 3:1-3 NKJV)

When Jesus appears, and we see him as he really is, all those who are God's children will be transformed to be like him. The question is, "In what sense will we become like Jesus when he returns?" The Apostle Paul shares this in Philippians 3, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself." (Philippians 3:20-21 NKJV)

In Colossians 3, he writes, "When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." (Colossians 3:4 NKJV)

The body of Jesus is now a glorified body. It visibly radiates who he really is as God's majestic and righteous Son. But while we become God's sons and daughters the moment we receive Jesus, our bodies won't manifest this new identity until Jesus returns.

The life of Jesus resides within our weak and mortal bodies until he returns, and our bodies are transformed to be like His glorified body. The natural truth is that our bodies progressively lose whatever vitality they've had as they age! But the day is coming when Jesus will appear—and when he appears, he will change our bodies so that they manifest our true identity as God's children.

1Corinthians 15:51 says, "Behold; I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality." (1 Corinthians 15:51-53 NKJV)

How does it all work? Well, first, make sure that you are indeed God's child. It's easy to read these scripture verses and assume that everyone is God's child—but that's not what John means. John is writing to people who have chosen to become followers of Jesus God's children by responding to the invitation God makes. According to John.1:12, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:" (John 1:12 NKJV)

According to the Bible, we all are alienated from God because of our sins. But God's love for us is so great that he sent Jesus to die for our sins. Because Jesus has died for our sins, we all can become God's children. But you must choose Jesus to be your Savior and receive Jesus into your heart. The moment you make that decision, you become God's child. Jesus comes to live in your heart through the presence of the Holy Spirit as you experience God's love.

God promises you will receive a glorified body when Jesus returns if you have become His child by receiving Christ. If you haven't accepted Jesus, today is a good day to do that. For those of us who are God's children, we await this day. John says in 3:3, "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." (1 John 3:3 NKJV)

II. We Can Be Pure In Heart

Since our ultimate destiny is to become utterly and gloriously righteous, we should make as much progress in that direction as possible in the meantime. Even though our bodies can't presently manifest our new identity as God's children, our characters can—and they should.

John is not saying that we can become perfectly pure in this life. He has already said that all Christians continue to sin. "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." (1 John 3:8 NKJV)

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor *is* he who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:10 NKJV)

John is not saying that we can become pure by our own power. Only God can empower real moral change in our lives. But we can cooperate with God as he works to purify us. And we should cooperate because this kind of moral character change is consistent with God's creative plan for who we are and what we will one day become. Paul argues the same point in Rom.13:11-14. "And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts." (Romans 13:11-14 NKJV)

Since we will soon inhabit God's kingdom, we should represent His character now. It's important to let Jesus take control of your life. As we listen to His Holy Spirit, he directs us to turn away from the things that are selfish and destructive. The more we cooperate with Him, the closer we come to a life of moral and ethical integrity. What is God directing you to turn away from? What character changes is he leading you into? How are you responding?

Responding to Christ helps us understand what John means in verse 28 when he writes, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him." (1 John 2:28-29 NKJV)

III. We Can Be Bold and Unashamed

John wants us to be confident and unashamed when Jesus returns.

But what leaps out at you in this passage is the phrase, "so that you will not shrink back from him in shame." We don't like anything that resembles shame, and the very mention of it makes us think God might be unhappy with us unless we behave perfectly at all times. But notice that John does not say "so that He will not shrink back from us in shame." He says, "so that you will not shrink back from him in shame." That's a significant distinction.

Our actions can grieve the Holy Spirit, but that doesn't mean God rejects us. Jesus may disapprove of your actions, but it doesn't cause Him to disown us. Jesus laid down his life to make us God's children, and he is not ashamed to call us his brethren. "For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren," (Hebrews 2:11)

The people that Jesus will be ashamed of when he returns are those who have turned away from Him and denied him as their Lord and Master. "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38)

"But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 10:33)

John is concerned about those who, when Jesus returns, might shrink back from him in shame. Sadly, some may shrink back in shame because they regret wasting their Christian life!

Conclusion

Is it possible to receive Christ and become a Christian but then live selfishly instead of surrendering to Jesus? We all probably do this from time to time if we're honest about it. And if that's how we're living when Jesus returns, we would probably be ashamed. At that moment, we would realize that we let the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things to keep our spiritual life from being fruitful.

We need to live in such a way that when we see that God's kingdom is all that really matters, we will not regret wasting our Christian life on things that don't matter. The return of Christ should motivate us to be better followers of Jesus. It's not the *only* motivator or the *main* motivator (gratitude for grace & abundant life while serving Jesus)—but it is a healthy part of our motivation.

We don't want to shrink back from Jesus in shame when He returns because we've wasted our Christian life on selfish things. I want to be confident—not because I

have lived righteously enough to earn entrance into his kingdom—but because I have lived my life to advance his kingdom.

How can you know that you will be confident rather than ashamed when Jesus returns?

- Not by gritting your teeth and trying really hard.
- Not by forcing yourself to do more every day.
- Not by comparing what you do for Jesus to what others are doing for him.
- Not by morbid introspection to try and root out every selfish thought and action.

What does John say? He says we can be confident when Jesus returns by simply "continuing to live in fellowship with Christ." That is exactly what Jesus himself said (cf. Jn.15:4,5). "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (John 15:4-5)

We cannot bear fruit or advance Christ's kingdom by our own strength or ingenuity. The Kingdom of Christ will bear much fruit as we abide in him. If we make it a habit to stay close to Jesus, we will be changed to be more like Him. We will learn to depend upon our fellowship with him. We will develop a pure heart and be confident and unashamed when he returns.