

The Teaching of 1 John 2:28–3:12

The focus of this study is 1 John 3:2: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God! The world doesn't know us [as such] because it doesn't know Him. Beloved, though we are now the children of God, what we shall be hasn't yet been manifested; but we've known that, when He's revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." This verse is of no little dispute among Bible students; though it may have actually been clear to the original recipients, the same sadly cannot be said today. In my estimation, the only way to unearth as closely as possible what John had in mind when he penned this declaration is to consider its immediate context, beginning at least as far back as 2:28 and continuing through 3:12. So, with that said, and...

Since I obviously can't do justice in one study to all 14 verses, I'll have to skim over some clauses and phrases in this passage that aren't absolutely pertinent to our acquisition of John's intended meaning in verse 2. So, before we begin delving into it some of the verses specifically, let's read the entirety of this passage, emphasizing the concept of righteousness. ... Now...

2:28-29: Now little children, abide in Him so that when He appears we may have confidence and not be shamed away from Him at His presence. Since you know He's righteous, you know that everyone practicing righteousness has been born of Him.

In other New Testament letters we learn that the first-generation church had dealt with attacks from without and from within: besides being persecuted physically, even to the point of martyrdom, she was troubled mentally by professed prophets who taught lies about Jesus and His disciples; then, to top it off, her ranks were infiltrated by folks Paul called "false brethren" who weren't only slipping in counterfeit doctrine, but even teachings which tended to lead Christians off into immoral lifestyles (just read 2 Peter 2 & Jude). So...

Those to whom John penned First John were Christians who had to deal with some of the same things: They had to deal with antichrists from without (cf. 2:18 & 4:1ff); they had to deal with subversives from within (cf. 2:19); and of course they had to deal with the horrific *mess* those infiltrators would leave behind, such as {1} problems related to their teaching that the Messiah hadn't yet come the first time much less the second time, {2} hateful treatment of one another, {3} just general wickedness in their lives. So...

As with nearly every letter in the New Testament, this one was penned to encourage those who were going through these very confusing and difficult times, which is why verse 28 begins with the charge to remain steadfast in Christ in order to have confidence instead of being shamed away from before His presence. Since the same idea and words were used for "confidence" and "shame" in the Greek version of Proverbs 13:5, John may very well have had this saying of Solomon in mind: "An ungodly man is ashamed and will have no confidence." See, at least in this context of First John...

To abide in Christ / God is clearly a way of saying to NOT live in an UNgodly or UNrighteous manner, for the very next statement is this: "Since you know that He's righteous, you know that everyone practicing righteousness has been born of Him," and then in 3:10 he said it in the negative: "everyone not practicing righteousness is not born of God." But we'll get more into the righteousness business a little later. For now...

Let's consider John's statement to abide in Christ so that "we" may have boldness at His appearance. Let's focus on John's first person pronoun "we" here for a moment.

Speaking of their world, John had just said a few verses earlier that, at the time he wrote (ca. AD 65), it was in the process of "passing away" (v. 17); in fact, due to all that was transpiring at the time—including the presence of the antiChrist no less, he even went on to say twice, "it is the last hour" (v. 18). So do we *really believe* it was a mere fluke that he led them from there right into a discussion of their Lord's return? With that and John's choice of the first person pronoun "we" in verse 28 in mind, recall that even...

Jesus Himself indicated that John could in fact live until His return: After Jesus told Peter about his future death for Him, Peter then asked, "What about John?" To which Jesus said, "If I'd like for John to remain till I come, what's that to you?' ... So the word spread around that John wasn't going to die, even though Jesus didn't say he wasn't going to die but that 'If I'd like for him to remain till I come...'" (John 21:21-23). So, yes, John could and did choose the first person pronoun "we" in First John 2:28; after all, Jesus did say to John and several other disciples that He'd return with angels in judgment and His kingdom before all of them had died (Mat. 16:27-28; see my study on this passage on my website here: ASiteForTheLord.com/id15.html). Anyway, movin' on...

Concerning the word translated "appears" here, M. R. Vincent (after citing several passages in which it's found), said in his *Word Studies of the New Testament* that the meaning is much deeper than merely an appeal to the sense of sight: he said that it addresses spiritual perception and contemplates a moral and spiritual effect (cf. his notes @ John 21:1). Since this is a passive word, a better translation would be "when He shall be manifested," a word which, according to J. H. Thayer in his *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, could mean either made visible or made known or both.

Concerning the word *parousia* translated "coming" here, Vincent said it literally means "presence," thus the consequential arrival of one who was in the process of coming. W. E. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, notes that *parousia* is from *para* which means "with" and *ousia* from *eimi* which means "to be," thus "to be with" or to be in the presence of. Therefore, to summarize, John was saying, "Let's all abide in Christ (i.e. live godly & righteously, v. 29) so that, when He appears, we may have confidence *in His presence*." Now on to...

3:1-2: Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called "children of God"! The world doesn't know us [as such] because it doesn't know Him. Beloved, though we are now the children of God, what we shall be hasn't yet been manifested; but we've known that, when He's revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. OK, so...

We've now come to a spot that brings us back to something I brought up earlier: moments ago, referring to 2:19, I mentioned "the subversives." Who were these infiltrators? Or more to the point of John's writings, who were those troubling these disciples of Christ? Who were those who left their Christian ranks because they were never truly Christian? Right: the Hebrew people who rejected Jesus as the Messiah; they were called "Judaizers." See...

When John wrote during the transition between Pentecost (Acts 2) and Holocaust (AD 70) —between the departure and the return of Jesus, there was an *extreme* disagreement concerning who exactly were the children of God: the majority Israelites who rejected Jesus or the minority Israelites who accepted Jesus? Well we know today the truth of that which John was reassuring these disciples, i.e. that the minority—or the remnant—were God's true children; that fact just needed to be made known, manifested, or revealed for all of them to witness at the promised demise of Jerusalem with its temple by Jesus! See...

This very same issue was what Paul was dealing with in Romans 8:16-18. Just as John here in 2:20-21 brought up the Spirit in this connection, so Paul wrote, "The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that WE [i.e. the remnant, or what he called in verse 23, "the firstfruits"] are the children of God; and since [we're His] children, then [we're also] heirs—heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ since we're suffering together with Him that we may also be glorified together with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which is about to be revealed in us."

Note how Paul emphasized "glory" and "glorification." Those who believed in Jesus as the Christ were chosen to be God's *real* children (and what's "real" to God is that which is spiritual and eternal, not that which is material and temporal), and being *joint*-heirs to the glory of Christ they'd logically be glorified *with* Him. Listen to Paul again: "These [i.e. those who rejected Jesus as Messiah] shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord [corresponding to the being shamed from His presence in 1 John 2:28] and from the glory of His power, when He comes in that Day to be glorified in His saints..." (that's 2 The. 1:9-10 which corresponds well with Col. 3:4 where Paul also said, "When Christ ... appears, then we also will appear with Him in glory"). Likewise...

In Philippians Paul wrote that "our citizenship is in heaven from which we eagerly wait for the Savior ... who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (3:20-21). What's even more interesting about Philippians 3 is that it's all about Christ imputing His righteousness to His bride-body (v. 9) in order that she might be made fit for Him—the Groom. (Cf. my study on this chapter on my website here: ASiteForTheLord.com/id15.html.) Why is this interesting? Because I believe *that* was the primary thing John had in mind when he was writing out text under consideration; i.e., while (according to 1 John 2:28-29) they were to do as Paul taught in Romans 13:13 and act like they were already accredited with Christ's holiness, they would be greatly anticipating the fulfillment of the imminent hope of being glorified with Him in His perfect righteousness, which would in turn of course vindicate the Christians as God's true children or the New Covenant spouse of the Christ. Consider prophecy for a moment:

In Hosea 2:19 God had said, "I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness," so then later in 10:12 (and corresponding to what John and Paul both wrote) He went on to say, "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord till He comes and rains righteousness upon you." See...

Those of John's world didn't know (and thus wouldn't acknowledge) that Christians were the true children (or spouse) of God because they didn't really know God; as with Saul before he became Paul (Acts 23:1 & 26:9), the Christ-rejecting Jews "thought" they knew God, but they were sadly, very sadly, mistaken. So...

What did John mean when he said that they'd become like Him *because* they'd "see Him as He is"? Well, out of the two groups fighting over who were God's true children, which group ended up being those who saw God/Christ face to face when the second coming occurred in order to finalize the fulfillment of all prophecy, thereby creating "the perfect" that Paul wrote about in First Corinthians 13:10-12? Right: Christians.

By having the Christ's righteousness imputed to them (that which they were waiting and hoping for, Gal. 5:5), they were the ones who were placed into a face-to-face fellowship—a consummated relationship—with their Creator. Paul wrote of them at that time in First Corinthians 13:12 that, altho they "saw" (i.e. understood) that all things would be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus upon His return, it'd only be "then" that they'd "see face to face." So...

For them to "see Him as He is" meant for them to see Him—this Jesus of Nazareth that the others had rejected—as the fulfillment of the true, everlasting righteousness—John's topic under consideration—that was prophesied in Daniel 9:24 (500 years earlier). See...

All those of their world/time would "see" the Lord in some respect or other (such as their judge) at His return, but only Christians would be given the privilege of seeing Him in a face-to-face, reconciled relationship. Because they were given that privilege, they were of course in turn glorified with Him in His perfect righteousness, binding them to His and their Father Yahweh as well to the point that He could then live in them as His temple; as Jesus Himself said in Matthew 13:43, it was then that "the righteous would shine forth in the kingdom of their Father." By the way...

This statement of Jesus, in what's known as *The Parable of the Tares in the Field* (on which I also have a study on ASiteForTheLord.com/id15.html), is an echo of Daniel 12:3. Permit me to camp here for just a moment: In the previous verse, in Daniel 12:2, it speaks of the time of the dispensing of resurrection-life, an event—per verse 7—placed, by the way, at the time of the demise of Jerusalem and Judaism.

I bring this up because the shining forth of the righteous in the kingdom is directly connected to the time of the resurrection, and in the midst of Paul's lengthy resurrection treatise he wrote something corresponding perfectly to our text in First John: He said to "awake to righteousness and don't sin, for some don't have the knowledge of God; I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor. 15:34). Ya just can't get much closer to saying the same thing as that! This verse by Paul is like a summary of First John 2:28—3:12 (if not more of that letter). Well...

Besides all this and more that could be mentioned, it seems impossible to me to think John did NOT have Psalm 17:15 in mind: David said to Yahweh, "I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness." Wow!

And John didn't leave his readers in the dark concerning the character and nature of Jesus even before His return, for in the general context that we read at the beginning we found John emphasizing what Jesus was like at the time he was writing: after writing in 3:2 about Jesus "as He is," in 3:3 he said that Jesus is pure, in 3:5 he said that Jesus is sinless, and then in 2:29 and 3:7 he bookended this section by plainly stating that Jesus is righteous. So...

When they, in just a few years, reached that point in time when they saw Him as He was even before He arrived, that seeing of Him would be in a face-to-face relationship, because they *then* saw Him in their Christ-imputed-righteousness state along with Him, thus being glorified together in that manner with Him. Let's end with one quick answer to a question:

So what did John mean by "what we shall be has not yet been manifested"? Well, it's reminiscent to me of Paul in Philippians 3 again: "NOT that I've already attained [to resurrection-life] or am already perfected, but I press on that I may lay hold of that for which Jesus has laid hold of me."