

## **Your Sustaining and Purifying Hope**

*1 John 2:28 - 3:3 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. <sup>29</sup> If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. NKJ 1 John 3:1 ¶ 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

Many years ago there was a big hydroelectric dam that was to be built in a valley near a town in America. Once the dam was complete, the town would be completely submerged by water, so the people were to be relocated long before then. During the time when the dam was being built, people still lived and worked in that nearby town. However, that town which had always been well kept now began to fall into disrepair and ruin. The residents no longer seemed to care about keeping it up. When asked why, one of the residents put it this way: “Where there is no faith in the future, there is no work in the present.”

What was that man saying? Since there was no chance of that town being anything except under water in the future, the people didn't care about maintaining it in the present. When there is no hope for the future, life in the present suffers. That's how we're made. We're made to look forward to things. We're made to work towards things. We're made to live in the present with a sense of anticipation at what is still to come. When we lose hope, we are in a bad way.

*Proverbs 13:12 <sup>12</sup> Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.*

Depressed people are people who have no hope. Every now and then you meet someone who perpetually lives in a place of pessimism and expectation that things will not work out. They have no hope that things will be better, only an expectation that it probably won't. They're salespeople for Murphy's Law – if it can go wrong, it will.

People who have placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ are to be people of hope. Once you are in Christ, a reverse Murphy's Law takes place, which says, if something can go right in your life, it eventually will – Romans 8:28.

In this passage, John is dealing with hope and its impact on the present. The way you view the future in Christ is going to affect the way you live in the present. In this passage, John is going to show us how the hope of Christ's return ought to affect us in our lives in the present. He will show us that Christ's return is a sustaining hope, and that Christ's return is a purifying hope.

### **I. Christ's Return is a Sustaining Hope – (3:1-2)**

Verses 1 and 2 are perhaps some of the most powerful verses in all of Scripture. These verses describe your present position, and your future glorification.

*Verse 1 says, Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God.* Those words 'what manner' are meant to make us stop and stare. They actually mean something like, “what foreign kind of love is this?” “From what place does this love come?” What unearthly kind of love is this? Indeed, what kind is it?

As Jesus said, we bless those who bless us. We curse those who curse us. Paul said that we will perhaps die for a good man; possibly we would die for a righteous man. This is our love. We love those who love us. We love those we think are worth it. But God's love is to love a race of rebels, who are sinking their own ship. God's love is to love traitors, who have committed treason against You, and still declare their independence, not knowing how it will destroy them. According to John, God has given us this love to the degree that he has made us His children.

*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:*

What would you have to do, to get a race of rebels to become your children? Well, firstly, you have to do something about the punishment they deserve. You cannot give up your justice; otherwise you are no longer good. But if you simply give them what they deserve, they end up in hell. So you become one of them, and live the perfect life none of them could. You teach them, instruct them, and model a life of love for God before them. And then, most importantly, you suffer their punishment for them on a cross; experience your own rage and wrath at their rebellion.

Once you have done that, you have taken away their guilt. But they are still not your children. You have to do something else. You have to send your Spirit to revive those stony, dead hearts, and make them new and alive and inclined to God. You put the Spirit of the Son of God into the heart of each believer, so that the relationship of Jesus to the Father becomes in many ways your relationship to the Father.

Then, having forgiven you your sins entirely at His own expense, having given you His Spirit to permanently include your heart to the Father, God still does something else. He adopts you. Adoption is not the same thing as regeneration. Adoption is where God, having forgiven and regenerated you, now gives you the privileges of a natural-born child. He confers on you the status of a child with every right as a natural born child.

John says – look and stare at the kind of love God has for you, to have done all this to make us the children of God.

*Psalms 31:19 Oh, how great is Your goodness, Which You have laid up for those who fear You, Which You have prepared for those who trust in You In the presence of the sons of men!*

And if this is true of you, then the world does not really know you anymore. You're the recipient of a foreign kind of love, one that has brought you into a new kind of relationship which completely re-orders your life.

*John 15:18 ¶ "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*

Now, John is making a point here. He is saying – this is the kind of love God has for us, and it *isn't even finished*. Up to this point, God has justified you, reconciled you, forgiven you, regenerated you, adopted you, sealed you, indwelt you by His tender mercies and grace. And verse 2 tells you that if this isn't enough, the best is yet to come.

*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.*

We are presently the children of God, even in this body which is dying, even with this sinful nature which weighs us down. But what we will be when he is revealed has not been fully revealed. It is so

glorious, that we cannot begin to picture it. When He is revealed, we will be like Him.

*1 Corinthians 15:49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.*

*2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;*

*Philippians 3:21 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.*

*Colossians 3:4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*

Can you imagine that moment? In one moment all physical pain is taken away and replaced with a vitality and strength and energy beyond what you have ever known. Every physical disability or deformity – broken teeth, short-sighted eyes, arthritic joints, asthmatic lungs, is immediately corrected. Every sign of bodily deterioration is taken away, and a kind of beauty covers you. You suddenly have a body that will not last you another 80 years, or 800 or 80 000, but an eternity.

C.S. Lewis said something about this which has always struck me. He said: “remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. . . . There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.”

Do you understand that endurance is built on hope? Christians persevere; Christians endure because of what is still ahead. This is the whole theme of the book of Hebrews: endure because of what God has promised you! Stay the course for the joy set before you. Don't meditate on your sufferings; meditate on the promised glory and hope.

*Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

Endurance is built on eschatology. When the knees grow weak, when the head sags, the answer is not to think on how much you have sacrificed, or on how much you have suffered, or on what you are suffering now. At that point, the thing to meditate on is: if God has loved me so much to make me a child of His, and it hasn't even been fully revealed what that will be, how can I complain? How can I think of giving up? How can I murmur? How can I imagine departing from my Lord?

I want you to notice something very important about this transformation. John says we will be like Him. But why? Because we will see Him as He is. Apparently, the way God has set up this relationship is that we respond to seeing Christ, the way flowers respond to sunlight. The more of Him we see, the more like Him we become. And at least physically, once we see Him as He is, we will be transformed physically to be just like Him in our resurrection bodies.

This is a hope which sustains us. When we are about ready to give up, the thought that it will at some point end, and the trials will be over, and the pain and the suffering and the sacrifice worth it.

## **II. Christ's Return is a Purifying Hope 2:28-29, 3:3**

The return of Christ comforts our hearts, it strengthens us. But it is also meant to compel us to action. It is meant to convict us and change us. There are two ways that this hope is purifying: Firstly, because I want to be assured, secondly, I don't want to be ashamed.

“I want to be assured.”

Now notice there is a chain of reasoning here.

In verse 3:2, John tells us that Jesus is coming back and will transform those He comes back for. So who is He coming back for?

3:1 – He is coming back for those who are the children of God, whom the world does not know. So how do you recognise one of the children of God?

*If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.*

This hope of Christ returning for you is yours only if you are one of God's children. And what is one of the signs that you are one of God's children: you practice righteousness. Not a once-off deed of charity, but as a lifestyle, you seek to please God.

Therefore, this hope which sustains and encourages you, also propels you to once again work out your salvation. Prove by your life that He is in fact coming for you. Let your life bear the fruit of one born of God, of one for whom the pure Lord Jesus is coming to collect.

Everyone in the world would like the benefit of having a resurrection body like Christ's. Who would not want that hope for himself? But John lays down a condition before you can claim that such a hope is yours: that you practise righteousness. That you purify yourself.

When I was at school, I was in the swimming team, and we would compete against other schools, that were usually quite a distance away. The school bus would take us there, and we would swim our hearts out, and exhausted, we would wait for the school bus to collect us and take us back to our school. And there was a simple way that you were allowed on your school bus, and that was that you wore your school uniform. When you had your uniform on, the bus would take you. Boys from other schools could not catch a lift in our school bus. The way you know that Christ will come and collect your weary and exhausted body from this life is that as a habit you wear his uniform. You wear the clothing of His character.

*2 Peter 1:10-11 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; <sup>11</sup> for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

Look at verse 3:

*And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

Those who truly have the hope of His return, purify themselves, since He is pure. The hope of Christ's return is a purifying hope because it pushes us to make sure of our walk with God. “I don't want to miss the bus!” Well, make sure you are one of the ones He is coming back for. How do I know? If your life is conforming to His pattern.

The return of Christ also purifies us for another reason that we see in verse 28:

*And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.*

“I don't want to be ashamed.”

John tells us to abide in Him so that when he comes, when He is revealed, we may have confidence

and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. The word for confidence means to be open and courageous, to be outspoken, free. It is the image of someone who is not in any way afraid to see his manager, because he has done all that was required of him.

What comes to mind is Jesus' parable of the talents. The two servants who diligently doubled the money their master gave them, were eager to see him. They come to him and say, "Matthew 25:20 *'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.'* "

There's confidence there. This kind of confidence comes from living in a way which only makes sense if Christ is coming back. When you give things up, and sacrifice, and don't live as the world does, so that your life is like a sum which doesn't add up unless you factor in the return of Christ, then when He comes there is confidence.

*Isaiah 25:9 ¶ And it will be said in that day: "Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."*

"That is, the saint at the time of the Rapture should be living in such close fellowship with his Lord that the sudden appearance of the Saviour merely continues the fellowship that was in progress on earth, like Enoch who walked with God on earth and suddenly was not, for God took him. There is no need for a gradual adjustment to that fellowship into which he is being introduced at the Rapture, because the latter fellowship is just a continuation of the former. It is an instantaneous freedom of speech, of holy boldness, of assurance." (Wuest, Kenneth S.: *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English Reader*. Grand Rapids : Eerdmans, 1997, c1984, S. 1 Jn 2:28)

On the other hand, there seems to be the possibility of shame at the return of Christ. Now some commentators feel this only has to do with finding out that you were actually an unbeliever when Christ returns. And certainly, such people will feel shame. They will be like the ones who say they prophesied in Christ's name, but He declaims any knowledge of them.

The word for shame in the original means to shrink from someone, to be disgraced, dishonoured, embarrassed. And I think there is some room to say that believers may feel some shame at Christ's return. I do not say that the shame will last for all eternity. No, everlasting shame is what people in hell experience. I do not say that you will live with eternal regret. No, that is again, what people in hell experience. But are we to imagine that we shall arrive at the Judgement Seat of Christ, where our lives are evaluated and we will experience no regret whatsoever?

*1 Corinthians 3:11-15 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup> each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. <sup>14</sup> If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

God will bring out the motives of our lives. And I suggest, to the degree that things are burned up, is the degree to which we will experience shame. Now after they are burnt up, the shame is over.

*1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.*

But I wonder if we have not minimised what that burning up of wasted time and years might not feel like. A poem by Martha Snell Nicholson greatly moved me when I was younger:

"When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ and He shows me His plan for me,  
The plan of my life as it might have been had He had His way, and I see  
How I blocked Him here, and checked Him there and would not yield my will.  
Will there be grief in My Savior's eyes, grief though He loves me still?  
He would have me rich, but I stand there poor, stripped of all but His grace,  
While memory runs like a haunted thing down the paths I cannot retrace.  
Lord, of the years that are left to me, I yield them to Thy hand:  
Take me, break me, mould me, make me, to the pattern Thou hast planned."

And let me suggest something else. Perhaps part of the judgement seat of Christ is not simply an evaluation of what we did do, but on what we are at that point. In other words, there isn't clear evidence from Scripture that at the return of Christ, God simply makes everyone equally spiritually mature, and just presses a massive reset button, formats everyone's hard drive, and reloads us with 100% Christlikeness. No. Listen to what Kenneth Wuest wrote:

"While the saint enters heaven in a sinless state, yet he is not catapulted ahead to absolute spiritual maturity in an instant of time. He grows in likeness to the Lord Jesus spiritually through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit all through eternity, always approaching that likeness but never equalling it, for finiteness can never equal infinity. The change which comes at the Rapture is therefore a physical one. We shall be like our Lord as to His physical, glorified body." Wuest, Kenneth S.: *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English Reader*. Grand Rapids : Eerdmans, 1997, c1984, S. 1 Jn 3:2

Let's put it another way. At Christ's return, you are stripped of all sin and idolatry and unbelief and false ideas you have believed. That doesn't mean you are made as fully Christlike as can be. Which means that at the return of Christ, some Christians will be more mature and more like Christ in terms of their wisdom and knowledge than others. And what do you do with people with a greater wisdom? You put them in positions of greater responsibility.

*Luke 19:17* <sup>17</sup> "And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.'

What might it do to our desire to be like Christ if we knew that at the moment of death or Christ's return, our eternal state begins where we left off! We will have to learn what we did not learn here. We will have to understand what we did not seek to understand here. There is a very real continuity and relationship between what you do with your Christian life now, and how you spend eternity there. I've said before that we will all be full of joy, but some of us will be fuller than others because we will be able to hold more.

Sanctification matters! Now is the time to fight! Now is when there is sin to renounce, enemies to resist, temptations to flee, false doctrine to reject! Now is the time of warfare within your own soul and without! Now is the time of testing! There is no test once you are glorified! There is no probation period after He returns! The time to test your love for Him is now – when there are idols and false loves. The time to test your righteousness is not when sin is no longer an option, it is when it is!

So, if you say, I don't want to be ashamed. I don't want to find that I have to attend grade 1 lessons in wisdom and understanding when Christ returns. I want confidence. I want to have that happy feeling a child has when he has made something and dad gets home, and he says, Daddy, look! Look what I did!

How can I be assured and not ashamed? Verse 28 tells us.

*“Abide in Him.”* Once again – this precious truth. Live in communion with Christ. Be a branch that takes its life, its sap from the vine. Let His life be your life, as you drink in His Word, depend on Him totally, and seek to obey Him in all things. Remain in Him, commune with Him, and when He convicts you, confess your sins, and He will cleanse you. And then the communion will grow, and so will the conviction. If you live this life of seeking Him and growing deeper and deeper into the knowledge of Him and His will, His return will be something you long for.

The hope of Christ's return should all at once lift you and move you. It lifts you by encouraging you to endure. But then it moves you to live a pure life, so that you are assured His return is for you, and so that you are not ashamed before Him, but rejoice in a life well-spent for Christ.