

Children of God

1 John 2:28-3:3

Introduction

Paul says that he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because it is the power of God to salvation. This gospel hinges on the truth that Jesus was the God-Man who came to save His people from their sins. In times of crises, big and small, we are confronted with the question of whether we believe that Jesus really is Lord and Savior. And the way we act demonstrates our belief.

In this passage, John urges his audience to stand fast on the gospel as they have been taught, to abide in Christ. Abiding in Christ has to do with how you live your everyday life. It is not merely a state of mind or a sense of identity, though it includes those things. Abiding, remaining in Christ means that everything we do at all times is grounded on the hope that we have in Him, in the hope that He will bring our salvation to completion. This call to abide in Christ is founded on the absurd love that God has for us, the love of calling us His children. This love in turn makes us want more and more to be like Christ.

Not Ashamed

It is helpful to remember once again the immediate context that John indicates. It is “the last hour” (2:18), indicating that some crisis is near at hand. The destruction of Jerusalem, prophesied by Jesus and precipitated by an increase in false teachers (antichrists), was such a crisis. So, John exhorts his audience to abide in Christ, to remain steadfast in their beliefs and in their living. If they do, then when the Son of Man comes, they will not be ashamed (cf. Mark 8:38). To be ashamed of Jesus the Messiah, to reject Him, results in our own shame, and for some, that will be an eternal shame. Those who stand fast under the name of Jesus, on the other hand, will have confidence when Jesus is revealed. This had immediate implications for the people of John’s day, but it certainly is applied to us as well. Those who stand with Christ will stand confident in His vindication, whether it comes through His Word, or through judgment on a people, or through His final coming.

Practicing Righteousness

As we stand with Christ, through the grace of God, we know that He is righteous. Those who follow Jesus are known by their fruit (Matt. 5:16, 7:15-20; 1 John 2:3). If we are saved, John makes it clear that we obey our Lord and practice righteousness (James 2:26). Those who practice righteousness are born of God (v. 29). Now, we must remember that walking in the light includes acknowledging (confessing) your sin (1:9). This is in fact practicing righteousness. Walking in the darkness includes lying to yourself about your sinlessness (1:8, 10). When you look at a tree full of apples, you know what kind of a tree it is.

Children of God

This is not at all a teaching of salvation by works, as John demonstrates in the next verse. It is all a matter of grace. “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God!” We were not His children, and yet He made us His children, adopting us through Christ as His sons and daughters. Did He call you His children because you called out to Him, because you asked Him to, because you started to obey Him? Certainly not! He called you his children *so that* you might call out to Him, *so that* you might

call Him Father, *so that* you might obey Him. We love Him because He first loved us (4:19). Your adoption into Christ is visible, recognizable. People should be able to tell that you are a Christian because you practice righteousness. This practice is not hidden away in your home or kept for Sundays or done only around other Christians. It is done such that the world, the unbelieving ideologies and religions and philosophies and those that practice them, do not know you. They do not know you because you look like Christ, and they did not know Him (John 15:18-21, 16:3).

Like Jesus

This passage is most often taken to speak about the final resurrection. John reminds the “beloved” that we are the children of God now, and yet it is not certain what the result of our salvation will look like in particular. But, we do know this: when Jesus is revealed, ultimately and finally to the world as Lord and Savior in the final judgment, we shall be like Him. We are and will be conformed into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29, Phil. 3:21). We are putting on the new man (Eph. 4:23-24). Our hope is that one day God will bring all this to completion (Phil. 1:6) when we are raised in incorruption, glory, and power (1 Cor. 15:42-43, Col. 3:4) in the image of the heavenly Man (1 Cor. 15:49). The victory is ours in Christ, and so we ought to remain steadfast (1 Cor. 15:57-58).

It is also possible to see the immediate context of the judgment on Jerusalem in view here. John drives home what he has mentioned in 2:28. “We” are the children of God, which means that when Jesus is revealed and vindicated by the judgment on Jerusalem, we too, like Him, will be vindicated. We shall clearly see Him to be who He claimed to be. This understanding of what John says does not at all cheapen the application to our future. Rather, it makes it richer. One day, we (Christians in the present) will be like Jesus, our salvation and glorification will be completed, and we will be vindicated in our following of Christ when He raises us from the dead. We have seen Him and His saints be vindicated time and again, first in His resurrection, then in the destruction of the Temple and old system, and throughout history. Standing on this ground, we look ahead with hope in Him that He is who He said He is, and thus purify ourselves, looking unto Him.

A Hope that Purifies

God’s love for us in making us His children and the hope we have to see Christ drives us to purify our lives. If God has called you and made you His, then you love His Son who died for you. If you love Him, then you love His call to keep His commandments (John 14:15). This means we practice righteousness because of the Spirit working in us (Gal. 5:22-26). This means that we are ruthless against our own sin, making no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts (Rom. 13:14). Why do you hate your sin? Because you look at Christ and His righteousness and you love Him and you yearn to be like and be with Him. Why do you not hate your sin? Because instead of looking at Christ and yearning to be with Him, you look at yourself or your neighbor or the world. What do you need to be purified of? Where do you need to practice righteousness? Before you begin, listen to the wonder John proclaims once more: Behold how great is God’s love for you, that you should be called a child of God.