

**Fundamental Christian Attitudes: Hope, Part 2**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-137

Now tonight we're going to continue our look at the subject of hope...hope, the last in our list of spiritual virtues, spiritual attitudes that characterize a healthy believer and consequently a healthy church. Turn in your Bible, if you will, to 1 John chapter 2 and verse 28...1 John chapter 2 and verse 28. Starting in verse 28 and actually running down to the third verse of chapter 3 is a text that I want to address tonight as we think more about this matter of hope.

Let me begin reading in verse 28, "And now, little children, abide in Him so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame that is coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him. See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears we shall be like Him because we shall see Him just as He is and everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies Himself just as He is pure."

Now here is a passage of Scripture that looks at the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ. Here is a passage of Scripture that really finds its focus in verse 2. "Beloved, now we are children of God but it has not yet appeared what we shall be." That's not going to happen until He appears, and therein lies the focus of the passage on the matter of hope tied to the coming of Jesus Christ. Then in verse 3 it says, "And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself just as He is pure." So the theme here is hope.

And as we learned this morning, there are a number of things that the Bible says about hope and we went through them somewhat this morning. Our hope is sure. It is steadfast. It is anchored into the presence of God by the person of Jesus Christ who is there as our forerunner. Our hope according to Peter is undefiled. It is eternal. It does not fade away. It is reserved in heaven for us. Paul said the same thing basically in Colossians chapter 1 and verse 5. It is an enduring and eternal hope which is a component part of the gospel, guaranteed to us in the very predestination of God before the world began when He chose those whom He would make like His own Son.

And then we talked about the fact that hope comes from God. It is a gift of grace. It is enhanced and enriched through the Scriptures. It is reasonable, that is we can explain it, it is not a fantasy. We can show why we believe because of what Scripture says. It is secured for us by the resurrection of

Christ. It is confirmed in us by the Holy Spirit. It defends us against Satan. It produces joy. It is strengthened through trials. And it is ultimately realized in Christ's return. That is what takes us here to 1 John. Our hope comes to reality at the return of Jesus Christ. And that's the point there of verse 2. "Beloved, now we are children of God," that is a fact present, "but it has not appeared as yet what we shall be." The fullness of what that means is in the future. "And we know that when He appears at that point we shall be like Him and our hope will be realized."

And so we pick up really where we left off this morning with this tremendous truth that our hope is set for its fulfillment at the return of Jesus Christ. And just a brief comment, as I said this morning, when you die your spirit at this point goes to be with the Lord, your body goes into the grave and that is not yet the fulfillment of your hope, that is a partial fulfillment, your redeemed spirit into the presence of God. But the fullness of Christian hope awaits the resurrection. It awaits the time when the bodies come out of the grave and are joined together with the spirits that have already been in the presence of the Lord and we become that perfect Christ-like eternal being both body and spirit, or body and soul, soul and spirit being the same thing, the inner person conformed to God's perfect, righteous standard.

And so, we await then the resurrection for the fullness of our hope. Now believers who die go into the presence of the Lord and live in perfect joy and perfect bliss and perfect righteousness. But they are not yet complete because they have not experienced the full realization of their hope that comes in the resurrection. So that is basically the theme of this particular passage. In verse 2 we are taken immediately to the reality that we have not yet become what we will become when we see Him when He appears at His Second Coming. Those who are dead and those who are alive at that time will become perfect both inner man and outer man and then our hope is realized.

Now as we think about hope in light of this passage, I want us to look at these verses because they're very, very important. And John builds us to a climactic conclusion which comes in verse 3 by presenting five features of the believer's hope...five elements of the believer's hope. And now we're going to get away from the theology of it a little bit and down to the practice of it. We're not going to divorce ourselves from theology but we're going to make our theology practical. We're going to take our theology down to life and we're going to look at five features of the believer's hope. And this is a very pastoral section as opposed say to being a theological and doctrinal explanation. It becomes very pastoral and John here is talking about how believers live who have this hope. There are five features of the believer's hope that unfold here.

And let's look at the first one in verse 28 and let's start with this as a first point. The believer's hope is guaranteed by abiding...it is guaranteed by abiding. Verse 28, "And now, little children, abide in Him so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." Now if you read your Bible you're going to find out that in the general description of the coming of Jesus Christ there are going to be saints who welcome that event and there are going to be

the ungodly who are ashamed and shun that event, right? When you read, for example, in Revelation the very direct statements that when the Lord comes the ungodly are going to cry for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them to hide them from the face of the one who comes, you get an idea of the kind of shame that is going to be expressed among the ungodly at the return of Jesus Christ, when the Lord comes in the picture of Armageddon, on the great white horse coming to conquer with a great sword and massacring the ungodly of the world. There is going to be an immense amount of shame at that event.

But John says here, "We do not want to shrink away from Him in shame at His coming like many will do, rather we want to have confidence when He comes." We want to have confidence. And that confidence comes, he says, in verse 28 by abiding in Him so that when He appears we will have that confidence.

Now when we talk about abiding, it's a very interesting subject and not an easy one to understand at first. I hope we can understand it at last tonight when we get through it a little bit. The concept of abiding is particularly inimitable to John. John is the one who talks about it and writes about it. In fact, you have him talking about it right here in this his first epistle and also you have him writing about it in the fifteenth chapter of his gospel, the gospel of John. He talks about branches that abide in the vine, remember that? And those branches that abide bring forth fruit. And branches that don't abide are cut off, you remember, and cast into the fire where they are burned, and that's a picture of hell.

Now what is that saying? It is saying there are people who will attach themselves to Jesus Christ. And I think in John 15 because it was in the upper room, the last night, the night in which Judas was betraying Jesus, and that whole event was unfolding in that very moment of John 13 to 17 is that Last Supper event and all that goes on in those five chapters occurred at that moment, it's when Judas is exposed and he goes away to betray Christ and all of that. And I really think that when he's talking about those branches that appear to adhere to the vine, but are cut off and cast away because they bear no fruit, he has in mind particularly in mind Judas. It is a Judas branch that doesn't abide, or doesn't remain...the word abide means to remain.

So, when we talk about abiding in the vine, we're talking about giving evidence of genuine salvation by remaining. John has already alluded to this back in verse 19 of chapter 2 where he writes, "They went out from us..." That is to say there are people who come and associate with believers and associate with the church but don't stay. They went out from us but they were not really of us. For if they had been of us they would have remained with us. You see, it is characteristic of genuine faith that it is sustained, that it remains, it doesn't defect. It may struggle. It may have its questions and doubts and fall into its times of sin. That's very possible and very normal, sad to say, for believers. But it never defects, it never denies Christ, it never abandons Him and His truth. They went out from us but they were not really of us, if they had been of us they would have remained with us. It is true

to say that genuine believers stay, genuine believers remain. They went out, verse 19 ends, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.

In other words, when somebody claims to adhere to the truth of Christ to believe the gospel and to be associated with Jesus Christ, claims to be a Christian and they turn their back and walk away and abandon that, they are by that demonstrating that they never really were true believers because they did not abide. They went out in order that it might be manifest or shown that they all are not of us.

So down in verse 28 he says, "Abide in Him." And those who abide will be the ones not ashamed when He comes. It's the equivalent of calling you and calling the reader to a true salvation. You remember in John chapter 8, and this, by the way, was a constantly recurring theme with John, but in John chapter 8 probably as poignantly and concisely as anywhere he addresses this issue. It says, Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in Him, John 8:31, they had announced their faith, they had said they believed, and He said to them, "If you abide in My Word then you are alethesmathetes," that means true followers, true learners, true disciples of Mine.

In other words, it's a question of abiding. It's a question of remaining in the relationship, remaining committed to the truth. Now that's essential. Our eternal hope is guaranteed by abiding. So be a believer who abides. True believers remain. Be a true believer. That's really what he's saying.

You say, "Well now wait a minute. If I've been saved, why do I need to worry about it?" Well because the Bible commands you to abide. Look at it in verse 28. He says, "And now, little children, abide in Him." Be for real. Stay. Don't defect. I suppose we could say theologically this is a call for the perseverance of the saints. He is calling on believers to remain, to stay faithful. And there are many such calls in the New Testament, many. There are a number of them, for example, in the book of Hebrews. In calling on believers to abide in Christ, he is bidding us to adhere steadfastly to the gospel, to live in constant dependence on Jesus Christ, to render continued response to His Word as manifest in loving obedience. In other words, he's telling us to persevere.

Now some of you are saying, "Now wait a minute, why does he press this duty on us? If we're true Christians we will abide. If we're true Christians we're going to remain because He's going to keep us, because He by His power promises us eternal security, He promises that He will never let us go, that He will never lose any of us, that He'll bring us all to glory. Why do you press the duty of abiding? Why do you press the effort of persevering when we're already secure? Why?"

Listen, because privileges don't cancel obligations. You could say that about everything. You could say, "If I'm going to go to heaven, then why press the issue of obedience, why not just get saved and live any way you want to live?" Privileges do not cancel obligations, they increase them. So he is saying to us since you are God's children and since He holds you to the fulfillment of your eternal hope, be faithful to abide. And he's calling for dedication and consecration, if you will, of the highest

and most devout order.

While our abiding in Christ is secured by the Holy Spirit, we have, verse 27 says, an anointing which we received from Him, and that anointing is the Holy Spirit. Look at verse 27, "And the Holy Spirit who is the anointing which we received from Him abides in you." So we have an abiding internal Holy Spirit who preserves us, who intercedes for us, who guards us, keeps us, seals us unto the day of redemption, but that privilege does not release us from responsibility. We have here a certain tension that is true in other doctrines, the fact of, for example, we are elect and predestined to salvation does not release us from the obligation to repent and the obligation to believe and the obligation to obey the gospel. The fact that we are going to be brought to glory some day doesn't release us from the responsibility to love God and to obey Him. The Spirit is not given to us to exempt us but to enable us. And the whole process of obedience, though it is energized by the Holy Spirit, is not without our participation. Every command in the Bible is to us, not the Holy Spirit. We are commanded to abide, we are commanded to obey, we are commanded to persevere, we are commanded to endure, we are commanded to be faithful and not to stray away and not to defect and not to fall away. The Lord told Peter, "I have prayed for you that your faith fail not." Remember that? "I have prayed for you that your faith fail not."

Now you say, "Look, if Jesus is praying for Peter's faith not to fail, I don't think it will fail." That's a fair assumption because we can assume that Jesus not only has the understanding to make the request, but the ability to fulfill it. So we could say when He said to Peter, "I have prayed for you that your faith fail not," that's the end of the discussion. But it isn't because immediately after Jesus said that, Jesus said this to Peter, "Pray that you enter not into temptation."

Now you say, "Well I don't understand that." Well neither do I but that again is the incredible, incredible mystery of how our responsiveness works together with the infinite decree and sovereign purpose and power of God. He says, "Peter, I've prayed for you that your faith won't fail, and now I'm telling you, pray that you don't fall into temptation."

In 1 Corinthians 10:13 Paul assured the saints, "God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it." What a great promise. You're never going to have a temptation that isn't also going to have a way of escape and you're going to be able to go through that way of escape and endure that temptation. Isn't that wonderful? God is faithful and He will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able.

Well, that settles that. No. No. Because just four verses later Paul said, "Flee from idolatry." And verse 13, just one verse later, I should say, verse 13 says, "The Lord is going to make sure you never fall into a temptation that you can't escape from and bear," and then the next verse says, "Flee from idolatry." On the one hand you have God's promise to keep you, and the other hand you have your

accountability and responsibility of active involvement in abiding and in being obedient.

It's sort of like Philippians chapter 2, which I know is familiar to you. It says this, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed," verse 12, "not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure." If God is in me willing and working for His own good pleasure, what do I need to worry about?

Well, understand this, you are called upon to work the salvation that's in out. What does that mean? Take the wonderful work of God within you and demonstrate it on the outside by your obedience.

Now this is...this is typical of Scripture. It is all through Scripture. We are called to obey. We are called to respond. We are called to persevere. We are called to endure. We are called to be faithful. We're called not to lose heart and not to fall away and not to drift, and all of that. And at the same time the Bible promises that the Lord will keep us and hold us and protect us and bring us to glory. And it is that inscrutable mystery of our responsibility and God's sovereign unfolding purpose we will not understand in this life. Suffice it to say, as I said earlier, privilege does not cancel obligation, it only intensifies it. The greater the privileges of grace, the greater the responsibility of an obedient response.

In Titus, look at chapter 2 for a moment. In Titus chapter 2 verse 11, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, to mankind." And here's what that salvation does, "It instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, godly in the present age." We have a salvation in which is inherently the instruction to live a godly life. You heard people in the waters of baptism tonight express the fact that they were here as an act of...what?...of obedience to Christ...an expression of gratitude for the One who has worked His saving work in them.

So, when...let's go back to our text...so when John says in chapter 2 verse 28, "And now, little children, abide in Him," he is on the obligation side of this wondrous truth and he is emphasizing the fact that we have the responsibility to be faithful in our attachment to Jesus Christ to sustain that attachment to Him in an unbroken and loyal and faithful way. That's your part. God will do His part. And it is that abiding that guarantees our hope. Back to verse 28, "If you abide in Him then when He appears you will have confidence." And here we are at His appearing, His phaneroois the Greek verb, and it refers to His coming, particularly, obviously the Rapture of the church when He is manifest in our case, when He comes for His own to take us to be with Him. As He said in John 14, "He went away to prepare a place for us and He will come again to receive us unto Himself that where He is we may be also." As 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and following describes it, "The voice of the archangel, the trump of God, the dead in Christ rise first and we who are alive and remain are caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air and we're changed and transformed and taken to glory." Or as 1 Corinthians 15 describes it, we go through the transformation in a moment, in the

twinkling of an eye we shall all be changed, and so forth. Or as Romans 8 describes it, we will have the redemption of the body. That all occurs at the appearing of Jesus Christ. And when He appears for His own, we who are abiding will have confidence in His appearing.

And so, the first thing then to say about this hope is it is guaranteed by our abiding. And what I'm saying to you is you have a responsibility before God to persevere in faith and faithfulness, to move ahead faithfully day in and day out expressing loving obedience to the Word of God and the purposes of God that unfold in your life.

An illustration of this attitude of abiding comes in 2 Timothy chapter 4 in the case of the Apostle Paul who said, "I have fought the good fight," verse 7, "I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing." Paul says...I have fought the fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. I haven't wavered from sound doctrine, I haven't wavered in my trust in God, I haven't defected from the truth and henceforth when the Lord appears on that day there will be given to me a crown of righteousness. He had the confidence in the appearing of Jesus Christ that John wants us to have because he had kept the faith.

And so, I say to you as a believer, you have an obligation and so do I to continue to be faithful to the Lord. He will do His part and how the mystery of His inviolable purposes unfold, somehow in harmony with our responses, I don't understand but that's what the Scripture teaches. And to that we must be faithful. And so we are awaiting then the coming of the Lord and we who have been abiding will not be ashamed when He appears. What a tremendous reality that is. Be faithful to the Lord.

You may...I don't know what's going on in the life of all of you, you may be...some of you may be on the brink of defecting. You may be on the brink of walking away from this. And I warn you, you will be ashamed at His coming. You will be among those in Revelation 6:15 to 17 who if you're alive at that time will cry for the rocks and the mountains to fall on you and hide you from the face of the One who comes. You will be one of those of whom Daniel said they will come to everlasting shame and contempt. And so, I warn you as I think John was warning in His epistle, make sure your faith is real, make sure you are not a Judas branch, superficially attached but that you are real and you are genuine and you are truly Christ's and your faith is a genuine saving and persisting and persevering faith.

I have commented a couple of times that I've been going through the Old Testament with my study Bible and going through the book of Job. And I simply remind you that the whole picture of the book of Job is Satan's effort to show God that he can destroy a believer's faith. And that believer is Job, he's the target. And Satan goes to try to destroy his faith but it is an indestructible faith. It is an indestructible faith because God has granted him an indestructible faith and God preserves him. But

it is also indestructible because Job continues to be faithful. And he says, "Thou He slay me, yet will I...what?...trust Him." And we cannot, as I said, solve that mystery but we certainly can understand our obligation.

So, first of all then, in understanding this hope in John's words, it is guaranteed by abiding. Let's go back to our text, verse 29, and make a second point. It is realized in righteousness...it is realized in righteousness.

In other words, you guarantee your future hope by abiding and abiding is in fact righteous living. If you know, verse 29, that He is righteous, that is that God is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

Now our future hope then takes on some behavioral patterns. It's not just sustained faith. It's not just sustained trust. It shows up in righteous behavior. People who have this hope will not only be righteous at His coming, they'll not only be made blameless when He appears, but here and now, John says, they manifest righteousness. That's how you can tell a Christian. You can know them by their fruits. And this again is part of John's whole approach in this epistle where he is endeavoring to show throughout this whole epistle of five chapters how you distinguish true believers. They are characterized by abiding and here he says they're characterized by righteousness, and this unmask the phonies.

Some people might say, "I believe, I believe, I continue to believe and I stay in the church. I stay involved," and then the next question is, "Well, what is the pattern of your life?" You heard a testimony in the waters of baptism tonight about a person growing up and being in the church, involved in the church, doing all the superficial activities of the church, but not knowing the Lord and therefore not true righteousness being manifest. But when we know that He is righteous, we know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

You can tell then who the abiding believers are by their righteous behavior. That's only logical. A child will be like his father and the children of God will be like Him. If God the Father is righteous, then we can expect that His children will manifest His nature which is righteous.

Matthew 5:48, "Therefore you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Obviously that is the goal. The fact of the matter is, in this life we won't make the goal, but we certainly are in pursuit of it.

See the word in verse 29 "who practices righteousness," practices. This is a present indicative, that means to say it is a verb that has continuous action. And so the pattern of a true believer who has a genuine hope and who is really abiding is a pattern of righteousness, a constant flow of righteousness marks that believer. It's not an uninterrupted one, it's not perfection but it is direction. It is, as Paul



says in Ephesians 4:24, the new self which is in the likeness of God created in righteousness and holiness. There is a definite indication in the life of an abiding believer that he belongs to the Lord as manifest in the pattern of life. And so we are the ones who have that hope as made manifest in our righteous living.

You can always then examine your own works. You can take a look at your faith and ask yourself...what do I believe...if you want to affirm your hope. And then you can move from that and ask yourself...what's my life like. And if there is not that struggle and that desire and that drive and that passion for what is righteous, then you are not one that is born of Him. Our hope then is guaranteed by abiding and it is manifest or realized in righteousness.

A third point, as we move toward the climax of this text, the third point is that our hope is established in love...it is established in love. The idea of being born a child of God is introduced in verse 29, and it carries over at the end of verse 29, "Born of Him," it carries over into verse 1, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God." You ask the question, why are we born of Him? Why would God make us His children? And here comes the answer, "Because of His great love with which He has loved us." And the Apostle, of course, is overwhelmed with astonishment as he contemplates the amazing love of God which confers such honor on sinners as to make them sons. That just never ceases to be a staggering reality. And John particularly celebrates that reality not only in this epistle where he repeatedly refers to believers as sons of God and children of God, but even in his epistle where it also is of tremendous import to him that we are made the children of God.

For example, John 1:12, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe on His name." And this whole idea of belonging to God in a filial way, being a part of His family, being, as it were, God's own children, sharing His nature, is an overwhelming expression of God's great love. So he says in verse 1, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us."

And he doesn't even...you would assume maybe that he would use some adjectives, but he doesn't even try. He just says, "See how great a love." "Behold, how great a love." And that's all he can say. What manner of love. It speaks of something foreign, by the way. The phrase here, potaposis classic Greek for...from what country, or from what race, or from what tribe. It's a term to express something foreign. So we could put it this way, see how utterly foreign a love the Father has bestowed upon us, foreign to anything we can conceive, foreign to anything we can imagine, foreign to anything that is known to the human race. It is a love that is beyond human love, outside of human love. It is that love, according to chapter 4 verse 9, manifested so that God sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. It is this amazing staggering love which God has shed abroad in our hearts. It is this love which would allow a man to die for His enemies that He might redeem them to Himself. It is this love from which there is no separation, Romans 8 says. It is

this love which touches us when we are dead in sins and quickens us and makes us alive. It is an other worldly love, it is an unearthly love, it is a transcendent kind of love. And it is the basis of our hope, of our hope.

And so, he says see how foreign, how utterly incomprehensible the love of the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God. He loved us so much he brought us as close as He could bring us. He could have made us friends, He could have made us servants, He could have made us neighbors, but He made us family. He brought us as close as He could possibly bring us because of His tremendous love. And such we are, he says, that's exactly who we are, we are His children.

Verse 1 of chapter 3 then says, "For this reason the world does not know us because it did not know Him." Our hope...our hope is all tied up with a love that is utterly unlike anything the world could ever comprehend. No wonder they can't understand us. No wonder they can't understand the gospel. No wonder they don't connect with why we love God and why we love the Lord Jesus Christ, they cannot, it is incomprehensible. It is outside the realm of their experience.

And so then, our hope has been guaranteed as we abide, it is manifest or realized as valid in our righteous behavior. It is established in the love of God...this immense incomprehensible love with which God loved us enough to give His life for us.

Now let me take you to a fourth point in verse 2, and we're covering these perhaps more rapidly than we should, but I want you to grasp the wonder of them, and so I want to cover all five of them tonight. Number four, this hope is fulfilled in Christ's likeness. This hope is fulfilled in Christ's likeness. Verse 2, "Beloved, now we are children of God."

We've already established that, it happened at the point of salvation you became a child of God by His great love, as Ephesians 2 says, very same thing, "For His great love wherewith He loved us." But though we are the children of God, it has not appeared as yet what we shall be." And here we come to this idea that our hope is not yet fully realized. It will be fulfilled in the future, it says in verse 2, we know that when He appears. Back again to what we saw in Titus 2:13, that we look for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our God and Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that our fulfilled hope is tied then to His coming. So we know that when He appears it will be fulfilled. And here is its fulfillment. "We shall be like Him." That is the fulfillment of our hope.

Remember what we said this morning in Romans 8:29, "He has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son in order that His Son might be the firstborn, the prototokos, the chief one not the first in time, but the first in preeminence, over many brethren who are made like Him. So you know that it was God's plan to redeem a whole humanity, make them like His Son and then make His Son the head over all of that redeemed humanity. We're the children of God who will some day enter in to

our hope, eternal glory and its fulfillment is when we shall be like Him. And that cannot occur until we see Him as He is. So when He comes at the Rapture of the church to take His own and we meet Him in the air, that is when we become like Him. And again I say, as much as glorified humanity can be like incarnate deity, we will be like Jesus Christ. Presently we are sons, we are children, but the glorious manifestation of what that means in the fulfillment of our hope has not yet happened. And so we can say then that our hope is fulfilled in Christ's likeness, that's what we look for.

Remember one of those favorite chapters of mine, Philippians 2, where Paul says I press toward the mark for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. And I've reminded you many times that the prize when we're called up is Christ's likeness, that's the prize. The upward call means being called up. When we're called up the prize is to be like Christ. Paul says the goal in life, I press toward the goal which is the prize. The prize is Christ's likeness, and so is the goal. Just as when we're called up we'll be like Christ, until then the goal now is to become more and more and more like Him. And John said that, "If we say we abide in Him," over in chapter 2 verse 6, "we ought to walk in the same manner as He walked."

So, the goal of our salvation is Christ's likeness. The fulfillment of our hope is Christ's likeness. And that is also the pursuit of our life, to be ever and ever increasingly like Jesus Christ. We are God's children constantly being conformed to the image of Christ, in this life as much as possible. In the next life, by the amazing glorifying work of God we'll be made like His Son. So our hope then is fulfilled in Christ's likeness.

Now I don't know all that that means. People always ask me funny questions, they say, "We'll we all be thirty-three years of age?" No, we won't be any age, because nobody in eternity is any age. You say, "Well if somebody was a child of eleven or twelve and they go to heaven, are they frozen in eternal youth? Are they going to be eleven forever?" No. There won't be any elevens or twelves, there won't be any age. It won't be like here. It doesn't necessarily mean that we will all...listen carefully...that we will all look the same. In fact, I don't think we will. I think we'll have the distinctions that we have here because there have been a few folks who have been up in heaven and were manifest in some visible form, such as those who appeared at the Transfiguration who were recognizable. There will be distinctions. You will be you and I will be me and I even believe that even though we will be made like Christ in terms of sinless perfection, and in terms of being able to perfectly worship God and reflect the glory of Christ, we will still differ as to our responsibilities and our eternal capabilities which will be tied to our rewards.

In other words, your eternal reward is not a bunch of medals that you're going to wear on your white robe. So you'll go around and say, "How many have you got? I've got more than you've got." That's not going to be the way it is. And it's not going to be that some people have one crown they have to wear every day and you've got a wardrobe of them, you can change and only wear once a month because you've amassed such an amazing record. That's not going to be the way it is. But there will

be a distinction, a distinction of the eternal rewards has to do with the kind of service you will render in your Christlike perfection. So don't...don't assume that by saying we're all going to be like Christ that we're all going to look like the picture of Jesus that's in the book that you saw when you were a kid. We're not. In fact, none of those pictures is based upon any reality, pure speculation and that's not the point anyway. We're not all going to look the same. We're not going to be clones. We're going to be ourselves. But we will be Christlike in the sense of our perfections, in the sense that we have a glorified resurrected body that can transport itself throughout eternity and can reflect the glory of God in ways obviously utterly unknown to us now.

So we will see Him and we will be made like Him when we see Him just as He is. And we won't just be wearing white robes and doing all of those things that some have depicted in heaven, we will be busy serving the Lord and doing those things unique to our abilities as they are refined and perfected in eternal glory. That is the fulfillment of our hope.

Now that brings us to one last point. And this last point is, in my mind, a very, very essential one and really the appropriate place to end the whole discussion, although we could say much more. Our hope is guaranteed by abiding. Our hope is realized or manifest in righteous living and behavior. Our hope is established or based on God's foreign love, something that is so transcendent it's completely foreign to any human understanding or definition. And our hope is fulfilled in Christ's likeness. Now we come to a very practical aspect and that's the fifth point in verse 3, our hope is characterized by purity...our hope is characterized by purity. And this certainly is very close to verse 29, very close to the righteous pattern of behavior. But this in particular focuses on the matter of purity.

Verse 3, "Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him, purifies himself just as He is pure." This is really John's purpose for the whole discussion. What he is saying here is that if you have genuinely focused on your meeting with Jesus Christ, that has a purifying effect on your life. That is a great motive. You're going to face the Lord Jesus Christ. You're going to face Him. You're not going to have to pay for your sins, but you're going to face Him in a time of rewards when according to 1 Corinthians 3:10 to 15 your work will be evaluated, whether it's gold, silver, precious stone or wood, hay and stubble. It is possible, according to 2 John 8, that you could lose your reward. John says, "Look to yourselves that you lose not the things you've wrought but you receive a full reward." You could forfeit what God has eternally planned for you.

I don't know...I don't assume that heaven is going to be a place of shame because it's going to be a place of rejoicing and joy. But I can anticipate the fact that I don't want to face the Lord Jesus Christ with an impure life. If I know that He could come at any time, and I am always living in the reality of the imminent coming of Christ to take His own to be with Him in the air, I don't want to face Him with anything in my life that wouldn't please Him.

I remember as a kid reading a poem that was in my grandfather's Bible and I memorized it. And I think I can still recite it although I haven't in years. Remember this, that after we are taken up to meet Him in the air, we go immediately to the judgment seat of Christ, don't we where all of our life is evaluated and we are rewarded on the basis of our faithfulness. And I want to make sure I receive a full reward. Well along that line somebody wrote this poem and my grandfather wrote it in his Bible, and it goes like this:

"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 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 a path I can't retrace. Then my desolate heart will well nigh break; with tears I cannot shed I will cover my face with my empty hands, I will bow my uncrowned head. O Lord, of the years that are left of me I give them to Thy hand. Take me, break me and mold me to the pattern that Thou hast planned."

I don't know all of the emotions that one might feel at that moment, but I know the emotions I feel now are similar to what the poet thought when he wrote that. I don't want to be anywhere near having any reason to be ashamed at His coming. I want to be doing that which honors Him and pleases Him. I want to be living a pure life and he that has this hoped fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. If your focus is on Jesus Christ, that is a purging influence, isn't it? If you're living in the imminent reality of Christ's return, that's a purging influence. I mean, just the...just the imminent reality of any authority figure has an influence on you, just knowing the police are out there somewhere on the freeway has an effect on you.

I remember as a kid what would happen in the classroom when the teacher left the room. Oh my, I can remember...I was a very active kid, I'll put it that way, and much more active in the absence of the teacher than in the presence of a teacher. I remember doing a leap from one desk to another and I was in mid flight when she entered. I always sort of prided myself on being able to hear the pitter patter of those orthopaedic wedgies as they came down the hall, but on this particular occasion I missed. And I remember the severe character with which I was treated by the administration and then by my father who showed up at the school to apply certain lessons to appropriate places.

I know what it's like in athletics to have to answer to the coach, have to answer to the boss, the person to whom you're responsible. You understand that kind of perspective.

I hope you can say with the Apostle John, "Even so, come...what?...quickly, come Lord Jesus." I'm ready. He that has this hope purifies himself even as his Lord is pure. It's a purging influence when you live in the light of the imminent coming of Jesus Christ.

And so, there you have it in John's words, a summary of the wonder of the hope of believers. Guaranteed by abiding, realized in righteousness, established by love, fulfilled in Christ's likeness and characterized by purity.

I don't really believe you can...you can live in a true hope of Christ's return and not have it affect you in terms of your own sin life. There are a lot of people, you meet them all the time, who are preoccupied with prophecy, who want to fuss around with all the details of prophecy, solve every mystery, identify every personality and every time period. But have never really focused on the person of Christ. I want to understand what the Bible teaches about the Tribulation and the Antichrist and the demon hosts and the great battles and the holocausts, but that's really not what I'm looking for. What I need to be looking for all the time is Christ. And when my focus is on Him, it has a purifying affect on my life.

The Thessalonian church was a great church. When Paul wrote to them he never reprimanded them. He never reprimanded them. And when he wrote his epistle to them he had nothing to say but basically to give them some instruction and to commend them. And one of the things, as I pointed out this morning, for which he commended the Thessalonian church was this, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers, constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope." And then down in verse 10, "You wait for His Son from heaven." Are you in that waiting mode? Are you living as if Jesus could come in the next moment? Are you living in such a way that if He did come you would be pleased to have Him invade your life at the present time? Or would there be some shame if you knew He was coming? You need to live every moment as if He might be here in the next, for He may. This is our hope. This is not a hope which should frighten us, this is a hope that should fill our hearts with joy. And it will if your life is what it should be. Let's pray.

Father, again tonight Your Word has brought light to us and life because it's truth. O Father, what a wonderful, wonderful subject and theme that we've covered today and we pray, Lord, that You might cause us to live in the light of Your return, realizing that You could come at any time and take us to be with You. We want to be ready, realizing that we might be killed or die suddenly, unexpectedly and be immediately into Your presence. Help us to live, Lord, in the light of that reality in such a way that our lives are pure so that there was no anticipation of shame at the thought of Your coming, but only an eagerness to have You come. Step into our world and see it and take us out to be with you. Purify us, Father. With that hope we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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