

(1 John #18) in Prospect and Restrospect

by J. Glyn Owen

The Christian life is Christocentric, and our hope in Christ's coming inspires us to purify ourselves from unrighteousness and to practice obedience and righteousness.

Duration: 35:59

Scripture: Matthew 24:30, 1 John 1:8, 1 John 2:29, 1 John 3:3-6

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on two important aspects of the Christian faith: hope and habit. He emphasizes the Christian hope, which is centered around the belief that Jesus Christ will reappear in glory. The preacher also discusses the prospect that purifies, highlighting the importance of living a consistent and righteous life. He explains that Christ's purpose was to take away sin and break its dominion over believers. The overall message is that as children of God, our relationship with Jesus should lead us away from sin and towards a Christ-like life.

Transcript

Will you turn with me in the word of God to the first epistle written by John in chapter 3, and I would like to read verses 3, 4, 5, and 6. We are continuing in our expositions of this wonderful Christian document, and we come now to a very important section. And every man, says John, that hath this hope, the hope to which he has referred in the first two verses, every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law.

And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins, and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not, whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Now, at this point, the Apostle John has begun for the second time round to apply his three tests to those who profess to be Christian.

And here, beginning toward the end of the second chapter, he's applying the test of righteousness, or of obedience. What he's saying, in effect, is this. It is impossible to profess properly that we are Christian unless we can show by our lives that we are obedient to the Word of God and to the God of the Word.

Obedience is essential. It is a necessary fruit of the Christian life. If Christ is dwelling in us, if the Spirit of the Lord is in us, if we are truly the Lord's, then we ought to be obedient to our Lord as a general pattern of life.

We may slip, we may fall. He tells us in chapter one that no one can say that he hasn't sinned. So he's not preaching a kind of sinless perfectionism.

He's not doing that. But what he is saying, nevertheless, is this. A man who is a genuine Christian should be living a consistent life of righteousness.

Unless he does so, there is no evidence to point that he is truly a child of God, a Christian man or a Christian woman. Now, you will notice then, as you read the verses before us today and the verses preceding, that John is insisting that the Christian life is Christocentric. Christ is in the center of it all, and Christ determines it all.

John puts it in this way. He says, first of all, in the order of the text here, he says, if we are members of the family and the household of God, then we are awaiting the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. Brothers, he says, we are already the children of God.

It doesn't yet appear what we are going to be, but we know this. When he appears, we shall be like him. And then, every person who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure.

Christ is coming again, and if I'm his, I'm busy preparing myself for the vision glorious. Now, in verses 3 and 5, he refers not to the second coming of Christ, but to the first coming of the same Christ. You notice what he says in verse 3, every man, I'm sorry, in verse 5, you know that he was manifested to take away our sins.

Christ has already come. The incarnation is a historical fact. Jesus was born of the Virgin.

He has lived upon earth, and he came, says John, at this point. He says he came in order to do something which is most relevant to the theme under consideration. He came to take away our sins, and in him there is no righteousness.

So then, there is the second coming of Christ, there is the first coming of Christ, and then in between John speaks in verse 6 of communion with him. Whosoever abideth in him. The Christ who came and lived and died is a Christ who continues alive, as we were reminded so beautifully this morning by one of the boys.

He who is risen from the dead is the living Lord. It's Easter day today, in one sense, because our Lord is alive. And a Christian man is not simply a person who awaits the second coming, or who looks back to the first coming, and is related to both foci, but he is a person who is living in Christ today.

The Christian life is Christocentric, it centers in Christ. It arises out of what Christ has done, it awaits what Christ is going to do, and it draws the whole of its inspiration from the living Lord Jesus today. A Christian abides in Christ, he's a man who is in his element.

The element of the fish is the water, the element of the bird is the sky, the element of the Christian is Christ. And a Christian is a man in Christ, living in him, breathing in him, serving in him, everything he does, he does out of that relationship. Now then, what has that got to do with the subject under consideration? John will expound this and the application of his test of righteousness in terms of two main things.

They all arise out of the fact that Christ is so central in Christian experience. I want to refer to two things, the prospect that purifies and the practice that identifies, if that helps us to remember well and good. First

of all, the prospect that purifies, verses 2 and 3. Beloved, we are God's children now.

It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears, we shall delight in him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him, purifies himself as he is pure. John's statement to remember is this, if you're a Christian man, you ought to be obedient.

Very well then, he says, drawing now his thoughts or basing his thoughts on the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ and our belief in that and our hope in his coming. Right, he says, if you are a Christian man with hope in his coming, you will be a person purifying yourself from unrighteousness and disobedience and practicing obedience and righteousness. Now let's look at the way he does it.

He focuses around two things, the first of which we've already considered on a previous Sunday morning, the second of which I want to say a word about this morning, before we pass to something else. There are two things here, the child hope and the child habit. The Christian hope and the Christian habit.

The Christian hope is clear. I can only now repeat the three main threads in John's statement here. Here they are.

He will appear. Oh my good friend, I hope that fills your soul this morning. That our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us on the cross of Calvary and was buried, risen, ascended, now out of sight and we can't see him and we can't touch him or handle him, but he's going to reappear.

The curtain of blue will be severed. Now to the skies will come our blessed Lord Jesus in glory. He shall appear.

Second statement is this. We shall see him as he is. Not as he was, but as he is.

Not as the man of Nazareth in his humiliation and rejection, but as the Lord of glory crowned with glory and honor. We shall see him that day as he now is. And the third strand in the thought, we shall be like him.

Mystery of mysteries, wonder of wonders, a great metamorphosis proceeding now in measure will at last be complete and the Christian who has been born again will come to the image glorious, the image of his glorified redeeming. That's the child hope, that's the Christian hope. If you and I are Christian men and women this morning, this is something that should be like a dynamite in our spirits.

The hope of the glory of God. Right. Now arising out of that, John speaks of the child or the Christian habit.

Everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself even as he is pure. You see the point is this. John distinguishes this hope in the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ from a mere intellectual belief in the second coming.

I have no doubt that most of us present here today would say we believe that Jesus is coming again. But heaven only knows in how many of our lives this is a dynamic thing. We really believe it.

And we really expect it. If the preacher was to say well now the doctrine of the second coming of our Lord is out. Oh my, I'm sure the whole congregation would say look we've got to get rid of that man.

But John is interested in something much more than orthodoxy about the fact of his coming. What he's talking about is this. Hope in his coming.

Hope in his coming. This is an expectation of the soul because we love him you see. And we have faith in him.

And everything we are and everything we hope to be is related to him. He's the alpha. He's the omega.

He's the beginning. He's the end. We hope in him.

And therefore we await his coming. Now this is hope. Every Christian man or woman, says John, who hopes in him will do something to express that hope.

The Christian hope inspires action. The kind of action it inspires is this. It makes for holy living.

He that has this hope set on him purifies himself. Purifies himself. Gets rid of things that are wrong.

Examines himself in the light of God. To go back to John chapter 1. 1 John chapter 1. Walks in the light of God and sees what blemishes come to view when he looks at himself in the mirror of God's light. And gets rid of the dirt.

Gets rid of the filth. Gets rid of the evil habits. He purifies himself.

As he is pure. The effect of grace already received, as well as of glory so clearly anticipated, should always harness the energies of the soul to a holy, unremitting warfare with impurity and unrighteousness. A Christian man or woman is a man or woman at war.

Not with other people, but with sin in himself or herself. If a Christian is known as a man who is at loggerheads with other people, rather than with sin in himself, there's something gone sour and wrong. The Lord is coming again, and if I really believe that, I'm at war with sin in my soul, however, however it may appear.

Now, I think we must make it clear that, viewed against the larger spectrum of Scripture, this is not self-effort, pure and simple. It involves effort. It involves warfare.

It involves struggling. We wrestle not against principalities and powers. But we do wrestle.

I'm sorry, we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but we do wrestle against principalities and powers. A Christian is a wrestler, and he's a fighter. There's something to fight with.

There's a warfare on. The main warfare is in here, in my soul, against the old self and Satan taking advantage of the old carnal nature, and so forth. But now, this is not self-effort.

Paul puts it very beautifully, I think, in Philippians chapter 2, when he says to the Philippians, Now, he says, you work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For God is at work in you, both to will and to do for his own good pleasure. Have you noticed it? That's the beautiful balance.

You do it, says Paul, because God is at work in you. If you're a Christian man or woman, God is at work in you. Isn't this a sacred, isn't this a holy notion? God is at work in you.

Is there someone here this morning who doesn't know anything of God being at work in you? When the word of God is preached, you're like a stone. Feel nothing, sense nothing. God have mercy on you.

You need to be born again. Is there a man or a woman here who comes to the word of God every day, or to prayer, and you don't sense God at work in you? Man or woman, I tell you, you're dead while you live. Says Paul to every Christian in Philippi, God is at work in you.

So what? I sit back and do nothing. No, no, says Paul. You now work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, because God is about His business in your soul.

Work with God. Cooperate with God. Respond to God.

Go God's way. He that hath this hope set on him purifies himself. Do you notice how John ends it? Purifies himself even as he is pure.

I want you to notice one important thing here. John does not say, you purify yourself as he purified himself. Say, why do I mention that? For this reason.

If John said that, he would imply that Jesus Christ was at one stage or other impure, and He needed to be purified. All these incidental statements reveal the glorious doctrines of the person of Christ and His purity and His holiness and His deity. You purify yourself, he says, not as He purified himself.

He did not need to purify himself, but He was and is pure. Always has been, always will be. He is the pure one.

Now he says, He is the one who is coming, and when you will be transformed into His likeness, that's the kind of image you'll get ready for it. See that you're preparing for it. The prospect that purifies.

The child hope, the child habit. Do you hope in His coming? Then, this is the habit that gives the truth, or otherwise the lie, to what we profess with our lips. Every man that has this hope set on him purifies himself.

Now, this brings us to the very practical detail, the practice that identifies. Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness.

You know that He appeared to take away sins, and in Him is no sin. No one who abides in Him goes on sinning. No one who sins, that is, goes on sinning, has either seen Him or known Him.

Now, as we did very briefly in reading this passage, I want to do it again. John is here speaking of a general, habitual way of life. Not an act of sinning, but a habitual thing.

He's talking about our habits. A habit of right doing or a habit of wrong doing. It's not just acts of right doing or of wrong doing, but the general tenor of a man's life.

That is evident from the language he employs. What does it mean to be Christlike? What is Christlikeness? He is pure. What does that mean? How do we spell it out? Well, now, there are two things here.

I want to mention them briefly. The first thing is the consistency of God's Son. Now, you may think that's not relevant to our theme.

It is. I'll come back to it in a moment. You know, says John, that He appeared to take away sins, and in Him, Himself, there is no sin.

The consistency of God's Son. The purpose of His coming is made clear. Why did Jesus come? Well, says John, He came to take away sin.

This He did in many ways. Jesus Christ, first of all, came to take away sin because He came to take away the consequences of sin, the curse of sin, the guilt of sin. These words are reminiscent of those of John the Baptist when he pointed Jesus out as the Lamb of God, come to take away the sin of the world.

Jesus came to take away sin. In that sense. He came to take away sin in another sense.

He came to take away sin by destroying the power of sin in His people. You remember the announcement of His birth. He shall save His people from their sin.

Jesus came to take away sin. He came to take our sins away from us and to take us away from our sins. And if He doesn't do that, something's gone wrong.

That's why Paul gloried in the cross. God forbid, He says, that I should glory, said, in the cross of our Lord Jesus, by the which I am crucified unto the world and the world unto me. The cross drives a wedge between a man and the world, which represents the rule of sin.

He comes to destroy the power of sin in us. He came to destroy the power of sin so that if any man be in Christ, Jesus is a new creature. All things are passed away.

Everything's new. And everything's of God. That's the purpose of His coming.

To take away sin. Jesus Christ will never make you, never make me sin. Jesus Christ will never give you an excuse for sinning.

He will never give me an excuse for sinning. Never will. He came to take away the wretched sin, lock, stock and barrel.

And when He returns, every vestige of sin will be expurgated from the universe. It's as real as that. The warfare of Jesus Christ against sin is total.

He came to take the thing away, out of the way. But now notice the consistency of the Son of God. And in Him is no sin.

He wouldn't have it. He came to carry it away, but He did not allow the wretched sin to cause the least smudge upon His spirit nor upon His soul. In Him is no sin.

In other words, you see, Jesus Christ did not simply come to do something that was objective, carry the guilt away, but He kept His soul pure from the wretched sin. His pattern of living is consistent with the purpose of His coming. Why I'm so thrilled that by the Spirit of God we have the record that three times over, Pilate had to announce Him innocent.

I find no fault in Him, says Pilate three times over. The centurion at the foot of the cross, witnessing what he had, said, Surely this was the Son of God. But most important of all, God the Father acknowledged His righteousness, His purity, His holiness, His sanctity, His perfection when He received the sacrifice as an

unblemished thing for the sins of men.

When Jesus had offered Himself as the sacrifice for sin, God raised Him from the dead and made Him Prince and Lord of life and of death. God set His seal upon His Son's perfection. In nothing, therefore, can we find the least inconsistency between the avowed purpose for which Christ became man and the pattern of life He lived among men.

He was consistently against sin for righteousness, taking away sin, and Himself sinless, pure, righteous. In particular, says John, there was no solitary symptom of lawlessness in Him. Sin is lawlessness.

Lawlessness is a frame of mind before it is an action. It's an attitude of kicking against the bricks. You remember the prodigal son before he went away from home? He was a prodigal a long time before he left home.

You know, everything was irksome. He wanted to get away. That's lawlessness.

You don't need to go away from the church. You don't need to leave the fellowship. You don't need to go and live in the depths of iniquity to become a prodigal or to become lawless.

First of all, it's a matter of heart. I don't want to do the will of God. I'd rather my own.

And I think I'll have my own way. I'm such an individual, you see. God has given me an individuality.

This is how people talk sometimes. And I want to be myself, never mind what God purposes for me. I want to be my own self, and I'll have my own way.

That's lawlessness. You never find that in Jesus Christ. My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work at the beginning of His life, of His ministry.

And at the end, not my will but Thine be done. No token of lawlessness in Him, by the avowed purpose for which He became man then, as well as by the evident perfection of His life as man, Jesus proved Himself to be the enemy of all lawlessness, even as He was the friend of all sinners. Now, the consistency of God's Son.

The last thing is this. This is what brings us to the point. The identity of God's children, faced with the urgent necessity of showing that the Gnostic heretics were causing chaos to the people that John is addressing in this epistle, were not Christian.

The apostle John is telling them how and why. They may have shown acts of decency, or of well-doing, or of goodness. At one time they were members of the church.

And they may be very clever. They claim to be the spiritual elite. They have new revelations of God, and they know things better than the ordinary Christians.

That's what they profess. Says John, look, no man is a child of God who does not purify himself from lawlessness, who does not purge himself from sin and anything that is contrary to the will and the word of God. There must be a consistent mode of living to show a man's habit of life.

John sees every child of God, then, as not simply believing the record of what Jesus did when He first came, not simply hoping in what is going to take place when He comes again, but as, to quote him,

abiding in Jesus Christ all the time. A Christian is a man who abides in Jesus Christ. This is a most fruitful and a most pregnant concept.

A man in Christ is a favorite Pauline terminology. But this is what a Christian is, a man in Christ. And a Christian is a man who abides in Christ.

Can I quote to you a word from the Apostle Paul in order to bring out the marvelous thrust of this? He's writing to the Corinthians who were dabbling with immoralities, even the Christians at this point. And he writes in these terms, Do you not know, he says, that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? One body, and then he goes on to say one flesh. But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him.

Now, my friends, I must be daring and outspoken in order to bring this out. Such is the intimate life bond which is involved in the possession of eternal life. It is a spiritual intercourse that results from a marriage of spirits between Jesus Christ and the believer.

A Christian is joined to his Lord, not physically, but spiritually. As man and woman who are involved in physical intercourse are said to be one flesh, says Paul, you men, by your spirit in your soul, if you are a Christian, you are joined to the Lord. This is always a fruitful bond.

There are always children, the fruit of the spirit. The inevitable fruit is this, purging of oneself from unrighteousness and lawlessness and sin. So that a man's general mode of living is not evil, but righteous.

Not worldly, but Christlike. O my good friends, I have a fear in my soul of many people who love to dabble with evangelical religion, that I am not fighting the battle against sin. Don't tease, don't let us tease ourselves that because we belong to an evangelical church we are necessarily born again.

To abide in Him is to come under the influence and inspiration of Him in whom we abide. If He is my atmosphere, if He is my inspiration, if He is my life, and if I am so intimately joined with Him, then two things, and I am through this morning, I'll just put them to you in two or three sentences. John puts it here like this.

To abide in Him makes it impossible to abide in sin. Now you've got to choose. I've got to choose.

I can't abide in the two elements. He is consistent. He came to take away sin.

There was no sin in Him. He is consistently against sin. Right.

I can't abide in Him and abide in sin. I may slip into sin. John has given us the answer to that.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But I cannot go on consistently living in sin if I abide in Him. I'm not abiding in Him if I fall and abide in sin.

That means I have to question myself. I have to make sure where I am and discover my true spiritual lineage. The second statement is this.

To make a practice of living in sin means that not only is a person not abiding in Christ, he has never seen Him, says John, nor known Him. Now, this is a very, very remarkable statement, and we need to take it seriously. Whosoever abides in Him sinneth not, verse 6, the second part.

Whosoever keeps on sinning has not seen Him nor known Him. In other words, if Jesus comes into my life as my Savior, He breaks the backbone. He breaks the tyranny.

He breaks the yoke of sin. Oh, I may fall many a time, many a time. Who doesn't? All of us will.

But the backbone of the thing is broken. Sin, says Paul to the Romans, shall not have dominion over you. The dominion of it is broken.

The rule of it, the reign of it is broken. It may come back, and it may invade your mind and your conscience and so forth. Very well, then, what's the message? The message is this.

Those who are the children of God are intimately related to Jesus Christ. His coming again, His first coming, His abiding presence by the Spirit. On all three counts, because of what He did, because of what He will do, because of who He is now and what He does now, His total influence upon a believer is to get us away from sin.

My friend, what influences Jesus Christ upon you and upon me? Is there a possibility that we are dabbling with an imaginary Christ? Or are we dealing with a Christ of the Scriptures, whose consistent testimony of life and of life is this, I will make you like myself? Oh, may the Spirit of God today come in upon us like a wave of an ocean from heaven with an influence that will capture us afresh. To walk in the way of obedience and of righteousness and of purity, even though we may slip and fall from time to time and do some terrible things, even as Peter did and other saints have done, we shall be known by the general tenor of our lives as children of God and followers of Him in whom there is no sin. Let us pray.

Father, write Thy Word upon our hearts. We cannot meditate upon a theme such as this without feeling the wounds of the Word, but we thank Thee nevertheless that the Word that wounds wounds to heal, to offer it with a view to healing. And if the surgical instrument has been felt by any of us at this time, we ask of Thee that having excised what is evil, we may be healed of spirit and of soul, so that no root of bitterness springing up in the soul trouble us, no seed of rebellion cause us to become obnoxious in Thy sight and a hindrance to Thy work.

Cure us in heaven, Thy dwelling place, for Jesus Christ our Saviour's sake. Amen.

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