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ARE YOU READY FOR HIS COMING?

1 John 2:28-29

By

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1 John Lesson 12

Are You Ready for His Coming? 1 John 2:28-29

We have enjoyed watching some of the Winter Olympics on TV over the last couple of weeks. Some of the feats of the athletes are simply incredible! I wonder how those who do the aerial ski acrobatics and the ski jump do it for the very first time. They both look like sure acts of suicide!

One thing is obvious with all of the Olympic athletes: they have spent years preparing for the big event. Nobody tries a sport a few times and then qualifies for the Olympics. Years of preparation and training are absolutely essential. But even then, a few of the athletes still fail miserably or are disqualified when their big event takes place. That's always sad to watch.

A much bigger event than the Olympics is coming, and you will be enrolled as a participant. That event is the second coming of Jesus Christ in power and glory. It will be the most amazing event ever to shake the entire world. Listen to how Jesus described it (Luke 21:25-28):

"There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

The question is, "Are you ready for the big event?" You may think, "I've trusted in Jesus Christ as my Savior, so I'm ready." In one sense, that is true. But the Bible teaches that even as believers, we should be prepared for His return. Jesus concluded His Olivet Discourse with these warnings to the disciples (Mark 13:33-37):

"Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge,

assigning to each one his task, also commanded the door-keeper to stay on the alert. Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. What I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the alert!’”

The apostle John heard Jesus speak those words. John has warned us that we are in the last hour, with many deceivers trying to lead us astray from the truth. With this danger in mind, he has given us three tests by which we can detect such false teachers, and also test our own faith: (1) the moral test of obedience to Jesus Christ (2:3-6); (2) the relational test of love for the brethren (2:7-11); and, (3) the doctrinal test of believing the truth about Jesus Christ (2:18-27). Now John begins a second application of the tests: (1) the moral test (2:28-3:10); (2) the relational test (3:11-18); then, as in the first cycle (2:12-17), he interrupts the tests at this point to insert a word about assurance (3:19-24); finally, (3) the doctrinal test (4:1-6). In our text (2:28-29), John tells us how to be ready for the big event of all history:

To be ready for Christ’s coming,
abide in Him as little children.

John makes three simple, but important, points:

1. Jesus Christ is coming again.

“When He appears” in Greek is literally, “if He appears.” But the uncertainty is *not* about the *fact* of His coming, but rather about the *time* of it. The *fact* that He is coming again bodily is either true or the Bible is false. But we do not know *when* He will return. James Boice writes (*The Epistles of John* [Zondervan], p. 96) that in the New Testament, “... one verse in twenty-five deals with the Lord’s return. It is mentioned 318 times in the 260 chapters of the New Testament. It is mentioned in every one of the New Testament books, with the exception of Galatians, which deals with a particular doctrinal problem, and the very short books such as 2 and 3 John and Philemon.” Jesus repeatedly mentioned His own return. On the night before His crucifixion, He promised the anxious disciples (John 14:1-3),

“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”

When the disciples watched the risen Jesus ascend bodily into heaven, two angels appeared and said (Acts 1:11), “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” He will come bodily.

Believers disagree a lot about the details of prophecy, such as the millennium and the rapture. There are obviously good reasons for each view or else everyone who holds to the authority of the Bible would agree. But there is one thing every true believer, no matter what his prophetic views, holds as absolutely true: Jesus Christ is coming back bodily as the conquering Judge and King.

2. When Christ comes, some will be ready, but others will not be ready.

John indicates that there are two possibilities when Jesus Christ comes: either you will have confidence or you will “shrink away from Him in shame.” But, is John referring to believers who will be ashamed at the Lord’s coming, or to the heretics and those who have followed them in their denial of the deity of Jesus Christ?

It seems to me that the *primary* reference in the context is to the heretics and their followers. For a while, they professed to know Jesus Christ, but they turned away, showing that their faith was not genuine, saving faith (2:19). They have denied Him His rightful place as the Sovereign Lord and have turned, instead, to foolish speculations that puff them up with pride in their supposed knowledge. Because by their denial of Christ, they were ashamed of Him, when He comes He will be ashamed of them (Mark 8:38). They will shrink back in fear and shame when they see Him in His glory (Matt. 22:11-13; Rev. 6:15-17).

But, there may be a secondary sense, momentary in duration, in which even true believers could be ashamed when He comes. Some have worked for Christ out of selfish, prideful motives. They

will be saved, but as through fire when their works are burned up (1 Cor. 3:12-15). Surely, they must feel a sense of shame over their sin, even though they quickly will be transformed into Christ's image and enter heaven in their perfect resurrection bodies (1 John 3:2; 1 Cor. 15:50-53). Even we who have conscientiously served Christ are painfully aware of our many shortcomings and failures. We may have a brief moment of shame or regret when we see Him and think, "If only I had done more for Him!"

But, for those who abide in Christ, the dominant mood will be confidence when He comes. The Greek word means, "courage, confidence, boldness, fearlessness, especially in the presence of persons of high rank" (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Bauer, Arndt, & Gingrich [University of Chicago Press], second ed., p. 630). The word used for "coming" (2:28) was used of the visit of a king or emperor. If you've ever had to go before a high-ranking official, you've probably felt a bit nervous. Even John, when he saw Jesus in His glory, "fell at His feet like a dead man" (Rev. 1:17). But here John says, "we may have confidence ... at His coming." How can this be? John gives a simple answer:

3. To be ready for Christ's coming, you must abide in Him as a little child.

The command is simple:

A. Abide in Him.

"Abide" is one of John's favorite words. He uses it more than all other New Testament writers combined—24 times in 1 John. In the Upper Room, Jesus used it 11 times (in John 15:4-16). It is used both of God's abiding in us and our abiding in Him (see 2:27; 3:24; 4:15). There is a sense in which every true believer abides (remains) in Christ, but the fact that we are commanded to abide in Him implies persistent and purposeful action on our part (Robert Law, *The Tests of Life* [Baker], pp. 199-200). Note five things about what it means to abide in Him:

- (1) To abide in Him, you must be in Him.

Believers are never commanded to be *in Christ*, because that is a fact, but we are commanded to *abide in Him*. When you trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, you are placed in Him. Paul uses this phrase often to describe our permanent position of identifica-

tion with Christ and all of the blessings that He bestows on us by His grace (Eph. 1:3). This position of being in Christ comes to us through the new birth, when we are born into God's family. If you wonder how you can know if you've been born again, look for signs of new life. Have you truly trusted and are you now trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation? Have you repented and are you now repenting of your sins? Do you love God and the things of God? These and many more are signs that you have been born again. If you have been born again, you are in Christ.

- (2) To abide in Him is both passive and active at the same time.

There is a popular teaching that if you are abiding, you are not striving or exerting any effort. You are simply resting in all that Jesus is for you, as the branch abides passively in the vine. That's half of the truth, but not all of it (for a more complete discussion of this see James Rosscup, *Abiding in Christ* [Zondervan], pp. 146-170). There is the passive sense in which we rest or trust in Christ as our life and strength. We will accomplish nothing of value for God unless we abide in Christ in that sense (John 15:5). But at the same time, we are commanded to abide in Him, which implies that we must be active. The active side involves the three tests: obeying His commands (1 John 2:6; 3:24), loving the brethren (2:10; 4:16), and holding tenaciously to the truth of the gospel (2:24; 4:15).

- (3) To abide in Him means to live righteously.

Verse 29 (in context) explains how not to be ashamed at Christ's coming, namely, to live righteously (it also anticipates the theme of 3:4-10). When John says, "If you know that He is righteous," "if" has the sense of "since." "He" could refer to Jesus Christ the righteous (2:2), who is the subject of verse 28. But since the Bible normally talks about the Father as the one who begets us as His children, the "He" and "Him" of verse 28 probably look ahead to the Father (3:1). Note also that His righteousness (2:29) is perfectly compatible with His great love (3:1). We fall into error if we do not hold to both.

Don't mistake the point of verse 29. It is *not* saying that righteous behavior is the cause or condition of the new birth, but just the opposite. The verb is literally, "has been born of Him" (Greek

perfect tense). The meaning is that a righteous life is *evidence* of the new birth. Like begets like. A child will be like his parents, because he shares their nature. Because God is righteous, those truly born of Him will be righteous in the overall pattern of their lives. When we are born of Him, He grants to us "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3; see, also, Eph. 4:24). That new life in us produces godliness, or righteous living (1 John 3:9).

Living righteously is a lifelong process of growth in obedience to God's Word. It does not happen instantly or without setbacks and struggles. But if you are born again, you will be learning to judge every thought, motive, and attitude by God's Word. You will seek to please the Lord, beginning on the thought level (Matt. 5:27-30; Mark 7:20-23). The fruit of the Holy Spirit will be growing in your character (Gal. 5:22-23). You will be disciplining yourself for the purpose of godliness (1 Tim. 4:7). Of course, all of this is done in dependence on the Holy Spirit, but you must be involved actively in the process (Phil. 2:12-13; Gal. 5:16).

(4) To abide in Him means to hold firmly to the truth of the Word, especially to the truth of the gospel.

We focused on this last week (2:24, "what you heard from the beginning"), and so I only mention it in passing. In a day when there are many pressures to compromise the gospel in order to display love and unity, we must stand firm. If you do not hold tenaciously to the truth, you are not abiding in Christ, who is the truth.

(5) To abide in Him means to be at home with Him and to be an alien to this world.

We looked at this in 2:15-17, where John draws the line between love for the world and love for the Father. In contrast to this fleeting world, the one who does the will of God *abides* forever. If you are more comfortable watching TV or godless movies and hanging out with worldly people to join them in their vain entertainment than you are spending time with the Lord and His people, then you are not abiding in Him. If you have secret areas of your life where you block God out, you are not abiding in Him. To abide in Him means that you are at home with Him and He is at home with you. You feel increasingly like an alien or foreigner to

this evil world: "For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him" (3:1).

Much more could be said, but notice, also, how John again addresses his flock as "little children." The implication is:

B. Abide in Him as His little child.

We live in a day when pastors are told that they lack the professional expertise to help people with their "deep" problems. In seminary, you are told that you need to refer these difficult cases to the trained professionals. The not-so-subtle implication is that the Bible does not have answers for the tough problems that people face. For solutions there, we have to turn to worldly psychology.

I recognize that if there are biochemical imbalances or if drugs are involved, things get complicated to sort out. I also realize that some problems are not easy to overcome. Yet at the same time, the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes and the Holy Spirit in the believer is quite capable of producing His fruit, which describes an emotionally and relationally whole person. If the promises of God's Word do not apply to the difficult problems of life, then they really aren't much good. John's words, "little children, abide in Him," suggest at least four simple truths:

- (1) As a little child, do not over-complicate the Christian life.

"Little children" implies that abiding in Christ is simple, not something that you need a graduate degree to understand or practice. In fact, Jesus said (Matt. 18:3), "unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." I have seen a bumper sticker that reads, "Simplify." That's not bad advice in all areas of life, but it is especially appropriate for your walk with the Lord. Ask yourself these basic questions:

- ü Do I spend consistent, regular time alone with the Lord in the Word?
- ü Am I trusting God by drawing near in prayer to His throne of grace in all of my trials?
- ü Do I memorize and meditate on God's Word, applying it to my life?

- ü Am I faithful as a steward of all that God has entrusted to me, maintaining integrity and putting off greed?
- ü Am I growing in holiness, developing the fruit of the Spirit by walking in the Spirit?
- ü Am I judging, confessing, and forsaking sin, beginning on the thought level?
- ü Am I working at maintaining and deepening the relationships with those in my life, especially in my immediate family? This includes truthful, loving communication; listening; kindness; patience; forgiveness; and, humility.

This isn't rocket science! It is basic Christian living and those who have applied these things have endured terrible suffering and even martyrdom with God's joy. Invariably, when people have serious personal or family problems, they are failing at these and other basics of the Christian life.

(2) As a little child, depend on your Father for everything.

Little children depend on their parents for everything. Their parents must protect them and provide for them. They would not survive for a day if their parents abandoned them to the elements. If you are abiding in the Father as a little child, you depend on Him for provision, life, and power. You take every need to Him in prayer and draw near to Him as your loving, caring Father.

When trials come into your life, you must actively draw near to the Lord and depend on Him as you have never had to do at other times. If you do not *actively* do this, you will become angry and bitter at God and drift away from Him. This is why Peter writes to suffering believers (1 Pet. 5:7-11):

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all

grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

- (3) As a little child, do not think more highly of yourself than you ought to think.

You must humble yourself as a child (Matt. 18:4). Children are not strong in themselves, but only in their protector. They run to their parents for refuge. You are weak, but your heavenly Father is strong. It is only when we're aware of our own weakness that we rely on Him for our strength (2 Cor. 12:9-10). We can see an example of this in our text, in the little word "we" (2:28). In the flow of the sentence, you would expect, "you," not "we." But John includes himself with these little children. Even though he was an aged apostle, even though he had been with the Lord, he recognized his need to abide in Him as a little child.

- (4) As a little child, revel in the Father's great love for you.

This is implicit in the relationship between a father and his children. Every father loves his children with a special love. John will state this explicitly in 3:1-2, and we need to wait until our study of those verses to comment more. But for now, note that if you know and revel in the Father's great love, abiding in Him will not be a difficult chore, but a great delight.

Conclusion

So, are you ready for the biggest, most amazing event in world history—the return of Jesus Christ? The answer to that question depends on your answer to another question: Are you abiding in Him as a little child?

If not, why not begin today? Get alone with the Lord and your Bible. Confess all known sin to Him. Mourn over your coldness toward the Father's love and toward the Lord Jesus, who gave Himself for you on the cross. Accept His gracious forgiveness. Go over the questions that I mentioned earlier and prioritize where you need to begin. Change your daily schedule so that you can begin to implement these basics of abiding in Christ. As you do, you will grow in confidence as you anticipate His coming.

Application Questions

1. Is it wrong to be too dogmatic on your view of prophecy? On what prophetic issues do all orthodox views agree?
2. Do you agree that believers may feel momentary shame at the Lord's coming? If not, why not?
3. How can we know the balance between the active and passive aspects of abiding in Christ?
4. Some Christians argue that the simple answer of abiding in Christ does not work for difficult, deep-seated problems. Agree/disagree? Why?

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