

First John: Light & Life

Bold Belief In Tough Times

Written By
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In light of the seemingly perpetual gains of wickedness, lawlessness, and outright perversion masquerading as purity, believers have asked me many times, “Now what?” Translated, what should we be doing? How should we respond? How should we live?

We could answer this question with multiple answers by studying how saints behaved in similar situations in the Old and New Testaments. Still, for our purposes in this study, I think we obtain sufficient answers from John’s core teaching in 1 John 2:28 through 4:19. The opening, “and now” (*Καὶ νῦν*) of verse 28 alerts us to a coming thematic change. In the prior section, viz., 1 John 2:18-27, John focused on equipping saints to deal with false teachers in the local church. With verse 28 and moving through chapter 4, verse 19, he turns and talks about the type of Christian behavior needed in tough, trying times. We know this is a new unit because, as Dr. Zane Hodges points out, 2:28 and 4:19 form an *inclusio*. What is an *inclusio*? It is a rhetorical device that uses similar or identical wording to begin and end with the same emphasis.

To read the two verses in question side by side, you cannot help but see the purposeful word and theme repetition:

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. (1 John 2)

¹⁷ By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. (1 John 4).

Both verses use the same Greek word for “confidence,” viz., *παρρησία*, *parrasia*. Both verses underscore the importance of a Christian living in light of the soon appearance of their Lord. All the verses and chapters in between serve to unwrap the practical answers to the central question in this section:

What Does Bold Belief Look Like In Trying Times? (1 John 2:28)

Beginning in verse 28, John gives us our first answer to this all-important question:

Bold Belief Strives For Consistent Obedience (1 John 2:28)

First, read the pivotal, instructive text and then I'll offer some salient observations.

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²⁸ Καὶ νῦν, τέκνια, μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ· ἵνα ὅταν φανερωθῆ, ἔχωμεν παρρησίαν, καὶ μὴ αἰσχυνθῶμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ (1 John 2).

John, once again, speaks to the Christians in these doctrinally beleaguered and battered churches in a tender, loving fashion. Take note if you are a leader. From the nature of some of John's commands, it appears some Christians had not fared too well thwarting the deviant doctrines pushed by the Gnostics. Instead of speaking to them harshly, John chooses to lovingly woo them back to an intimate, vibrant walk with Jesus.

His opening command cannot be missed: “Abide in Him.” The verb *meno* (μένω) is a present active imperative. The present tense could be grammatically classified as a customary use, which is a regular occurrence but also leaves the door open for exceptions. Put differently, it denotes regular activity which is iterative, or repeated, “but not without interruption.”¹ Ostensibly, this means the goal of believers is to fulfill the command more often than not; however, the continual realization of this is left in doubt, probably because of the presence of a saint's freewill and the constant fight between the flesh and the Spirit (Rom. 7). The active nature of the verb stresses the saint's responsibility to fulfill the mandate. The imperative classification of the verb serves to inform you this is not a suggestion but a daily, moment-by-moment duty.

The verb itself, *to abide*, is used by John throughout the book, as we have noted (1 John 2:24 . . . two times, 27, 28; 3:17; 4:13; 2 John 1:9). It denotes a life known for obedience to Christ's commands, naturally resulting in an intimate fellowship with the Savior. The word does not address a Christian's redemptive standing before Christ. If it did, then salvation is reduced, by default, to spiritual works a believer must perform to either be saved or maintain a state of salvation. Both concepts, of course, fly in the face of the essence of the gospel to believe to be saved (John 1:7, 12; 6:29; 8:24, 30). The command, therefore, talks not about a saint's position in Christ but his performance in Christ. And, as stated, its use underscores the reality that there will be

¹ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar and Syntax* (Unpublised Dallas Theological Seminary class notes, 1981), 164.

times when a believer might not abide too well with his Lord (1 Cor. 3:1-5; Gal. 1 . . . and consider Peter's denials, Matt. 26:34).

How do you go about abiding in Christ?

- Read, study, and apply the Word of God to your life.
- Respond quickly to the conviction of the Spirit of God when you sin.
- Seek the daily filling and control of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).
- Walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh by taking radical action against the flesh (Gal. 5:19-25).
- Develop and maintain an active prayer life (Eph. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:17).

How are you faring? Are you abiding or drifting? When times are tough, as they are now, what is most needed are saints who live saintly lives. When people are godless, they need to see God living in and through you so they, too, can have the opportunity to come to know Him and His power to grant forgiveness of sin and the ability to live victoriously over the urges of the sinful flesh.

Textually, why should we always strive to abide in Jesus, to maintain a close, deep fellowship with Him? John gives us the answer to the question:

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²⁸ Καὶ νῦν, τεκνία, μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ· ἵνα ὅταν φανερωθῆ, ἔχωμεν παρρησίαν, καὶ μὴ αἰσχυνθῶμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ (1 John 2).

“So that” is one word in Greek, *hina* (ἵνα). This conjunction can be translated as either purpose or result. I would choose purpose here because to select result is basically to say what you think *will* occur when Christ appears. However, the imperative “to remain” precludes this choice because John does not know if believers will abide as they should.

God, therefore, wants us to abide in the Son, to obey and follow hard after Him for two purposes. One, so we can be confident when Christ appears, and two, so we have no shame when the day arrives for His glorious appearance for us. Before we dig into these two Greek words, we must first address which divine theophany John speaks about.

First, John says explicitly, “when He appears,” using the temporal conjunction to note that Christ’s appearance is not an “if” thing, but a “when” thing. He is coming back. Concerning the Lord’s prophesied return, Guy Duffield correctly observes:

Christ’s Coming is mentioned more than 300 times in the New Testament; that means that it is mentioned on the average of once in every twenty-five verses. In Paul’s epistles there are more than fifty (50) references to the Second Advent. It has been said that there are eight times more verses concerning the Second Coming of the Lord than there are those that concern His First Coming. Whole books (1 and 2 Thessalonians, Revelation), and whole chapters (Matthew 24, 25; Mark 13; Luke 21) are devoted to this subject. Jesus, Himself, often referred to His coming

again and urged His followers to watch and to be ready. In fact, about fifty (50) times in the New Testament believers are urged to be ready for the Lord to come again. In five New Testament passages the believer's posture is said to be that of WAITING for the Coming of the Lord: "... ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to WAIT for His Son from heaven...." (1 Thes. 1:9b, 10a). (See also Rom. 8:23–25; 1 Cor. 1:7; Gal. 5:5; Jas. 5:7.) The hope of the Second Coming was connected by Jesus with both ordinances of the Church. The Apostles were commanded to make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them with the assurance: "... and, lo, I am with you always even to the END of the 'AGE'" (Mt. 28:19, 20, NASB). Paul, quoting Jesus, gave the apostolic pattern for the observance of The Lord's Supper saying: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death TILL HE COME" (1 Cor. 11:26). (See also Mt. 26:26–29; Lk. 22:17–20.)²

Jesus said He would return in His great Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24-25), and the angels underscored this at His glorious ascension when they reminded the disciples of this truth (Acts 1:9ff).

Unfortunately, Christians all too easily get caught up with the daily tasks and enjoyments of the world, resulting in them forgetting to set their minds on heavenly things (² *Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth*, Col. 3). John, therefore, seeks to bring us back to the awesome reality that time will terminate with the appearance of Christ. The world will not go on its present downward spiritual evil spiral but will have to give account to Him (Ecc. 11:9; 12:14; Rom. 2:5-6; 1 Pet. 4:5; Jude 14-15). The righteous will not always be last, but first, nor will they be perpetually opposed and persecuted for the King is coming. Any believer who seeks to maintain a rich fellowship with the coming King will, by definition, keep His imminent arrival on the front burner of his mind.

Second, which divine return is John addressing? John used the word Parousia (παρουσία) to describe the Lord's coming or return. The word literally describes the physical appearance of someone (1 Cor. 16:17; 2 Cor. 7:6; Phil. 2:12). *Baker's Encyclopedia of the Bible* defines the word in this helpful fashion:

Parousia. Transliteration of a Greek word meaning "presence," "arrival," "appearance," or "coming." While it is used often with reference to men (1 Cor 16:17; 2 Cor 7:6; 10:10; Phil 1:26; 2:12) and once with reference to the antichrist (2 Thes 2:9), the word is employed most frequently with reference to Christ (Mt 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thes 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thes 2:1, 8). Consequently, the Parousia has denote the second coming of Christ at the end of the ages.³

² Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles, CA: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983), 519–520.

³ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Parosh," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1616.

Does this mean John is speaking about the Lord's Second Coming? I don't think so. Why? Let me explain.

We know from other portions of the New Testament there are actually two more appearances of Jesus. One is called the Rapture and the other is the Second Coming and they are separated by the seven-year tribulation prophesied by the Daniel (Dan. 9:24-27). Geisler shows the differences between the two events with this insightful chart:

Rapture	Second Coming
Meeting them <i>in the air</i> (1 Thess. 4:17)	Taking them <i>to the earth</i> (Zech. 14:4; Acts 1:11)
<i>Taking</i> believers to heaven (John 14:3)	<i>Bringing</i> believers back to earth (Rev. 19:14)
Coming <i>for</i> His saints (2 Thess. 2:1)	Coming <i>with</i> His saints (Jude 14)
Only believers see Him (1 Thess. 4:17)	All people see Him (Rev. 1:7)
No signs precede it (1 Thess. 5:1-3)	Many signs precede it. (Matt. 24:3-30)
The Tribulation begins (2 Thess. 1:6-9)	The Millennium begins (Rev. 20:1-7) ⁴

The two events are entirely distinct and serve different purposes. The Rapture of the Church triggers the Tribulation and sets the stage for God to deal specifically with Israel during the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7). Clearly, this is not the time of the Church's trouble, for the Church will be in heaven (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

What are some reasons for the Rapture of the Church before the tribulation? Here are a few of many arguments, and, again, we appeal to Geisler:

- The word Church never occurs in the Tribulation section of John's final prophecy (Rev. 4-18).
- At the end of the Tribulation, the Church is mentioned by an angel of judgment as being in heaven (Rev. 19:7; 21:9).
- God did not promise to keep the Church through the Tribulation, but to keep it from it (Rev. 3:10).
- The sudden spiritual apostasy which will sweep over the world in the

⁴ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four: Church, Last Things* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2005), 623.

- Tribulation is best accounted for by the removal of the Church (2 Thess. 2:3-7).
- What would be blessed about the hope of the Lord's appearance if we had to go through the horrors of Tribulation (Titus 2:12-13)?
 - Christ's coming with His saints in Revelation 19, which is clearly the Second Coming, supports the Rapture doctrine.

I could give you more evidence, but I think you get the point: a seven-year Tribulation separates two comings of Christ.

Why is this timing essential to consider in light of what John teaches in verse 28 of chapter 2? Good question. The timing tells us we are speaking about the Judgment Seat of Christ, which will occur right after the Rapture of the Church. Several NT texts address this sober time:

¹⁰ But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹ For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God." ¹² So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God (Rom. 14).

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5).

¹¹ For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is *to be* revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. ¹⁵ If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3).

The day and time is coming when all saints will be judged for how well they ran the spiritual race. Biblically, this is called the Judgment Seat. The Greek word is *bema* (βῆμα), and here is what it denoted in the ancient world according to Joe Wall:

The word *bema* means platform, raised place, or step . . . In the Greco-Roman world the Greek term was translated by the Latin word *tribunal*. The Roman term, *tribunal*, and the Greek term, *bema*, both referred to the platform upon which a ruler or judge places his chair when he issued decrees or judgments . . . The term also applied to the *bemas*, or tribunals, the Caesars and their generals carried into battle. At the end of the battle Caesar or a general sat on the tribunal to award crowns made of woven branches to those who had made heroic contributions to the winning of the battle . . . the term *bema* was used as well to refer to the platform in the Jewish synagogues from which the Scriptures were read aloud. There the rabbis pronounced the law, or judgments, of God. Finally, the term *bema* was used

for the place of judgment and the awarding of rewards at the Greek athletic competition in the Panhellenic festivals, such as the Isthmian and Olympic games. It is this last use of the term that Paul appears to have had in mind when he wrote about the bema.⁵

As human athletes competed for perishable rewards and were rewarded according to how well they ran, Paul's point is spiritual athletes compete for eternal rewards and are rewarded when they are evaluated by Jesus at the Bema Seat.

From Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 3, it is clear the Lord judges the quality of our work and service, not the quantity. He also judges the motivations behind our works and service, and on this day He will also reveal all of the things we have kept secret from others so His judgment is true (Mark 4:22). Some spiritual work will be gold and silver in nature because it was done with a pure motive. Other works will resemble wood, hay, and stubble, and they will not survive the fire of Christ's judgment. As Paul points out, some will have their spiritual work burned completely up, leaving them with only their salvation. They will enjoy the wonders of heaven, but as for spiritual rewards for running the spiritual race well or not, they will come up empty. Tragic.

As a side note, what kinds of rewards will Jesus hand out? There are four:

- *The Crown of Righteousness* is given to those who finish the spiritual race by living righteously (2 Tim. 4:7-8).
- *The Crown of Life* is given to those who persevered under trial, adversity, and persecution (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10; Matt. 5:11-12).
- *The Crown of Glory* is given to elders of the church who served well (1 Pet. 5:2-4).
- *The Crown of Exultation* is given to those who win souls to Christ (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19-20).

No, we don't strive for these crowns so we can strut around heaven like prideful peacocks. Conversely, we strive for these crowns to show the Lord how much we love Him and are devoted to Him. After all, He said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Humbly some will receive a great reward from His good, loving hand, only to turn around and lay the crowns at His feet because He is worthy of praise and adoration (Rev. 4:10-11).

Now, with all of this in mind, we circle back and consider why we should seek to walk closely and intimately with Jesus before His glorious return.

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* (1 John 2).

²⁸ Καὶ νῦν, τεκνία, μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ· ἵνα ὅταν φανερωθῆ, ἔχωμεν παρρησίαν, καὶ μὴ αἰσχυνθῶμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ (1 John 2).

There are two purposes denoted by John here. In light of the fact we will one day give account for how well we lived the Christian life, we should stay obedient to Christ so we (1) have confidence

⁵ Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 32-33.

when we stand before Him at the Judgment Seat, and (2) don't have shame when we see Him. Confidence is from Greek for boldness, *parrasia* (παρρησία). The Greek's used it to describe someone who had no issue with speaking publicly. Shame is from the Greek for someone who is embarrassed by the actions or inactions, and such shame always leads to disgrace, as Danker notes:

αἰσχύνω in our lit. only mid. and pass.; impf. ἡσχύνομην; 1 fut. αἰσχυνθήσομαι; 1 aor. pass. ἡσχύνθην LXX, subj. αἰσχυνθῶ (Hom.+; ins, pap, LXX, Test12Patr; w. ptc. foll. Just., D. 123, 4).

① to have a sense of shame, *be ashamed* (SIG 1168, 122; UPZ 62, 27 [161 B.C.] οὐκέτι ἤκει πρὸς ἐμὲ αἰσχυνθείς; Philo, Spec. Leg. 1, 321; Did., Gen. 84, 28) w. inf. foll. (Aeschyl., Hdt.; UPZ 62, 24; Sir 4:26; 22:25; Sus 11 Theod.; Jos., Ant. 13, 327) ἐπαιτεῖν Lk 16:3. μετ' αὐτῶν μένειν Hs 9, 11, 3. ἐξ αὐτῶν λέγεσθαι *be called one of them* IRo 9:2. Abs. (Gen 2:25) 1 Pt 3:16 P⁷²; 4:16; IEph 11:1 (perh. *be reverent*). αἰσχύ(ν)|θω[μεν] *let us be ashamed* (of criticizing Mary) GMary 463, 25–26. ὅταν ἐκδύσησθε καὶ μὴ αἰσχυνθῆτε *when you shall be stripped and not be ashamed* Ox 655, 22f (ASyn. 67, 35).

② to experience shame, *be put to shame, be disgraced* i.e. (as LXX for **ψῖβ**) be disappointed in a hope (opp. παρρησία) Phil 1:20; 2 Cor 10:8. ἀπό τινος (Is 1:29 v.l.; Jer 12:13; cp. Sir 41:17) *before someone* IJ 2:28.—DELG s.v. αἴσχος. M-M. s.v. αἰσχύνομαι. TW.⁶

How, then, should you live in trying, testy times? Live so closely and intimately with Jesus that when He appears to judge your performance, you won't flinch when he calls your name, nor will you feel shame you didn't love for Him as you should have. A saint who lives this way in the here and now will not only secure spectacular rewards and excellent approval from Jesus but he or she will touch many lives as they see how life is meant to be lived.

An old hymn from 1912 by Lelia Morris puts John's teaching here in proper focus:

Jesus is coming to earth again,
What if it were today?
Coming in power and love to reign,
What if it were today?
Coming to claim His chosen Bride,
All the redeemed and purified,
Over this whole earth scattered wide,
What if it were today?

Satan's dominion will soon be o'er,
O, that it were today!
Sorrow and sighing shall be no more,

⁶ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 30.

O, that it were today!
Then shall the dead in Christ arise,
Caught up to meet Him in the skies,
When shall these glories meet our eyes?
What if it were today?

The third stanza is most challenging, especially in light of the dark day in which we live:

Faithful and true would He find us here,
If He should come today?
Watching in gladness and not in fear,
If He should come today?
Signs of His coming multiply,
Morning light breaks in eastern sky,
Watch, for that time is drawing nigh,
What if it were today?

Chorus

Glory, glory!
Joy to my heart 'twill bring
Glory, glory!
When we shall crown Him King.
Glory, glory!
Haste to prepare the way;
Glory, glory! Jesus will come someday.

Yes, when Jesus returns, will He find you boldly waiting for your turn to be evaluated by Him, or will He hear you say, “Oh, no,” because you weren’t living as you should?