

## Hope That Purifies

### The Holiness of God's Children

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It is vitally important that we remember our privileges as members of God's church. It is our privilege that we are called children of God; and to bear the name of the family of God is something to keep our feet on the right path and to set us climbing toward perfection. Nevertheless, we are not merely called the children of God; we *are* the children of God. It is by the gift of God that a person becomes a child of God.

By nature, a human being is the creature of God, but it is by grace that he becomes the child of God. While all human beings are children of God in the sense that we owe our lives to Him, we become His children in the intimate and loving sense of the term only by an act of God's initiating grace and the response of our own hearts. As the scripture says, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.

**I John 3:1-3** Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Those who can truly be called the sons of God are an abundantly blessed people. The apostle John says that "now we are children of God." Christians are in the family of God already. When we were baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we were placed into the family of God. We are now sons of God, and we bear that name; there is no greater name. We can certainly be in awe of the position that we are in. John further states that it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. To the unbeliever all that is to come is in darkness and he can expect to go from the shades of

evening to the darkness or blackness of a midnight that will never end, but for the true Christian, light is sown.

What does this mean for the unbeliever? What is the cause of this darkened state? Is there such a thing as darkness? The English dictionaries define darkness with similar descriptions. I will give an example of one of them, and within the five definitions given, you will see a commonality between them:

1. The state or quality of being dark, as *the room was in total darkness*; 2) absence or deficiency of light, *the darkness of night* [I emphasize here the absence or deficiency of light]; 3) wickedness or evil, *Satan the prince of darkness*; 4) obscurity, concealment, *the darkness of the metaphor destroyed its effectiveness*; 5) lack of knowledge or enlightenment, *heathen darkness* [I emphasize the word “lack” used here].

Darkness is not something; it is the absence of something, the lack of something. You can have low light, normal light, bright light, or flashing light, but if you have no light constantly, you have nothing, and it is called darkness. That is the meaning we use to define the word. In reality, darkness is not, as in, it does not exist. If it were, you would be able to make darkness darker. The unbeliever’s spiritual darkness is simply the absence of light. It is the absence of God.

**I John 1:5-7** This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

The unbeliever is in darkness now, the only darkness he will ever know, but in the future from the dawning of the morning, he will go on to a perfect day, a day whose sun will never set. We have the eyes of hope given to us and with these far-seeing eyes, we behold the glory that is yet to be revealed. We are blessed with the joys of hope. Whenever at any time you feel downcast about the things of the present, refresh yourself with the thoughts of the

future. We are frequently cheered and comforted by seeing how kindly God has dealt with us in bringing us up out of the hole of the pit from where we came. We gain further consolation by seeing what is to become of us in the future yet to be revealed.

It is not my goal at this time to console anyone as much as it is to stir you to holiness. I John 3 is a very practical chapter; and while it deals with hope, it has more to do with the result of that hope and the purity of the true Christian's life. We will first look at the true Christian's hope, then secondly we are going to look at the operation of that hope and finally, we will use the operation as a test of that hope.

What is unique about a true Christian's hope? I John 3:1-3 speaks of people who have hope in Him; hope in Jesus Christ, which is also hope in God the Father. The Christian has a hope unique to himself, and it is a hope of being like Jesus Christ. "We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." I do not believe anyone would feel fulfilled in their hope if their hope was only to stand on the sea of glass and to be forever free from sorrow, toil, and pain. That would certainly be breathtaking; however, that is a future blessing that gives us general hope, but is it enough to sustain a hope that purifies? As wonderful as it may seem, if we could sit forever on a green and flower covered mountain, and could drink from the rivers of milk and eat from the hives of honey and so on, it would not be enough to perfectly satisfy us.

After all, the real truth contained in these metaphors and figures and what underlies them all is that the Kingdom a true Christians seeks after is a spiritual one and it is the Kingdom of being like his Lord. Being like Jesus Christ will consist in our sharing in His power, His joy, and His honor; and yet from the connection of the context, it lies mainly in our being spiritually and morally like Him. It is in being purified, even as He is pure. If we will become like Jesus Christ as to His character, pure and perfect, we will share in all His joys. What is our hope? Our hope is that "we shall be like Him because we will see Him as He is," as the apostle tells us in I John 3:2.

Every person sees morally what he is. A person who is bad sees evil and he is blind to good, and the person who is partially like Christ has only a partial view of Christ. You might also know your own character by your view of Jesus. We see the mainstream Christians not seeing a true view of

themselves because they cannot see a true Jesus. They do not know what to compare themselves to. If your eye does not see inexpressible beauty and integrity in Christ, it is your eye that is to blame because He is perfectly pure. When the eye of our inward nature comes to see Jesus as He is, then we will know that we are like Him. We cannot know that we are like Him until we actually see the way He is. It is the pure in heart that see God because God, the inexpressibly pure One, can only be seen by those who themselves are pure.

When we are perfectly pure, we will be able to understand Christ completely and fully. When we understand Christ or see Him as He is, which we will at His appearing, then we will be like Him. At that time, we will be free from sin and perfect. He is the conqueror over sin and death, and He is excellent in His virtue and holiness. He has conquered all the powers of evil.

**Romans 8:37** Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

By His conquering, we actually share in that conquering of Satan, sin, and the world. This then is our hope that we will be like our Master when we will see Him as He is. That is something we are working on now as diligently as we possibly can. Why do we expect this? What is the basis of our hope? The context shows us that we do not expect to be like Christ because of anything that is in us by nature, or any efforts that we ourselves can make. The basis of all is divine love. Notice I John 3:1 where it states: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God.” This is, of course, where it begins.

We expect to be like Christ, the beloved of God, because we also are beloved of God. It is according to the nature and purpose of the love of God to make us like God; and we therefore expect that divine love will work with divine light and purity and make us into light and purity. Paul goes on to say that we have been called the sons of God; and we really are sons of God. That is another basis of our hope. We hope to be like Christ because the sons of God are like each other. It is God’s purpose that Jesus Christ is the firstborn among many brethren.

**Romans 8:29** For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

It is God's goal to conform us to His Son and for us to be in His image and like Him. Our bodies will be conformed to be like God's body and we will not be conformed to be like an angel or any superhuman being. We will be conformed to be like Christ's body in His image. Since we are adopted into the divine family to be made like our Elder Brother, we therefore believe that we will be one day like Jesus Christ in the perfection of His excellence. We are now the sons of God; and we will become like Him as we work to purify our conduct and attitudes to conform to His image.

**I Peter 1:15** But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

We see in this scripture a command that we are to do something. Conform means "to be made similar to or identical with." Our bodies will be similar to God's in some ways and identical with His in others. We will not be in the image of angels; we are being spiritually created in God's image. The apostle John says that it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. He means that we do not know some of the specifics about what our nature will be like, but we do know what it will be like in general. We have many scriptures that show us the attributes of God and the character of God. We shall be like Him. We are the only creature that God has created and given the Spirit of God and are being conformed to His image.

This hope of being conformed to the image of God in Jesus Christ is what motivates a person to purify himself. It is the impetus that drives a person in Christian overcoming and growth because it assures us of the right direction. It thrusts us toward the Kingdom of God. We are going to be well above the angels and in the image and the mind of the Son of God, one who is worthy of the worship of angels. We are going to be like Him and He is worthy of worship and we as part of the family of God will be also.

This introduces a further element of our hope, that we are now one with Jesus Christ and therefore when He shall appear, we shall be like Him. He was hidden from the world, and the world did not know Him. We are hidden and the world does not know us. He is to be revealed and there is to be a day of His unveiling to the world. When He is revealed, we will be revealed too, knowing that we are united to Christ by sacred spiritual bonds. Therefore, we expect that when we see Him as He is, we will be like Him. That is something that is almost beyond our comprehension. It is beyond our full comprehension.

For simplicity's sake, it is right to say that the basis of our hope lies altogether in and through Him, and every man that has this hope in him purifies himself. All true hope is the hope in and through Jesus Christ. If your hope lies within yourself, it is a delusion. If your hope rests on any earthly priest and not upon this one great High Priest of ours, your hope is a lie. If your hope stands with one foot on the work of Christ and the other foot on your own resolutions and merits, your hope will fail you. Hope in Him is the only hope that can be acceptable to God. It is the only hope that will bear the stress of your weight and that will stand the test of your dying hour and of the Day of Judgment. Our hope then of being like Christ is a hope in and through Christ; and we trust Him and depend upon Him. If He does not make us like Himself, our hope is gone. Our hope is always ultimately in the Father, but it is in and through Jesus Christ.

Second is the practical application of I John 3:3, which speaks of the operation which hope has upon the character of the person. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself. It does not puff him up, it purifies him. When God makes a person His child, He takes away the evil heart of the flesh. When He shows a person His great love to him, He humbles him and lays him low; and so the expectation of God's Kingdom, of absolute perfection, never exalts a person. He who grows great in self-esteem through the blessings of God does not know the love of God in truth. A person who has this hope of perfection in himself finds that it does not give him license to sin.

If a Christian could live as he liked, how would he live? Would he live a life of sin? He would live absolutely without sin. Paul mentioned struggling with this in Romans 7:18 where he writes:

**Romans 7:18** For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

A Christian with God's Spirit wants to do the right thing, but human nature tends toward sin. The unrenewed heart would like to sin, but the renewed heart just as eagerly loves to obey God. When God has changed us, He can give us not only a hope, but a full assurance that the hope will come true and that He is changing us. We are in the process of sanctification. This hope does not puff up or lead to license.

Gratitude for this hope leads to holiness. Anyone who feels that God has saved him and is on the way to being made like Christ will consider how to show gratitude to Him, to be thankful, and to please Him. Where there is the good hope of God's Kingdom, the Christian naturally recognizes that God loves him so much and has provided such a glorious future for him that he wants to obey God in everything and wants to serve Him with his whole heart and body. This attitude is critical to our hope and purifying ourselves, because it shows the motive that should be behind it. Such a person, when led by the spirit, also feels that holiness is appropriate to his expectations, and he expects to be like Christ.

The most natural thing is that we are seeking after it now. If God intends to make us heirs of immortality to dwell at His right hand, does it seem right that we should now live as the world does? The very natural fitness of things under the blessing of God's spirit leads the child of God to purify himself since he expects to be completely like Christ. True Christians will never live as slaves to sin because God has transformed their hearts at conversion so that they will now grow in their love of righteousness and in living according to God's Word. The world becomes despicable to them. Before conversion, they were wholly given to sin. After conversion, they should be wholly given to God.

If all Christians would use the same energies in advancing the Kingdom of God that they had in promoting the kingdom of Satan, the world's society before conversion and the church as a whole would be a much more accurate witness of God's way of life. Unfortunately, we all bring some of the world into the church with us, so it cannot quite be an accurate representation, but that is what we are now working toward. No requirement is more reasonable than this. It should cause sadness with Christians that they have used such great energies in the cause of Satan and his entertainment and done so little in the service of God.

The apostle Paul illustrates energy in the holy life by comparing the rewards obtained in the two kinds of servitude—that of the world and that of God.

**Romans 6:19** I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness [this is our purpose and what we are to do as children of God]. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

Paul's illustration of slavery stresses the importance of giving oneself wholly to God rather than to sin. When people are unbelievers, they are totally captivated by sin and the end result of such sin is death. Sin always brings destructive results in people's lives. We can certainly see this by looking at the world and the fruit that is being produced in people's sinful lives.

In this service which leads to holiness, slaves of God receive important benefits, whereas in contrast, in the service of sin they had experienced many evils and suffered for them. In I John 3:3 it says that every man that has this hope in Him purifies himself, so the believer is said to purify himself. We do not believe that anyone actually purifies himself in the way that sinners are purified by God, applying to them the precious blood of Jesus, but we look to God for all purity, believing that He is the creator of it. Still in I John 3:3 it says that, "every man that has this hope in Him purifies himself." That is to



say that God, through the Holy Spirit, works in everyone who has a true hope so that we work to become purified, and we use all possible means to overcome sin and to walk in righteousness with God's help. Let each one of us always be examining himself, not just prior to Passover, but throughout the entire year.

When a person has a true hope in Christ, he begins to purify himself by accessing the power of the Holy Spirit which is dwelling in him. First, he puts away all his greater sins. Perhaps before conversion he was immoral, using vulgar language and actions or engaging in dishonesty.

Conversion is the process of sanctification that does away with all that. However, there are sins which, though we are purged from them, will try to return. The person who has a hope of the Kingdom of God will purify himself every day from them. He will hate the very thought of those sins and any expressions or actions that might tend towards them. He abhors them and flees from them, because he knows that if he begins to loiter with them, he will soon go from bad to worse. He understands that in his warfare to avoid and flee is the truest courage and therefore from such sins he flees. Like Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife even though he left his garment behind to get away from the temptation and sin. Joseph purified himself from an evil temptation

We know how our lives go. We have our ups and downs, and sometimes we fall into some sin and things go from bad to worse if we do not rectify it very quickly. The Christian begins from that day forward until he dies to continue seeking to purify himself. With time, he finds out that there are certain sins in his nature that more readily overcome him than any others do. Against these, he sets a double watch. He is painfully aware of them so he arms himself with the shield of faith and other armor. Possibly he has a quick temper. He is distraught over this and earnestly prays about it to God asking for His help to overcome and to guard his tongue so he does not say harsh words and to guard his heart so as not to indulge in unkind feelings.

He may detect some sin that runs in his family. He knows that his household has some peculiar fault. Again, he cries to God to purify him and his house from this evil thing. He is afraid of growing worldly and becoming envious. He looks at his own position, and he observes what the peculiar sins of that

position are, and then with the power of the Holy Spirit he seeks to purify himself from all these sins. It is a process that is ongoing. It is the process of sanctification. He knows the temptation to impatience and murmuring will come, and he tries to purify himself from that. Under the power of God's Spirit, this purifying of his own life is a great work to be done, but it is a work that everyone who has this hope in Christ will do.

If he is indeed hoping in Christ, this will be the great struggle and warfare of his life, to get rid first of this sin and of the others, that he may be holy, sanctified to the Lord. How does he purify himself and by what means? He does it first by noting and imitating the example of Jesus Christ. He familiarizes himself with the life of his Savior and fellowships with Him. He is in this way helped to see what sin is and where sin is and to hate it. These are obvious statements that I am making but they are something that we need to remind ourselves of daily. Then he prays for God to give him a tender conscience. We must have a good, sensitive conscience that will shiver when the very thought of sin arises. In this society with all of the entertainment that is offered to us, we are always facing a temptation. A Christian must endeavor to have this sensitiveness because he knows that if he does not have it, he can never be purified of his sin.

Many people's main thought is concerning other people's opinions, and their question is what will the other person think about them. You will never be completely holy until you do not care, whatsoever, about the opinions of anyone else except God, because a thing that is right, is right anywhere and anytime. Moral courage is essential to true holiness. The person who has this hope in him will not say that if the door is shut and nobody hears of it then they are free to do whatever they want. Such hypocrisy shows a degenerate heart. The true Christian will say this is right before God and though no eye sees me to commend me, and though everyone speaks against me to blame me, I will do the right thing and resist temptation. This is one way in which the Christian purifies himself.

Then the Christian notes the lives of others and makes them his beacons. If you were sailing down a large river and saw a boat ahead of you that had run upon a shoal, there would be no reason for you to go there to find out where the true channel is; you would let other shipwrecks be your beacon. So also when the Christian observes a fault in another person, he does not stand and

condemn the other's faultiness, but rather he determines to avoid that fault. When he sees the virtue of another person, if his heart is right, he does not begin to criticize. A wise Christian tries to purify himself by hearing a doctrinally sound ministry. The true Christian not only wishes the minister to provide search and examination material for him, but his prayer is here in Psalm 139:23-24:

**Psalm 139:23** Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

This is the attitude of the person who is seeking to purify himself. He does not want to live in sin thinking it is not sin, but he wants to get away from it, to avoid it and to flee from it. It may be that some few Christians do not want to know too much of Christ's commands because there may be some they see as awkward, and they do not really want to deal with them. It is always important for a servant to do as his master tells him, and it is essential for comfort and obedience that whatever Christ has spoken we should endeavor to perform in His strength. We must set before us Christ as our standard, and we purify ourselves even as Christ is pure.

It is a mistake to make anyone our model except Jesus Christ because in any other life but His, there is sure to be something negative in excess. No one is fit to be a model for everyone except the Savior who redeemed us. This is not to say that we cannot look to those who are living God's way of life and learn from them and imitate even the good that they do, but no human is a perfect example.

Remember I spoke to you earlier about darkness, that there is no color in it. In the color white, all the colors are blended. A perfectly white substance combines all the colors of the rainbow, merged in true proportion. Green, indigo, and red are only the reflections of a part of the solar rays. Apply this principle to John, Peter, and Paul. They are parts of the light of God's Kingdom and they are differing colors with exquisiteness in each one of them, but if you want to get the whole of the rays of light, you must get to Christ because all light is in God and Him. In Him is not simply the red or the blue, but in Him is light, the true light, the whole of light. You are sure to get a lopsided character if any man is your only copy after which you

imitate. If we copy Christ, we will through the power of His spirit obtain this sterling character.

This is our life's business, because while we are contending against sin, purifying ourselves by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, we will be bringing honor and glory to God. A true witness is what glorifies God. Your heart will become a field in which the power and grace of God will be displayed. Because He will come and purify you, He will be the real purifier while He is using you to purify yourself.

The third point I wanted to make is that we will use the operation as a test of that hope. The operation is the function, the activity of purifying ourselves, as a test of that hope.

**I John 3:2-3** Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Verse 3 is a very real and short test. The extent to which we really grasp the teaching of verse 2 is proven by the extent to which we implement verse 3. It is what we are and what we do that really shows our faith and our witness. This is the great theme of the epistle of James.

**James 2:20** But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

Obviously we have to do something in order to have true faith. There is no dispute between James and John. Both are saying the same thing, namely that faith is of no avail unless it leads us to this hope in Christ. It becomes a very thorough test of what we truly are. In other words, our failure, at least for most of us, is in the realm of belief. Why do we therefore fail so much in practice? The answer is that our belief is defective. If only we really did see ourselves as we are depicted in the Bible, the problem of conduct would immediately be solved. The real trouble with most Christians is not so much in the realm of their conduct and practice, as in the realm of their belief. If our faith is lacking, our belief is weak, and we are going to slip into sin. The

ultimate way of carrying out these duties and really practicing these things is to have such a grasp and understanding of the doctrine that the practice becomes inevitable, it becomes part of us.

We cannot very well look at this verse in Revelation without observing the way in which the New Testament always presents its teaching with regard to the whole issue of holiness. Holiness in the highest sense belongs to God.

**Revelation 15:4** Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested."

Holiness belongs to Christians as consecrated to God's service and so far as they are conformed in all things to the will of God.

**Ephesians 1:4** just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

**I Peter 1:15** but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

There is an aspect where pure holiness is of God, but we also are to be holy. It is not something that we only strive for, it is much more than that. Personal holiness is a work of gradual development. It is carried on under many hindrances, and that is why there are frequent biblical admonitions for watchfulness, prayer, and perseverance.

We will look at a few distinctions about holiness. In purifying oneself, holiness is really what we are trying to achieve. We are trying to be a holy people. The first distinction is that holiness, according to the New Testament, is an inevitable deduction from doctrine. It must never be regarded as something in and of itself. In other words, we must never approach the holy life simply in terms of living the holy life. Holiness is something that follows and is an inevitable deduction from doctrine and from an understanding of our position as Christians. We must especially acknowledge that the New Testament presents its teaching and doctrine of

holiness in terms of this great truth concerning hope in Christ. It is after it has told us what we are and who we are, and of the hope that lies before us, that the New Testament brings in this doctrine of holiness and sanctification and Christian behavior. Therefore, we should not have the idea of living the holy life because it is a good life in and of itself, but instead our reason for being holy is that we are children of God and we are destined for glory. If we do not practice holiness in those terms, we will, sooner or later, inevitably go astray.

Look at mainstream Christianity, and you will see tremendous numbers of people trying to be holy. Many are living by God's laws but they are falling short because they are not children of God. That is the whole issue. In order to be holy, you have to be a child of God. When we wrongly make holiness a thing of itself, we produce our own rules and regulations and we may become self-righteous because we have carried out our duties and forgotten the real objective, which is that of having this hope in Him and thereby purifying ourselves.

The second distinction is that holiness is not something we are called on to do in order that we may become something. It is something we are to do because of what we already are and that is children of God.

**I John 3:1-3** Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

The world and mainstream Christianity does not know God or the children of God. There is a great deal of teaching on this subject which really amounts to the fact that we are to be holy and live the holy life in order that we may become truly Christian and members of His family. We are children of His family, a sign of which is that we have embraced His truth. It is our way of life, which we live because we are of God.

**I John 4:4-6** You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world,

and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

All Christians and Christian ministers should be living their lives in such a way that their contact with others so clearly manifests their character of integrity and purity so that no one would be willing to call them into question.

We are not to live a good and holy life in order that we may become a Christian. We are to live the holy life because we are Christian. We are not to live this holy life in order that we may enter the Kingdom of God, but because we know we are going to enter the Kingdom of God. We try to become as perfect as we can in this life, and we look forward to and anticipate going into God's Kingdom and receiving eternal salvation and eternal life. The reason that we are holy is because we are children of God, not because of anything we can do to work to become perfect. God is the one who does that. The world cannot achieve perfection because they are not children of God.

Holiness is a general term used to indicate sanctity or separation from all that is sinful, impure, or morally imperfect. Holiness is moral wholeness. The holiness predicated or required of Christians upon whom the scriptures everywhere lay almost exclusive stress is that of character and conduct. We build good character and conduct because we are God's children. It is not only our obligation, but more importantly, it is what we want to do because the Holy Spirit now dwells in us. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure.

We are not to strive and sweat and pray in order that at the end we may receive eternal life. Of course, we are doing this, but it is not our only goal or reason or we will fall short. We start from the perspective that we have been made children of God by the grace of God and Jesus Christ.

Remember in I John 3:2 "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him." We have an assurance that we have been called, and we are preparing now for a responsibility in God's Kingdom. It is

because we know that we are going to meet God that we must prepare to meet Him.

The third distinction is that we must never think of holiness or sanctification as a kind of higher, or happier, or holier life which we are meant to enjoy as Christians and into which we should be entering. We must regard it rather as a life to which all Christians are inevitably called and which every Christian should therefore, automatically, be living. Far too often the subject of holiness is handled like it is a wonderful life that we can live, one of happiness and joy and peace, but that cannot be our only goal. It is a major goal and a major reason that we are trying to overcome sin, but we must realize who we are, and that as God's children we must be holy. We have no choice. How can we be a child of God and be worldly? How can we be a child of God and be more of the world than of the church? We cannot.

Sometimes people attending God's church are labeled by other members as one of two types of Christians: the ordinary Christian and then the Christian who has had some kind of extra blessing. Holiness is something that is applicable to every Christian, not something that is an extra blessing. It is the norm of the Christian life, which everyone who has truly understood the doctrine is doing his or her utmost to live and practice with no division or dichotomy. All Christians, if they understand the doctrine, truly are living this kind of life. It is not something in a separate category. It is something that flows out of the life that is in them. It is an inevitable expression of what they have received.

The fourth distinction is that the holiness of which the New Testament speaks and the holy life, the life process of sanctification which the apostle John talks of, is not so much something that we receive as a gift but rather it is something that we work out. All of God's working with us to perfect us, His tests, His discipline, His blessings are linked to gifts of grace. They all fall in a sense under the gifts of grace. I am speaking about it not as being specifically a gift that is given uniquely to one or several of his children, but to all of them. We have received our justification by faith as a gift, but in the sense that I am referring to sanctification and holiness—I am not referring to it as a gift in the same sense as justification. Sometimes people seem to think of this life of holiness as something that comes to you perhaps suddenly as a gift, but instead this life of holiness is a way of life because of what we are.



Sanctification involves more than a merely moral reformation of character brought about by the power of the truth. God, through the Holy Spirit, brings the whole nature of the Christian more and more under the influences of the mind and principles of God, implanted in the heart and mind in regeneration.

In other words, sanctification is the carrying on to perfection the work begun in regeneration and it extends to the whole person. Sanctification and holiness does not suddenly come to us, and we receive some special or exceptional blessing, but rather we are reminded that we are children of God, and we are told of the inheritance that awaits us. We have been given a glimpse of the vision of the glory that awaits us beyond death and the grave; and having seen it, we are told that in light of that to proceed to work this out and to purify ourselves as He is pure. It is not a gift received but something that we must work out and put into practice. Consider how the apostle Paul puts the same thing in Philippians 2:12-13.

**Philippians 2:12** Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Because of this admonition, we work it out. It is not some mystical experience that suddenly comes to us, but it is the outworking of the doctrine, and it is the right application of the truth that we claim to believe because we are children of God. It is what we are. The apostle John tells us in I John 3:3 that everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself. It is very important that we realize that “Him” does not refer to the man himself, but to Christ. John does not say everyone who has this hope within himself, but everyone who has this hope in Him, that is in Christ, of whom he has just been speaking in verse 2. That hope is in the second coming and in the power of Christ to change our body so that it may be fashioned like His glorious body. It is the hope that is in Christ and all that He does. People who have this hope purify themselves.

Purify is a very interesting and important word. It is a very positive word and we must never think of it as negative. There is a difference between purifying and cleansing. John gives us an example of the meaning of cleanse in I John 1:9.

**I John 1:9** If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The main difference between the two words, purifying and cleansing, is that one is an external action and the other is an internal action. To cleanse is to deliver, on the surface, from evil and pollution and all that is unworthy. Purification is something that happens within: in the spirit, the mind, and the essential nature. Therefore, to purify means not only to get rid of the tarnishing effect of sin but also to avoid sin in a person's whole nature and being. As a Christian, one must inevitably purify oneself. It is not enough just to stop sinning and overcome, one must flee from sin, avoid it, and not allow oneself to be in a situation where the temptation to sin is present, or even where there is the appearance of sin. This means not only that we separate ourselves from the sins which we have committed in the past, but with our whole being we completely shun and flatly reject sin because the desire within us is to be like Christ and to strive to be like Him, totally rejecting what the world has to offer. It is not just that we do not sin, but that we are positively and actively pure even as He is pure.

That is the whole idea of this word purify. It is a deeper and more profound word than just the idea of cleansing and getting rid of the effects of sin on the surface. It is much more thorough than that. It is perfectly expressed in just one phrase: People who are concerned about purifying themselves are those who want to be like Jesus Christ. We could also, and more importantly, say it is to be like God the Father.

The Christian no longer merely thinks about being just a little bit better than obvious sinners in the world or being better than they once were. There is danger in this kind of thinking. Rather, their whole idea is intensely positive and active such that they will love the light and hate the darkness instead of loving the darkness and hating the light. They want with their whole being to have a positive desire to be like God and Christ and to be well pleasing in

His sight. According to John, that is the feeling of the people who truly understand this promise of the glory that yet awaits them. It means we cannot be guilty of idolatry by being intentionally involved and obsessed with the world's entertainment, books, movies, TV shows, sports, software games, music, or anything that makes a Christian appear worldly. One cannot purify themselves while becoming worldlier.

How can we purify ourselves? According to John, it is an active process, not a passive one. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself. He does not submit to purification, he purifies himself. The whole emphasis is on the activity. In other words, the New Testament teaching about holiness is not one that tells us that all we have to do is to let ourselves go and surrender ourselves or to give up effort in striving. It is not just telling us that all we have to do is to die, get rid of and forget ourselves, and then life will come in, rather it is active; and we are told to purify ourselves even as He is pure.

This doctrine of active purification is not just confined to John's teaching. You will find it everywhere in the New Testament. Here in II Corinthians 7:1 is the apostle Paul's teaching.

**II Corinthians 7:1** Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Paul is making a distinction between cleansing and perfecting. That is an identical statement with I John 3:3 that we have been considering here. We see both the sense of cleansing ourselves by not submitting passively and perfecting ourselves to be holy. Also take for example Hebrews 6:11-12, 18 and 19. We are exhorted in these verses to show diligence in this matter of the full assurance of hope to the end, and we are not to be apathetic and lazy. Like those who have gone before us, we must be diligent to press on and strive to purify ourselves.

**Hebrews 6:11-12** And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

**Hebrews 6:18-20** that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

There are many other terms in the New Testament that suggest this same thing. Take for example those words used by the apostle Paul in Colossians 3: 5.

**Colossians 3:5** Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

These members of a different and rebellious nature will not agree to be ashamed. We have to take the sinning tendencies out of our body parts and expel them. We are enabled to do this by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us and which is included in the fact that we are children of God.

In more detail, how are we to do this? The New Testament indicates that the process must be followed up. We purify ourselves by considering Christ, looking to Him, and His perfect life. That is the pattern we are to follow. The apostle Paul reminds us that God has called us so we may be conformed to the image of His Son. If that is God's plan and purpose for use, then the first thing we must do is to look to Jesus Christ. We must look at the way He conducted Himself and imitate His life. The way Paul puts it in Colossians 3: 2 is to set your mind on things above and not on things on the earth, which indicates that in order to purify ourselves we must be looking to the Kingdom of God, the throne of God in heaven, to God the Father and Jesus Christ. If we are looking to the world for our salvation, even our physical salvation, we are looking in the wrong direction.

Again, observe the activity, set your mind and your affections on things above, read your Bible every day, meditate on God's sovereignty and glory, and that you are His child. Think about these things and do not let your mind be set on things on the earth. Deliberately refuse to dwell on earthly

thoughts. Consider what Paul says about the contrast between temporary and eternal things in II Corinthians 4:17-18.

**II Corinthians 4:17-18** For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

We must look at things with the mind's eye, meditating on them, having looked at God and His Son and following them while looking and setting our mind on the things above. We must do our utmost to see that vision of glory of the unseen things. We must not love the world. We must crush our members that are on the earth and crucify the flesh. As we do all these things, we will be purifying ourselves even as He is pure.

What are the encouragements and the motives for Christians to purify themselves in this way? They are quite self-evident. It is a matter of what we might call Christian common sense. If we believe that we are children of God and that we are really in the family of God and that this uncertain physical life of ours will someday suddenly come to an end and we will rise to meet Christ in the air at the appointed time, is it not spiritual common sense that we should be preparing ourselves for that? That is wisdom from above.

Is it not hopelessly illogical and unreasonable to go on living in contrast to that to which we are called? If we believe this and claim it, then it is consistently a matter of common sense and saintly logic and spiritual reasonableness that we should do so. There are further inducements given to us in the Bible. Because of our frailty, another great reason for purifying ourselves is so that we may not find ourselves feeling ashamed when Christ arrives in glory. John tells us this in I John 2:28.

**I John 2:28** And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

In order not to be ashamed, we have to abide in Christ and have hope in Him and be purifying ourselves. This means if we have been purifying ourselves, we as children of God are going to see Him when He comes, and we will see Him as He is for the first time. We will really understand what our salvation means to Him and what it cost Him when we look into His face and His eyes at that time. If we do not want to feel ashamed or that we are unacceptable because we have kept our focus on the insignificant temporary things of this earth with its pollution and unworthiness then prepare to meet your God now and be ready for Christ's coming and avoid that sense of shame. This is a negative reason, but an even stronger reason for purifying ourselves is that we all should have a positive desire to be like Him. We should be filled with a strong aspiration and longing to live this glorious, wondrous life that Christ has made possible for us by His death and resurrection.

We should all be energetic and full of spiritual life to please Him if we really believe He came from heaven to earth, if we really believe that He suffered the agony of the crucifixion and shed His holy blood that we might be redeemed and rescued. If we really believe that and love Him, our greatest desire should be to please our God and Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That is the reason for holy living. It is the written word of God's appeal for holiness, an appeal to our sense of honor, to our sense of love and gratitude and we should not have to be offered a reward to entice us to purify ourselves and to be holy. We want to do this because we are God's children, and it is who we are. Everyone who has this hope in Him and believes that he is going to see Him and be like Him and be with Him purifies himself just as He is pure. We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him.

The following scripture was used yesterday by John Ritenbaugh and today it was used in closing the sermonette so I firmly believe that God wants us to understand this. Speaking of our future as God's church and the bride of Christ, the apostle John writes here in Revelations 19:7-8:

**Revelation 19:7-8 (ESV)** Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

That term “bright and pure” is describing that fine linen which is the character and holiness of God’s church. There is not a moment to lose. There is so much to be done, and the amount of time we have left is uncertain, but we know it is very short. There is no time to waste. Thanks to the Spirit that dwells in us, we are a people who are always pressing toward the mark. We are always looking forward because we have in sight the vision of glory for which we have already begun to experience in a small way. For that which we are destined, we are pressing towards God’s Kingdom, forgetting the things that are behind and redeeming the time at hand, grabbing the opportunity, using every second because of the certainty and hope that we see in Christ, as He is, and that we will be like Him.