

WHEN HE SHALL APPEAR

Scripture Reading: I John 3:2

Too often the General Epistles are read and applied to members of the Body of Christ. A good example is I John 3:2, where John is talking about the appearing of Christ and the believers being like Him. This sounds very much like what Paul says in I Corinthians 15:51-52, where he speaks of the believers being "changed," when Christ shall return and call the dead from the graves. It is assumed by many that in as much as John speaks of "sons of God" and Paul speaks of "sons of God," they must be speaking of the same people. It should be noted that in I John 3:2, John is speaking of Israel as being THE "CHILDREN" OF GOD. (The Greek word is not *sons* but *children*.) Thus, John and Paul are not speaking of the same people.

When reading any portion of Scripture, we must always discern WHO is writing, to WHOM it is written, at WHAT TIME it is written and WHAT is written about? When applying these questions to I John 3:2, we see God had stopped His prophetic program. We see that it is Israel who is addressed by the phrase in 2:1, "My little children." This term is never used by Paul and is never applied to the Body of Christ. It is always referring to Israel.

The challenge of our text is that when Christ appears to set up His Kingdom, these "children of God" (the Jews) will become the Priests of God (Exodus 19:6) and will serve Christ as His Priests in His Kingdom. The members of the Body of Christ are not looking for Christ to appear here on earth; but rather, we are looking for His appearing "in the air" (I Thessalonians 4:17) and our being "caught up" to "meet the Lord in the air [in the Heavens]; and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

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KNOWLEDGE—NOW AND THEN

Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 13:8-12

I used to believe that Paul's epistles just added a little whipped cream to the strawberry shortcake of the Gospel proclaimed by our Lord and the Twelve. This passage is one of many which convinced me that the prophecies, the tongues and the supernatural knowledge of the Kingdom program would be superceded by something more appropriate for this dark age in which we live. Remember the day of Pentecost happened before Paul ever recorded the wonderful things God revealed through him. That day must have been the start of the Old Testament Kingdom rather than the start of the Body of Christ. Because Israel rejected God (in rejecting the ministry of the Twelve) God set Israel aside during the Book of Acts, saved Saul of Tarsus, and used him as the revealer of the glorious truths he penned for our spiritual understanding.

Verse 10 says not *He who* is perfect, but rather *that which* is perfect. It must refer to a future, more complete revelation that God had promised to Paul, surely the Gospel of the Grace of God. Verse 12 says "*Now* we see...but *then*," not *here* but *there*, as some want to explain it. This speaks distinctly to me of a clearer, rather, more complete unveiling. I Corinthians was written in the early years of Paul's ministry, and Acts 26:16 tells us Paul was to receive further revelations as God's plan was unfolded for us through the pen and life of Paul. He not only revealed the marvelous completeness of the Grace of God in the Cross, but he was the living demonstration of it—saved out of Judaism (the Law) to reveal the fullness of the Grace of God!

Harold Steinbron

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NOW IS SALVATION NEARER

Scripture Reading: Romans 13:11

Preaching in a small church in Georgia, at one point in my sermon I yelled, "Wake up!" The old farmer in the back, eyes heavy from much labor, thought my exclamation was intended especially for him; but it was intended for us all. "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

To understand this verse, we need to mention the three types of salvation in the epistles of Paul.

First, there is salvation from the *penalty* of sin. In Ephesians 2:8 we read, "For by grace are ye saved through faith." This salvation is realized the moment one believes the Gospel and trusts the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior (Romans 5:1). This salvation is a one time, once for all deliverance.

Second, there is salvation from the *practice* of sin. Paul wrote to the *saints* at Corinth, "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation" (II Corinthians 7:10). These justified believers had been carnal. Their repentance led to a salvation from many carnal practices.

Third, there is salvation from the *presence* of sin. We live in a world that hates God and loves sin. Also, we have within us the old man which tempts us; but the Lord will take us out of this world and "change our vile body." This salvation is nearer than when we believed.

Jon Bekemeyer

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CONFESSION—THEN INSTRUCTION

Scripture Reading: Psalm 51:13

David had sinned in the matter of Bathsheba. This sin was followed by another heinous crime: He had Bathsheba's husband killed in battle—murder. It is hard to tell just how far this would have gone and how many sins the "cover-up" would have involved had not God intervened through His prophet Nathan. This 51st Psalm is the record of David's confession—and what a confession it was! There is no self defense. We don't hear David making excuses like, "If only she had not been exposed and caught my eye." Or, "Why wasn't she in the house where she belonged?" Or, like another [Adam] once said, "The woman...Thou gavest to be with me..." In short, God's fault, her fault.

David's confession was thorough. This "man after God's own heart" had truly taken God's side against himself, and this is what true confession and repentance is all about. David asks God to "Purge....Wash....Create a clean heart....Renew a right spirit....Cast me not away....Restore the joy....Uphold me with Thy free spirit." *Then*, and only then, could he "teach the transgressors Thy ways, and sinners be converted unto Thee." In short, David had to first be restored to the Lord through his own confession of sin before the Lord could use him to teach and lead others.

This great principle is transdispensational. That is, it is good for all time. Notice Paul's words to Timothy, "Take heed to thyself, and unto the doctrine [teaching]" (I Timothy 4:16). Not that Timothy was caught up in sin at the time, nor did he have a matter like David to settle between himself and the Lord, but the order is the same. Only *when* our lives are in tune with God, as revealed in His Word, can we be the vessels "unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use" (II Timothy 2:21).

Ivan Burgener

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THE WICKED ONE REVEALED*Scripture Reading: II Thessalonians 2:8*

The first epistle to the Thessalonians was written to remove all anxiety concerning brethren who had died. To remove this anxiety, Paul reviews the blessed truth of the Rapture of the Church which is His Body. Paul writes to them that they might no longer be ignorant of the fact that the saints, whether dead or alive, will be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air at His coming (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Paul's second epistle was written upon his hearing of their anxiety touching the living saints. He writes to assure them, that in spite of what they might have heard from others, the dreaded "day of the Lord" could not come until the saints are gone. Only after the Church is gathered unto Christ and taken out of this sin-cursed world will "the man of sin," the wicked one, be revealed. Then will those who rejected the truth, along with the wicked one, become the due objects of God's wrath. Thus, Paul reassures the Thessalonians that they will be separated from the scene of judgment and the revelation of Satan and the unbelievers.

The foremost concern is that we be not found in the company of those "who believed not the truth." The moment we believe the gospel—how that Christ died for our sins and took the judgment of God for us—and put our trust in Him, we pass from death unto life. We are saved—saved from our sins and their penalty, saved from eternal separation from God, and saved from the dreaded "day of the Lord." Once we have put our trust in the Saviour, we can have full assurance with the Thessalonians that "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians 5:9).

*John Baker**Notes:***WHO DO MEN SAY THAT I AM?***Scripture Reference: Matthew 16:11*

In this passage, we have the most important question in the Bible; for a person's eternal destiny depends on what he believes concerning who Christ is and what He has done for our salvation. In verse 16, Peter answered correctly, saying, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." This all-important doctrine of the deity of Christ is the answer to all the cults that deny it and to all the philosophies and reasonings of men.

There are many references in the Bible that prove that the Lord Jesus is God the Son. We need to know these in order to answer those who do not believe. John 1:1 states that "... the Word [Christ] was with God and the Word was God." Other verses also have this very direct statement, such as Matthew 1:23. "They shall call His name Emmanuel...God with us." The disciple Thomas stated, when he recognized the risen Christ, "my Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

We should note that throughout the four gospels the believers addressed Jesus as Lord; those who did not believe addressed him as Master or in some other way. The thief on the cross showed his faith by addressing Jesus as Lord (Luke 23:42). The title of LORD is a reference to His deity. This can be seen in Philippians 2:11 where it states that one day every person will confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord." In I Timothy 6:15, He is referred to as "...the King of kings and Lord of lords." Other verses that prove His deity are I Timothy 3:16 "God was manifest in the flesh," and Titus 2:13 "...the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ." Still the great question for all cults and religions is, "Who do men say that I am?"

*John Willson**Notes:*

THE DISPENSATION OF GRACE

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:1-9

Paul's Ephesians letter explains, defines, expounds and affirms that which the apostle was commissioned to reveal and establish: "The Dispensation of the Grace of God, which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery...Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men...**THAT THE GENTILES SHOULD BE FELLOWHEIRS AND OF THE SAME BODY AND PARTAKERS OF HIS PROMISE IN CHRIST BY THE GOSPEL:** Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God...Unto me, who am the least of all saints is this grace given."

"...That I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all...see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, Who created all things by Jesus Christ." More detailed description of the Church which is His Body—the Church of the dispensation of the grace of God—is presented by the apostle in these verses:

"For He is our peace, Who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one Body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Ephesians 2:14-16). God has always dispensed His grace as it pleased Him and according to His plan and purpose, but the Dispensation of the Grace of God transcends all.

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Robert E. Hanna

THE APOSTLE OF GRACE

Scripture Reading: Acts 20:22-24

Paul writes to the youthful minister Titus of the "hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; but hath in due times manifested His Word through preaching, **WHICH IS COMMITTED UNTO ME** according to the commandment of God our Saviour" (Titus 1:2, 3). As the apostle closes his epistle to the Romans, he writes, "Now to Him that is of power to stablish you **ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL,** and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25). Earlier in the letter we find Paul saying, "I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I **AM THE APOSTLE OF THE GENTILES**" (Romans 11:13).

In giving instruction to Timothy regarding the teaching of sound doctrine, Paul exhorts that the young minister adhere to "the glorious gospel of the blessed God, **WHICH WAS COMMITTED TO MY TRUST**" (I Timothy 1:11). "[God] hath saved us...according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles" (II Timothy 1:9-11).

Paul affirms his desire to complete "the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, **TO TESTIFY THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD.**"

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