

Module 11: 1 John 3:1-3

1) Observations and Observational Questions that guide Interpretation

- a) Read 1 John 2:18-3:10 for context.
- b) What words do you see as important, either because they are repeated often or they are part of a key teaching in verses 3:1-3?
- c) What title do you suggest for the paragraph starting in verse 3:1?
- d) Transition (1)
 - i) “Children of God” cf. “born of Him” (2:29)
 - ii) *Teknon* (children) cf. *teknia* (little children), that John sometimes calls his readers
 - iii) Children of God in the spiritual sense, not physical sense in which every human being is a child of God.
- e) “See”
 - i) This is a command!
 - ii) 2nd person plural = you all
 - iii) “The force is that we need to take time to contemplate this love and allow its reality to sink down into the depths of our being.” (Jackman)
- f) “How” (NASB, NIV)
 - i) Only 8 times in the NT.
 - ii) “What manner of” (KJV, NKJV)
 - iii) “What kind of” (ESV)
 - iv) *Potapos*: from what country
 - v) “It is as if the Father’s love is so unearthly, so foreign to this world, that he wonders from what country it may come.” (Stott)
 - vi) The word ‘always implies astonishment’ (Plummer)
- g) “Father”
 - i) Word position is last in the phrase. (See how great a love has bestowed on us the Father.)
 - ii) Emphasizes the following:
 - (1) the Fatherly character of the giver
 - (2) the intimate relationship between the giver and receiver
- h) “Has bestowed”
 - i) Perfect tense
 - ii) “This love is a permanent gift; it cannot be earned or purchased but is a gift that will not be withdrawn.” (Hiebert)
- i) “And such we are”
 - i) Not in the KJV or NKJV
 - (1) Scholars generally accept these words as authentic
 - (2) Scribal oversight
 - ii) We are not just “called” children of God, but truly we are!
 - iii) “The words ‘children of God’ were no mere *title*, but the expression of a *fact*, a fact which was to colour all their thoughts and actions, to banish superstitious fear, and to fill them with a thought of ever-present love, which should sustain them in all the trials and distresses of the world.” (Lias)

- j) Why does the world not know us?
 - i) Grammar is such that it's not obvious what "for this reason" refers to.
 - (1) It could be because we are children of God.
 - (2) It could be because it did not know Him.
 - ii) My preferred understanding is that the reason the world does not know us is that we are children of God. A prime example then, included here, is that the world did not know Him.
- k) Who is meant by "Him" in verse 1?
 - i) Is it God the Father? If so, this means throughout history the world did not recognize, know, or accept God the Father.
 - ii) Is it Jesus? If so, this means the world did not recognize, know, or accept Jesus when He was on earth.
 - iii) The tense of the verb "did not know" refers to a particular time in the past when the world did not know Him. Thus, the better understanding is that "Him" refers to Jesus.
- l) Who is meant by the first "Him" (like Him) in verse 2? Who is meant by the second "Him" (see Him) in verse 2?
 - i) Second "Him" refers to Jesus, because we shall see Jesus at His coming.
 - ii) First "Him" refers to Jesus also.
 - (1) Consistent use of the pronoun "Him".
 - (2) Cross references
 - (a) Romans 8:29
 - (i) We are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son
 - (ii) That Christ might be the firstborn among many brethren
 - (b) Philippians 3:21: Jesus will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory.
 - iii) When Jesus appears, we will be transformed to be like Jesus in holiness and with a resurrection body.
 - iv) We will NOT become little gods.
- m) What is "this hope fixed on Him"?
 - i) "This" refers to the truth that we shall be like Him.
 - ii) Hope (*elpis*) is joyful and confident expectation, not just wishful thinking.
 - iii) "Fixed" is not in the original Greek. (This hope on Him.)
 - iv) "On Him"
 - (1) KJV, NKJV, NIV, ESV all translate this "in him"
 - (2) Means "upon" Jesus, the sure foundation. Does not mean the hope that is "in" the believer (i.e. the hope that the believer possesses).
- n) "Purifies" and "pure"
 - i) *Hagnizo* (verb): to make pure, cleanse morally
 - ii) *Hagnos* (adjective): pure from carnality, chaste. In this case, it refers to the complete absence of sin in Christ.
 - iii) "Purifies" is present tense, meaning it is a repeated, on-going activity.
 - iv) This verse emphasizes the believer's responsibility in self-purification.
 - v) Earlier in the epistle (1:7, 9) Jesus' part and God's part of our purification is mentioned.

- vi) “As the begrimed workman must personally apply the soap and water to be cleansed, so the believer appropriates the God-given means of cleansing from the moral defilement that may have been incurred in daily life. Included in this self-purification is the believer’s renunciation of objects, activities, and attitudes which he finds to be defiling.” (Hiebert)
- o) “And”
 - i) There’s our present condition. This is our second (i.e. spiritual) birth, which is into His family as children. (Regeneration or Justification in verse 1)
 - ii) There’s our future transformation to be like Jesus. (Glorification in verse 2)
 - iii) There’s our on-going process now of becoming more like Jesus in purity, as we anticipate our glorification. (Sanctification in verse 3)
 - iv) The “and” highlights *God’s work* in our regeneration and glorification and teaches us a great motivation we have for *our responsibility* to increase in purity during the sanctification time in between.
 - v) Hiebert puts it this way: “The past experience of regeneration brings with it a living hope for the future, and this hope motivates present Christian living.”
- p) What other observations do you see?

2) Interpretation

John commands his readers to look, sit back, and deeply contemplate the wonderful, astonishing gift, once given and always to remain, that demonstrates how much God the Father totally loves them, including John the Apostle, their shepherd, and their spiritual father in the Lord. This gift is being called “children of God”! Not only are the believers given this name; this gift is also that they truly are God’s spiritual children, whatever man may think or say! John wants this reality to sink in and transform how they live their lives. The world does not know the believers, because they are children of God. The believers are radically different from the people in the evil world in which they now live. Since the world is estranged from God, it doesn’t understand those who are born-again believers. A substantiating example of this is that the world did not know or accept Jesus, the Son of God, when He was on earth.

John reiterates how loved the believers are by calling them “beloved” himself. John and his fellow believers are children of God starting now on earth. What they all will be in the future is not clear yet. They do know, however, that when Jesus is seen in person by the believers, then the believers will be transformed to be like Jesus, in purity and in resurrection bodies. That will happen because the believers will finally see Him in His glorified state and it will be their time to be glorified also. Two revelations to the believers, of Christ and of the believers’ final state, will be made simultaneously.

The reason for writing about the return of Christ and the believers’ future state is not theological, but ethical. Everyone who has confident expectation in their transformation to be like Jesus will pursue, individually and personally, what it takes to rid himself of sin and pursue ethical, clean living. The ultimate example is Jesus in His purity. This purity is the believers’ end goal also.

3) Applications

- a) What can you do to ensure you take the time to reflect on the magnificent love God has given to us by adopting us as His children? Remember that this is a command.
 - b) How do you respond to the fact that the world does not know us? Barker says of verse 1, “The author wants his readers to know that approval by the world is to be feared, not desired. To be hated by the world may be unpleasant, but ultimately it should reassure the members of the community of faith that they are loved by God, which is far more important than the world’s hatred.”
 - c) As you walk in the light (abide with God and Christ), do you find yourself seeing more sinful areas of your life exposed by the revealing light of God? This was the Apostle Paul’s experience. It is natural and shows growth. If this is not happening with you, ask yourself if you truly are abiding in Christ, that is, deepening in your relationship with Him.
 - d) Do you desire to live a pure life because of the hope of seeing Jesus as He is at any moment?
 - e) What is God’s obligation versus our obligation in ethical living?
 - f) What other application do you have?
- 4) Handout for next week
- a) Worship God for the blessed hope that can come at any moment!
 - b) Exalt God for what the Holy Spirit has taught you in 3:1-3.
 - c) Read verses 2:28 to 3:24 for context.
 - d) Focus on verses 3:4-10.
 - e) How do these verses fit into the context of what we have already learned?
 - f) What do you think is the one main point of these verses? Make sure to base this interpretation on what you observe in the text. Remember, observation, then interpretation, then application.
 - g) Fill in the title for the paragraph beginning in verse 3:4 in the SURVEY CHART.