



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

A Family and a Future (1 John 3:1-3)

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A hundred years ago, one of the most well-known writers in the English-speaking world was George Bernard Shaw. He was also outspoken on his religious views, commonly referring to himself as an atheist.

In his last writings we read, "The science to which I pinned my faith is bankrupt. Its counsels, which should have established the millennium, led, instead, directly to the suicide of Europe. I believed them once. In their name I helped to destroy the faith of millions of worshippers in the temples of a thousand creeds. And now they look at me and witness the great tragedy of an atheist who has lost his faith."

Even in these sad words, Shaw still couldn't accurately diagnose what the true "great tragedy" really was. The tragedy wasn't that he lost his faith. The tragedy was that he placed his faith in the wrong thing. He said it was science that he pinned his faith to. Shaw, as with all people, was created to know, love and bring glory to God – a God he claimed didn't even exist. That's the tragedy. At the end of his life, there was no hope, no anchor, nothing sure.

When you and I reach the end of our lives, will we know that we put our faith in the right place, in the right Person? John writes in this short passage today just how precious it is to have hope and to have assurance that we aren't wasting our lives pursuing and believing that which will one day destroy us.

I. ADOPTION INTO GOD'S FAMILY

1 John 3:1 - See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

John cannot hide his wonder and amazement when he considers the love of God and that he would actually condescend to sinful humans to adopt them into his family. But the truth is before us – God does forgive rebellious people who repent and call them his children. We have to show care, though, that we understand exactly what is meant by that phrase, because the words “children of God” can mean different things to different people.

In one sense, all people are God's children because we are created by him and are accountable to him. Paul used the phrase in this way when he was speaking to a crowd on Mars Hill in Athens, quoting some poets of the day.

Acts 17:28-31 - "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring." Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver

or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Paul starts with the known (human authors), refers to their philosophy (that we are all God's children in a generic sense), then moves to the responsibility each of us has as God's created beings to repent of our own ways to seek him. The family relationship is there, but so is the accountability, which all children have with their parents.

This generic view (that we are all God's children) is seemingly contradicted elsewhere in Scripture, though.

John 1:12 - But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

1 John 3:10 - By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

These verses, and others like them, make it plain that not every person can be considered a child of God. So there is a generic sense of the phrase, as Paul used it on Mars Hill, and there is a spiritual sense of the phrase which divides all people into two camps – those in God's family and those outside of God's family.

Another way of looking at this is through the biblical doctrine of adoption. Several times in the New Testament, writers will use this beautiful picture of adoption to describe what happens when someone believes in Christ to follow and obey him.

Galatians 4:4-6 - But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Ephesians 1:4, 5 - ...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

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My wife and I adopted our daughter. We were at the hospital when she was born and had built a relationship with the birth mother. But one thing I noticed in the whole adoption process: our daughter, Megan, did not do anything to become part of our family. She didn't pick us out from other parents; she didn't retain the attorney to handle the legal side; she didn't spend any money for the paperwork or healthcare; she made no decision whatsoever. Her dad and her mom took care of all of that. She was chosen to come into our family. She just had to show up, be born and enjoy all the benefits a child receives.

That's what God does for his spiritual children. He chooses us, adopts us, gives us a heart to follow him and love him. John can hardly hold in his joy when he writes about this great love and what it means to be a true child of God.

II. APPEARANCE OF A GLORIOUS FUTURE

1 John 3:2, 3 - Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

There will always be a natural tension for God's spiritual children in this life. After all, we are citizens of a kingdom that isn't of this world. We have ultimate allegiance to a King who is eternal, not mortal. We have been given a new nature that makes it possible to reject the impulses and desires of our fleshly nature. All that and more is wrapped up in John's words "we are God's children **now**."

But he is also pointing us forward, to what will be someday. It hasn't appeared yet, but surely will. That gives the child of God a great hope to move deeper in our love and devotion to God as we are in the here and now.

John says when Jesus appears, we shall be like him. For any believer in Christ, that will be the final reward. The one whom we have loved and followed, communed with and sought to obey – we will be in a place of fellowship and bliss for eternity and because the Scriptures say that there will be no pain, no tears, no sin in that place, we will be like him. Pure and holy, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, acceptable before the Father. That is a great hope.

Titus 2:11-14 - For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and

godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

It's interesting that both John and Paul (who wrote the Titus passage) use the idea of purity in conjunction with the appearance of Christ. Again, there is massive hope for the believer that when Jesus appears to restore all things, part of the restoration will be to create purity in the very people he saves from judgment.

But the purity is not just for the future. For the person who trusts Christ and is changed by the gospel, the purification starts in this life. Both in 1 John and in Titus, we see that there is cooperation on the part of the Christian to gradually understand and practice what it is to be more and more like Christ himself.

Colossians 2:6, 7 - Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

1 John 2:5, 6 - but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

That is what is meant by John when he says that our hope of Christ's appearing should result in purifying ourselves as he is pure. We are to walk as he walked. That happens throughout the earthly life of a believer. While we are here in the world, with the fleshly nature warring against our spiritual one, we will not experience full purity. But the hope we have in Christ, because of Christ, through the power of Christ is that we will be pure on the day he appears, because we will be like him.

Until then, the one who follows Christ should continue on the journey with joy and with the confidence that he has the help of the Holy Spirit to make progress toward maturity and purity.

If one isn't following Christ, God's help in purity will not be available, much less the desire for it. Also absent is the future hope of eternity with Christ in heaven. All people have to make the crucial decision whether to repent and obey God or not. That determines our eternal future and the enjoyment and quality of our brief life on earth. If one is to be adopted into the family of God, all he must do is accept God's free gift of salvation.