

“Confidence in Christ Alone”
(An Exposition of 1 John 2:28-29)¹

Introduction

We have seen that the overall purpose of this letter from the Apostle John is that we who are believers in Christ might have the great blessing of *the assurance of our salvation*. From time to time as we go through this book together, we do well to remind ourselves of John's statement to that effect toward the end of this letter. In 1 John 5:13 he tells us:

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, *that you may know that you have eternal life.*” (italics added)

God clearly reveals to us here in His Word that He does *not* want His people to be unsure of whether or not we have truly been reconciled to Him through the cross of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He does *not* want us to go through life wondering whether or not God is *our* God, Christ is *our* Savior, and heaven is truly *our* home. He wants us to have *certainty* regarding these things. He wants us to have *assurance*.

This theme really runs *throughout* this letter. Everything that John says here, even when refuting false teaching, is in some way or another aimed at encouraging believers to have assurance of our salvation. False teaching, *especially* false teaching about the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, tends to rob believers of assurance. Why? Because assurance is based upon the grace of God in the gospel of His son, and false teaching in many ways *opposes and contradicts the very gospel itself*.

And so John *exposes and refutes the false teaching* of those who were disturbing the purity and peace of the church. He also *reminds us of the truth of Christ* - that Jesus truly *is* the Christ (2:22); that those who deny the Son (by denying Christ's true divinity, or his true humanity in the incarnation) have not the Father (v.23); and that all who *abide in Christ* and so *abide in the truth of Christ* as we have heard from the beginning (v.24), have the promise of God to us – even **“eternal life”** (v.25).

Abiding in Christ

That brings us to our text this morning. Notice that here in v.28 John *repeats* the phrase with which he ended the previous verse - **“abide in him.”** There he writes:

“And now, little children, *abide in him*, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.” (Italics added)

The Greek word for **“abide”** (or *remain*) occurs no less than 24 times in this short letter. It is a clearly a key theme throughout the letter. And that should be no surprise to us, as this theme is closely-related to the idea of assurance, isn't it? John tells us that if we want to *know* (another key word² that occurs at least 25 times in the letter) that we are saved, we must *abide in Christ* (and in the truth of Christ), rather than being led astray by false teaching.

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

² γινωσκω = *to know*

Notice how tenderly the Apostle John exhorts believers in the church - **“And now, little children, abide in him . . .”** John isn't lecturing them or berating them. The things that he says in this letter, even the those things that might be difficult to hear, are written out of a sincere love for them, out of a desire to do them good, that they might grow in the grace of God.

We must abide in Christ, and in many ways this involves *abiding or remaining in the truth of Christ*. This means that we do not follow after every fad that comes along, every new “secret” thing that false teachers try to sell you in order to make merchandise of your souls.

The Christian must be *immovable* when it comes to the truth of the gospel of Christ. We must stand fast in the truth of Christ as we have been taught from the beginning – as we are taught in the Word of God.

Certainly every one of us who believes ought to take to heart the words of the apostle Peter where he exhorts us to make it our lifelong aim to **“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”** (2 Peter 3:18) But we are to grow *in* the knowledge of Christ, rather than grow *past* or away from the true knowledge of Christ.

Confidence at the Coming of Christ

Secondly, notice *the reason why* John exhorts to to abide in Christ – that we may have *confidence at the coming of Christ* when He returns in glory! In v.28 John writes:

“And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.”

John has already spoken of the **“antichrist”** earlier in this very chapter (v.18, 22); now he speaks of the return of Christ. You should take note that John does *not* speak of any intervening event such as “the rapture” that is separate from and prior to Christ's return. He simply speaks of Christ's return and the judgment to come.

When Paul says that we believers who are alive and remain will be **“caught up together”** with the departed saints **“to meet the Lord in the air”** (1 Thessalonians 4:17), he is clearly speaking of what will happen at our Lord's return in glory to judge the living and the dead.

And here in our text John does not bring up eschatology in a vacuum; he certainly doesn't bring it up in order to satisfy our curiosity as a matter of mere trivia or interest. He brings it up in such a way as to show its vital importance and relevance to each one of us.

Now there may have been a tendency among the false teachers, whether the gnostics or some other ancient heretical doctrine, to not only deny Christ's true bodily incarnation, death, and resurrection, but also then to *deny His bodily return* as well! This may be at least part of why John brings it up here.

But the main thing that John is emphasizing is *the certainty of the coming judgment* at the end of the age at Christ's return. This is an essential truth of the Christian faith, isn't it? That is why, for example, we confess in the Nicene Creed that we believe that the Lord Jesus Christ “shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead.”

When our Lord returns in glory there will only be one of two responses, and John lists them here, doesn't he? Either we will be among those who abide in Christ by faith and so **“have confidence”** or boldness at His return, or we will be among those who **“shrink from him in shame at his coming.”**³

Which one of these groups are you in? Are you among those who **“have confidence”** at Christ's return? Do you rejoice at the very thought of Christ's return in glory to take His people home and to judge the wicked?

Or are *you* among those who will **“be ashamed before him at his coming”** (KJV)? The vision that the Lord gave to John in Revelation 6:14–17 describes it this way:

“The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

Notice who will be among that group – *all kinds of people!* It will include **“the kings of the earth”** as well as **“the rich and the powerful.”** (v.15) They don't get a pass, and their great power and possessions, which were not used for God's glory, will do nothing but add to their condemnation!

This group will also include **“everyone, slave and free.”** The unrepentant come in all shapes and sizes, from all walks of life. And the judgment of Christ will be the great equalizer, won't it? All who are outside of Christ will stand condemned before Christ, and will beg *the mountains themselves* to cover them and hide them from **“the wrath of the Lamb”** for **“who can stand?”** (v.17) As the Psalmist says in Psalm 130:3,

**“If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?”**

Left to ourselves, outside of Christ, the Lord *does* mark our iniquities. And so *no one* can stand before Him at the judgment. But thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ, that the psalmist goes on to say in the very next verse:

**“But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.”** (v.4, italics added)

And how is it that there is forgiveness to be found with the Lord? Because, as the final verses of that Psalm put it:

**“O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.”** (v.7-8)

3 See *The Letters of John*, by John R.W. Stott (p.121).

Confidence in Christ Alone

That brings us to our *third* and *final* point, which is that *our confidence must be in Christ alone*. How is it that anyone can hope to stand before the Lord of glory at His return? His glory will be such that even *the kings of the earth* and *the powerful of this world* will be *utterly terrified of His wrath* and beg the mountains to fall on them and hide them!

There is only one way, and that is through faith alone in Christ alone! It is only by the grace of God alone that we are saved from the wrath to come.

And so, *for believers*, who on our own deserve nothing but the just condemnation and wrath of God for our sin and wickedness, we stand in Christ alone in such a way as to have confidence or boldness at Christ's return – even rejoicing at it and hastening that great day! *What a difference the cross of Christ makes!*

The believer in Christ may look at that scene painted for us in Revelation chapter 6 and sing the words of “It Is Well With My Soul,” by Horatio Spafford, when it says,

“O Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
the clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
the trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend;
even so, it is well with my soul.”

How can any mere mortal, and a sinful one at that (!), say, much less sing something like that? Because of the truth of the gospel that was sung in the previous verse:

“My sin oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
my sin, not in part, but the whole,
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more;
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!”

Do you see why it is so important to be in Christ and to abide in Christ? Let no one lead you astray by false teaching. Let no one lead you astray from the simplicity of faith in Christ! Abide in Him by faith and you will have confidence or boldness, whether He comes or calls you home!

You could say that, while John certainly doesn't use the word, it is the great gospel doctrine of *justification by faith alone* that he has in mind here. What is justification? (I'm glad that you asked!) The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* puts it well in Q/A 33:

“**Q. 33.** *What is justification?* **A.** Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”

It is all the act of God's grace, not of our works. It is the grace of God in which He *freely forgives all of our sins*, having paid our debt Himself by the death of His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The flip side of that is that He also “accepts us as righteous in His sight.” How can God look upon a sinner as “righteous”??? “Only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.” God accounts Christ's perfect righteousness to us by faith, so that *He accepts us in Christ!* If you are in Christ by faith, God accepts you as completely and unchangeably as He accepts His own Son!

Conclusion

In closing, *where is your confidence?* Is it in your own goodness? Is it in your own good works? Even in your own religiosity? (The Pharisees were quite religious too!)

Or is your only confidence to stand before God to be found *in Jesus Christ alone - in His blood and righteousness?* That is the only way to have confidence at Christ's return in glory – to have confidence or faith in Christ alone!

The Scripture says that the one who comes to Christ by faith will *never be put to shame!*

In Romans 10:9–13 Paul tells us:

“because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. *For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”* For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

No wonder John tells us in our text:

“And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.”

Only the one who is justified by faith alone in Christ alone can have such confidence at Christ's return. May we all be trusting in Him alone and abiding in Him always! - Amen