

Deep Hope -Lesson 6

1 John 2:28–3:2

Part 1 Identify the Issue

We never stop longing to be better people, do we? There's always some aspect of our behavior or personality that we wish we could change. And what's true for people in general—this desire to become a better person—takes on special meaning for people who call themselves Christians.

We not only want to become better people, but we want to become Christ-like people. How does that happen? These are questions we all struggle with, no matter how old we are or how long we have been following Christ.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

[Q] Do you feel like that kind of change is possible? Why or why not?

[Q] Is it realistic for people like you and me to imagine becoming “like Christ” someday? Explain.

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Jesus Christ will return to earth again.

Read 1 John 2:28–29.

John introduces two new ideas in this section of his letter. The first new idea he introduces is the Second Coming of Christ (v. 28). In this one verse, John uses two distinctive New Testament words to describe the Second Coming of Christ. The first is the word appears. It's the same word he used back in chapter 1 (see 1 John 1:1). This particular word describes the invisible becoming visible—something hidden being revealed.

[Q] Throughout the Old Testament period, God was there but could not be seen. He was hidden, so to speak, behind a pillar of fire or smoke on a mountain. But in Jesus of Nazareth, the invisible God became visible. But then he disappeared and returned to heaven. How will it be different when Christ returns to earth again?

The second word John uses is the word coming. This word was used to describe a king riding into one of his territories to be welcomed and honored by his subjects. Remember that in the ancient world there was no CNN broadcasting images of the king on the nightly news, no photographs to look at, no YouTube videos of his latest speech. Most people would live their whole lives without ever actually seeing their king. So a king visiting one of his cities was a rare and glorious event. People would line the streets—“There he is! That’s him!” Sometimes they would go out to meet him, to join his entourage, and accompany him into the city.

[Q] That idea raises an interesting possibility about the so-called “rapture” of the church.

When Paul describes the church being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, is he describing the rapture of the church to heaven? Or is he describing the church meeting Christ to accompany him on his triumphant return to earth? What do you think?

Teaching Point Two: When he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

John’s description of the Second Coming is positive and inspiring. He wants us to look forward to that day “confident and unashamed.” And in 3:3 he describes it as our “hope.” Many of us were taught that the Second Coming was a source of fear, not hope.

Sermons on the Book of Revelation have often included scary-looking charts and even scarier terms like tribulation and Armageddon and the mark of the beast. The Second Coming was supposed to be a good thing, but it inspired more fear than hope.

[Q] How do you feel about the Second Coming? Does it fill you with hope or with fear? Explain.

[Q] Why can we be confident and unashamed?

Look at verse 1 John 2:29. With this verse John introduces his second new idea to this letter: the “second birth.” Up until now he has described a relationship with God in terms of fellowship and belief. Now he uses the language of birth and family. Once again, this isn’t a new idea for John. It’s central to his gospel (John 3).

[Q] Read 1 John 3:1. Why do you think this fact brings John such wonder after all these years?

[Q] Picture a military family standing on the tarmac, waiting for their father or mother to step off a troop transport, home from war. How does this mental picture help you better understand the Second Coming?

[Q] John says, “If you are a child of God . . .” That’s a big “if.” How does that show how the Second Coming can be a scary proposition?

Teaching Point Three: We will become like him.

Read 1 John 3:1–3.

As he’s writing, an even more wonderful thought comes to John’s mind, under the inspiration of the Spirit. When Christ returns, we’ll not only see him, we’ll be like him! Look at verse 2. You see, when you’re someone’s child, you don’t just belong to them; you resemble them. You can’t help it. You carry their DNA.

But it's not just the DNA that gets passed along. The values and habits and passions of the family get passed along, too. So if your last name is Manning, you probably play football. If your name is Kennedy, you know politics. If your name is Clooney, it's no surprise you're in show business. And if your name is Christian, you're destined to be like Christ. It's in the genes.

It's who you are. Look back at 2:29. John uses the language of being born—of parents imparting life to a child. Not just life, but likeness—the family traits. If we've been born of God, we have the “righteous” gene. We've inherited this propensity, this capacity, for doing good.

Unfortunately, we still have that old nature with us, too—the one we inherited from our natural parents and from Adam and Eve. It's a struggle sometimes to live by the new nature rather than the old one. But the fact remains that we are now God's children; we have his life, his nature, at work within us. So becoming like Christ isn't just a possibility, it's a promise.

[Q] Look again at verse 2. What do you think this means?

[Q] How does this verse help us understand why it's so hard for us to be like Christ?

Note: This is in part because of that old sin nature. But it's also because now we see him “through glass darkly,” to borrow Paul's language. We can't always see clearly what Jesus would say or do in a given situation. We can't hear him over the noise our world or the promptings of our sin nature. Sometimes we lose sight of him completely. But someday we will see Him face to face, in all His glory. And then we will be like Him. We will become the people we long to be, the people we were born to be, when we are born of God. And that gives us hope.

[Q] Look at verse 3. How does the hope of Christ's coming not only encourage us to hang in there, but actually change us, shaping us into who we will be?

[Q] So, how does transformation happen?

Note: It's certainly not automatic. You have to act towards it. But it's not a matter of gritting your teeth and trying harder, either. It's a matter of spending as much time with Christ as possible. Spiritual formation isn't a matter of trying harder. It's a matter of getting closer. It's a matter of relating to Christ as much as possible- spending time with Him each day, talking to Him as you make your way through your day, worship Him each Sabbath, hanging out with His people and joining Him in His work in the world. Because the more we're with Him, the more we're open to the work he wants to do in our lives.

[Q] So how does the Second Coming give us hope?

[Q] How can that hope carry you through dry times and difficult seasons and disappointment with ourselves and one another?

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

The hope of the Second Coming means it's never too late to change, to grow. It means that day by day you are becoming the person you long to be, the person you were born to be when you put your faith in Christ, and the person you one day will be when you see Christ face to face.

Action Point: On your own this week, look up as many verses as you can find on the Second Coming (use a concordance or a tool like biblegateway.com). Jot down what you learn and why it encourages you.