

does not mean that we should seek to separate ourselves from unbelievers, for to do so would make it impossible to be a light for Yeshua to them. Rather, what I am emphasizing is the need to guard our hearts and though we live in the world, we must constantly affirm that we are not “of the world.”

2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

As John makes clear in the previous verse, so here he reaffirms that believers in Yeshua are *now* constituted as children of God and this eternal status is not something we must wait for in the future. Yet as children of God by faith, we are in the on-going process of sanctification, that is, growing in maturity of our faith and becoming more and more conformed to our Lord, Yeshua. It is on this basis that John now continues to affirm that our success in becoming like Him is assured, for this is the very purpose of God for His children.

John addresses his readers here as “beloved” (*ἀγαπητοί, agapētoi*), by which he could mean “loved by God” or he could be using “beloved” as a term of endearment, stressing his own pastoral care and affection for this believing community. That he uses this same term to address his readers a number of times in this epistle¹ would opt for his using it as a term to express his own affection and care of his readers.

... and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. – John’s point is, in one sense, obvious: while we have the promise of immortality and eternity in the very presence of our Lord, an eternity that is entirely devoid of sin, sorrow, sickness, and death, along with everything that constitutes the brokenness of this world, we simply do not know what the days ahead hold for us as we await the coming of our Lord.

In the phrase “has not appeared as yet,” the Greek verb *φανερώω* (*phanerōō*) is translated “appeared.” This verb is found nine times in our epistle,² carrying contextual meanings such as “to be evident or manifest” (2:19), but it more often denotes something that, apart from divine revelation, cannot be fully known. This is surely the meaning in our current verse, including the use of the same verb in the next clause of our verse to describe the appearance of Yeshua as He returns in accordance with His promise.

While God has revealed the ultimate reality which consists of

1 Cf. 2:7; 3:21; 4:1, 7, 11.

2 1:2; 2:19, 28; 3:2, 5, 8; 4:9.

eternity with Him for all who are believers in Yeshua, the exact sequence of events that will eventuate in this reality are not so clearly laid out in Scripture. We are certain that Yeshua will return to this earth as He promised, but we do not know the exact timing, or when He will return. Thus, we await the unfolding of God's perfect plan, living in anticipation of Yeshua's coming, always seeking to be faithful and obedient as we wait.

As Kistemaker explains:

We are in principle children of God (v. 1) who lack perfection because of sin. But that which is principle now will become full reality in the future. John, therefore, observes, "What we will be has not yet been made known." That is, God has only begun His marvelous work in us which in time He will bring to completion.¹

We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him just as He is. – The Greek of the first phrase could be taken one of two ways. The subject of the aorist passive verb φανερωθή (*phanethē* from the verb φανερώω, *phaneroō*, "to appear, to become visible, to reveal") could be either the "it" of the phrase "it does not yet appear what we shall be," or the "Him" of the following phrases, "we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is." While commentators differ as to which option they consider most likely, the weight of evidence, both contextual as well as syntactical, surely favors Messiah as the subject, for the final phrases of the verse clearly point to Him.²

John has already referenced the return of Yeshua in 2:28, and here again he appeals to Yeshua's coming as that event which initiates the bringing of all things to God's appointed design. John makes it clear that even though we do not know all of the details, particularly the various events in our world that will lead up to the consummation of all things, we do have certainty about our final sanctification and our eternal dwelling in the very presence of our Savior. For we will be like Him in that we will be clothed with immortality, never again to be encumbered with the cloak of death which sin brought into the world.

This is affirmed by John's emphatic statement that "we know..." (οἶδαμεν, *oidamen*). Our sharing in Yeshua's immortality is not something left up to a future revelation, but is already affirmed because God has

1 Kistemaker, *1John*, p. 295.

2 For a fuller description of why "Messiah" is the subject of the passive verb φανερωθή, see Culy, *I, II, III John: A Handbook of the Greek Text* (Baylor Press, 2004), p. 69.

revealed it to us through His word.

For example, in the prophet Jeremiah, ADONAI speaks of His “eternal love” for His chosen ones:

ADONAI appeared to me from afar, saying, “I have loved you with an everlasting love (וְאֶהְבֶּתְךָ עִלְמָיִם אֶהְבֶּתְךָ); Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness. (Jer 31:3)

That which is described as “eternal love” has neither beginning nor end. Therefore, this confirms that those who are His children will inherit eternal life.

Thus Paul writes in his epistle to the Romans:

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (Rom 8:29)

And in Colossians we read:

When Messiah, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Col 3:4)

Likewise, in his grand teaching on the resurrection in 1Cor 15, Paul teaches us regarding what will take place at the return of Yeshua.

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. (1Cor 15:50–53).

John speaks to this same reality in Revelation when he describes the eternal city of God:

There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. (Rev 22:3–4)

That His name is written on their foreheads means that they belong to Him. This is the same symbolism that attaches to the *teffilin* (טֹפְתִין, cf. Deut 6:8; 11:18) which are to be bound “as a sign on your

hand and they shall be for frontals [ornaments] between your eyes.” The wrapping of *teffilin* is to be a constant reminder that we belong to God through the work of His Son, Yeshua.

...*because we will see Him just as He is.* – Here, in the Apocalypse, John gives us further understanding of what he writes in our epistle. For when He states “they will see His face,” we are given further elucidation on what he means by the phrase in our verse, “because we will see Him just as He is.” Following the fall of mankind into sin through the disobedience of Adam and Chavah, we hear the response of Adonai to Moses’ request to see His glory: “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” (Ex 33:20). How then should we understand John’s words in Rev 22:4, that those who dwell in the eternal city will “see His face.” This means that even as Adam and Chavah enjoyed unrestricted fellowship with God before their fall into sin, so those who are given eternal life with God will have that same, unimpeded fellowship with the Almighty.

Surely we know God in truth through the revelation He has given us: through the creation, through the inspired word, and most perfectly, in His Son, Yeshua. There is nothing amiss with the self-revelation God has given. The weakness comes from our own inability to fully comprehend what He has revealed of Himself, and to accept and affirm it without any semblance of doubt or lack of complete, unwavering faith. Now, while still possessing the sinful nature, we struggle against the flesh and against the sinful nature which wars against the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:17) and would seek to persuade us to doubt what we know by faith to be true.

But when Yeshua returns, our mortality will be transformed and we will be eternally free of death because we will be free of sin and thus of the sin nature. By God’s omnipotent power and mercy, through the work of Yeshua on our behalf in His death, resurrection, and intercession, we will regain an even greater position than that which Adam and Chavah had before the fall. For while Adam and Chavah were created with the ability to sin and thus to be separated from the very God Who created them, such will never be possible for those who possess eternal life and who are therefore eternally the “children of God.” When mortal puts on immortality, we will never again be separated from God, for sin in its entirety will be done away with, for “the last enemy that will be abolished is death” (1Cor 15:26), and death is the fruit of sin in our fallen world.

This is what John means when he writes that “we will see Him just as He is.” We will know Him by having complete and uninterrupted fellowship with Him, a fellowship entirely devoid of any fear, doubt,

or human weakness, because the sin nature or the “flesh” (as Paul describes it) will be entirely eradicated.

3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

In the opening phrase of this verse, the NASB adds the word “fixed” in order to properly represent the Greek, which in a word-for-word translation has: “and each one who has this hope upon Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” But the construction of the Greek phrase τὴν ἐλπίδα ταύτην ἐπ’ αὐτῷ gives emphasis upon the word “hope” by adding the demonstrative “this” (ταύτην), and thus not describing “hope” in a general sense of human desire, but of something that is sure and already known. Indeed, in the previous verse John states that as believers in Yeshua we know that He will return. It is therefore not some wishful thinking, or desire for which we cannot be certain. By faith we know that Yeshua is coming again. Thus, the hope of which John speaks in our text is the firm assurance and certainty of Yeshua’s coming, a sure and certain hope which we possess by faith in Him. Thus, the NASB’s “fixed on Him” is a worthy translation of what the Greek represents.

This hope is not something the believer manufactures or must somehow cause to exist in his or her mind. Rather, our hope is Messiah Himself.

Of this I was made a servant according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Messiah in you, the hope of glory. (Col 1:25–27)

The hope every true believer possess is vested in the very person and work of Yeshua, made know to us through the Ruach, and laid hold of through the gift of faith granted to us by God’s grace (Eph 2:8–10).

...*purifies himself, just as He is pure.* – In these words, John does not convey a wish, as though he were saying “may he purify himself,” nor a possibility, “he may purify himself,” nor a command, “he ought to purify himself.”¹ Rather, John states this as a reality for everyone who is born from above by the Ruach and who is therefore a child of God

1 Kistemaker, *1John*, p. 296.

through faith in Yeshua and the saving work He has accomplished. That is, the life of every believer is one that continues to grow in conformity to Yeshua Himself, being more and more known by purity of life in contrast to impurities of the world. Since He is our hope, we strive to walk as He walked, to put into our daily lives and activities the righteousness we know to be His. As Calvin writes:

The meaning then is, that though we have not Christ now present before our eyes, yet if we hope in him, it cannot be but that this hope will excite and stimulate us to follow purity, for it leads us straight to Christ, whom we know to be a perfect pattern of purity.¹

This striving to be pure as He is pure connects with John's previous exhortation about Yeshua's coming in 2:28. For when we abide in Him, we may look with confidence to His return and not shrink back in shame at His appearing.

4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

It is important to note in this verse, as we have noted before,² that John often speaks of the dominant character of one's life as indicative of whether one is truly born again or not. The NASB has added the word "practices" in the opening phrase of our verse, i.e., "Everyone who practices sin..." and rightly so. For Greek utilizes a present participle which, in this context, surely denotes "characteristic action." John is fully aware that believers do sin, for he has exhorted us to confess our sin and thereby to be cleansed from such unrighteousness (1:9, cf. also 2:1) and be restored to fellowship with God and with fellow believers (1:7). But in this verse as well as in the previous chapters (cf. 1:6; 2:3-4, 11), John makes it clear that if the dominant character of one's life is that of living in disobedience to God and to His Torah, then such a person is self-deceived if he or she continues to maintain that they are truly "children of God."

But to make such a clear and bold statement as John does in our verse, may well prompt an obvious question: "What constitutes sin?" "How is sin to be defined?" Quite clearly, as far as human culture and society is concerned, "sin" is "defined" on a sliding scale. What one culture considers "sin," another culture accepts as the norm. And even

1 John Calvin, *1John*, p. 207.

2 See the comments above on 2:17.

within a given culture, one generation defines something as sin which the next generation accepts without concern.

So John makes it clear to us that “sin” (*ἁμαρτία*, *hamartia*) is defined as “lawlessness” (*ἀνομία*, *anomia*). This Greek word, *anomia*, is the word regularly used to translate the Hebrew word תּוֹרָה, *torah* in the Lxx,¹ with a prefixed *alpha* (*alpha privative*), which is equivalent to our English prefix “un” in a word like “unlawful.” This, *anomia* could just as accurately be translated into English as “no Torah” in the sense of “against Torah” or “negating Torah.” The attempts of some to interpret *anomia* as, in a general sense, unwillingness to submit to law, disregards the obvious use of the term throughout the Lxx, a use which must be taken into consideration when seeking to know how the word is used in the Apostolic Scriptures. F. F. Bruce’s comments are representative:

The AV rendering, “sin is the transgression of the law” (taken from the Geneva Bible), is unfortunate, since it suggests the contravention of this or that specific law rather than a generally lawless attitude towards God. ‘Sin is not transgression of law but lawlessness, and lawlessness is sin.’²

The line of argument often heard by those who hold that the Torah has been abolished in the death of Yeshua, usually takes one of two paths. Some would divide the Torah into “civil, ceremonial, and moral” commandments, with the conclusion that only the moral commandments remain, but the civil and ceremonial have been done away with. The second argument often starts out by arguing that there are many requirements of the Torah which cannot be done in our day, since such commandments require the Temple, the priesthood, and sacrifices. The conclusion that is therefore reached by those who take up this line of argumentation is that if there is no way to keep all of the commandments, God must not require us to keep any of them, except those which are clearly spelled out in the “New Testament.”

To the first argument, that only the “moral” commandments remain active after the death and resurrection of Yeshua, one has yet to hear a valid explanation of whether the Sabbath falls into the category of civil, ceremonial, or moral. It seems quite clear that when the biblical text describes “profaning the Sabbath” (cf. Ex 31:14; Neh 13:17–18; Is 56:2, 6), this speaks of a moral failure. Indeed, the Hebrew word חָלַל (*chālāl*)

1 Of the 226 times תּוֹרָה appears in the Tanach, 213 times it is translated in the Lxx by νόμος.

2 F. F. Bruce, *1John*, p. 89, quoting W. Kelly, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* [3rd Edition, London, 1953], p. 150.

translated “to profane,” is used in a text like Gen 49:4, where Jacob describes the immoral actions of Reuven:

Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, Because you went up to your father’s bed; Then you defiled (*אִלְלַח*) it — he went up to my couch. (Gen 49:4)

And many other texts could be marshaled to show that this Hebrew verb very often is used to describe what are clearly immoral actions. What is more, any disregard for what God has commanded has a moral component, for to disregard or transgress what God has commanded is in itself an act of rebellion, and rebellion is the sin of divination and insubordination.

For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. (1Sam 15:23)

The second argument is that since there is no Temple or functioning priesthood, many of the commandments cannot possibly be kept, and thus God must no longer require what we are unable to do. But this too is short-sighted from a biblical standpoint. Consider Deut 30:1–3.

So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where ADONAI your God has banished you, and you return to ADONAI your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then ADONAI your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where ADONAI your God has scattered you. (Deut 30:1–3)

Here, while in the land of their enemies, being exiled from the Land because of their rebellion and unfaithfulness to God, there would be no Temple, no priesthood, and therefore no ability to keep the commandments that required Temple services and the priestly service. Yet God states that if “you return to ADONAI your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today,” He would restore them from captivity. This must mean that what God requires is obedience to all of the commandments which one is able to obey, coupled with a heart that longs to do all of the commandments when able to do so.

Thus, the common attempts to circumvent the clear and obvious meaning of John’s words in our text fall very short when put up against

the light of the Scriptures.

5 You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.

In this verse, John continues to emphasize that a person whose life is characterized by sin is not a child of God. As noted above, in v. 4, the phrase *πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν*, “everyone who is doing sin” utilizes the present participle in the Greek, which often denotes a present and ongoing action or customary activity. In emphasizing that someone whose life is characterized by sin has proven himself or herself not to be a “child of God,” John is simply reiterating the teachings of Yeshua Himself. For Yeshua Himself taught:

Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin (*πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν*) is the slave of sin. (Jn 8:34)

Thus, John utilizes the exact phrase in v. 4 (*πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν*) as we find in Jn 8:34 which records the words of Yeshua.

Moreover, since the very purpose for Yeshua’s incarnation was to conquer the domain of sin in the world, for a person to confess on the one hand that he or she is a true disciple of Yeshua and yet to have a life characterized by sin, is entirely incongruent. Remember the words of Yochanan HaMatbil (John the Baptist) when he saw Yeshua approaching:

The next day he saw Yeshua coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (*ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου!*)” (Jn 1:29)

You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; – John affirms that his readers know this important fact, that Yeshua came in His first advent “to take away sins.” How is it that they have come to know this? Undoubtedly the answer is through the teaching of the Apostles and their own written accounts in the Gospels and Epistles.

We should note that in the phrase “to take away sin,” the Greek text has the definite article and the word “sin” is in the plural: “to take away the sins.” The NASB and other English translations presume that the articular plural indicates the abstract category of “sin” in general. But if that were the case, we might expect the singular to be used rather than the plural. Rather than indicating the category of “sin,” the articular plural prompts the reader to ask the question, “what sins”? To which the obvious answer is “our sins,” i.e., all who, by faith, confess Yeshua