

LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD

STUDY NINE

Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3

You and I have been in the presence of great people, but we have never been in the presence like that of our glorified Lord. This will be a presence that will leave you stunned and silent. You will be lost in wonder and love and praise. When He appears, we will be caught up with Him. John wants us to prepare ourselves for that moment with confidence and anticipation, knowing Christ's return is sure to occur.

—Charles R. Swindoll

NEARLY two millennia have passed since our resurrected Lord's ascension. Two white-robed heavenly messengers assured those who witnessed Christ leaving, "Someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!" (Acts 1:11). That "someday" may be soon! We might be mere days or even hours from His return.

Christ's imminent coming evokes fear and dread for some. But for us, the firm promise, "He will return," inspires a whole different feeling. Jesus-followers view the climactic day of Christ's appearing with the eyes of delight and a heart of excitement. That day glimmers with glory because, on that day, we will be taken up in a flash into eternal bliss, united with our Savior and living unhindered by the pain and curse of sin in our world.

Even into his nineties, the thought of Christ's return transported the aged apostle John into a state of rapturous wonder. He saw Jesus taken up into heaven. We can easily imagine how the thought of Him coming from heaven might strike John speechless. If there ever were such an occasion for awe, it certainly would have been when he wrote 1 John 2:28–3:3, our passage for this study.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Unshakable joy filled John's days because of the immovable hope he held. He knew the secret of maintaining it and wanted believers like us to carry with us day-and-night the same excitement about our Lord's return.

Think of a spiritual song you have memorized that expresses hope for the day of Christ's return—perhaps the hymn by John W. Peterson, "Jesus Is Coming Again." Make a melody to Jesus in your heart. Then invite His presence and assistance as you read His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The subject of the "end times"—or the "end of the age" or the "last days"—fascinates many Christians. It also confuses them. It has done so from the beginning. After Jesus resurrected, His disciples asked Him, "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel?" (Acts 1:6). They didn't understand what He taught when He said He must go away and then return (John 14:1–4).

Theologians call this doctrine of the "end times" *eschatology*. Learning eschatology requires patient reflection. Furthermore, when learning these vital truths, we must remember that God didn't tell us the future so that we could merely solve a theological jigsaw puzzle. Knowing our future helps us make wise choices today.

Believing right helps you think right. Thinking right helps you live right. Living right helps you worry less. And worrying less helps you anticipate the greatest event just over the horizon, our Lord's return. —Chuck Swindoll

The *Searching the Scriptures* method of correlation proves vital for the study of eschatology.¹ Comparing how multiple biblical authors addressed the subject of the end times expands our understanding. So, for this study, we'll begin with a look at John's statements in 1 John 2:28–3:3 and then we'll turn to some of Paul's.



Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3



Observation: Assurance from Abiding

Observe *1 John 2:28–3:3*. Read it slowly. Hover over key words and let their meaning spark new connections in your understanding. Take your preliminary notes below.

An Important Command—Remain in Fellowship

Note John's command, "remain in fellowship with Christ" (1 John 2:28) or, in the New American Standard Bible, "abide in Him." How does John's command connect to Christ's return? Hint: he gave one positive reason and one negative reason.

A Reassuring Reminder—Confidence

What reassuring reminder did John give in 1 John 2:29? What is John's logical connection between 2:28 and 2:29?



Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3

Obedience to Christ fosters intimate fellowship with Him. The closer our fellowship, the stronger our assurance. Our awareness of God's love deepens, confidence in God's power increases, and longing for God's person intensifies. As a result, our enjoyment of God's company heightens.

Biblical authors repeat words and phrases to emphasize their points. John used the word translated "children" in two ways (1 John 2:28; 3:1–3). What were those ways? What did John emphasize in each way?

An Outburst of Wonder—Love

In which verse do we find John marveling at our identity in Christ and Christ's return? Why was he marveling?

John wrote our eyes will behold Jesus in all His splendor at His return. John himself beheld the glorified Christ on the sandy shores of Patmos. A gold sash draped Jesus' white robe. His face shone like the sun while His eyes flamed like fire. Astonished, John could only fall on his face before Jesus' feet, which glistened like bronze (*Revelation 1:12–16*). *What a moment!*



Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3

A Glorious Promise—Likeness

What transformation did John say would accompany our seeing Christ at His return (1 John 3:2)?

The Lord will have no trouble bringing a dead person's body back together when He returns. He created you from nothing to start with. And He will have no trouble recreating you from the dust as He brings you back. You will possess an imperishable body, radiant in glory.
—Chuck Swindoll

John's command in 2:28, "abide" or "remain," is in present tense. Just as a wedding does not guarantee decades of marital bliss, neither does the moment of our new birth guarantee a life of sweet communion with the Lord. A banquet of fellowship with Christ awaits the new Christian. John encourages us to sit at His table daily through prayer and enjoy the presence of the risen Jesus.



Interpretation: A Fixed Hope That Results in Purity

The elderly apostle made a remarkable statement in 1 John 3:3:

And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:3)

The New American Standard Bible renders 1 John 3:3 this way:

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

Use your interpretation skills to research what John meant in this verse. Consult your trusted commentaries.² Netbible.org provides helpful study tools as well.



Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3

In what way does hoping in Christ's return purify Christians? What kind of purity did John mean?

Consider the opposite of John's claim. What did John imply for those who do not hope in Christ's return? Summarize what the two opposing lifestyles might look like for those who do and do not hope in Christ. What weight of relevance does John's statement carry today?



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Christ's Return

The doctrine of the return of Christ is no fairy tale to get children to behave, no soothsaying fantasy to get people through a dismal world, and no fad invented to sell books to people worried about the future. On the contrary, the second coming of Christ is part of the body of truth taught not only by Jesus Himself but also by His apostles, the early church, and every generation of true believers throughout the last two millennia. In 1 John 2:28–3:3, John refers twice to the moment “when He appears” (2:28; 3:2). It's clear that he's urging all of us, his readers, to think and plan ahead, to realize that the Lord's return is an inescapable reality which we can face with assurance, not shame. In light of Christ's coming, we're to be filled with hopeful anticipation, knowing that “we will see Him just as He is” (3:2).³



Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3

John tells us to keep a fixed hope. This hope results in an ethical and moral purity as you set your eyes and heart on the Savior's return. This isn't just a theological truth to agree with. We stand on it and live by it. John gives us ethical, practical, personal counsel. Anticipating Christ's return will purify you. Just imagine seeing Him face to face, knowing you'll be changed inside out, and you'll spend eternity with Him. As you focus on that, you will receive an internal cleansing. Sin will not seem that attractive. Temptation will not seem nearly as alluring when you have focused on your Savior's return at any moment.
—Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Paul's Explanation of What's Ahead

Paul gave more details about Christ's return than John did. Both brought up eschatology to add life instruction because what we believe about the future affects how we live today.

Order of Events—1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Observe *1 Thessalonians 4:13–18*. List the order of events that will occur at Christ's return.

What did Paul emphasize regarding Christ's return?



Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3

At Christ's return, nothing else will matter. All your cares and worries and struggles and problems will melt away. Deterioration, disabilities, distress—all will be gone. How great this will be! The blind will see. The lame will walk. The deaf will hear. We shall be like Him because we will see Him as He is. —Chuck Swindoll

What exhortations did Paul attach to Jesus' second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 18)?

Actual Reality—1 Corinthians 15:50–58

Observe *1 Corinthians 15:50–58*. What did Paul emphasize in this passage regarding what will happen to believers at Christ's return?

What exhortation did Paul connect with Christ's return? (1 Corinthians 15:58)



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1 John 2:28–3:3

Purity. Comfort. Diligence. Hope. Christ's impending arrival inspires all four traits in Christians. If we believe right—that Christ can appear in the sky before our eyes at any moment—then we will get our priorities right. If we get our priorities right—fellowshipping with Jesus and walking in the light—then we will live right. Those who live such lives wait confidently for Jesus.



Application: Anticipate in Wonder

For this study, use application to practice anticipation. Consider how the white-robed messengers reassured the disciples saying, “Someday he will return” (Acts 1:11). Take time to get alone in the quiet. Get lost in thoughts of Christ's return. Simply sit in wonder. Meditate upon what you'll experience at Christ's coming. Hear the trumpet. Watch the clouds split. Feel your new skin. Behold His shining face.

Let's close this time in private worship. Pray to your Comforter. Sing to your Deliverer. Adore your Lord, Jesus Christ.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I wait for Your Son with eager expectation. How I long to behold Him face to face, when my perishable body shall be made imperishable, and my eyes shall see Him as He is! Glorious. Thank You for giving me this hope. Thank You for sending Jesus to take on flesh and absorb sin's curse on a criminal's cross where I belong. But by grace, You have redeemed me from sin and Satan. I praise You in Christ's name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, *grab a copy* at the Insight for Living Ministries web store.
2. Grab a copy of Chuck's *commentary* on 1 John if you don't own it already. Chuck also recommends the *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* as a good single-volume reference for studying the New Testament.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 73–74.

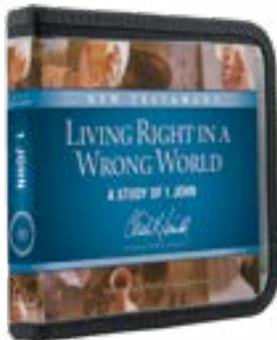


Our Lord's Return: Then What?

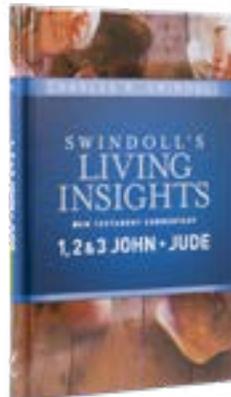
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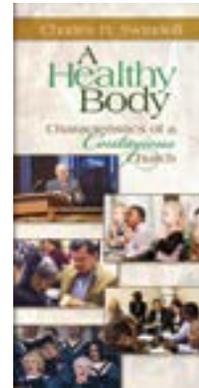
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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

