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Beloved, Now Are We Children Of God



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† John wasn't telling his readers that becoming God's children was still waiting somewhere in their future. He said, now are we children of God. Their identity had already changed through Christ.

† At the same time, John spoke of something they were still waiting to see revealed. They were already God's children, but the full glory of their new covenant identity hadn't yet been manifested.

† John's words must be read within the first-century setting of his letter. He repeatedly told his original readers that they were living in the last hour and that Christ's appearing was approaching (1 John 2:18, 28).

† The movement in this passage is powerful, loved by the Father, called children of God, already possessing that identity, and awaiting its full manifestation.

1 John 3:1-2

See how great a love the Father has given us, that we would be called children of God; and in fact we are. For this reason the world does not know us: because it did not know Him. 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.

† Notice John's word now. He didn't tell those believers that they would become God's children thousands of years later. They were God's children when John wrote to them.

† Yet something hadn't been fully manifested. They were living during the transition from the old covenant age into the fully established new covenant order (Hebrews 8:13).

† John connected their expectation with Christ being manifested. This wasn't an isolated statement. Earlier in the same letter, he told them to abide in Christ so that they could have confidence at His coming (1 John 2:28).

† The world didn't recognize God's children because it hadn't recognized Christ. Their identity came from their relationship with the Father through the Son, not from the world's recognition or approval.

1 John 2:18

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.

† John identified the time in which his original readers were living. He didn't say they were approaching a last hour thousands of years away. He said it is the last hour.

† The appearance of many antichrists was evidence John gave his readers for knowing their place in redemptive history.

† This provides the immediate setting for John's statements about Christ's appearing and what God's children would become. His expectation belonged to that first-century last-hour context.

1 John 2:28

Now, little children, remain in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not draw back from Him in shame at His coming.

† John spoke directly to his own readers and told them to remain in Christ because of His coming.

† The language of being manifested connects directly with the next chapter, where John said that when Christ was manifested, they would be like Him (1 John 3:2).

† John wasn't changing audiences or introducing an unrelated event separated from his readers by thousands of years. His statements flow together as one expectation within the letter.

Romans 8:14-17

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons and daughters of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons and daughters by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

† Paul agreed with John, believers in Christ were already God's children.

† Their adoption wasn't merely a future possibility. The Spirit testified that they were children of God.

† Being God's children also made them heirs. Their identity, inheritance, and relationship with the Father were centered completely in Christ.

Galatians 3:26-29

For you are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

† God's children are identified through faith in Christ, not through physical ancestry.

† Paul said those who belonged to Christ were Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise.

† This destroys the idea that covenant inheritance ultimately depends on ethnicity, genealogy, or belonging to a physical nation. The promised family is found in Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18

But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

† Being made like Christ wasn't about believers becoming divine beings. It was about transformation into His image and sharing the glory of the new covenant relationship.

† Paul described transformation already taking place among first-century believers as they moved from glory to glory.

† The surrounding chapter contrasts the fading glory of the old covenant with the surpassing and continuing glory of the new covenant (2 Corinthians 3:7-11).

Hebrews 8:13

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is about to disappear.

† Hebrews shows why something could already be true while its full covenant manifestation was still approaching. The new covenant had been established through Christ, while the old covenant system was approaching its removal.

† This explains the first-century transition without denying what believers already possessed. They were already God's children, already in Christ, and already receiving the blessings of the new covenant.

† The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 publicly demonstrated that the old covenant age had reached its end. The temporary temple system was removed, while Christ and His everlasting kingdom remained (Hebrews 12:27-28).

Historical References

† Josephus recorded the devastating destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans in AD 70. His account provides important historical testimony concerning the judgment that brought the old temple order to its catastrophic end.

† Eusebius later recorded the tradition that believers in Jerusalem departed the city before the war and went to Pella. His account preserves an early Christian memory of believers escaping the judgment that came upon Jerusalem.

† Irenaeus repeatedly identified believers as God's children through Christ and emphasized their restoration into fellowship with God. His writings show how central adoption, life, and restoration in Christ were to early Christian teaching.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't have to wait to become God's children. Those who belong to Christ are part of God's family now (Galatians 3:26).

† Our relationship with God isn't based on an earthly temple, physical genealogy, or the old covenant system. We come to the Father through Christ (Ephesians 2:18).

† We aren't living in John's last hour waiting for the old covenant age to disappear. That first-century transition reached its conclusion, and we live in the continuing reality of Christ's kingdom and new covenant.

† Our identity isn't determined by whether the world recognizes us. We belong to God because we're in Christ.

† The Father's love isn't merely something we're waiting to receive. John wanted believers to behold the incredible love

already given to them, they were called children of God, and that is what they were.

† That same relationship with the Father continues for those who are in Christ. We can live with confidence, gratitude, and joy because our place in God's family rests in what Christ accomplished.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Were John's readers already children of God?

A: Yes. John said, now are we children of God (1 John 3:2). Their identity wasn't postponed until a distant future.

Q: What hadn't yet been manifested?

A: John said what they would be hadn't yet been manifested, and he connected that manifestation with Christ being manifested (1 John 3:2). The immediate context connects this expectation with His coming (1 John 2:28).

Q: Was John speaking about something thousands of years away?

A: John's own time statements don't support that conclusion. He told his readers, it is the last hour, and pointed to conditions already present among them as evidence (1 John 2:18).

Q: Does being like Christ mean believers become God?

A: No. Scripture describes believers as being transformed into Christ's image and sharing in His glory, not becoming God themselves (2 Corinthians 3:18; Romans 8:16-17).

Q: Are believers still children of God today?

A: Yes. Those who belong to Christ are God's children through faith. That covenant relationship didn't end when the old covenant age ended (Galatians 3:26-29).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

Source Index

† 1 John 3:1-2; 1 John 2:18; 1 John 2:28; Romans 8:14-17;
Galatians 3:26-29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Hebrews 8:13

† Historical writers: Josephus, Eusebius, Irenaeus

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