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A Letter to Dear Children, Part 10

A Celebration of Two Tenses

Text: 1 John 3:1-3

Bruce Karin, in his book *Telling It Again and Again,* writes about the benefit of repetition. He says that repetition can have a timeless quality and can place us in *the eternal now of the present moment*. John, the devoted follower of Jesus, celebrates *the eternal now of the present moment*, with these first century believers.

Now, we are the children of God! What a statement of hope. What an encouragement to those who are overwhelmed by their shortcomings and think they could never measure up to the calling God has placed on their lives. **Now**, we are children of God!

This love of God is so different that John asks, “of what country is this?” (One of the translations of the Greek word, *potapos).* That love of God is of unique quality. The same Greek word is used in Mark 13:1-

*Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, “Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!”*

What might we observe about this love?

1. It has a specific source. It is the Father’s love.
2. It has a specific effect. It *makes* us children of God

Those of us who celebrate this persistent, God-given present, also have a future.

The future features:

1. The appearance of our Lord (when He shall appear)
2. The recreation of the children of God (we shall be like Him)
3. The unveiling of our Lord (we shall see Him as He is).

Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:12

*For now, we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*

We wrestle with a great temptation to favor only one of these tenses. Some live in the present tense only, making a living, celebrating who they are, what they have accomplished and how they have arrived. The present takes much out of us, doesn't it? Recall Jesus’ rhetorical question in the Sermon of the Mount. In the section of that teaching, in which Jesus addresses anxiety, Jesus says, *Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”*

*(*Matthew 6:25 NKJV)

When one is consumed by the present tense, one is concentrating on providing food, clothing and shelter.

While that is admirable and responsible, it is also limiting.

Hear the promises of God. Hear God inviting us not only to a faith-filled present but to a God-filled future.

Recall with me the institution of the Lord’s Supper.

*“For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.” (Matthew 26:28-29 NKJV)*

What language of the future! Here, in an upper room, Jesus dares His followers to look beyond that place, beyond that night, beyond that bread, beyond that cup.

Another passage speaks to this. II Corinthians 4:16-18 NKJV:

*“Therefore, we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*

However, we don’t want to live in the future only. The ideal life of faith would be a life which celebrates two tenses. We would celebrate the *now* of seeing ourselves as the children of God (v. 2) and we would *also* rejoice that one day in the future, we shall see Him and be like Him.

***Illus.***

I heard the late Gardner C. Taylor preach this text. In his colorful imaginative preaching he said, “We shall be like Him! One day we shall stand with Jesus and look so much like Him that the angels shall nudge each other and ask ‘which one?’”

You and I live between the *already* and the *not yet*, in this exciting present, while holding the promise of an outrageous future. We sing, *Abide with Me* while also singing *When We All get to Heaven.*

Now we are the children of God- present

Andit does not yet appear- the future.

We who hold this hope find ourselves in a dynamic, vibrant pursuit of The Eternal. We purify ourselves (v. 4). This does not mean that we have any ability to self-consecrate or self-sanctify. In context, this fourth verse reminds us that only *God* can make us pure and righteous. However, those who hold to this posture as children of God are in the ongoing process of being purged and hallowed.

**Illus.**

Mark Salter, longtime aide to the late Senator John McCain, paid tribute to his boss in an interview with PBS’ Judy Woodruff.

*Well, I think he saw the world as it was.*

*He saw it, and with all its corruption and cruelty, and yet he believed he was able to hold onto hope. And I think he had that capacity to believe that things could be made better, that the world can be made better. And I think he had that because he had experienced the worst in human nature and the best in human nature in the very same experience when he was in prison in Vietnam.*

We, the children of God, hold on to two tenses, the present and the future, both of which are infused with hope!

Amen