

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST JOHN
RELATIVE TO YOUR SPIRITUAL MATURITY!

Read 1 John 2:12-17

Introduction

The first section of John's letter talked about heavy subjects like sin, forgiveness, and obedience. Now he turns to perhaps the strongest theme in this letter, love, one to which he returns again and again. First John 2:12–14 is a six-line poem where John addresses three different groups of believers. John speaks to new Christians, older Christians, and those in between, in that order. He then talks to each again, in the same order. New Christians are reminded of their forgiveness through Christ, older Christians of their faith in an eternal God, and other of their spiritual strength to overcome “the evil one.”

Children, Fathers, Young Men

“I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.” (vv12-14)

Little Children:

“I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake... I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father.” (vv12, 13c)

We each begin the Christian life as little children. When we are in this state spiritually, it is enough for us to know and be amazed at the forgiveness of our sins and all it took for God to forgive us righteously in Jesus Christ. Because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake, you have something to rejoice in. If we do not rejoice in this, something is wrong. We probably fail to see the badness of our sin and the greatness of His forgiveness. When we see how great our sin is, and how great the cost was to gain us forgiveness, we are obsessed with gratitude at having been forgiven.

John uses different words for little children in verses 12 and 13 (*teknia* and *paidia*, respectively). *Teknia* has more of an emphasis on a child’s relationship of dependence on a parent, while *paidia* has more of an emphasis on a child’s immaturity and need for instruction.

Fathers:

“I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning... I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning.” (vv13a, 14a)

Just as surely as there are little children, there are also fathers. These are men and women of deep, long spiritual standing. They have the kind of walk with God that doesn’t come overnight. These are like great oak trees in the Lord, that have grown big and strong through the years. “*Knowing Him*” is what spiritual maturity has its roots in. It is not so much in an intellectual knowledge (though that is a part of it), but more so in the depth of fellowship and relationship we have with Jesus. There is no substitute for years and years of an experiential relationship with Jesus.

“*I have written to you*” gives a repetitive connotation. John saw it necessary to emphasise the same point to Fathers. We can extrapolate and say, since the Father knows Him who is from the beginning then they

should use their experience and great knowledge to help, build, support, and correct the little children and young men.

Young Men:

“I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one... I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.” (vv13b, 14b)

As much as there are little children and fathers, so also there are young men. These are men and women who are no longer little children, but still not yet fathers. They are the “front-line” of God’s work among His people. They are engaged in battle with the wicked one. We don’t send our little children out to war, and we don’t send our old men to the front lines. The greatest effort, the greatest cost, and the greatest strength are expected of the young men.

For this reason, many have sought to stay in spiritual childhood as long as possible. This is wrong. It is like being a draft-dodger or a vagrant. We expect children to not fight in wars and to be supported by others, but we don’t expect it of adults. These young men have overcome the spiritual foes that would seek to destroy their spiritual life. They know what it is to battle against Satan and his emissaries as a partner with God.

Verse 14b gives the idea of repetition that indicates emphasis. Not only have the young men... overcome the wicked one, but they have done it through the strength that comes to them through the word of God. God’s Word is our source of spiritual strength.

Do you consider yourself one of the young men spiritually? Then are you strong? Are you putting your strength to some spiritual use? Do you resent that your strength is tested and developed by God? These young men, who had gained some measure of spiritual maturity, were known by the fact that God’s Word lived in them. The Word of God had made itself at home in their hearts.

Don't Love the World

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.” (vv15-16)

In our passage and in Paul’s letters, “world” is often used in the third sense, to refer to human (and demonic) existence that is at odds with and hostile towards God – the worldly realm that is in rebellion against the heavenly realm. In the Gospel of John, Jesus refers to Satan as “the prince of this world” (John 12:31a; 14:30; 16:11). Later in this Letter, John says that “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Other apostolic letters refer to the world in this way, as well.

John has told us that if we walk in sin’s darkness and claim to be in fellowship with God, we are lying (1 John 1:6). Now John points out a specific area of sin that especially threatens our fellowship with God: worldliness, “to love the world”.

The World & Things in the World

We are not to love either the world’s system or its way of doing things. There is a secular, anti-God or ignoring-God way of doing things that characterizes human society, and it is easy to love the world in this sense. Notice what the world wants from us: love. This love is expressed in time, attention, and expense. We are encouraged and persuaded to give our time, attention, and money to the things of this world instead of the things of God.

If you love the world, there are rewards to be gained. You may find a place of prestige, of status, of honour, of comfort. The world system knows how to reward its lovers. At the same time, even at their best the rewards that come from this world last only as long as we live. The problem is that though we gain prestige, status, honour, and comfort of this world, we lose the prestige, status, honour, and comfort of heaven.

The things in the world isn't so much a warning against a love for the beauty of the world God created (though we must always love the Creator instead of the creation). Instead, it is more of a warning against loving the material things which characterize the world system. The world buys our love with the great things it has to give us. Cars, homes, gadgets, and the status that goes with all of them, can really make our hearts at home in the world.

Simply, love for the world is incompatible with love for the Father. Therefore, if one claims to love God and yet loves the world, there is something wrong with his claim to love God. Through the centuries, Christians have dealt with the magnetic pull of the world in different ways. At one time it was thought that if you were a really committed Christian and really wanted to love God instead of the world, you would leave human society and live as a monk or a nun out in a desolate monastery. This approach, and other approaches that seek to take us out of the world, have two problems. The first problem is that we are not biblical in our approach. The other problem is that Jesus intended us to be in the world but not of the world. We see this in His prayer for us in John 17:14-18.

The Character of the World

The character of the world expresses itself through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. These lusts seek to draw our own flesh away into sin and worldliness.

The idea behind the pride of life is someone who lives for superiority over others, mostly by impressing others through outward appearances — even if by deception. To get an idea of how the world works, think of the advertising commercials you most commonly remember. They probably make a powerful appeal to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or to the pride of life. Many successful ads appeal to all three.

In listing these aspects of the world, John may have in mind the first pursuit of worldliness, that of Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6).

- Of Eve in the Garden of Eden, it is said that she took of the forbidden fruit when she saw that the tree was good for food. She thought about how good the fruit would taste, how it would satisfy her flesh. She went after the lust of the flesh.
- Of Eve in the Garden of Eden, it is said that she took of the forbidden fruit when she saw that the fruit was pleasant to the eyes. She saw how pretty and desirable it was, and it pleased her artistic sense. She went after the lust of the eyes.
- Of Eve in the Garden of Eden, it is said that she took of the forbidden fruit when she believed that it was desirable to make one wise. How smart the fruit would make her! How her husband would admire her! She went after the pride of life.

This explains why the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are sin even though they feel good and satisfy something in us.

- God knows we have a fleshly, bodily nature, and physical needs that feel good when satisfied. Yet it is not in God's nature to influence us through the lust of the flesh.

- God knows we have eyes, and that appearance means a lot to us. He made a beautiful world to please us! But God always looks beyond the outward appearance, and it is not in God's nature to influence us through the lust of the eyes.
- God knows we have emotional and psychological needs to be wanted and to accomplish things. He made us this way! But it is not in God's nature to influence us through the pride of life.

We often rarely appreciate how much the world dominates our thinking and how often our thoughts are more of the world than of the Father. We usually believe that we think much more Biblically than we really do. We should rigorously measure our habits of thinking and see if they follow more the world or God our Father.

- Think of your standard for success: is it worldly or godly? Would you consider the apostle Paul a failure or a success?
- Think of your standard for what makes a person of the opposite sex appealing. Is it a worldly standard or a godly standard?
- Think of your standard for spirituality: is it worldly or godly? There is a worldly spirituality out there, and many people embrace it.

This shows how great our need is to not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2).

The Folly of Worldliness

“And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” (v17)

This reveals the folly of worldliness. What we invest into the world we invest into what cannot last because the world is passing away. As we saw with the example of the tower of Babel, the world never wins out against God, though by some appearances it does. That the world is passing away, it is not a prayer, not a wish, and not a spiritual sounding desire. It is a fact. The world is passing away, and we must live our lives and think our thoughts aware of this fact.

This is powerfully illustrated by the life of Lot in Genesis chapters 13, 14, and 19. Lot attached himself to a true spiritual man, named Abraham. Yet he was selfish and chose for himself what seemed the most lucrative, without considering the spiritual implications of what he was doing. He became financially prosperous, but pitched his tent toward a wicked, worldly city — Sodom. After a while, he was sitting in the gates of the city as one of Sodom's civic leaders. He had worldly status, influence, wealth, and comfort. Yet, it was all taken away in a moment when the judgment of God came upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot put all his eggs in the wrong basket and was burned by the fact that the world is passing away.

The ancient pharaohs were buried in the pyramids with all sorts of riches, which were thought to be of some use to them in the world to come. In the end, they were only of use to the grave robbers. The pharaohs could take none of their worldly stuff with them to the world beyond. No one drives through the gates of heaven with a moving van filled with the stuff of this world. It is true: The world is passing away.

He who does the will of God abides forever:

This stands in strong contrast to the passing world. Because some things are forever, it is much wiser to invest our lives into that which cannot be lost i.e., doing the will of God. We are in regular contact with three eternal things: the Holy Spirit of God, the people around you, and the eternal words recorded in the book you hold. Time, attention, and expense put into those things pays eternal rewards.

