

## "The Christian and The World"

### I John 2:12-17

Good and evil, God and Satan, holiness and worldliness, are mutually incompatible. Does the church really understand that?

*I write to you, dear children,  
because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.*

*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 evil one.*

*I write to you, dear children,  
because you have known the Father.*

*I write to you, fathers,  
because you have known him who is from the beginning.*

*I write to you, young men,  
because you are strong,  
and the word of God lives in you,  
and you have overcome the evil one.*

*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*

In 1 John 1:5-2:2, we studied the means of maintaining fellowship with God. It is through the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses all our sins that we can enter into fellowship with God. That blood is applied to us when we confess or agree with God our sinful nature, are baptized into his name, and He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Our continual fellowship with God is made possible by the fact that we have One in heaven who is the propitiation for our sins. 'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous'. That is our means of fellowship, and maintaining fellowship with God. If sin comes in and interrupts, we do not say that

we have no sinned, but we agree with God that our sinful nature is not dead and bring it into the light and allow Him to forgive us.

After showing the means of maintaining fellowship, John tells us in 2: 3-11 the marks of those who are in the Christian fellowship. How do you know if you are indeed a Christian? How do you get that assurance? How do you recognize other Christians? We were given those tests in 2: 3-11, and they were: obedience to the Lord's commands, and love to the brethren.

In this lesson we see John personally addressing individual members in this church in Ephesus who were at different stages of growth in fellowship.

He addresses the whole family of God with this one expression in verse 12: 'Little children' - 'I write unto you, little children'. He uses the same phrase again in vs. 13. In the Greek language there are two different words that are used for 'little children', that is not shown in our English translations - it can't be. But the word that is used in verse 12 that we're looking at first literally means 'offspring of any age'. So, when it speaks of children, it doesn't mean 'little infants', or even adolescents. He is not speaking about age or experience but about how we are the offspring of God no matter what physical age we are. In other words, he is speaking of those who have been experienced the new nature through the new birth.

Some might say, 'Why does that really matter?' It matters a great deal, because there are those, who believe in the universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. They say that God is everyone's Father, and that we are everyone's brother and sister in humanity because we all own God as our Father. It becomes very popular, especially in the ecumenical movement and in syncretistic religion - trying to say that all roads lead to God because God is everyone's Father, and so we're all brothers and sisters in humanity. But this word right away tells us that John is addressing those who are the offspring of God, and the inference is that there are those who are not the offspring of God. Right away he is setting down a demarcation line that we find throughout the whole of Scripture, and particularly in the New Testament: that God sees in this world not one great humanity with Him at the head, but two families that exist. There are those who are the children of Satan. Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees: 'You are of your father the devil' (John 8:44) - then there are those who are the children of God.

The great question is posed: how do you get into God's family? If God is to be your Father, then you must be His son; and if you are to be His son, then He must

have given birth to you at some time - you must be born of God. That is simply what the doctrine of the new birth teaches. It's not about simply making a decision, although that is part of it, but this is something that comes from heaven itself. A man or a woman who comes to faith in Christ does not essentially come to the Savior in conversion just on the earth, but there is actually some transaction that has taken place in heaven, that has caused them to give birth to the very life of God in their soul. Let's never forget that! Christianity is not just 'deciding to follow Jesus', although it is that - but there is a supernatural element whereby God's very life, by His Spirit, is breathed into us...and that's how you become a son or a daughter of God. That's why Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3 several times: 'Nicodemus, you must be born again'.

We are born-again! We are forgiven of our sins, because we are resting on Calvary's work. Do you understand?

We also need to remember that the theme of this letter is not only is fellowship but assurance. Verse 12: 'I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake'. Do you know that your sins are forgiven you?

We rest on His work, His completed atonement at the cross.

But who is John is addressing? Who are these people that he refers to in verse 13 as 'fathers', as 'young men', and then again as 'little children'?

## **God's people in the Fellowship**

**First** he speaks to the fathers in verse 13: 'I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning'. It may be that these fathers were elders or leaders in the congregation. Very seldom are elders called 'fathers', but the likelihood is that at least some of them, if not all of them, were elders in the church. They were the most mature, not in age, but in their spiritual experience of God. When you look at this verse he commends them because they have 'known him', probably referring to the Lord Jesus, 'that is from the beginning' - because in the first couple of verses of this letter, that's who he talks about when he speaks of having fellowship with Him who was from the beginning. He commends these men for their experience in the things of God. That doesn't necessarily come with age - it often does carry with age - but because you're older doesn't necessarily mean that you've been experienced in the things of God, but these men had.

Is that how we recognize elders or leaders in the church? Often the reason we qualify them is because they have knowledge of Scripture, or they teach, they can preach a little bit: but these men needed to know God! Fathers in the faith!

While it is commendable to have a great knowledge of the Scriptures, and while it is good to have experience of life, the fact of the matter is: to be a father in the faith a person must know God through their own personal experience - to know God in all His fullness! That is what Paul said in Philippians 3:10: *'I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death'* It also entails that they needed to be a good example to the flock, they needed to discipline the flock as a father, they needed to have tender compassion. 'Fathers, I write unto you because ye have known him who is from the beginning'.

**Then secondly**, he addresses the 'young men'. While they may not have been fathers in the experience that they had of Him who was from the beginning, like the first group, one thing is for sure: they are standing strong against sin and against doctrinal error. *'I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one'*, and then if you look at verse 14, *'I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one'*. They have the word of God in them, and that is the key! These young men, while they may not have the experiential knowledge of the word, they know the word and they know the doctrine - they know how to recognize error. They are opposed against every form of sin and iniquity!

Their world was not much different from our world, and yet John was able to commend those young men in the faith because they had overcome the wicked one, because God's word abided in them. Not only fathers in the faith can be exemplars in the faith, but so can young men and young women can be examples in godliness, just as Timothy himself was. These young people had overcome the wiles of the devil himself, because the word of God dwelt in them, they believed it, they lived it out, and they faced false doctrine and sin and error - they overcame the devil himself. They had the victory; they were triumphant; they were overcoming.

This is the difference between a young man in the faith, and a child or someone who is still an infant or a babe in Christ. In Ephesians chapter 4:14 Paul said: *'Henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive'*. Sometimes young people in the faith believe one doctrine this

week and the next week they believe another doctrine, and they're just blown back and forth depending on who the popular teacher of the moment is. That's not the way we are to be and the cure is to know the word of God, to stand fast with the word of God in us, living it out. We're to have the word of God in our head, knowing the doctrine will help us identify false teaching.

Ephesians 6 tells us that the word of God is the sword of the Spirit, it's the only offensive weapon that we have against the forces of evil. It doesn't matter whether you're a father in the age sense, or a young man, the fact of the matter is: whether you have the adolescent youth within you or the strength of young manhood, Isaiah says in Isaiah 40:30-31 that even *the youths shall faint and grow weary, but it is them that wait on the Lord who shall renew their strength*. Old or young, it's around this book, it's on your knees, it's before your God - only then can you overcome the wicked one!

**Thirdly** he addresses the little children vs. 13. As pointed out earlier the 'little children' here in this particular verse is a different 'little children' than verse 12, and it basically speaks of those who are young in the faith, those who are babes in Christ, those who have recently come to awareness of God and who need to grow. Peter tells us that we are to desire the pure milk of the word as newborn babies' desire their mother's milk, 1 Peter 2:2. . You don't set a baby down to a T-bone steak, you give them a bottle; and gradually it grows. But if that baby, after one year of life, does not grow - It is a tragedy. Paul had to write to the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 3:1, and say to them: 'You are still babes! I want to feed you with meat, but I have to feed you with milk. You're carnal, you think you know everything, but you know nothing!'

The good news as to why John addresses these three groups - fathers, young men, little children, is because those false teachers and heretics, the Docetists and the forerunners of the Gnostics who claimed some kind of elite knowledge of God that only came through a special revelation to certain highbrow individuals, were saying: 'You have to be top-notch, you have to be one of the elite, you have to get up there, there's no room for the babes, there's no room for the young men, it's only the elite who can know God'. John says: 'No, I write to the fathers, I write to the young men, I even right to the little children' - isn't that wonderful? There's no ageism with God. Rick Atchley, who preached for the Richland Hills church of Christ said in one of his sermons, " Sometimes I'm concerned - and I don't wish to criticize the church, but there are churches that are 'Young people's churches', then there's churches that are 'Old people's churches' There are churches that are 'black churches' and churches that are 'white churches', but the beauty of what God

wanted when He was thinking out the plan of salvation and the miracle of the mystery of the church was that there be no divisions, and all ages, and all classes, and all races, and all peoples would be able to be together!”

Sometimes the older or more mature Christian can look down at the younger ones wanting them to be more mature and won't allow them to be young. Then there are the younger Christians who want to take the whole thing by the reins and run away, not appreciating the wisdom and understanding of the more mature. God wants us to live together, as God meant us to live together! John's point is that no matter what age these people were, no matter what stage they were at as members in the church, every single one of them from the fathers' right down to the little children manifested something of Christ's character somewhere.

Those are the members in the fellowship, but then secondly he talks to them about;  
**A danger to the fellowship.**

In 2:15, he says: *'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world'*. John's letters have the great theme of love throughout them. But here we have John showing that there is a negative aspect to love. You don't often hear this in the day and age in which we live; everything seems to be positive even in Christian circles, but here is a negative side to love. Of course, this stands to reason when you think about it for a moment, because a Christian can't at the same time love God and love the devil, that would be ridiculous. A Christian cannot love righteousness and sin. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount when He said: 'You cannot serve two masters; ye cannot serve God and mammon'. The Psalmist put it in Psalm 97: 'You that love the Lord hate evil' - the other side of love for God is a hate for evil things. Paul said in Romans 12:9, 'Abhor (hate) that which is evil, cleave to that which is good'. He's telling us that good and evil, God and Satan, holiness and worldliness, are mutually incompatible - do we understand that? James said it in a very forthright manner, when he said in James 4:4: *'You adulterers and adulteresses, know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God'*.

The way John uses the word “world” is a reference to the world system, 'Love not the world system'. What is the world system? It is the system which man has built up in an effort to make himself happy, satisfied, and fulfilled apart from God. One person has defined it like this: 'Human society is the world system organized in wrong principles, characterized by base desires, false values and egoism'. In short, the world system is any sphere where the Lord Jesus is not loved, and the Lord Jesus is not welcomed.

John says the **first reason** why we ought to hate the world is that it's incompatible with our love for the Father. We can't love the Father and love the world; we can't love the Father and lust the flesh, lust with the eyes, and have pride in our life. Someone has defined worldliness as 'anything that keeps us from loving God as we ought to love Him and from doing the will of God as we ought to do it'.

The **second reason**, why we should hate the world in verse 17 is the fact that it is temporary. Verse 17 says: "*The world passes away, and the lust thereof*". When a company or a business falls into financial straits, sensible people don't invest in it. When a builder sees that the ground is like fine dust, he doesn't lay a foundation on it. To live for the transient things of the world is absolute foolishness, it's like rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic, it may keep you busy for a moment and even give you a sense of purpose for a while - but the boat is going down, so what is the point? We wouldn't purposely go out and buy a car if we knew it was going to break down every two weeks, so why then do we invest our lives in things that do not and will not last? This world will pass away. John is saying that we need to give our heart to something that will last! Beauty does not last, it has an expiration date. Fame is fickle and even political power passes!

Let me throw out that challenge to all of us today: fathers, elders, young men, little children - why don't we work for something that is permanent for a change? Why don't we work for something that will last! 'He that doeth the will of God abides for ever'