

Encouragement for Everyone – 1 Jn 2:12-17

I mentioned a couple weeks ago that as John wrote this letter, he comes across as a loving grandfather, earnestly desiring to see his family follow God's ways. The section we cover today keeps that perspective, as he writes to several subgroups within the family. He addresses the little children, the fathers, and the young men. In two parallel sets, the patriarch sets down reasons for writing to the family. What we find as we dig is that each section is really addressed to all believers, and he's using the monikers of children, fathers, and young men more like a literary device, or to address three stages of growth in the faith. He has already addressed all of his readers as "my little children," so it's easy to see him continuing that idea. (read vs. 12-14)

Little children – these are the new believers, "babes in Christ." They have a genuine relationship with God because their sins are forgiven. This is the foundation, the starting point of everything in our relationship with God. This sums up everything he has been talking about, and our touchstone with reference to life – I know my sins have been forgiven. With nothing more than that knowledge, we have hope in life. No matter how long we have been saved, or how mature we become in the faith, that is still our foundation – In Jesus Christ, because of His sacrifice for us, our sins are forgiven. By the way, this verb is in the passive voice – we received forgiveness; we didn't gain it by any effort on our part.

Fathers – these are spiritually mature ones. They have come to a deeper knowledge of who God is: everlasting, creator, self-existing. This verb is active, indicating a personal process of learning. We are speaking of people who have lived life, seen struggles, and have seen God come through with His faithful love and provision. These precious folk become the encouragers for the younger ones who are just beginning to face the trials of life.

Young men – they are actively growing in Christ, engaged in the battle against evil. This may indicate standing against heresy, or the personal battles against wickedness in their lives. Young men have energy, enthusiasm, and are ready to "take on the gates of hell with a squirt gun" – but they need the wisdom and guidance of the fathers to help guide them. Nevertheless, the church needs the enthusiasm and vigor of these strong warriors.

As John revisits the three groups, he changes the tone of his writing slightly, from present tense to past tense. This was typical of ancient style, noting the time that has passed in the course of the letter. He also changes the word for children, using now the term for infants, as though to emphasize the beginning stage of their faith.

Children – this shows growth from the first knowledge of forgiveness, to learning more about God as their Father. This is one thing we should always be looking for – growth in our faith and understanding. By the way, it is worthwhile to note in all of these sections, John has nothing but positive encouragement for the believers. We ought to be eager to encourage one another, and careful in our critiques.

Fathers – retaining their standing, not losing ground. He repeats his affirmation, knowing these precious saints needed no correction or further instruction. It's as though the apostle looks at them again and says, 'keep it up, I'm thankful for you.'

Young men – they are now spiritually strong (having gained victory), because the Word of God abides in them. John Wesley, in his commentary, says the Word is "deeply rooted in your hearts, whereby ye have often foiled your great adversary." This is the true secret of success in our lives. Ps 119:11, 15 says, "I

have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” “I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.” Colossians 3:16 says “let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly...”

Now, summing up all the previous encouragements for the believers, John gives instructions to all, and this is the first direct command in his letter. “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 desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

Basically he is telling us all, regardless of where we fit in the family, not to become careless, thinking the battle is over, nor to forget there are two ways of life, and we have been called away from the world’s ways. What does he mean by not loving the world or its things? He uses the word *kosmos*, which emphasizes the order or system of this world, rather than the physical place. What are the things of this system? The desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, and the pride of life – all of which are temporary, passing. The devil will try to engage us with good looking promises, and there may be pleasure for a time, but it is soon gone. What is often left afterward is emptiness, guilt, regret, and pain. Whether we look at the party culture, the sexual revolution, or any other area, what the world sells us ends up hurting in the long run. When we look at God’s commands for us, we discover that they are always for our good – to protect us from the damage sin brings. Why should we settle for temporary pleasures that ultimately do more harm than good, when God offers us true and eternal blessings for following Him? John’s underlying theme so far in this letter is, “if you claim to follow Christ, then live like it.” This section of chapter 2 is expressing support for those who have faithfully been doing just that, and encouraging them to remain faithful.