

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



THAT YOU MAY KNOW – A STUDY OF 1,2 & 3 JOHN *Encouragement for the Family of God - 1 John 2:12-14*

“¹² I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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.” -1 John 2:12-14 (NKJV)

BACKGROUND AND SETTING FOR 1ST, 2ND, & 3RD JOHN:

(1) AUTHOR = The Apostle John – If you will notice, the letter of 1 John bears no inscription (name, autograph, signature). It doesn’t give us a name of an individual in the actual letter itself. For that reason 1 John is often called an “anonymous letter,” but 2 and 3 John do carry an inscription. They are written by someone called “the Elder,” a reference to one of Jesus’ closest disciples/apostles who was a part of Jesus inner circle, John. The moniker “Elder” does indicate that John is advanced in years when these letter were written. The language and style of all three letters are identical to each other as well as to John’s Gospel, so the traditional view and the most commonly held view is that all three were written by the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20-24). There is no reason to doubt this and early church leaders titled these three little book by John’s name.

John actually wrote 5 books in the New Testament... not just these three.

5 Books Written by the Beloved Disciple:

- 1. The Gospel of John**
- 2. First John**

3. Second John
4. Third John
5. The Book of the Revelation

And this I think is significant... all of his books were written later in life and after all the other books in the Bible were recorded.

Here are some facts we know about John:

- He was the son of Zebedee and Salome (Mt. 4:21; 27:55-56; Mk. 15:40-41)
- He and his brother James were fishermen with their father (Mk. 1:19-20)
- He and James were called Boanerges or Sons of thunder by Christ because of their fiery behavior at times (Mk. 3:17; cp. Lk. 9:53-54)
- He was one of the 3 most intimate disciples of the Lord (Mt. 17:1ff; 26:37)
- He was a close associate of Simon Peter... the first ones to arrive at the tomb (Jn. 20:2-8), they suffered imprisonment together after healing a lame man (Acts 3 & 4), and they traveled together to Samaria after the gospel was preached (Acts 8:14-17) not to mention that they were the disciples closest to Jesus
- He was one of the pillars (prime leaders) of the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9)
- From external and extra-biblical sources (history/tradition), like Polycarp, Papias (*pappy-us*), and Justin Martyr (early church fathers) we are told the following about John from his writings – These early church fathers often quoted John and used his writings
- Polycarp and Papias were identified as pupils of John - They have writings dated as early as the 2nd century
- John was eventually banished to the isle of Patmos by the Roman emperor Domitian, from where he received the visions and wrote The Revelation (cp. Rev. 1:9)
- He returned to Ephesus to live out the rest of his life, from where he wrote these three epistles as well as the gospel that bears his name - Archeological remains bear his name in ruins of churches and shrines
- John outlived all the other apostles
- The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ was written by John probably close to the same time he wrote these small epistles which bear his name.
- Remember the book of the Revelation was written about the vision that John saw while banished to the Greek island of Patmos on the Aegean sea.
- Tradition says that this was after John had been sentenced to death by martyrdom.
- We know little about John's later life and death from the Bible
- The most insightful bit of information comes from John 21 when the risen Christ was talking to Peter about Peter's death - After Jesus told Peter that he would not live long Peter asked about John's death. Jesus replied that if John lived until Christ's return, that was not Peter's concern. This was not a promise that John would live until the Lord

returned, but it does seem to indicate that the Lord knew John would live a long time (John 21:19-23)

- **Tradition holds that John was sentenced to death in a boiling vat of oil, yet he emerged unharmed from the experience**
- **Again tradition tells us that John lived into old age perhaps dying sometime after AD 98... He is thought to have died in Ephesus – But in fact the mystery and unknowns concerning John’s death and what happened to him are not known and are varied...**

God Questions? How Did the Apostle John Die?

We know that the apostle John was exiled for his faith late in life (Revelation 1:9). The Bible does not give us details on how the apostle John died, but tradition gives us a few theories.

The most plausible theory of John’s death states that John was arrested in Ephesus and faced martyrdom when his enemies threw him in a huge basin of boiling oil. However, according to the tradition, John was miraculously delivered from death. The authorities then sentenced John to slave labor in the mines of Patmos. On this island in the southern part of the Aegean Sea, John had a vision of Jesus Christ and wrote the prophetic book of Revelation. The apostle John was later freed, possibly due to old age, and he returned to Ephesus, in what is now Turkey. He died as an old man sometime after AD 98, the only apostle to die peacefully.

Another theory concerning John’s death is associated with a second-century bishop named Papias of Hierapolis. According to one commentary on Papias’s writings, John was killed by a group of Jewish men. However, many historians believe Papias was misquoted or misread and doubt the credibility of this theory.

There is also a legend that says John did not die but rather ascended straight to heaven like Enoch and Elijah. There is no biblical evidence to lend validity to this story.

Ultimately, it is not essential to know how the apostle John died. What is important is the fact that he was not ashamed of Christ (see Luke 9:26) and was willing to die for his faith. A man will not die for something he knows to be a lie. John knew the truth that Jesus had been resurrected, and he was willing to die rather than to renounce his faith in his Savior.

(2) DATE = A.D. 90-95 - As with most books in the Bible, we cannot know for certain when and from where these epistles were penned. As to a date, it is commonly believed to have been written close to the end of the 1st century, with a fairly wide possible time frame... somewhere between 90-95 A.D. Again, we don’t know the exact time or order of the books having been written, but here are some possible dates for John’s writings...

Dates for John’s Biblical Writings:

- 1. The Gospel of John = AD 80 to 98**
- 2. First, Second and Third John = AD 90 to 95**
- 3. The Book of the Revelation = AD 94 to 98**

Of course we know God inspired the Bible and that it was written with His leading, but this may explain why the book of John seems so applicable to the readers of today. **Think of this... John had more time to think about what questions were raised in the 50 or more years after the resurrection of Christ. He knew what doubts had been raised and how to answer the questions before we knew to ask them.**

(3) PLACE OF WRITING = Ephesus – Again, as with most books in the Bible, we cannot know with certainty when and from where these small letters of John were written. Some guesses are better than others, but are still just that guesses. It is believed by most Biblical scholars that John wrote these letters from Ephesus, the place believed to be where he died. It is usually accepted that John wrote them late in his life. Supporters of this point to 2 John 1 and 3 John 1. In both verses, the author calls himself “the elder.” In the original text, there is a definite article before “elder.” Thus, the reference is probably to an older man rather than to one who serves as an overseer in a local church. Also, 1 John 2:1,12,28; 3:7,18; 5:21; and 3 John 4 all reference John’s readers as his “little children.” Such a fatherly concern points to John as an older man.

(4) RECIPIENTS = 3 different audiences - The Epistles of John were written to various audiences. They were all written after John was an old man living in Ephesus.

3 Recipients of John’s Letter:

1. **Letter 1 = The Ephesian church (and/or surrounding churches)** - The first epistle was not addressed to anyone in particular, but was written more as a sermon
2. **Letter 2 = Elect lady** - The second was written to an unnamed “elect lady.”
3. **Letter 3 = Gaius** - The third to a man name Gaius. There are three men who bear that name to whom the letter could have been written. There was a Gaius in Macedonia (Acts 19: 29), Corinth (Rom. 16:23), and Derbe (Acts 20:4).

(5) PURPOSE = Multiple purposes - In terms of a positive stated purpose, John actually gives us reasons why he wrote these epistles:

3 Stated Positive Purposes for These Letters:

1. **That your (our) joy may be made complete = 1 John 1:4**
2. **That you may not sin = 1 John 2:1**
3. **That you may know that you have eternal life = 1 John 5:13**

Like the gospel of John, the 3 letters of John were written to supply evidence essential for the building of credible faith.

It also seems evident that John had a purpose to write that was negative in nature.

Three Stated Negative Purposes for These Letters:

1. **He addresses false doctrines that threatened the faith of the early saints = 1 John 2:26).**
2. **There were some who even went out from among the believers = 1 John 2:19 (see also Acts 20:30)**
3. **Of particular concern during these days was the threat of Gnosticism-**
 - The word “Gnosticism” comes from gnosis, which meant “knowledge.”
 - It was “the philosophical result of the blending of the cosmology (*Cosmology deals with the world as the totality of space, time and all phenomena. Historically, it has had quite a broad scope, and in many cases was found in religion*) of Greek thought with the theology of oriental religions, esp. Judaism” (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 3, p. 648).
 - Gnostics believed they had superior knowledge, and such knowledge was limited only to their select group.
 - According to them, salvation came from knowing theories rather than faith in a Savior.
 - Such a claim obviously puts them at odds with the Lord’s apostles who were promised to be ‘guided into all truth’ (Jn. 16:13).
 - It also contradicts the promise made to those who, upon reading inspired documents, would have apostolic insight into previously hidden mysteries (Eph. 3:3-5).
 - To meet such a threat, the error of gnosticism had to be exposed. Gnostics believed that all matter was evil, and the spirit of man was good.
 - They believed the human body and the spirit within had no effective contact with each other.
 - A redeemed soul inside a sinful body was not affected by immoral behavior.
 - Thus, a person could engage in all sorts of wickedness and it would not endanger the soul.
 - This “theory” puts them in conflict with the Incarnation, or God dwelling in bodily form (cp. Phil. 2:7; Col. 2:9; Jn. 1:14).
 - In terms of everyday application of such a doctrine, usually one of two extremes were practiced: (1) man should abstain from everything that would satisfy the sinful flesh (2) since the soul could not be affected by sinful behavior, man was at liberty to do anything that would satisfy the flesh
 - Generally, gnosticism fell into 2 categories:

2 Categories of Gnosticism:

- (1) **Docetic Gnosticism** – Docetic gnostics (from dokein, ‘to seem’) did not believe that Christ came in bodily form. He only seemed to have been physical; it was “imagined.” If He did come, He was not perfect while in the flesh (cp. 1 Jn. 4:1-3).

- (2) **Cerinthian Gnosticism** - Cerinthian gnostics (named after Cerinthus, an Ephesian gnostic) attempted to make a distinction between the man Jesus and the Christ. They taught that Christ descended upon Jesus at His baptism, and ascended shortly before His crucifixion. Thus it was not Christ who suffered, died, and rose again but Jesus (cp. 1 Jn. 5:6). In order to combat these heresies, John provides proof of the reality of the Lord's fleshly body. He offered testimony using 3 of his 5 human senses (1 Jn. 1:1). Also, to refute the notion that sinful activity can be indulged in without consequences, John pointed out the following: (1) only those who are pure have an eternal hope (1 Jn. 3:3) (2) only those who do righteousness are righteous (1 Jn. 3:7) (3) those who habitually practice sin are of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8)
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APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. *Why is motivation so important in Christian growth? How can we maintain it?*
2. *Why is knowing that you're forgiven so basic to the Christian life (see 2 Pet. 1:9)? Is there a danger of abusing this truth?*
3. *How can a person who did not have a loving earthly father grow to appreciate God as his heavenly Father?*
4. *What has God used most to encourage you in your walk with Him? How can you be an encouragement to others?*

Write an encouraging note...

Take the card with the name of someone in this room. Think of the nicest and most encouraging thing you could say about the person named on your card. Write it on the card by their name. As they leave tonight they will be given their card.

Years ago, a "Dear Abby" (*Arizona Daily Sun* [1/10/99]) column ran a story by a retired schoolteacher. One day she had her students take out two sheets of paper and list the names of the other students in the room. Then she told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and write it down by their names.

She took the papers home that weekend and compiled a list for each student of what the others had said about him or her. On Monday she gave each student his or her list.

Before long, everyone was smiling. "Really?" one whispered. "I never knew that meant anything to anyone." "I didn't know anyone liked me that much!"

Years later, the teacher went to the funeral of one of her former students, who had been killed in Vietnam. Many who had been in that class years before were there. After the service, the young man's parents approached the teacher and said, "We want to show you something. Mark was carrying this when he was killed." The father pulled out of a wallet

the list of all the good things Mark's classmates had said about him. "Thank you so much for doing that," Mark's mother said. "As you can see, Mark treasured it."

A group of Mark's classmates overheard the exchange. One smiled sheepishly and said, "I still have my list. It's in my top desk drawer at home." Another said, "I have mine, too. It's in my diary." "I put mine in our wedding album," said a third. "I bet we all saved them," said a fourth. "I carry mine with me at all times." At that point, the teacher sat down and cried. And, she used that assignment in every class for the rest of her teaching career.

That story shows how much we all need encouragement...

Encouraging others can be a powerful way to uplift and motivate them. However, sometimes we fall short in providing that encouragement. Here are a few reasons why:

Some purely human reasons we may fail to encourage others:

- (1) **Self-Perception and Insecurity** - We might feel threatened by others' success or what they have or have accomplished that we haven't. We can't be happy for or encouraging to others because our own sadness over our loss or what we don't yet have that we wish for or desire.
- (2) **Projection and Nitpicking** - When we project our insecurities onto others, we fail to recognize their positive actions. By downplaying or tearing others down it somehow make us better about ourselves... at least that is what we think, but it's never so. Being critical, negative, nitpicking and tearing down it only feeds the cancer of bitterness.
- (3) **Lack of Emotional Well-Being** – Our own emotional scaring and brokenness may cause us to be inner focused and overly obsessed on our lack and brokenness and we can't see beyond our own hurt. Encouraging others not only benefits them but also contributes to our own emotional well-being. It creates social bonds, enhances our mood, and provides a sense of satisfaction².

Remember, you are more inspirational than you think! The power of "encouragement"... **Dr. Charles Swindoll** speaks to the awesome power of encouragement. He says, "Encouragement is awesome. It (can) actually change the course of another person's day, week, or life"

Scripture makes it clear that believers are to be in the business of building up others rather than tearing them down. The lines may at times get blurred by us, and we may not even be cognitively aware of how our words, facial expressions, attitudes, an actions may be either encouraging or discouraging. It can take a form a "just-kidding" dig, a curt reaction, or an outright negative comment, being overly critical, or not saying anything at all when you should have said something. And our reaction in all of this may be "don't be so sensitive," or "they need to stop wearing their feeling on their sleeve," or "can't they take a joke," or "they deserved it." But the Bible doesn't allow us to evade our call to be encouraging to others at all times and in all ways...

A few important Scripture to remember on the Christian call to encouragement:

- (1) **2 Corinthians 13:11** - *“¹¹ Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.”*
- (2) **Philippians 2:1-2** - *“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”*
- (3) **Colossians 2:2** - *“My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ.”*
- (4) **Hebrews 3:13** - *“¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”*
- (5) **1 Thessalonians 5:11** - *“¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”*

Throughout the Bible we see instructions to encourage one another and verses that are meant to encourage us. *Why do you think encouragement is emphasized in the Bible?* Primarily because encouragement is necessary to our walk of faith.

10 Things Encouragement Does: (according to Scripture)

1. **Encouragement makes it easier to live in a fallen world in a holy way -**
2. **Encouragement makes it easier to love as Jesus loved (John 13:34-35) -** ³⁴ *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*
3. **Encouragement gives hope (Romans 15:4) -** ⁴ *“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.”*
4. **Encouragement helps us through times of discipline and testing (Hebrews 12:5) -** ⁵ *“And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you.’”*
5. **Encouragement nurtures patience and kindness (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) -** ⁴ *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”*
6. **Encouragement makes it easier to sacrifice our own desires for the advancement of God’s kingdom -**
7. **Encouragement makes it easier to live the Christian life -**

8. **Encouragement from the Bible gives us the will to carry on** - It is a glimpse of the bigger picture. It can prevent burn-out.
9. **Encouragement can save us from believing lies (“sin’s deceitfulness”)** -
10. **Encouragement helps us experience abundant life (John 10:10) – “¹⁰ *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*”**

5 Things Lack of Encouragement Does:

1. **Without encouragement, hardship becomes meaningless, and our will to go on wanes** - Jesus told His followers, “*In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33b). Jesus did not shy from telling His followers about the troubles they would face. In fact, He told them the world would hate them (John 15:18-21; see also Matthew 10:22-23 and 2 Corinthians 2:15-16). But Jesus’ grim forecast was tempered with cheer; He followed His prediction of trouble with a sparkling word of encouragement: He has overcome the world. Jesus is greater than any trouble we face.
2. **Without encouragement, life would soon feel pointless and burdensome** -
3. **Without encouragement, we can be overwhelmed by the very real pains of our lives-**
4. **Without encouragement, we feel unloved** -
5. **Without encouragement, we begin to think that God is a liar or is unconcerned with our welfare** -

So, the Bible tells us to encourage one another, to remind each other of the truth that God loves us, that God equips us, that we are treasured, that our struggles are worth it.

Now, the apostle John has been dishing out some strong words as he warns the flock about the false teachers who were trying to deceive them.

- He has just said (2:11) that if you don’t love your brother, you’re in the darkness—not saved!
- He is about to say that if you love the world, you don’t have the Father’s love in you (2:15).
- But before he says that, he inserts this short section to encourage those who may have been troubled by what he had written.

John wants his readers, at whatever stage in the Christian life they are at, to consider what God has done in their lives. He wants them to know that they have authentic faith. (John inserts other similar assuring clarifications in 3:19-22 and 4:17-18.) **John Calvin** put it (*Calvin’s Commentaries* [Baker], p. 182), “*having faithfully spoken of good works, lest he should seem to give them more importance than he ought to have done, he carefully calls us back to contemplate the grace of Christ.*”

Six times John uses the perfect tense in the explanatory (“because”) clauses. It describes action completed in the past with ongoing results. John Stott (*The Epistles of John* [Eerdmans], p. 98) explains, “John is laying emphasis on the assured standing into which every Christian has come, whatever his stage of spiritual development.” To grow, we must be assured and encouraged about what God has done and is doing in our lives.

1 John 2:12-14... In many ways this is a difficult text to understand. It raises several questions:

Some Technical Questions to Consider in 1 John 2:12-14:

- (1) **Why does John use “write” in the present tense three times and then shift to the aorist three times?** - (The NIV obscures this, translating them all the same) (*The aorist tense in Ancient Greek is a type of verb form that conveys information about aspect rather than time. Unlike other past tenses (such as the imperfect and perfect), the aorist simply states that an action has happened without specifying how long it took or whether the results are still in effect¹². It describes an event as a complete action, distinct from ongoing, repeated, or habitual actions. While most usages of the aorist refer to past events, it can also be idiomatic to use it for present time, such as in commands or imperatives¹. In summary, the aorist tense is a timeless form that focuses on the action itself, regardless of when it occurred.*)
- (2) **Why does he use different terms for “children”?** - (The NIV also obscures this; I recommend that you use the NASB or the ESV as a study Bible)
- (3) **Why does he say the particular things that he says with each group? Is there a reason for each emphasis?** -
- (4) **Why does he repeat the exact words about the fathers, and almost repeat identical information about the other groups?** -
- (5) **Why does he use the sequence: children, fathers, young men, rather than a chronological one?** -

I do not promise to give definitive answers to all of those questions, although I will try to explain some of them throughout this study.

- With regard to why John changes the tense of the verb, “I am writing,” I have not found any satisfactory answers, except that it is a stylistic change that calls attention to the repetitive structure of the text.
- As to why John repeats himself, perhaps the best answer is that as a good teacher, he used repetition to drive these points home.

John’s main application and key thought in these three verses (vv.12-14) is...

Wherever you are in your Christian walk right now, God wants you to be encouraged by His grace so that you will grow and flourish in our faith walk to full maturity.

John gives us two truths in **1 John 2:12-14** to carry along this key thought.

4 Truths to Consider in 1 John 2:12-14:

- (1) There are stages of growth in the Christian life... don't be content with where you are, but seek to grow
- (2) God wants us to be encouraged by His grace so that we will be motivated to grow
- (3) The goal of the Christian life is to be spiritual fathers, who know Him who has been from the beginning
- (4) The means of attaining the goal is to be strong young men who overcome the evil one through God's Word

Let's examine these truths...

THERE ARE STAGES OF GROWTH IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: DON'T BE CONTENT WITH WHERE YOU ARE, BUT SEEK TO GROW

"¹² I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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." -1 John 2:12-14 (NKJV)

Commentators divide over whether John is talking about two or three groups here.

Division over the groups names in 1 John 2:12-14:

View 1 = 2 Groups View - Those who advocate two groups point out that John uses the Greek word translated "little children" six other times in this epistle to address the entire church (2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21). The other word, translated "children" (2:13; 2:14 in Greek text) occurs again in 1 John only in 2:18, where it addresses the entire church. So they argue that John addresses the entire church under the terms, "little children" and "children," and then divides them up into "fathers" and "young men." This view also helps to explain why John does not follow a chronological order from youngest to oldest.

View 2 = 3 Groups View - Others, however, argue that John is addressing three groups in terms of spiritual maturity (not chronological age). The odd order may be explained as his taking both ends of the spectrum first, and then showing the means of getting from the one end to the other. I am comfortable with this three-fold breakdown, as long as we keep in mind that what John writes to the little children also applies to every stage of the Christian life. Even mature believers need to remember that our sins have been forgiven and that we know God as our Father. Also, the little children in the faith and the young men need to see clearly the goal of becoming spiritual fathers, who "know Him who has been from the beginning." And the children need to be prepared for the battles against the enemy that they must win in order to grow to maturity.

But the point is clear, both here and in other Scriptures, that we should never be complacent with where we're at in our Christian walk, but should daily strive to know Christ better in order to grow to maturity. Physical growth is normal for children, and it's always abnormal when children do not grow and mature. Even spiritual adults should always press on toward the goal of knowing Jesus Christ better and growing in godliness (Phil. 3:7-16; Heb. 5:11-6:3; Hos. 6:3). If you become spiritually complacent, you will not remain neutral; you will go backwards.

I'm convinced that God's grace as shown to us on the cross is the greatest motivator to keep growing.

GOD WANTS US TO BE ENCOURAGED BY HIS GRACE SO THAT WE WILL BE MOTIVATED TO GROW

***"¹² I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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."** -1 John 2:12-14 (NKJV)*

Frankly, often it is more difficult for those of us from Christian homes to appreciate God's grace as the motivator to grow.

- Those who have been saved from a difficult past know where they would be if God had not intervened in their lives.
- They are more likely to see that they have been forgiven much, and thus to love Christ much (Luke 7:36-50).
- Whereas, those of us who grew up in the church are prone to think pharisaically that we didn't need as much forgiveness as the person with a sordid past.
- We need to see how wretchedly sinful our hearts really are.
- If God had let me go, I'd be enslaved to a multitude of terrible sins.

With the hymn writer, we need to sing often, **"O to grace, how great a debtor, daily I'm constrained to be; let Thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee"** (Robert Robinson, "Come Thou Fount"). God's grace encourages me to grow in my walk with Him. John presents three stages of growth:

3 Stages of Growth in the Christian Life:

- (1) **The foundation of the Christian life is to know that your sins are forgiven and to know the Father** - Here we're focusing on John's twofold address to the **"little children"**

(2:12) and the **“children”** (2:13). If there is a nuance of difference between the two terms, **“little children”** (from a Greek word meaning, to beget or bring forth) points to the relationship by birth between a child and his parents. **“Children”** (from a Greek word emphasizing training) points to children under discipline or training. By using both terms, John shows his *authority* as an apostle and his *affection* as a spiritual father to his family.

(2) **As God’s little children, we need to be encouraged by the truth that our sins are forgiven for His name’s sake** - **“I’m writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake”** (2:12). Don’t ever allow yourself to read a verse like that and think, “Ho hum!” **The forgiveness of all of your sins for His name’s sake is the greatest blessing in the whole world!** Never get over the amazing truth that although you were a rebel who deserved God’s wrath, He graciously sent His Son to bear the penalty in your place!

As David exclaims in **Psalm 32:1-2**, **“How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,”**

After rehearsing the sins of Israel in the wilderness, **Nehemiah 9:17** proclaims, **“But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.”**

Jesus’ last words to the disciples before He ascended into heaven were these in **Luke 24:47**, **“that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”**

John Bunyan has a wonderful book, **“The Jerusalem Sinner Saved,”** where he expounds on the fact that the good news of forgiveness of sins be proclaimed *first* in the very city that crucified the Savior.

When John tells the little children in the faith that their sins are forgiven **“for His name’s sake,”** he means that their sins are forgiven on account of the person and work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

- Our sins are not forgiven because of anything that we do.
- We cannot do penance to work off our debt of sin, because Jesus paid the debt in full.
- We cannot add good works to atone for our sins, because Jesus atoned for them fully through His blood.
- Maybe you’re thinking, “But you don’t know all the terrible things that I have done. Doesn’t a really bad sinner have to do something to qualify for God’s forgiveness?”
- Learn from the apostle Paul, who calls himself the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). In **Ephesians 1:7-8**, he writes, **“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.”**

- Forgiveness of sins is *for His name's sake*, not for anything you have done or can do.
- All you can do is receive it by faith.

Notice, too, that forgiveness of sins is something that the youngest child of God can and should experience. It is foundational to your Christian walk that you know that your sins are forgiven, not because of anything in you, but solely because of what Jesus did for you on the cross. The enemy will repeatedly come to accuse and condemn you for your sins. Answer him every time, not with your performance, but with the name and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(3) As God's children, we need to be encouraged by the fact that we have come to know the Father - *"I have written to you, children, because you know the Father"* (1 John 2:13). As with the forgiveness of sins, so knowing God as your Father is foundational to your Christian walk.

In his classic book, *Knowing God* ([IVP], p. 182), J. I. Packer wrote, *"You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all."*

We've had little ones in our home this week. They are doing great. The love to have what they call "sleep overs" at their Gigi and Dad-dads house, but when something happens and they get upset... especially Liam will cry and say, "I want my daddy!"

Little children love their daddy. They trust him to provide for all of their needs and to protect them from harm and danger. From an early age, they imitate their daddy. When they get older and go to school, they promote his glory by telling other kids what their daddy can do. If they are properly trained, they also learn to submit to their daddy's authority. From the earliest stage of our Christian life, we should know God as our Father. He loves us and cares for us far more than any earthly father ever could. As John will go on to say (3:1), *"See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are."* Knowing that God has forgiven all your sins and that He is your Father are foundational to your Christian life. Never forget these precious truths!

THE GOAL OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS TO BE SPIRITUAL FATHERS, WHO KNOW HIM WHO HAS BEEN FROM THE BEGINNING

“¹² I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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.” -1 John 2:12-14 (NKJV)

John jumps from the beginning to the end, before going back to the means of getting from one to the other. Both times, for emphasis, he repeats exactly the same thing, that the fathers *“know Him who has been from the beginning.”* The verb, *know*, is in the perfect tense, meaning, you have come to know Him and still know Him. The Greek verb means to know by experience.

But, why does John refer to God as “Him who has been from the beginning”? Why is *this* a distinctive of those who are spiritually mature? I suggest three reasons

3 Reasons John calls God “Him who has been from the beginning”:

- (1) **The phrase focuses on the eternality of God, and spiritual maturity involves developing an eternal perspective on life** - This phrase prepares us for the next section, where 1 John 2:17 says, *“For the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives [lit., abides] forever.”* The older you get, the more you realize how short and uncertain this life really is. As you grow older, you see more clearly that all of the things that people strive to attain—riches, recognition, pleasure, adventure, or whatever—fade away in the face of death and eternity. The earlier in your Christian life that you can learn that the Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal One, who was with the Father in the beginning, and that you will quickly step out of time and into eternity, the more you will grow spiritually. That eternal perspective will help you not to get enamored by the world and the things in the world.
- (2) **The phrase points us to God’s eternal purpose in Christ, and to the wonderful fact that it included us by His sovereign choice** - Paul wrote (Eph. 1:8b-12), *“In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.”* Babies in Christ often stumble over the doctrine of God’s sovereign election, but spiritual fathers submit to it and, as Jesus did, they rejoice in it (see Luke 10:21-22). We rejoice in it because it means that salvation is not a matter of our feeble human will, but rather of God’s mighty will and purpose. All praise goes to Him for the wonder that *“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world”* (Eph. 1:4)!

(3) **The phrase points us to Jesus Christ as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end, of our Christian experience** - (See Rev. 1:8, 17.) All of God's riches are ours in Christ. We will spend all eternity plumbing the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ, which surpasses all knowledge (Eph. 3:18-19). And so the goal of the Christian life is to grow into spiritual fathers, who "know Him who has been from the beginning." Of course, that process never is complete, and so we should always be pressing on to know Him better. But, how do we grow from spiritual children to be fathers in the faith?

THE MEANS OF ATTAINING THE GOAL IS TO BE STRONG YOUNG MEN WHO OVERCOME THE EVIL ONE THROUGH GOD'S WORD

"¹² I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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." -1 John 2:12-14 (NKJV)

John writes to the young men, *"because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one"* (2:14). These words show us that the Christian life is not a perpetual Sunday School picnic! It is an intense battle with the enemy of our souls, who seeks to devour us (1 Pet. 5:8).

While we can and should experience victories over the temptations that the enemy puts in our path, there is another sense in which such victories are never complete or final. He doesn't give up! So we must understand the victories of these spiritually strong young men in a relative sense. Also, even when we win such victories, we are never strong in ourselves, but only in the Lord, and in the strength of His might (Eph. 6:10). Often the weapons that the enemy brings against us are not frontal, but rather deceptive. As Paul wrote (2 Cor. 11:3), "But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." So we must always be alert to his schemes (2 Cor. 2:11).

It is only when you allow the Word of God to abide in you that you will overcome the enemy's schemes. The Lord Jesus overcame the tempter every time by citing Scripture (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). The only way that you will grow strong spiritually and overcome the evil one is to let the Word of God dwell in your heart by meditating on it day and night (Ps. 1:2) and treasuring it in your heart (Ps. 119:9, 11).

CONCLUSION

Most of us probably can remember our defeats much more easily than we can remember our victories. God doesn't want your defeats to sabotage your Christian walk. His grace means that your sins are forgiven and that you are now His child. Knowing that should not lead you to sin more, but rather to be encouraged to grow more.

The German poet, **Goethe**, said, **"Correction does much, but encouragement does more."** The Bible has both, of course, in proportion to what we need.

Here, John wants to encourage us, no matter where we're at in our level of maturity.

3 Simple Truths to Remember:

- (1) To be effective, encouragement must be true, not mere flattery -**
- (2) The truest thing about you is what God says in His Word, and that is encouraging not discouraging -** If you have trusted in Jesus Christ, God says that your sins are forgiven for His name's sake. He says that you have come to know Him as Father.
- (3) God wants you to be encouraged to grow strong through His Word, so that you will overcome the evil one -** As you do, you will grow into a mature believer, who knows Him who is from the beginning.

That's why John wrote these encouraging words.