

Love of the World  
1<sup>st</sup> John 2:12

Song: Faith is the Victory  
Responsive: Proverbs 4:20-27  
Ephesians 5:1-14  
Psalms 119: 9-16

So last week we finished up with verses 12-14 where John is addressing the 3 stages of the Christian life. I was reading some more this week and read an interesting take on this which made a lot of sense to me. So in true fashion of what seems to be happening more often, I want to go back and revisit these verses again looking at them from a different perspective. Instead of looking at these verses as stages within the physical life of the believer I think it actually makes more sense to understand it to be talking about the spiritual maturity of the individual.

The argument for taking these 3 verse's figuratively and not literally hinges on the fact that if it was to be taken literal then why does I not include those who are in the final stages of life. John lists little children, young men, and fathers but no mention of any past that. Another point made in the argument toward understanding it figuratively is that it looks to be written in a form of Hebrew Parallelism, repeating to show forth emphasis. Being a type of poetry, opens up the possibility for a figurative understanding and not just a literal understanding. So instead of seeing this as 3 age groups of Christians being addressed here as I was my initial thought last week, I think that it does make a lot more sense to understand it figuratively and that what John here really is referring to is 3 differing levels of maturity within the Christians walk.

So, if we look at it with that understanding how does that change this passage? What more can we take from this other than what it first appears at face value with a literal interpretation. Well first off, John says I write to you little children because your sins are forgiven, and in Hebrew parallelism poetry he repeats again in verse 13 and says I write to you little children because you have known the Father.

Leading up to these verses has been one of John's major points...if you know the Father, then you walk in the light, you have fellowship with the Father and with the Son who is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from unrighteousness. So if we look at this with a figurative meaning, when John is referring to little children here, instead of referring to children who believe, he is would rather be talking about new converts.

John is not the only Author to use this type of terminology, Paul uses the terms Babes in Christ in his writing when referring to these little children, to these new converts. If we go to 1 Corinthians, 3 we see Paul talking to the Corinthian church and he calls them babes in Christ. Starting verse 1.. And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to to receive it, and even now you are still not able.

What we see here with Paul is one of the issues that we see with a new convert. Some one who has not matured spiritually, who does yet grasp full understanding and knowledge and is still learning the basic things of scripture. He says he speaks to them as if they are carnal, as if they were unbelievers. because they are not able to receive the meat of scripture but must start out with the basics.

Paul when he wrote to the churches in Galatia, he called them his little children, and said that he labored as if giving birth to them again, bringing them back to the truth of the gospel of Christ, and away from the false teaching that they had fallen under. This was hard work, and painful work to see them falling away and he likens it to giving birth having to bring them back to the truth, back to the basics, back to a fuller understanding of Christ.

These new converts can appear more carnal than spiritual in their walk, which can be a point of frustration to those who are teaching them. The analogy of babes, and little children is so true, for we all know with little kids it seems that we as parents are constantly instructing, constantly rebuking, and constantly repeating the same things over and over again. Any parent knows how frustrating this can become and we just wish that they would grow up faster!

That is the frustration I think Paul is feeling in his writing to the Galatian Churches, Just like dealing with small children sometimes out of frustration we throw up our arms and say, I have not already told you this, you should know this by now why do I have to keep repeating myself! Did you not listen the first time? Actually we don't just have this problem trying to instruct small children, but teenagers, too!

So here in 1<sup>st</sup> John, he writes to the little children to remind them that their sins are forgiven. As Paul said, I write as to those who are carnal because like a child you keep forgetting, you keep not learning these basic things. These who are new in the faith, they stumble, fall, and struggle breaking free from the sins of the flesh that has held them captive for so long. but John here reminding them, you do not need to keep doing this because God has forgiven you. It is a return to the basic, to the milk of the word. This is a great encouragement to the new believer who may get frustrated with their constant struggle.

The implications of this is that forgiveness is the beginning, it is not based on our maturity, or our ability to avoid sin, in fact John says we will never reach a state of sinlessness within this life, and if you think you have then you have made God a liar. He says that forgiveness is found in Christ and our willingness to seek forgiveness. As he said in chapter 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Be encouraged little children, for you know the father, who is faithful to forgive. Be encouraged because you are not alone, but you are in fellowship with God and the saints who are there to help you grow, and learn along this journey.

Next we see John writing to Young men. He says, “I write to you young men, because you have overcome the wicked one, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you. Once again taking this figuratively it would be referring to someone who has been walking with Christ for a time. Their faith has been tested and proved to be true. We see this in Chapter 4, verse 4 of this book. John says You are of God little children, and have overcome them because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. Also over in chapter 5, v 4 he says, For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world- our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. As in the song we sang this morning, Faith is our victory, Faith is the victory that overcomes the world

These adolescent Christians understand that it is the word of God that gives them strength. They have matured from being little babes, and have grown to understand more of scripture and they have learned that scripture itself, helps and gives strength when faced with the same trials, temptations and sins that they may struggle with. But instead of giving into them, as they might have as little babes,

they have strength from the knowledge of scripture to be able to withstand falling into sin as they once did.

As we read in Psalms this morning, David fully understood that strength to overcome sin is found by meditating on, and being in the word of God. David said, With my Whole heart I have sought you, Oh let me not wander from your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

What John writes to these so called young men, he reminds them where they have come from and where they were. Their faith has been tested, and it has been proven, they are strong, and they have overcome the devil. Do not be discouraged, and frustrated, look where the Lord has brought you! Continue in faith, continue relying on God, and his word, for he is your strength, and your salvation.

Lastly we see here Fathers. John says he writes to them Because they have known Christ who is from the beginning. If we continue with the figurative understanding of these verse's Fathers would be those who have reached spiritual maturity. Note that This does not necessarily come with physical age,

For there are those who may be older who are new converts, and reversely there may be those who are younger who have been in Christ quite a while. Using the term Fathers denotes that the individual has experience, and that they have passed through the previous stages that John mentions here. This would be a person who has grown in faith and would probably be a leader, or a teacher, or at the very least someone that others in the church look up to, or go to for advice much like our own fathers who are there to teach, guide, and watch out for the little children.

One of the big things we can take from these verses is the fact that there is growth. A child, becomes a young adult, then will become an adult. Just as in life there is an ever present move forward in maturity, it should be the same in the spiritual life. While physical growth happens naturally without any real effort, spiritual growth goes require effort. Prayer, bible reading, sound teaching and doctrine and a strong fellowship with other Christians are all necessary for spiritual growth.

Christians should not maintain the same level, but should seek to grow, they should be eagerly seeking to mature in their faith, and understanding of the word. Paul likens the Christian life to a race, He says that we must strive for the mark, push onward to the finish line. In what we read earlier in Corinthians, Paul is criticizing them for still being children, for still needing the milk, the basic things of scripture, they are not striving, or pressing for the mark, or running the race as they should. In this faith, there is no room for complacency, or ignorance. If there is not this maturing, this growing in faith, and knowledge, if we become complacent, and happy to stay as children, or even never move past spiritual adolescence then there is a problem.

Whether that problem is our own pride and arrogance by being unteachable, or if we have surrounded ourselves with teachers who do not challenge us, with teachers who as scripture says, tickle our ears telling us what we want to hear, or if we just plain choose to live in ignorance and do not want to be bothered with all that doctrine stuff and would rather just have experiences instead of true growth then at the very least these should all be warning signs to us, for all of scripture instructs us to grow, to learn, and to mature.

Now Moving on to verse 15 here, John continues again writing another warning, and another test to his reader. In chapter 1 he said that we should walk in the light, and be in fellowship with God, and with each other confessing our sins and seeking forgiveness. In Chapter 2, he says that if we do

not love our fellow Christians brothers and sisters then we are walking in darkness and the truth is not in us. And here, verse 15 he says that if we love the world, then the Father is not in us.

He says, 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 it is of the world. Each of these 3 categories covers a lot of different things. The Lust of the Flesh I think could be referring unchecked desires of the flesh. Paul gives us a list in Galatians of the lusts, or works of the flesh. Galatians 5:19-21 says. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, but it isn't just sexual lusting and desire but it can also be our social life, seeking contentions, being full of jealousy or hatred.

The second category listed here is the lust of the eyes. This is an unchecked desire for anything what we can not have. Being covetous, or materialistic. Having our focus on things, on stuff and making our focus and goal to gain worldly treasures.

And lastly we see the pride of life. This would be having pride in yourself, in your experience or knowledge because of age, or status, or past experiences. One of the interesting things to note with this list of categories is that they are each trials, and temptations that Christians may struggle with in the different stages of their life, both physically, and spiritually.

The young, new believers may struggle with the lust of the flesh and leaving the old life. The middle aged believer, someone who has been in Christ for awhile, who has matured and has been able to cast of the lusts of the flesh, by strength given to them through the holy spirit working in them, they may in danger of falling into the lust of the eyes..of desiring more, being envious or covetous of others. And lastly, the aged believer may struggle more with the pride of life. Taking pride in the experience, what they have gone through, or knowledge or the status they have. Thinking themselves just a little holier, or just a little better than those around them, instead of humbly giving all glory to God for his constant guidance, and deliverance throughout their life.

We as humans like to categorize, prioritize, and makes lists of lesser to greater. And I think There is a tendency to look at and focus upon the lust of the flesh, and categorize that as the worst of these 3. But John here puts them all under the word world, and if anyone loves the world they are not of the father, but are of the world. While we may want to list these out, and categorize them from from lesser to greater, God does not. Sin, is sin and it is what separates us from God. AS we mature, both physically, and spiritually the sin that we struggle with my change, but that does not negate the fact that it is still sin, and it is still rebellion against our Father.

Verse 15 and 16 have large implications on our life, and sets forth another test here. Do we love the world, so we love the things of the world, are we wrapped up in immorality, selfish ambitions, and pride? John says that if we are, then the love of the father is not in us.

In closing here, John tells us in verse 17 that all of these things of the world are fleeting, they are passing away but he who does the will of God will abide forever. This should actually be encouraging to us, for we all struggle with sin, every one of us, from the young, to the old but one day this world will fade, or we will fade from it and we will one day abide with God, in heaven forever. What encouraging words, what a wonderful thing to meditate upon when it seems that the temptations and trials we face have us beaten. One day, the race will be over, one day we will receive the prize and all of this world will pass away, and we will hear from our Father, Well done, my good and faithful servant.