



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Written Reminders (1 John 2:12-17)

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Weekly Bible Study Schedule

- **Tuesday, March 12, 7 AM in HHR #5**
-Breakfast Provided
- **Tuesday, March 12, 8:30 PM in Office #301**
(Speaker Pro-Tem's office)

INTRODUCTION

From the website of the Missouri Secretary of State, concerning the origin of the Missouri state nickname “The Show-Me State”:

The most widely known legend attributes the phrase to Missouri's U.S. Congressman Willard Duncan Vandiver, who served in the United States House of Representatives from 1897 to 1903. While a member of the U.S. House Committee on Naval Affairs, Vandiver attended an 1899 naval banquet in Philadelphia. In a speech there, he declared, "I come from a state that raises corn and cotton and cockleburs and Democrats, and frothy eloquence neither convinces nor satisfies me. I am from Missouri. You have got to show me."

The opening segments of this first letter from the Apostle John reveal that possibly the Apostle hailed from Missouri. He severely took to task the false teachers and those with false claims of being right with God. Words did not mean much to John, and like Congressman Vandiver, he wanted to see the proof: following God's commands and showing *agape* love to one's brother.

Sprinkled throughout these opening passages, though, are words of assurance and encouragement. The passage to be discussed in this study is one of those sections. After posing two tests to those who falsely claim to “know Him” and to “walk in the light”, John gave an assurance to those of his readers who truly do know God and walk in the light. He stated later in this letter that a purpose of his writing them was so they would know (be assured) they have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

It could be quite easy, especially for new believers, to doubt and question their faith and standing with God after John's stinging rebukes and his “Show-Me” proof of claims. As one starts a new life of “walking in the light” and “abiding in Him” (in other words, a new life of being forgiven and

having a right relationship with God), he or she will struggle in areas of obedience and love. When this new believer gives in to temptation or fights against their own pride and ego, Satan and one's own heart will seek to discourage and sow seeds of doubt. And John's words in this letter could also add to the uncertainty.

But John desired to reassure his readers by reminding them of their standing and what has taken place in their lives. He also gave them a reminder of where their love and allegiances should lie.

1 John 2:12-17 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. ¹⁴I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been 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 evil one. ¹⁵Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

JOHN'S ASSURANCE OF THEIR POSITION

The three groups of believers John addressed in this passage are not clearly identified—scholars have a number of views. One is that John is addressing three different age groups. Another view is that these are three different levels of spiritual maturity. Still another is that all believers are addressed as “children” while the other two designations refer to physical ages.

While each position has its supporting facts, each also has some issues. It seems best to view John's group as believers in different stages of their spiritual maturity. And even as we adopt these groupings, “we must remember that in a quite different and secondary sense *each Christian life* also has analogies with youth, young manhood, and age so that what is said may

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS @ 8:30PM, OFFICE #301

TRUMAN BUILDING: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, 4TH FLOOR CAFETERIA

PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

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also be applied to most Christians generally” (italics mine).¹ And these *applications* are all *applicable* to today’s believers, as well.

Children

The qualities listed by John of the “dear children” are those shared by all believers. But even for those young in their faith, these qualities are dear. They are a reminder of their righteous position before God. First of all, they stand before God with their sins forgiven (2:12). Not because of anything they have done to earn God’s forgiveness for they could do nothing. Rather, it is because of the great work of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace...* (Ephesians 1:7 cf. Colossians 1:14; 2:13-14).

**“PRIDE, PRESTIGE, POWER AND POSITION
COUNT FOR NOTHING IN THE KINGDOM OF
GOD.”** **--DANNY AKIN**

Yes, there is room for those young in the faith to grow in spiritual maturity, but from the very beginning, their sins are forgiven. They are righteous, because of Christ, before God. Thus, secondly, they also know the Father; one of John’s various phrases that he used to describe those in right standing with God. John wants them not to doubt their salvation, but with assurance, to continue to grow and progress in spiritual maturity.

Fathers

The two statements written to “fathers” are identical. John, who advanced in age by the time of this writing, was writing as one who is mature in age and faith to others (men and women) who are mature. These men and women “know” God. The Greek word translated “know” is *ginoska*, meaning “to know by taking in knowledge, to come to know.”² They do not merely understand doctrine or facts about God, though these are necessary. They have also come to know God through life’s experiences, much meditation and time spent in study and prayer.

They know not only that God is faithful, but they have seen His faithfulness in their own lives and the lives of others. They have read that God is good all throughout Scripture, but they have also been recipients of God’s goodness; even if they cannot see it at the time. They continue to grow in

the grace and knowledge of God and this enhances their faith, trust, worship and love for Him.

Young Men

John gave three reminders to the “young men” of the faith. They are strong, they have the word of God abiding in them and they have overcome the evil one.

These young men (this is a reference to women, as well) in the faith are those believers who have been walking in the light for a time. They are beyond the initial stages of being “born again”. They have a growing understanding of biblical truth. Their worldview is based upon the Scriptures and they have a love for God’s truth. They sing with the songwriter:

Psalm 119:16 I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word.

Psalm 119:92-94 If Your law had not been my delight, Then I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget Your precepts, For by them You have revived me. I am Yours, save me; For I have sought Your precepts.

Psalm 119:103-105 How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Because the word of God abides in the growing believer, the evil one is overcome. This is repeated in John’s word to the young men of the faith. They have victory over the evil one, who is Satan, the accuser (Job 1& 2; Revelation 12:9-10). The evil one has no power over the believer, no threats of any substance, no fear to hold over his or her head. As the believers grow in knowledge and understanding of Scripture, and in their obedience of it, the stronger they become and better equipped to see and stand firm against the deceptions and schemes of Satan. They stand as a guard protected with the truth able to refute error and lies.

While John addressed each of these groups individually assuring them with truth concerning their walk with God, each group share the traits of forgiveness and knowing God. But the goal and aspiration of every child of God is to grow from that simple knowledge of God to having an intimate,

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close relationship with the One who has redeemed us. In doing so, the evil one is defeated and a joyful relationship with the Holy One grows more each day.

JOHN'S ADMONISHMENT NOT TO LOVE

Since John's readers are in right standing with God, albeit on various maturity levels, he gives all a dire warning: love not the things of the world.

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world nor 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 and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

The Greek word translated "world" is *kosmos*. *Kosmos* can be understood in a number of ways. It can be understood as the physical earth and universe. It can also be thought of as the people of the earth. For example, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..." (John 3:16). It was the people of creation which motivated God's love to send Jesus to them.

The definition that fits best in John's context is that *kosmos* refers to the system, philosophies, and worldviews of mankind. James Boice writes that this is "the world of men in rebellion against God and therefore characterized by all that is in opposition to God. This is what one might call the 'world system'".³ It is this system which the Apostle wrote that does not know God (3:1), "lies in the power of the evil one" (5:19; cf. John 12:31; Ephesians 2:2), and rejected His Son, Jesus, while He was here on earth (John 1:10). Since, this "world" does not know God and has rejected His Son, it also hates those who follow after His Son (John 15:18-21; 17:14; 1 John 3:1). It is this "world" and its things (attitudes, philosophies, religions, actions, ethics, beliefs) that John called the people of God not to love.

There are three reasons given by John: who the believers are, what the world does and where the world is going.⁴

WHO BELIEVERS ARE

The first reason deals with the incompatibility of loving both God and the world. As stated earlier, the world's system is at enmity with God—it does

not know God, it hates God, it is in rebellion against God and it has rejected Him, His Son and His people. Therefore, any love for this world and the things of the world shows that a person does not have a love for God, the Father.

The allure of the pleasures of the world will be an enticement to those who have been redeemed. God's people still live in their fleshly bodies and thus, will still feel the draw to the things of the world. And there will be the occasional fall to these temptations.

But God's people have been called to turn their back on the things of this world. If one truly loves God, he or she will hate those things, ideas and philosophies that are set up against Him (2 Corinthians 10:1-6). They will not, for they know that they cannot, serve two masters (Luke 16:13).

WHAT THE WORLD DOES

The second reason is found in the things the world does. This system which is at enmity with God takes much of what He has created and twists and debases for its own purposes. Danny Akin aptly writes, "The problem is not that God created the material things of the world. The problem is that people have made these things into idols. The three things listed in this verse...should not be seen as a comprehensive list of vices. These are avenues by which sinful humanity is especially prone to pervert the goodness of God's creation."⁵

John started this list of the things that world does (2:16) with "the lust of the flesh". God created humans with natural, good desires. But when sin entered His creation, these desires became perverted and distorted. While this phrase brings to mind sexual perversions (adultery, fornication, homosexuality, etc.), it applicable to anything that perverts normal desires (gluttony, drunkenness, gossip, unholy anger, hatred) and sets itself up opposed to God's law.

Galatians 5:19-21a Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these...

The second thing the world does deals with the "lust of the eyes"; that is, the coveting of what is seen. People see what others have and then become

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dissatisfied with what God has provided them—a problem of the poor and the rich. Eve saw the forbidden fruit was “a delight to the eyes” and she ate (Genesis 3:6). Achan saw the gold and silver in Jericho, which was not to be taken, and he “coveted them and took them” (Joshua 7:21). David saw Bathsheba, Uriah’s wife, taking a bath and saw that she was very beautiful. He then sent for her and committed adultery with her (2 Samuel 11:1-5). It is no small purpose that within the Ten Commandments is listed: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exodus 20:17).

The last of John’s short list is “the boastful pride of life”. In one sense, pride is the source of the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. But here, the Apostle is discussing that arrogance which seeks to put oneself above others. It is an exaltation of self which denies any type of dependence on God. It is what drives the attempt to be greater than our neighbors in our possessions, status, prominence or any other symbol the world determines as important.

These things are not from God and matter little to Him; while people make much of them and hold them as quite precious. “Pride, prestige, power and position count for nothing in the kingdom of God.”⁶

WHERE THE WORLD IS GOING

The third reason John gave for not loving the world is the simple reminder that the world is not here forever. The things of the world that tempt and are quite attractive are temporary and fleeting. Even if the world would last forever, these things one pursues or oneself can disappear in a moment’s notice. In other words, why should one chase after and heavily invest in that which will be gone?

Colossians 3:1-2 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the

right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

The Apostle Paul mentioned a foolish man in the last of his letters. He tells Timothy about “Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica... (2 Timothy 4:10). Demas was one of Paul’s helpful companions on his missionary team (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24). We do not know what drew him away or if he ever came back. But what a foolish choice—a “striving after the wind” as Solomon wrote (Ecclesiastes 1:14, 18; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9).

With all these reminders, John gave one more: that “the one who does the will of God lives forever” (2:17b). Instead of pursuing the lusts of the flesh, eyes and pride of life which will all pass away, John instructed his “dear children” to pursue the will of God—for that person will live forever.

And what is the will of God? John has already discussed that: obey His commands (1 John 2:3-6) and love others (1 John 2:7-11). For one who truly knows Him and walks in the light, these traits will confirm one’s claim.

CONCLUSION

In this section of his letter, John wrote to assure his readers of their right standing with God. It was not a denunciation of those who have wrong views of God and false claims concerning their relationship with Him. He wrote as a spiritual father comforting his children.

But he also wrote a word of warning. For God desires that people follow His will and not the temporary things of this world. His will brings eternal satisfaction instead of a fleeting pleasure.

Through Christ, God can truly forgive all your sins--are you interested?

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1979), 59.

² John F. MacArthur, *1-3 John* The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2007), 75.

³ Boice, 63.

⁴ I have borrowed the main points of this section from John F. MacArthur, *1-3 John* The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2007), 83-92.

⁵ Daniel Akin, *1, 2, 3 John* The New American Commentary Vol. 38 (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Publishing Group, 2001), 109.

⁶ Akin, 111.