

Bible Study for January 29, 2020

There are two distinct strands in the book of 1 John. They are what John Piper has called the “strand of confidence” and the “strand of vigilance.” The strand of confidence is seen in passages like 2:21, “*I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it.*” The strand of vigilance is seen in passages like 2:1, “*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.*” The apostle John seems to write with two purposes in mind, to encourage the true believer of his assurance of eternal life and to warn against the deceitfulness of sin. Both of these purposes are in this text. The first purpose or strand is seen in vv. 12-14, where John encourages his readers with assurance of the forgiveness of sins, knowledge of God and victory over Satan. The second purpose or strand is seen in vv. 15-17, where John warns his readers of the danger of loving the world.

How do these two strands relate to one another both in this text and throughout the book of 1 John? I believe what John Piper has said about this relationship: “I think John means for the strand of confidence to motivate the strand of vigilance. He wants to motivate the fight with the confidence of victory.” In this week’s text, the encouragement of vv. 12-14 is the motivation for heeding the warning of vv. 15-17. In other words, our refusal to love the world is grounded upon our victorious relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Strand of Confidence vv. 12-14

In these three verses John reminds his readers that they are a part of God’s family. They have been forgiven, known God and overcome the wicked one. Three groups (little children, fathers and young men) are addressed in these verses. John repeats his message in order to emphasize the certainty of their belonging in God’s family. In the first set of three John uses the phrase “*I am writing to you,*” while in the second set he uses “*I write to you.*” The reason seems to be that in the first set John is writing from his perspective while writing, but in the second he is writing from the perspective of his readers after receiving the letter.

The term “*little children*” is a term of intimacy used throughout 1 John to refer to all believers. Understanding this will enable us to see that what John says about each of the three groups (little children, fathers and young men) could be said equally as truly about all believers. However, there does seem to be a progression of maturity indicated by the use of these specific terms. The difference doesn’t relate to physical age as much as to spiritual maturity. “*Little children*” represent the newborn in Christ. “*Fathers*” represent those possessing the depth and stability of ripe Christian experience. “*Young men*” represent the strong and victorious in spiritual warfare. Since the repetition of these three groups is a method of emphasis, we’ll examine the corresponding pairs together.

Little Children vv. 12, 13c

These are the young believers who have begun by knowing their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake (v. 12). The text says their “sins are forgiven ... for his name’s sake.” In Scripture, the term *name* is often used to refer to the character of the person who bears the name. John is saying, these *little children*’s sins are forgiven based solely on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are forgiven based on His merit, not because of anything which they might or might not do. This is an important reminder for all of us, especially new believers. The time comes when the new believer sins and must be reminded that they are accepted not by their goodness but by the perfect righteousness of Christ. They also have come to appreciate their position as children of God by coming to know the Father (v. 13c). They don’t just know Him as God, but as a Father who loves and cares for them.

Fathers vv. 13a, 14a

John now turns his attention to the spiritually mature (*fathers*). Since Paul’s ministry in Asia had begun over forty years before John’s letter was written, it is certain that there were many in the congregation to which John wrote who had reached spiritual maturity. The same thing is said about the *fathers* in both vv. 13 and 14, they “have known him who is from the beginning.” Notice the depth of their knowledge. They not only knew about Him, but they knew Him in an intimate way. There is also depth reflected in the phrase “that is from the beginning.” The *children* know God as the Father, but the *fathers* know God as the eternal, immutable God who does not change with advancing years, but who is forever the same. Time hurries on, but in all generations they find a refuge in Him who from everlasting to everlasting is God. They are already consciously living in eternity (Stott, 102). What a comfort it must have been to those who were advancing in age to know the eternal unchanging God with whom they will spend eternity!

Young Men vv. 13b, 14b

In between the children and the fathers are the *young men*. These are believers which are strong and victorious in the battle against the wicked one. In the *little children* we see that forgiveness of sins and knowing God as our Father are a part of the Christian life. In the *fathers* we see that intimacy with the eternal God is characteristic of the mature Christian. But in the *young men* we see that the Christian life also involves fighting the enemy. Not only does the Christian life involve fighting the enemy, it involves defeating the enemy! They had

Weekly Bible Study
meets on Wednesday at
two times (11:30-12 and
12-12:30). Both in
Capitol Annex 436 or, if
occupied, the 4th floor
lounge (404).

“overcome the evil one.” The second statement in v. 14 is the same as the statement in v. 13, but it adds two explanatory clauses. The reason these *young men* overcame the wicked one was their strength and the reason they were strong was because the word of God abided in them. What a great word that is to all of us who are in the battle of the Christian life. The source of strength that will enable you to be victorious is found in the Word of God.

What is said in these three verses about each of these different groups of Christians can be said equally true of all genuine believers. Take heart, your sins are forgiven and God is your Father! Be encouraged, you have an intimate relationship with the eternal Creator God! Rejoice, you are an over comer through the Word of God that you hide in your heart!

The Strand of Vigilance vv. 15-17

Having encouraged his readers with their status with God, John now challenges them to guard their affections. This is the strand of vigilance that John uses throughout this letter. Be alert, be vigilant, be on guard lest you fall into sin. The warning which John issues here is one that believers are in constant need of being reminded, “Don’t Love the World!”

John has a lot to say about love in this epistle. We are told to love one another and to love God. Now John warns against a love that cannot be a part of the life of any believer: love of the world.

The word “world” in this passage does not mean the physical, material world but the invisible spiritual system of evil which is ruled by Satan. It is the world that Paul talked about in Ephesians 2:2-3. It is this world that John warns his readers to not love. He is essentially forbidding worldliness (which is love of the world).

Worldliness is not things we do or places we go (although those can reflect it). It is the desire or affections of the human heart. In fact, when John describes to us what he means by “the world” in v. 16 he lists three attitudes of the heart of many toward material things. Worldliness is not ‘things’ but our concentration on ‘things.’ Someone put it this way: “The Christian is not ruined by living in the world, but by the world living in him.” The Christian is to be in the world but not of it!

After warning his readers not to love the world, John gives two compelling reasons to not love the world in vv. 15-17: (1) the antagonism between God and the world and (2) the temporary nature of the world.

1. The Antagonism between God and the World. vv. 15b-16

This verse clearly states that one cannot love the world and love God at the same time. Because the kingdom of God is at war with the kingdom of the world, the two will never coexist peacefully. To pledge allegiance to one side is to declare opposition to the other.

John MacArthur put it this way,

Either one is a genuine Christian marked by love and obedience to God, or one is a non-Christian in rebellion against God, i.e., in love with and enslaved by the satanically controlled world system. No middle ground between these two alternatives exists for someone claiming to be born again.

The Lord Jesus put it this way in *Matthew 6:24*,

No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

James put it this way in *James 4:4*,

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

“*All that is in the world*” is defined in v. 16 as “*the desires of the flesh, and the desires of the eyes, and the pride in possessions.*” These are the main areas where we are tempted to abandon love for God and to embrace love for the world. It is in precisely these three areas that Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3. It was “good for food,” “pleasant to the eyes,” and “a tree to be desired to make one wise.”

Satan has never changed his strategy because it still works. The “desires of the flesh” describes the desire of our own fallen and sinful nature. This is temptation from within. The “desires of the eyes” describes temptations which assault us from without, through our *eyes*. It is ‘the tendency to be captivated by the outward show of things, without enquiring into their real values’ (Dodd). The “pride in possessions” describes the attitude that glories in material things. It is the attitude that assumes one is more than he really is, simply because of his many possessions, to trust in things rather than God.

2. The Temporary Nature of the World. v. 17

The second reason John gives to not love the world is the temporary nature of the world. The world and its lusts (*all that is in the world*) are passing away. They are only temporary, they won’t last. Everything that seems so promising about the world: the things you crave, the things that you long to have which look good, the things you surround yourself with that is the source of your pride, it will all cease to exist someday.

Look everywhere around you; rust, corrosion, and rotteness are all constant reminders of the temporary nature of all things material. What a startling realization for many when they stand before their Creator and realize that all the things they lived their life for no longer exist. Nobody in their right mind buys stock in a company which is going out of business. Neither should anyone invest their affections in a world that will be destroyed. Jobs, houses, cars, entertainment, sports, education, etc., is all temporary.