



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Growth in the Kingdom (1 John 2:12-14)

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Before we engage in this week's consideration, let's visit last week's homework assignment: what have you determined to be a biblical definition of Love?

¹²I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. ¹³I 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 evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. ¹⁴I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. . 1 John 2:12-14 NASB

This is an awesome text considering the time in which it was written, i.e. 64-68 AD. Nero has been engaged in a serious campaign against the Christian community as scapegoats following the burning of the city of Rome (see comments by Roman Historian Tacitus¹.

For comparison, consider: "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. 2 Tim. 4:6-8

The Apostle Paul is nigh onto his martyrdom and not given to sharing casual thoughts. He is well aware of his imminent departure and naturally shares things of significance. Similarly, John is sharing things of significance for his flock of believers. John is well advanced in years and the dating of this epistle is likely in the 67-69 AD time frame making John's age somewhere in his early to mid 60s. (Notice also: John says, in the passages following the one under observation this morning: "...children (infants), it is the last hour..." 1 John 2:18.).

As an application: have you left any words of wisdom for your heirs in your personal will?

In today's text: 2:12 "children" is John's term of endearment for the believing community. John has weathered 1) the onslaught of the impassioned Judaizers for close onto 40 years, 2) the developing confusions relative to the relationship between the Covenants, and 3) the terror of the Roman Empire under Nero. Things are getting dicey!

Of all the believers, John is the premiere "Adult". John is probably the last surviving Apostle, though we lack textual evidence to declare this. (Odds are, Paul has been martyred by

Nero, Peter is close to being "offered", leaving John as the last man standing.) Compared with John, everyone else outside the apostolic band is in the category of "children" as it pertains to The Faith.

So John addresses them as "Children" in verse 12. Some translations add the adjective "little", but it is not in the text, nor is the adjective "dear". Both are interpretative inserts. What is significant in the address of John is the reality that all of God's children start at ground-zero with the forgiveness of sins.

¹²I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

Ground Zero: Here is the significant issue: Forgiveness and substitution. Forgiveness...on account of His Name. Wow! Forgiveness...the forgiving, absolving, forgetting of transgressions...forever.² Substitution...on the basis of His Name!³

Every believer begins on the basis of THE NAME and what The Name represents for.

THE NAME-Jesus...Messiah; Christ; Anointed One; the name which is above every name!

WHAT IT STANDS FOR: The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Substitutionary Atonement⁴. Big word with awesome implications.

Bottom line: **He for me, for Sin: me for Him for righteousness!** (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus took my place, bore my just punishment. I am to take His place in my generation, demonstrating the impact of His gospel on my life.

He for me, for Sin: me for Him for righteousness! (2 Cor. 5:21).

This is the basis for and recognition of what John in his gospel refers to as being "born from above/born again"⁵. Here is the starting point for every follower of Jesus Christ. Everyone begins in "spiritual infancy" as a newborn babe (1 Peter 2:2). (God, in His sovereignty opens the mind of an individual⁶, enabling him/her to "believe" the good news of the gospel. At this point, the individual is an infant in The Faith.)

PENNSYLVANIA

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So John addresses three categories of spiritual status: 1) Infants, 2) Young men, and 3) Fathers in 2:12-14. John doesn't explain his rationale for these three categories. This is left to our deduction.

Through the ages, saints have considered these three categories as representative of spiritual growth in The Kingdom. This seems consistent with Jesus' parable of growth in the kingdom reflected in Mark 4:26-29. First, the blade (i.e. Infant stage); then the ear (i.e. the young men), and finally the full corn in the ear (the fathers—those more mature).

This might also be reflected in Paul's observation in his first epistle to Corinth when he says, "...and now abideth faith, hope, and love..." (1 Corinthians 13:13). **Faith** being the beginning of one's spiritual journey; **hope** being the experience of one growing in The Faith; and **love** being the maturing manifestation of one's journey in The Faith.

In any event, John sees this fellowship of believers as containing these three categories. (Those in the 4th category have already abandoned the boat...and we will address them in a subsequent study (1 John 2:19).

Legitimately, much can be made of these three categories, in terms of the New Covenant⁷ and a focus on equipping men and women in terms of The Faith. The Old Covenant terminology, would be Discipleship.

STAGES OF PROGRESS FOR THE BELIEVER

Beginning as Infants: they need the assurance of their relationship with The Father.

Developing as Young men: they need the encouragement of being anchored in the word of God and its role in overcoming the wicked one!

Progressing as Spiritual Fathers: from the beginning of their encounter with the Risen Christ and the truths of The Faith, they have advanced through the first two stages and are able to mentor, counsel, and encourage those following along in that same train.

Application:

What do you think are the spiritual needs of the Infant in their faith journey? Are you personally prepared to address those needs in your current context? What are the needs of those in the Youth of their faith journey? Again, are you personally prepared to address those needs? What are the needs of those who are more mature in their faith journey?

In your personal faith journey you will or have already traversed one or more of these three stages. While traversing each of them, make note of what assisted/enabled you in each phase so as to be able to counsel/encourage those who follow you.

Might I suggest you consider developing a personal format/curriculum of equipping/discipling so as to assist individuals in each phase/category? (I am available to serve as a resource in this area.)

Undoubtedly, you will encounter colleagues in each of these categories laboring here in The House and/or Senate and even back in your Districts. **Though you are here, in the Legislature at the behest of your constituents; you are ultimately here by the will of God and as one of His representatives.**

As a believer, you recognize your ultimate service to your constituency is to be under-girded by biblical truth. Your obligation is to serve your constituency in terms of what they **need** versus what they **want**. The same is true as it pertains to the biblical spiritual state of your colleagues here in the Legislature or associates back in your District.

As with King David, you and I are to serve our generation "...by the will of God..." Acts 13:36

Give some thought to these three categories of spiritual growth and come prepared at our next session with a few suggestions as to what you might focus on while seeking to assist someone in each category.

QUESTION TO PONDER

I surface this for consideration given the breadth of your religious encounters both here in the halls of the Legislature as well as back home. Is it possible for one to enter the household of the faith and thereafter manifest minimum growth and progress and yet still be a member of the family of God? If you have a settled opinion, marshal your argument logically, and biblically. If you are uncertain, we might entertain this question as a study area once we conclude our time in this epistle.

¹ <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/christians.htm>

² Micah 7:18, 19

³ Isaiah 43:25

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁵ John 3:5

⁶ Acts 16:14

⁷ Jeremiah 31:31-34 & Hebrews 8:8-13