

08. The Epistle of 1 John—2:13-14

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
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John has been dealing with those who claim to be Christians and in fellowship with Jesus Christ—but who don't love other Christians.

1 John 2:9-11 (NKJV)

⁹ He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. ¹⁰ He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Please understand, John doesn't have 'backsliding' Christians in mind when he said this but—church-going *unbelievers* ('tares' among the 'wheat'). The thing he zeros in on that in his mind, more than anything else, determines the genuineness of someone's salvation is whether or not they love other Christians—the family of God.

John declares in no uncertain terms, that any person who goes to church and calls himself a Christian but hates other Christians for whatever reason—is deceiving himself.

They are blind to their true condition and are walking in darkness (unsaved).

Now, after he speaks to false or phony Christians—he now begins to address true believers in Christ:

1 John 2:12 (NKJV)

¹² I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

As we said last time, "**little children**" literally means "*born ones*" and refers to all believers in Christ at any stage of spiritual growth.

We all enter the family of God as spiritual babies—but we must not stay that way because our Father in heaven expects His children to grow up! This, to me, is one of the great tragedies of the modern church—many Christians are not growing up in their walk with Jesus—they're 'growing old' but not growing up!

They seem to be in an arrested state of spiritual development—while at the same time thinking themselves to be 'spiritual giants' (hold onto that, we'll come back to it). As we said last time, when it comes to the spiritual growth of the children of God—we need to clarify a few things.

1. Spiritual growth doesn't affect a believer's standing before God.

That was a settled issue when they received Jesus as their Savior and God's righteousness was imputed to them at that moment.

Spiritual growth (or the lack thereof) has no bearing on a person's righteous standing in the eyes of God because—His righteousness was imputed *to* them and not earned *by* them:

Romans 4:5 (NKJV)

⁵ But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness...

2. Spiritual growth doesn't affect God's love for believers.

God's Word teaches that He doesn't love mature believers more than less mature or even carnal believers—He loves all His children equally. The reason for that is because His love for us is *unconditional*—based entirely on Him sovereignly *choosing* to love us and not on the merit (worthiness) of any individual believer.

Satan is always trying to get us to believe that God's love for us is 'merit' based instead of 'grace' based (undeserved blessing).

It's only when a Christian believes that God loves them based on how they *perform* that he (the devil) can cause them to live under the law and condemn them when they fail.

3. Spiritual growth is not measured by how long a person has been saved.

Many Christians think that spiritual growth is like physical growth—it happens automatically over time. So they believe, the older they are in the Lord—the more mature they are in their walk with the Lord.

Spiritual growth depends on a person's *hunger* for the Word, their *desire* to grow—and their willingness to pick up their cross and accept suffering for Jesus' sake.

4. Spiritual growth is not related to the amount of schooling or theological knowledge a person has.

There seems to be many Christians who feel that the more Christian education they have—the more spiritually mature they are—NOT TRUE!

There are many Christians who have degrees in theology (some are professors at Christian colleges and seminaries) who are shockingly immature spiritually speaking. One that comes to mind is John Calvin—whom many Christians venerate.

One author had this to say about Calvin—

"John Calvin comes across to me as a brilliant but cruel and vindictive man who hid behind his theology and in particular his view of the sovereignty and predestination of God as the justification for his harsh and authoritarian treatment of others who opposed his particular brand of Christianity. All you have to do is study how he ran the city of Geneva and his execution of Michael Servetus (Hunt p.68-71) whose only crime was that he dared to oppose Calvin. This kind of behavior won him the title of Protestant Pope.

Calvin's power was so great that it was tantamount to treason against the state to oppose him. A citizen named Jacques Gruet was arrested on suspicion of having placed a placard on Calvin's pulpit which read in part, 'Gross hypocrite! After people have suffered long, they avenge themselves...Take care that you are not served like M. Verle [who had been killed]...Gruet was tortured twice daily in a manner similar to which Rome, rightly condemned by the Reformers for doing so, tortured the victims of her inquisitions who were accused of daring to disagree with her dogmas. The use of torture for extracting "confessions" was approved by Calvin. After thirty days of severe suffering, Gruet finally confessed—whether truthfully, or in desperation to end the torture, no one knows. On July 16, 1547, 'half dead, he was tied to a stake, his feet were nailed to it, and his head was cut off.'"

Christian maturity is determined by how much Fruit of the Spirit is growing in a person's life not how much head knowledge they have.

John Calvin might have been a brilliant thinker, but he had very little Fruit of the Holy Spirit growing in his life—and therefore he wasn't a mature, Christ-like Christian (some challenge the notion that he even was a Christian).

5. Spiritual growth and maturity has nothing to do with the size of a person's ministry or the extent of their activity.

In other words, God doesn't give the biggest ministries to the most mature Christians—and the more they grow spiritually, the larger their ministry grows as a result. Some of the largest ministries in the world are run by some of the most carnal Christians (if they are true Christians).

This, we are told in Scripture, will coincide with the last days church—

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NLT2)

³ For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will reject the truth and chase after myths.

Revelation 3:17, 20 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked...²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me.

So, don't equate the size of a person's ministry with their own personal spiritual maturity or godliness.

Again, God doesn't reward the most mature Christians with big ministries and the less mature with small ones—that's a matter of His grace and sovereignty. The same is true with the level of **outward activity** that characterizes a person's life.

For some reason, we often think that the *busiest* Christians, those who are involved in the most ministries—these are the most spiritually mature people. Listen, activity and busyness for the Lord doesn't necessarily equal spiritual maturity—as we learn from a couple of sisters.

Luke 10:38-42 (NKJV)

³⁸ Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." ⁴¹ And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. ⁴² But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

At a quick glance, many would say that Martha was the mature one since she was busy serving the Lord, and that Mary was the immature one because she just sat at Jesus' feet listening to Him and enjoying His fellowship—however, Jesus Himself said the opposite was true.

Sometimes, busyness simply reflects a person who is trying to 'earn' God's favor which speaks of *immaturity* and not maturity in their walk with The Lord.

Once again, the size of a person's ministry or how much it is being blessed financially isn't the criteria of how mature they are in the Lord.

Paul the apostle's ministry was characterized by weakness, suffering, persecution, and poverty (2 Corinthians 6:3–10; 11:23–33; 12:9–10; Phil. 4:11–13; cf. 1 Timothy 6:6–10) which were actually the true signs of his maturity in the Lord (because he 'hung in there' and persevered over the course of his Christian life).

Listen, there is no secret to spiritual growth (not like the Gnostics taught)—it all depends on how *hungry* you are for God's Word and how much you *want* to be like Jesus! (2 Corinthians 3:18)

1 John 2:12-13 (NKJV)

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*...**

The second group John mentions that he is writing to are those he calls "**fathers**".

Just as surely as there are *little children* in the family of God—there are also **fathers** in the faith.

These are a reference to mature believers (men and women)—those who '**know**' (deep personal, intimate knowledge) "**Him who is from the beginning**"—a reference to Jesus (1 John 1:1).

As one pastor put it—

"These are men and women of deep, long spiritual standing. They have the kind of walk with God that doesn't come overnight. These are like great oak trees in the Lord, that have grown big and strong through the years."

1 John 2:13b (NKJV)

¹³ **...I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one...**

These are those who are no longer *little children*, but still not yet *fathers* (elder-saints in the faith)—and as such they are the "front-line" soldiers in the war against the wicked one.

One author said—

*"We don't send our little children out to war, and we don't send our old men to the front lines. The greatest effort, the greatest cost, and the greatest strength are expected of the young men.
For this reason, many have sought to stay in spiritual childhood as long as possible. This is wrong. It is like being a draft-dodger or a vagrant. We expect children to not fight in wars and to be supported by others, but we don't expect it of adults."*

"Because you have overcome the wicked one..."

1 John 5:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴ For whatever is born of God overcomes the world [and the 'god of this world']. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. ⁵ Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

1 John 2:13 (NKJV)

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.**

The “**little children**” addressed in verse 13 are not the same as those addressed in verse 12—two different Greek words are used.

In verse 12 the Greek word ‘teknia’ is used for ‘little children’ and in verse 13 John uses the word ‘paidia’.

- Teknia refers to *all* the children of God—young, old and in-between.
- Paidia is a word that denotes young *immature* children who are still under their parent’s authority and instruction.

Such children are ignorant and immature and in need of care and guidance.

One pastor summed these young believers in Christ well when he said—

*“Immature spiritual children are those who **know the Father** in the same way as an infant has little more than a basic knowledge of his or her parents. The distinguishing characteristic of babes in Christ is that they are consumed with their new-found relationship to the God and Savior they have come to know savingly and with the resulting joy and peace of that knowledge—but they are still infants, who have yet to feast on the nourishing spiritual meat of sound doctrine.*

As with physical babes, the ignorance of spiritual children makes them prone to weaknesses and highly susceptible to dangers. They are all too often motivated by fleshly desires and lack discernment to avoid what is harmful and pursue what is beneficial. They often naively attach themselves to their spiritual heroes or favorite teachers, for which Paul reprimanded the Corinthians: “For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not mere men?”. Spiritual children also lack discernment and are vulnerable to the allurements of deceivers and their heretical doctrines. That is why Paul warned the Ephesians—

“...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ...” (Eph.4:14-15)

1 John 2:14 (NKJV)

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.

There are 4 stages in our physical life (childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and, “mature adulthood,” “senior citizen” (otherwise known as— “My, you look good for your age!”).

John tells us there are three stages of spiritual life—little children, young men, and mature fathers.

One author comments on these stages in light of what John says about each group—

“Two things are characteristic of the **little child**: He realizes his sins are forgiven (verse 12), and he knows the Father (verse 13). While this is an excellent starting point, the child must go on to become a young man.

The **young man** in the faith not only knows the Father and knows his sins are forgiven, but he has overcome the wicked one (verse 13). How? By the Word of God (verse 14)—and not just by being able to quote it, but in how much a person submits his or her life to it!

The third category of spiritual life is that of **fathers**, or *mature ones*. Like little children, fathers know their sins are forgiven and understand the nature of their Father. Like young men, they overcome the wicked one by being submitted to the Word. And as a result, they have a simple, singular passion: To know Him that is from the beginning (verse 13)—to know Jesus (John 1:1).

As you walk with Jesus, spiritual life gets simpler and simpler because the longer you walk with Him, the fewer principles there are. I used to have notebooks full of principles concerning success in ministry, theology, and family. But the more time that passes, the more I say, “Jesus, You’re my life—not ministry, not theology, not success as a family, but just *You*. I love being with You; I love talking with You; I just love *You*.”

That’s when you know you’re reaching the state of spiritual fatherhood. And the interesting thing about fathers is that there’s reproduction. In the office, on the campus, around the neighborhood, others sense the Lord in you and are inspired to follow in your footsteps.

Children, young men, spiritual fathers—John commends them all.”

So spiritual growth should be the goal of every Christian—but the quickest way for Satan to hinder or stop that growth altogether is thru worldliness.

And yet, in a stroke of genius, he has been able, in the last days church, to make worldliness and carnality look like maturity and spirituality—

1 Timothy 6:6-10 (NKJV)

⁶ Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸ And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (Comment)

And so that’s what John begins to warn the children of God to be on guard against—

1 John 2:15-17 (NKJV)

¹⁵ **Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.** ¹⁶ **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 is of the world.** ¹⁷ **And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.**

These 3 verses are some of the most insightful and important in the Bible for understanding how Satan tries to defeat a child of God, keep them from growing and destroy their witness in the world—we’ll look at them next time.

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