

1 John 2:12-14

Godly Encouragement

I read a heartfelt story recently that I would like to share with you. A teacher asked her students to take sheet of paper and list the names of the other students in the class. Then she told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and to write it down by their name. The teacher took the papers home and compiled a list for each student of what the others had said about him or her.

When the papers were handed out smiles and laughter began. One student said, "Really? I never knew what I did meant so much." Another said. "I didn't know so many people liked me." Several years later the teacher went to the funeral of one of her former students. He was killed in action while in the Army. When the young man's parents noticed the teacher they went to meet her. The father said, "We want to show you something. Mark was carrying this when he was killed." And he pulled out of his wallet a paper with all the good things Mark's classmates had said about him.

"Thank you for doing this," Mark's mom said. "Mark treasured this list." A few of Mark's former classmates overheard the conversation and went over to the parents and the teacher. One young man said, "I still have my list too." A young lady said, "I have mine in my diary." Another former student said, "I bet we all still have the list." This story shows how much we all need encouragement—all of us.

In our study of 1 John we've seen the apostle dish out some very strong words. John warned his people about false teachers. He wrote that if we claim to have fellowship with God, but walk in darkness, we are liars.¹ If we say we are perfect and have no sin, we deceive ourselves.² If you don't love your brothers and sisters in Christ, you are in darkness and spiritually blind.³

These are all strong warnings. But they are warnings given in love. Love says, "Don't touch the hot stove" and "Look both ways before you cross the street." When you love, you always care about the well-being of others.⁴ The apostle is going to declare even more of God's Word is stark black and white

¹ 1 John 1:6

² 1 John 1:8

³ 1 John 2:9-11

⁴ Philippians 2:4

terms. But before he does he takes a moment to encourage God's people. He writes something good and encouraging to the new believers and to those who are growing in the Word and to those who have been faithful for years.

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.
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.
¹⁴ 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.
(1 John 2:12-14)

In this passage of Scripture we learn that there are three stages in the growth process of becoming what God desires for us to be. We are first little children, then young men and then mature stable fathers. We can also easily say young women and mothers too. But the idea is that in the Christian life, as in physical life, the goal is to grow and mature. We want to be more devoted to God. We want our love for others to increase. We want our hearts full of peace and joy.

Now as John tells us about the three stages of Christian growth, he tells us that what is true of all believers is specifically true, in our experience, in certain stages of our becoming more like Christ. All of us know that our sins are forgiven. All of us know something about God and Jesus Christ. All of us know something about overcoming temptation. But our actual experience of these things becomes more real for us at certain times in our lives.

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

What truth does a Christian first begin to root in his or her heart? The most basic and yet wonderful truth is that we are forgiven of our sins and we "have known" or more literally, have "come to know" the Father. The first conscious experience of a believer in Christ is the sense that the great burden of sin and guilt is gone. And also that God, the Creator and the Judge of all the earth⁵, is

⁵ Isaiah 40:28; Psalm 50:6

now our Father; a deeply loving Father, whom we may call "Abba", Dad.⁶ And we can go to our Father with confidence that He will receive us with tenderness and compassion.

Now, our sins are not forgiven because we hope they will be forgiven. Still less are they forgiven because the good we do outweighs the bad. They are forgiven for God's "name sake." God has promised us forgiveness of sins, because of what He has done for us in Christ. Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." And Isaiah 53:5, 6 declares,

But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

What makes me know my sins are all forgiven is that God has forgiven them through the sacrifice of Christ. God forgives all of our sins for His name's sake, because of His honor and reputation; to prove His love and mercy. He said he would forgive my sins through the blood of Jesus Christ and He has!

This is the first thing that we learn as new, spiritually young Christians: our sins are forgiven. This is such a joyful and comforting reality to the young believer. In fact it is still comforting to me having stood for Christ for almost 40 years. My sins are forgiven for His name's sake. Also the young believer has come to know God as Father.

I write to you, little children,
Because you have known the Father.
(1 John 2:13c)

What joy there is in your heart when you realize that you are not alone, but you are a part of the family of God. God is your Father! We are not living in a cold, mechanical universe with no meaning. The highest privilege that the gospel offers is that we can become the children of God and He becomes our Father. God is our Father and He knows us and loves us and cares for us⁷ 1 Peter 5:7 tells us that we can cast all our care upon God, our Father, because He cares for us. Fathers care for their children! Becoming a new, childlike believer is

⁶ Galatians 4:6

⁷ Matthew 10:29-31; Matthew 6:31-33

a wonderful experience. But we must not stay a babe in Christ forever. We need to grow up. So, John now moves on the second stage of Christian maturity: young men and women.

I write to you, young men,
Because you have overcome the wicked one.
(1 John 13:b)

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.
(1 John 14b)

Again, notice how the apostle compliments and encourages God's people. He states "I write to you...**because** you have overcome the wicked one...**because** you are strong, and the word of God abides in you."

If you have been a believer for a while, you've seen how God soften seems to deal so gently with new believers. It seems that every prayer they pray is answered with a "yes." Everyone they share their faith with comes to faith in Christ. Every obstacle in their path is easily overcome. And often as result young Christians, like all children, think life will always be easy. But gradually, a wise parent will expose his or her children to the realities of life so they can mature and develop strength of character. God does the same thing with His children too. Here's why.

In this [salvation] you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, ⁸ whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory
(1 Peter 1:6-8)

God's purpose in allowing troubles is to test the genuineness of our faith. And the benefit of the testing is not for God, it is for you. When we stand fast in faith we develop more of a Christ-like character. It deepens our love for God and Christ and our love and compassion for others. But how do we stand fast in faith? What makes our faith strong? The answer is back in 1 John.

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.
(1 John 14b)

We are strong in faith and hope and love, we overcome the wicked one, when the Word of God abides in us. Ephesians 6:17 proclaims that “the sword of the Spirit is the word of God.” Romans 10:17 says that “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” We begin our new life as children of God by the Word of God. We are informed in 1 Peter 1:23 that we are born again by the Word of God. Then we grow into strong young men and women as our lives are transformed by renewing our minds to the Word of God.⁸ We learn to “love without hypocrisy.” We learn to “Abhor what is evil.” We learn to “Cling to what is good.”⁹

I’ve said this so many times, but I’ll say it again because of love. It is absolutely impossible to grow up as a Christian, to become a spiritually strong young man or woman, without the Word of God abiding in you. This is why the devil sets up the schemes of life to keep you from Bible study and prayer. He will divert your attention to so many other things in life so that you do not root your heart in Scripture.

Time in the Word of God must take place more than just hearing it on Sunday mornings. It must be more than another option in life. It must become more than a kind of sweet, low-calorie desert we can take or leave as we please. It must become the Word of life to us.¹⁰ You must take hold of the Word of God so that the Word of God takes hold of your heart.

During his time in the wilderness Jesus Christ overcame every temptation of the Devil by saying “It is written” and then quoting Scripture. Psalm 119:11 says, “Your word I have hid in my heart that I might not sin against you.” God told Joshua,

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth,
but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may
observe to do according to all that is written in it.
For then you will make your way prosperous, and then
you will have good success.
(Joshua 1:8)

⁸ Romans 12:2

⁹ Romans 12:9

¹⁰ Philippians 2:15-17

To be a child of God and to know that your sins are forgiven is wonderful. To know that God is your loving Father fills the heart with joy. But children, and young men and women, if they are healthy, grow and become strong in the Lord.¹¹ And then, you come to the great place of being of full age spiritually.

I write to you, fathers,
Because you have known Him who is from the beginning.
(1 John 2:13a, 14a)

The One who is from the very beginning of all time is God, our father. But in the context of 1 John, the beginning refers to the beginning of the Christian era. And so to know the one who is from the beginning is to know Jesus Christ. Our great business is to know and fully grasp the glory and life of God in Jesus Christ. We must realize all that God has accomplished in Christ. We must realize how full of power and authority Christ is now. Then we must see and know who we are in Christ. When we know Christ and who we are in Christ, we will find ourselves being complete human beings. The apostle Paul wrote,

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord,
so walk in Him, ⁷rooted and built up in Him and
established in the faith, as you have been taught,
abounding in it with thanksgiving.

⁸Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy
and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men,
according to the basic principles of the world, and
not according to Christ. ⁹For in Him dwells all the
fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰and you are
complete in Him, who is the head of all principality
and power.
(Colossians 2:6-10)

Complete in Christ not only means that we are forgiven and saved in him, It means we should be able to think as he thinks, to serve as he serves and to love as he loves. According to Ephesians 4:13 this means we are measuring up "to the stature of the fullness of Christ." Let me show you why it is wrong to stay a babe in Christ.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers,
you need *someone* to teach you again the first
principles of the oracles of God; and you have
come to need milk and not solid food.

¹¹ Ephesians 6:10

¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

(Hebrews 5:12-14)

Here is why we don't want to stay spiritual babies. First, to be a spiritual baby is to be unskilled in the word of Righteousness. Simply put, you do not know how to apply the Bible to think right and have right attitudes so that you behave rightly. Secondly, an unskilled baby does not know how to discern good from evil. The world says, "Hey, do this; it's good." But God's Word says that it is bad. But you cannot discern between good and evil and so as a baby you are often deceived. There are so many people in our society who think that what is evil is good and normal. And finally, to be immature spiritually means you cannot teach or help others to grow up in Christ. It takes mothers and fathers to teach their children.

Some of us in this church, both near and far, are young both physically and spiritually. Make every effort to become all that God has called you to become. And for those of us who are older, both physically and spiritually, don't become stale—don't think you've arrived.¹² My longing for our church, both here and far off is this: May there always be little children, new believers who have come to faith in Christ. May there always be young men and women who are strong, because the Word of God abides in them. And may we all grow up to be fathers and mothers in the family of God.

Only one life to live. 'Twill soon be passed.
Only what's done for Christ will last.

¹² Philippians 3:12-14

