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A0429 -- July 18, 2004 -- 1 John 2:9-14 -- Preparing for Battle

⁹ ~O le,gwn evn tw/| fwti. ei=nai kai. to.n avdelfo.n auvtou/ misw/n evn th/| skoti,a| evsti.n e[wj a;rtiÅ

9 He who says ‘he is in the light’ and is hating his brother is in the darkness until now.

John continues to compare light and darkness here in v. 9. Most Christian commentators are unwilling to face the fact that true Christians can and do express hate. Most commentators try to argue here that John is clearly talking about people who ‘profess’ Christ but don’t really ‘possess’ Christ. What I like to call professing unbelievers. However, there is not a shred of evidence for this interpretation. If John was talking about a professing unbeliever hating a Christian, he would not have written: ***He... is hating his brother.*** The possessive pronoun ***his*** would be entirely misleading and unnecessary. The correct way to express that an unbeliever hates a Christian would be ***He who...is hating a brother,*** but that’s not what John said. Further, the context is the ***old commandment*** that our Lord re-issued in a new and fresh way, namely “to love one another” (John 13:34). John has in mind Christians loving Christians just as Jesus did. The Greek word for ***brother*** therefore (*adelphos*) must refer to a fellow Christian. Let’s face it, the claim that a Christian cannot hate another Christian is just plain stupid. If Christians can’t hate other Christians then I doubt very seriously anyone is a believer. We all struggle with feelings of hostility and animosity toward other believers at one time or another. I can assure you that every pastor knows that believers have problems and that many involve animosity or hatred toward another Christian. It’s therefore a sad reality, but it is reality. However, John pointedly argues that when a Christian hates another believer he is ***in the darkness until now.*** Being in the darkness does not mean this Christian is not really a believer! The statement must be understood in the context and the context began with 1 John 2:3 where John began talking about more advanced Christians. He said that the advanced Christian has the commandments, keeps the commandments and has come to know God intimately. The advanced Christian manifests anew each day the commandment of our Lord to “love

one another” (John 13:34) and in that sense the light of God shines through him. However, if a Christian makes a claim to be in the light but *is hating his brother* it is obvious that he *is in the darkness until now*. He is not an advanced believer. He has not advanced to be an abiding Christian. He’s all talk and no show. Many believers feel guilty for not advancing in the Christian life and so they try to say the right words and act the right way at the right places and right times. Nevertheless, this kind of believer can never cover up completely and he certainly can’t hide his inadequacy from God. That’s why John says this believer is *in darkness until now*. This kind of believer still has the opportunity to advance but as of right now they are morally and spiritually living like the world which John says is *passing away*. They still haven’t mastered the principle of living in the light, that is, staying in fellowship with God. If this is you the section of scripture that you need to master is 1 John 1:5-2:2. There should be no shame in being honest about where you are in the Christian life. If a supposed mature believer looks down on you because you are not as advanced as he is then that advanced believer might be open to the charge that he really isn’t that advanced after all! A truly mature believer will pray for and teach a less advanced believer through his words and works. He will never treat the less advanced believer with disdain or inferiority. He will love them just as Jesus loved the apostles. If you’re looking down on other believers because you don’t think they know much, you are riding a spiritual high-horse and you are going to get bucked off! That’s unacceptable behavior!

¹⁰ ο` avgapw/n to.n avdelfo.n auytou/ evn tw/| fwti. me,nei kai. ska,ndalon evn auytw/| ouvκ e;stin\

10 He who loves his brother abides in the light and a stumbling block is not in him:

On the other hand, the Christian who *loves his brother* is not only *in the light* but he *abides in the light*. Here’s John’s favorite word again, *abide*. He used it for the first time in verse 6. It’s the Greek word *meno* and it means “to remain, to stay”. Therefore, the believer who presently loves *his brother remains* or *stays in the light*. This section (2:3-11) is concerned with the period of the Christian life that follows infancy. There is no need for Christians to have a prolonged period of spiritual infancy like the Corinthians (1 Cor. 3:1-4) and the recipients of the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 5:12-14). These believers should have been teachers by then but they were still in spiritual infancy. This is not necessary. How quickly a believer develops “will depend on the quality of the instruction he receives in the church and on his willingness to apply that instruction in his personal life.”²¹ That’s why we are a teaching church. We want believers to grow out of spiritual infancy and into spiritual adulthood so that they can become teachers of God’s word. Maybe this church is going through a growing stage...maybe God is stretching you with the doctrine that is being

taught in Sunday School, Sunday Worship, and Wednesday nights...maybe God is getting you ready to teach others. That's a good thing. That's very positive for the spiritual development of this local body. He who ***abides in the light*** seems to correspond to the one Paul says ***is spiritual*** and ***judges all things*** (1 Cor. 2:15). John thinks of an abiding believer as one who operates out of his regenerate nature most of the time. He's heard the word, kept the word, and now manifests the love of Christ through his life day by day. He's abiding in Christ so that he is walking as Christ walked. He has put to death the old man and lives according to the new man. He's a spiritual man. This is where our elders in particular should be. Spiritual men who oversee this church in spiritual matters; taking on the problems of the congregation, teaching the word, exhorting and challenging further spiritual development among our members. And above all, "loving one another" as Christ loved the apostles. That's the mark of a spiritually seasoned believer.

The abiding believer is not only ***in the light*** but there is also ***no stumbling block in him***. The Greek word for ***stumbling block*** is *skandalon* and it refers to a booby trap, a snare to catch something. In particular it's the trigger whether it's a little stick or some device that triggers the trap. This individual doesn't have anything in him that acts as a trap or snare. This probably does not refer to laying a trap for someone else but a trap for himself. He does not allow himself to create an internal spiritual condition that will ensnare or trap him in sin. The implication is that non-abiding Christians do often create in themselves a spiritual condition that will inevitably result in sin. This is setting up a trap for oneself into which he will eventually fall. The spiritual advanced believer does not set a trap for himself which will result in sin.

11 ο` δε. misw/n to.n avdelfo.n auvtou/ evn th/| skoti,a| evsti.n kai. evn th/| skoti,a| peripatei/ kai. ouvk oi=den pou/ u`pa,gei(o[ti h` skoti,a evtu,flwsen tou.j ovfqalmou.j auvtou/Α

11 but he who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not see where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

When a Christian ***hates his brother***, he is terribly disoriented. Hate is a very serious problem for a Christian. He is ***in the darkness***, meaning that he is in spiritual darkness. He is living a life that corresponds to the world. He is living according to his old sin nature rather than his new regenerate nature. Not only is he located ***in the darkness*** but he also ***walks in the darkness***. The word for ***walks*** is *peripateo* and it means "to walk about" "to go about one's life". Day after day this Christian is going about his life in a state of spiritual darkness. Since he is in a state of spiritual darkness he ***does not see where he is going***. He

cannot tell the difference between the culture and Christianity. How well can you see where you are going when you are in a dark hallway, no moonlight, no lamp light, nothing...just pitch darkness. Now, this is precisely where all unbelievers and carnal Christians are at. As the great apologist Cornelius Van Til said, "Suppose that you are in the cold on a dark December night and you are looking for a black cat that isn't there and you are blind."ⁱⁱ The point is that when a believer gets in this position, he's can't see...he's blind...he can't differentiate between what is spiritually good and spiritually evil. A whole mass of Christians are in this situation. They are terribly open to satanic attack. They are easy targets for Satan and they get involved in all sorts of anti-biblical movements that often go under the banner of Christian. But they can't perceive it because they are spiritually blind. They get lured into what they think is some good Christian organization or something and yet John says they do *not see where they are going*. Oh, they think they are on the right track but their *eyes are blind*. They think, "Oh how spiritual this is." But in reality, they don't have a clue, they are blinded. They are just like unbelievers. You know how spiritually lost an unbeliever is? They don't seek God, they are at enmity with God, their hearts are desperately wicked. They are living as autonomous beings. That is, what they think becomes the law, they become the final authority and ultimate reference point for determining what is right and wrong. Self becomes ultimate. Man becomes ultimate. Now, this is what hate will do to a Christian. It will destroy a Christian. It will make a Christian spiritually blind. And it is these types of Christians that tear churches apart, cause church splits.

PURPOSE OF FELLOWSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP: *RESISTANCE TO ANTICHRIST'S*

READ vv. 12-14. These are purpose clauses. John's goal is to bolster the confidence of his readers so they will be motivated to stand against the Revisionists, a group of teachers who subtly "revised" Christianity. Because of the infiltration of the Revisionists, John's readers are going to have to go to battle with them and he wants them to know that they have the armor and weapons that will give them victory over their enemies. In back of all victorious warfare are well-trained warriors. In back of all well-trained warriors is an excellent training manual. In back of an excellent training manual is a well-trained general. God is the General; he wrote the training manual, the Bible, and Christians who know that manual are the best equipped soldiers on the earth.

God is the General → Bible is the Training Manual → Christians are the Warriors

The key element of a successful warrior is that he must have a sound mentality. If the soldier's mentality is weak, undisciplined, and frail then he will not make a good soldier.

Back of all victorious spiritual warfare are Christian warriors who have a disciplined mentality. A disciplined mentality results from continual fellowship with God which leads to knowing that manual and putting it to work. Once this training regimen is mastered, the Christian soldier is ready to go to battle against the world and demonic powers.

The difficult question in vv. 12-14 are the three categories *little children*, *fathers*, and *young men*. Do these categories refer to age/sex? If so then *fathers* and *young men* certainly leave out women altogether. This section would then be written only to boys and men. This doesn't make much sense. Many commentators have said that these categories refer to spiritual maturity? The *little children* being immature believers, the *fathers* being the mature believers, and the *young men* fitting somewhere in between. But this doesn't fit well either for three reasons: *first*, the sequence is wrong. If John had meant these to be categories of spiritual maturity he would have started with the most immature and moved to the most mature: *little children*, *young men*, and then *fathers*. But that's not what John did. Instead, he placed *fathers* in the middle and *young men* last in both sequences (1st sequence vv. 12-13; 2nd sequence v. 14). *Second* reason this is wrong is because he refers to all his readers as *little children* throughout the epistle (cf. **1 Jn. 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21**). *Third* problem with these categories referring to spiritual maturity is that both the *children* and the *fathers* are said to *know Him*. This would place them on the same level of spiritual maturity. Well, if the categories don't refer to age/sex and they don't refer to spiritual maturity then what do they refer too? Each category looks at John's readers from a different perspective. John is looking at his readers from different angles, that is what John is doing. He's not separating out different groups of Christians as to where they are spiritually but he is pulling out different aspects of their previous training that they will need to go to battle with the Revisionists. First, notice the sequence in vv. 12-13: *little children, fathers, young men*. Now notice that the sequence in v. 14 is the same: *little children, fathers, young men* although there is one slight difference in the Greek. The words *children* are actually two different words. The first is *teknion* and the second is *paidion*.

12 Γρα,φω υ`μι/ν(tekni,a(o[ti avfe,wntai υ`μι/ν αι` a`marti,ai dia. to. o;noma auvtou/Å

12 I write to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven through His name.

v. 12 is the first purpose statement. John begins by reminding them of when they were *little children*. John is reminding them that *the sins have been forgiven through His name*. The Greek doesn't say *your sins*, but *the sins*. If it really said *your sins have been forgiven* then this could give the impression that they no longer needed to confess their sins as we

learned in 1 John 1:9 since they would already have been forgiven. Instead, what John is saying is that his readers understood what forgiveness was, they had been forgiven the moment they believed. The Revisionists were telling them they did not have true forgiveness. The Revisionists were obviously trying to undermine their assurance of salvation so that they could get a hearing with them and mislead them. John says “you have genuine forgiveness.” *forgiveness* comes *through His name*. *His name* refers to Christ. *forgiveness is* through Christ. Dr. Luke said it this way in Acts 4:12 *"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."*

In our day many commentators say this book is written so that we can know if we really believe or not. The book’s theme is said to be “Tests of Life”.ⁱⁱⁱ Anyone who reads v. 12 can obviously tell how stupid that approach is. John blankly states that their sins have been forgiven! Commentators who try to get around this are ignoring the obvious. This has nothing to do with a ‘professing unbeliever’, one who ‘professes’ Christ but does not ‘possess’ Christ. Obviously, John’s readers are Christians. In fact, the next verse indicates that these are spiritually advanced believers. So, here in v. 12 John reminds them of their salvation, they already have forgiveness. One must first be saved before he is qualified to go into spiritual warfare.

13 gra,fw u`mi/n(pate,rej(o[ti evgnw,kate to.n avpV avrch/jÅ gra,fw u`mi/n(neani,skoi(o[ti nenikh,kate to.n ponhro,nÅ e;graya u`mi/n(paidi,a(o[ti evgnw,kate to.n pate,raÅ e;graya u`mi/n(

13 I write to you, fathers, because you have come to know Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I wrote to you, children, because you have come to know the Father.

This is John’s second purpose statement. Here John addresses the same readers from the perspective of *fathers*. They were called *little children* in light of their salvation. But here the term *fathers* indicates advancement beyond salvation. John says they *have come to know Him*. This refers back to 2:3-4 where John says that the one who has come to know Him both has the commandments and guards or keeps the commandments. Obviously, John’s readers both have and keep the commandments. They *know Him*. John’s readers are advanced believers. They are disciples of Christ. They are in advanced stages of fellowship. The one they *know* is *from the beginning*. This refers to the eternality of the one they know. It is difficult to determine if the one they have come to know is the Father or the Son. According to John’s other writings to know the Son is to know the Father. (John 8:19; 14:7, 9). The Father and the Son are co-eternal. Distinct persons but one in essence.

These believers have come to know God. This further qualifies and assures John's readers that they are ready to go into spiritual warfare because they have a deep knowledge of God. "The term **fathers**, therefore, carries with it an overtone of seasoned experience with the Eternal God."^{iv}

Here John enters a third purpose statement. But this time John refers to these same readers as *young men*. Here John is reminding them of their past victory over Satan. The verb *overcome* is *nikao*. We get the English word Nike from this verb. Nike sports shoes stands for "victory". The tense of this verb is interesting. John put it in the perfect tense. The perfect tense means they overcame in the past but that the results are lasting. What this means is that these believers have had a past victory over Satan which gives them confidence in future battles. What victory have they had over Satan? 1 John 5:4-5 tells us that the victory is regeneration that comes as a result of believing that Jesus is the Son of God. Believing this is a victory over the evil one. Like all great armies, a sense of invincibility lends great confidence in battle. Fear has no place in battle, only boldness; and confidence is gained as one sees victory. Men who have seen many victories can face almost any enemy. John's readers are looked at as *young men* because *young men* are the ones who have the vigor and strength to fight battles. With great strength and vigor John's readers will go to battle with the Revisionists. Their past victory over Satan should give them confidence to overcome them.

Here John gives a fourth purpose statement. Notice that John shifts tense. He's been saying *I write to you*, present tense. But here he switches to saying, *I wrote to you*, aorist tense. Some commentators think that John had been writing this letter and here he got interrupted. But this is not necessary. What John is doing from 13c-14 is repetition. The aorist tense marks the importance of repetition. When we prepare for war we need always be reminded again and again of our training. We don't go to war forgetting all we have been trained for. Neither should the Christian soldier. When you go to war you are to recall your training through the word of God. This time John refers to his same readers as *children*. Notice that he does not say *little children* which is the Greek word *teknion*, but he uses *children*, which is the Greek word *paidion*. The difference is this, *teknion* refers to an affectionate relationship while *paidion* refers to an advanced child, a mature child (cf. Matt. 18:2, 4ff; Mark 9:21-24). This is precisely John's reason for using *paidion* rather than *teknion* in this purpose statement. Notice that these *children* have advanced spiritually. John says they *have come to know the Father*. When John calls them *little children* (*teknion*) he is merely referring to the fact that they are saved. By calling them *children* (*paidion*) that *have come to know the Father* he is talking about some spiritual advancement. When an infant has been born it does not know its father, but after some time the infant grows to recognize his

father. That's the difference between the spiritual infancy designated by the Greek word *teknion* and a little spiritual advancement designated by the Greek word *paidion*. They should remember that time of advancement in their spiritual lives. Just as one advances from day one of basic training to a more advanced training and state of readiness and alert so we ought to remember that time of progress spiritually because it gives us confidence and a remembrance of all we have learned. These principles are useful in battle and will be necessary to recall when facing the Revisionists who exert strong authority.

14 pate, rej(o[ti evgnw, kate to.n avpV avrch/jA e;graya u`mi/n(neani, skoi(o[ti ivscuroi, evste kai. o` lo,goj tou/ qeou/ evn u`mi/n me,nei kai. nenikh, kate to.n ponhro, nA

14 I wrote to you, fathers, because you have known Him from the beginning. I wrote to you, young men, because you are mighty and the word of God is abiding in you and you have overcome the evil one.

At verse 14 he gives another purpose clause directed again toward the same group from the perspective that they are *fathers*. Their admonition is pure repetition...nothing changes. In both v. 13 and here in v. 14 he says that as *fathers* they *have come to know Him* who was *from the beginning*. This means their relationship with God has deepened. They have the commandments and they guard the commandments. They therefore know God. Finally, he addresses the same group as *young men* one last time. He repeats the fact that they *have overcome the evil one*, referring to their victory over Satan at the moment they believed in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. But John adds something else they have to their advantage. John says, *you are mighty and the word of God is abiding in you*. This is the battle cry! *young men* are those who put their lives on the line, young men are *strong*, vigorous, and zealous to conquer. Additionally, John says *the word of God is abiding* in these *young men*. This means the *word of God* is dwelling in them richly. They have taken in Bible doctrine and assimilated it into true working knowledge. The *word of God* is the only Christian weapon. Of all the pieces of armor the Christian soldier wears the *word of God* is the only offensive weapon. Notice what Paul says in *Ephesians 6:10-17* ¹⁰ *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.* ¹¹ *Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.* ¹² *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.* ¹³ *Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.* ¹⁴ *Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,* ¹⁵ *and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE*

PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; ¹⁶ *in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.* ¹⁷ **And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.** All the other pieces of armor deflect the enemy's weapons, protecting the soldier, but the word of God is the sword. It is your weapon. Can you wield it? Do you know your weapon? Can you harness the power of the word of God and use it against your foes? I was told that many of the Iraqi soldiers had advanced weaponry and that if they knew how to use them, we would have lost a lot more men so far in this war. Knowing your weapon is the key to spiritual victory. Knowing the word of God, your sword, is the key to meeting your enemy with all confidence and being victorious. John's readers needed this reassurance that they were prepared for battle with the Revisionists? Are you? Are you able to detect false doctrine when you read Christian books? Are you able to detect false doctrine when you hear Christian speakers? You've got to know your enemy to be an effective warrior. That's why I'm here. I spend my days and nights studying our enemy, his methods, his teachings, so I can warn you and arm you. That is a shepherd's job, to protect, to guard the flock. John's readers were ready for battle with the world. Are you?

ⁱ Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 88.

ⁱⁱ Van Til, Cornelius, *The Conflict In History* (Audio Lecture; Van Til CD ROM).

ⁱⁱⁱ See commentary by Robert Law who popularized this destructive view.

^{iv} Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 88.

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