

1 John 2:12-14 (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. 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.

There have been many pastors who have been criticized as preaching too negatively. Jonathan Edwards, AW Tozer and Martin Lloyd Jones all received those criticisms and some were fired partly for these reasons. Yet have you been tracking what John has said so far?

1 John 1:6-10 (NKJV)

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

1 John 2:4 (NKJV)

⁴ He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1 John 2:9 (NKJV)

⁹ He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.

1 John 2:11 (NKJV)

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.

John has **wonderfully positive** things to tell us. But at the same time he uses very **negative statements** to powerfully make his points.

John is not trying to **discourage** the true followers of Christ. His condemnations are targeted to the **false preachers** and **false teaching** that is attacking the true church. John is holding out truths about following Christ and what followers of Christ **will do** and **will not do**.

None the less those dramatic claims are frightening. The readers are probably thinking, am I even really a believer? Am I **doing** these things that believers are to be doing? Am I **not doing** the things that Christians **don't** do.

How have **you** been feeling as we have been going through First John? Have you had some of the same concerns? Can you look at your life and say that you do the things Christ said to do? Can you say that you **love the brothers** and do not **hate**

them? If all of us tell the truth, we will all say the same thing. We don't do it perfectly. We don't do it as well as we see that we could. So it is easy to despair and think that we, too, are not in Christ.

Well after making all the strong, but true, statements that John has made, it looks like John is going out of his way here to write some **encouraging** things. It is as if he is saying, I don't want to lose these people reading this message. I don't want them to focus on the wrong things. I don't want them to see what I have been saying from the **wrong perspective**. I need to go back to the basics of their salvation. I need to remind them of their identity. I need to remind them of who they are in Christ so they can rise up and live the victorious life in Christ.

If you regard this passage in that attempt, you may find it to be very encouraging to you too.

Now, in John's attempt, he also bolsters up the believers to take on what might seem impossible to them. These believers might be like us in thinking, yes, the super Christians will do all this stuff. But not believers with our personalities and dispositions and life conditions and on and on we go.

But John, in his encouragement, is also laying out the groundwork that **if we have this new identity, we have no excuses** for not living the Christian life as it is to be lived. So we need to watch for that in the text as well. It gives us **fuel** to call the devil a liar when he whispers in our ear that we cannot possibly do this thing that the Lord has placed in front of us to do.

Now our passage this morning is normally viewed in one of two ways.

First is that it is addressing the different **stages of growth** as Christians. The **young children** are those needing discipled. The **young men** are those who have some serious successes under their belt but **they still need much growth**. But the **fathers** are those who are very mature and who are the foundational people of the church.

But others point out that these terms, **young children, young men and fathers**, are all used for all believers at various points, so they believe it is referring to the needs of **all believers** no matter what stage they are currently in.

I like Martyn Lloyd Jones's approach. He accepts that both are true and both are useful.

Let me get a few of the technicalities out of the way first and then we will delve into the real message.

First the words for children are different in verse 12 and verse 13. The word in verse 12 is a word that emphasizes the **familial connection**. It is like saying I am a child of **Harold Zeigler**. I am obviously not a young child. But I am **his offspring**. The second word for child is specifically a **young child** and the emphasis is that the person is **still under parental instruction** and in need of care and guidance. This has led many to believe that the first word for child is addressing all believers. Maybe that was John's intention. But it is impossible to know for sure, and as such, it probably does not matter. There is much to be gained without debating that issue.

Notice too that there are two verb tenses when John says, **I write to you** and **I have written to you**. I have read a lot of theories about this as well. But the one that rings most true to me is based on the context of John making this as **encouraging** as possible and as **dogmatically true** as possible.

I can remember times in my marriage where I have said and done things that gave the indication that maybe I could not be depended upon. My response in trying to encourage my wife's confidence was to say, I love you now. I have loved you in the past. I love you. The evidence is all there. And that is the end of it.

I think that is what John is doing here. I am writing you. I have written you. I will write you. And not a bit of it is changing. And it never will change. I believe the verb tenses are intended to emphasize the strength of the doctrinal truths. There is nothing fluctuating here. This is not a new idea. It is not a **new** "knowing" like the Gnostics had, that would change over time. The way that John says this would produce **security** in his listeners.

Now if you were writing to people who you had just preached some very **dramatic and hard truths** to, yet you believed that the people you had written them to **are believers**, what would you next emphasize to **comfort them**?

If you are holding out the Christian life in all of its difficulties and even impossibilities, what do you focus on to help them **rise up to continue on**? What is it that Christians need to know to **face and embrace** the Christian life? Pay close attention here because John gives it to us.

I will first lay them out. And then we will delve into them.

- 1. Our sins are forgiven for Christ's name sake**
- 2. We have power to overcome sin**
- 3. We know the Father and the Son through the work of the Holy Spirit**

That is John's message to these believers. Now the beauty of this is that each of them appeals more to a believer in **one stage of life** than **another**. But all of them

are crucial in **each stage of life**. So we do not need to have a fist fight about whether this is for **every believer** or is for people in **different stages**. There is nothing to stop both from being true.

Let's start with **Our sins are forgiven for Christ's name sake**.

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

Do you believe, right now in your heart of hearts, that all of your sin is forgiven? Do you believe that God will never ever punish you for a single sin that you have committed?

(And as a side note I want to make a distinction here. God never punishes a believer's sin. He disciplines us for that sin. Christ has already received the punishment for our sin. The goal in punishment is to make someone pay for what they have done. The goal in discipline is to make a person learn from what they have done. God will punish sin in unrepentant unbelievers. He will discipline sin in His children.)

So do you believe that God will never ever punish you for a single sin that you have committed?

Well if you are in Christ, that is the foundational truth that you must have to live as you are called to live.

A Christian is not a person who is seeking forgiveness. A Christian is not a person who hopes that some day he might be forgiven. A Christian is not a person who is longing for forgiveness. That is not the Christian position.

A Christian is a person who knows that the sins they have committed are forgiven.

A Christian is a person who knows that the sins they have committed are forgiven.

We may talk to people, and maybe sometimes that person may be ourself, who thinks it to be **too assuming** to believe that God has forgiven our sins. After all, we know the sins we have committed, and sometimes we have done them fully knowing that we were violating what God clearly said. We know that we do not deserve to be forgiven. There is nothing good about us. So we might think it to be **some kind of humility** to say, "I am not sure that God would forgive the sins I have committed because they are particularly distasteful".

Yet that is all wrong. When we encounter that kind of attitude, that **lack of belief** in God's Word, we need to respond with correction. The world believes this kind of thing because deep down they think they must **earn from God** the forgiveness He offers. But that is not what God's word says.

The million dollar question that we must all know the answer to is “**How** are our sins forgiven?” “**By what means** are our sins forgiven?” And John tells us the answer to that question in verse 12. **FOR HIS NAME’S SAKE.**

There is the million dollar answer that sets **an end to all of our fears.** Our salvation is not about **our merit** or **the degree of our sinfulness.** It is all about Jesus showing off **His character** and winning people to Himself all on **His** merit. If it were about us at all, we should fear. We would inevitably fail at some point and be disqualified. But if it is for **His Name’s Sake,** we can rest confidently. Jesus will never fail.

We must understand this. On what grounds are our sins forgiven?

Some people will say that their sins are forgiven based on the idea that **God is love.** While there is clearly much truth in that statement, people’s understanding of that is usually wildly misleading. It is based on a notion of God that will **overlook our evils** because He is **that nice of a guy.**

Where is Jesus Christ in that? Why would Christ have had to die if that is how God forgives?

This is kind of a side point, but in order to measure whatever message someone is putting out, we always need to ask, based on what they are saying, **what roll does Christ play** in the salvation of a person? If it is not **the central role,** the message is false. It is really that simple. If Christ does not play the **central role,** the **necessary role,** in a person’s salvation, the message is false. Also if the message says it is Jesus **plus** something else that is required to save us, again it is wrong. Cults always say you must join us. You cannot be saved by just belief in Christ for your salvation. You must **be part of us** so you can enter heaven. That is a massive red flag. We are going to find ourselves in eternity with people who had a lot of really screwy doctrine. But the one thing they will all have in common is that they will believe that **they were saved by Christ alone and nothing of themselves.** Their faith was **in Christ** for salvation.

Always use Christ as the litmus test for someone’s message from God. If salvation does not depend completely upon Christ, there is something wrong with it.

No, God does not just overlook stuff because He is so nice. His **love** is wonderful, but so is His **Justice** and His **wrath** and His **righteousness** and **His law.** And they are all perfectly meshed in the person of God so that He embodies all of them perfectly without conflict.

John has already told us how we are forgiven. He has told us the basis on which we are forgiven. **1 John 2:1-2 (NKJV)**

¹ My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if

anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Christ was our propitiation. He took upon Himself all of our sins. That is why **we can** and **must** claim that when we believe in Christ, all of our sins are forgiven. Why. Because Christ **does all things well**. It was impossible that He would have missed one of our sins. It is impossible that He would have done an incomplete job on the Cross. If He took all of our sins upon Himself, all of them were forgiven. Nothing slipped through the cracks. And He never says “most of them were forgiven”. Or “some of them were forgiven”. He forgave all our sins. And really, would any of us have any reason to fight **current sins** if we did not believe we already had forgiveness from **past sins**? That would be like paying a parking ticket when we were just sentenced to the electric chair. Wouldn't we think, if I am already damned, what difference does it make? Even if I live perfectly going forward, the sins of my past will doom me.

A believer must **know** and **be convinced** and **fully believe** that **all** their sins, past present and future have been paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ. Only then are we ready to rise up and take the challenge of doing what Christ wants us to do.

That is some of the ammunition we must have to live the Christian life.

Are you clear about this? Do you believe in your soul of souls that all of your sins have been forgiven? If you are in Christ, you **must** and you **are right** to believe that. If you are not in Christ, you are mistaken to believe such a thing. You must respond to what Christ has done by expressing your Faith in Him and His completed work.

OK Second

We have power to overcome sin

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

14 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.

When we came to Christ, the most important step in overcoming the wicked one was taken. Some of us may have sensed it and been aware of it. Many of us may not have. We may not have known it until later in our Christian lives. But it happened none the less.

You could say on that day we changed domain names.

Romans 8:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

There are lots of ways of saying this in scripture. This is just one. But you and I were in the domain of sin. We were under the **domain** of the law. We were **dead** to Christ. We were helpless and hopeless. We were in the **land** of sin. It ruled us and we didn't care.

When we came to Christ we entered a **new domain**. Now we are **in Christ** and we are no longer **in Sin**. We are **under Christ's domain** and no longer under **the condemnation of the law**. Baptism gives us the picture of switching domains.

We died in Christ and came back up into a completely new domain.

A person in Christ has already overcome the wicked one in the most powerful way possible. We were brought to life in a kingdom outside of the evil one's control.

He is not our father. We have a different father, a different authority. We do not need to do a single thing that the evil one suggests. That is the first and most important step in overcoming. And how did that happen?

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

John in our text says

and the word of God abides in you

This first victory, this first step in being strong in the Lord, came about through the word of God opening our eyes and bringing us to life. But the overcoming does not end there. Christians are defined as overcomers. If you study that word you will find that **those who do not overcome** don't get **second class** tickets.

They are not allowed on the plane. Christians overcome because that is what they are born for. If you don't believe me, check it out yourself.

Now **how** do we overcome? I will keep saying this until I die. The primary sanctification we need happens between our ears. Our primary problem is that we believe lies. God's primary method of sanctification is not to zap us with some mystical feeling. It is not to raise our spiritual excitement level. It is to direct our **minds** by **His Spirit** to **His truth** and replace the lies, one by one, until we live out the truth we by faith have learned to believe. That is sanctification 101.

Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.

² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

So in review, the **first** encouragement is that a Christian is forgiven of all their sins for Christ's name sake.

The **second** encouragement is that a believer has overcome and will overcome sin by the power of His word

And **third**,

1. We know the Father and the Son through the work of the Holy Spirit

¹³ I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning.

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.

Every believer has some knowledge of the one true God. Carla and Diane tell of coming to Christ without much biblical background. So they did not know much. But they knew to call upon Christ and to depend upon Him for salvation. And they believed that Christ would save them, whatever that meant.

That is a knowing of Christ that is **wonderful and beautiful**. But it is certainly not complete.

Over time we get a deeper understanding of our multifaceted God. We begin to see Him in a more complete picture. He keeps getting **bigger** and we keep getting **smaller**. He keeps getting **more important** and we keep getting **less important**.

We begin to see Him from the perspective of being **the creator of the universe**, the one who **owns all** and **all owe submission to**. We see his might and power and love and grace. And all that is happening because of the Holy Spirit. If God's Spirit was not doing that work, we would still be blind and dead.

Carla and Diane were brought to a knowledge of God right off the bat. To be a Christian is to know God. You must know God to call upon Him. Every believer knows the one true God. And every one of them knows the one true God through the Holy Spirit and through His Word.

We certainly do not **know Him** to the **same degree**. But we all know the **same God**. This is true of all believers and it is true of no unbelievers. The Gnostics, who go on and on and on about knowing God, do not know Him at all. They know the vivid images of their imaginations. They know their ideas. They know their crafted plans. But the **greatest** of them lacks what the **least** believer has. A knowledge of God.

Now how does all this apply to the various stages of life for believers?

Well the **new** Christian, the child in Christ, knows one thing for sure. His sins are forgiven. He knows that he is good with Christ. And just like a little child, they just want to know that He loves them and that they are safe in His arms. They can depend upon Him to nurture them and keep them safe. They are in a dependent state and they are not all that useful. But they **know God** and they know that they have been saved from the punishment of their sins.

But they cannot stay there. They must, at some point, begin fleshing out their faith. They are the young men in that passage. And when they begin fleshing out their faith, they will realize they have a massive fight on their hands. The **world**, the **flesh** and the **devil** are not going to relent. So they apply the Word of God. In addition to realizing that their sins are forgiven, they find that the **word of God** that **overcame the domain they were born in**, now **overcomes the world, the flesh and the devil**. They walk by faith, not believing what their **eyes see** or what their **seemers say** or what the **Devil whispers**. They believe God, and their lives look more and more like they belong in their new domain.

Then come the **old men**. These are the mature Christians. And it isn't like they don't need to rest upon their **sins being forgiven**. By this time that idea is a staple to them. They bank upon it. They depend upon it.

And it is not that they **no longer must struggle and fight**. Certainly that never goes away. That has grown into being an expected part of life. They become **examples** of overcoming. People can come to them for help in dealing with life's situations because they have a history of doing the right things for the right reasons. They respond well to trials in whatever form they present themselves. They become depended upon because they overcome. And they become a source of strength for others.

But what characterizes their lives more than the younger believers is the rock solid confidence they gain in the character of God. They know Him. Oh they don't pretend to **know what He will do**. But they have learned to **expect good from Him**, even in the most difficult and trying situations. Life blows no longer knock them off kilter. And it is not because they are so strong. It is because the trials of life have actually done what James says they should be allowed to do.

James 1:2-4 (NKJV)

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

The fathers have **experienced God**. And they want more of Him. They are preparing to meet Him because they expect to meet Him pretty soon. They are no longer seeking so much for what **God will give them** in this world. Now they are more focused on God Himself and the rich reward that His presence is, and the fact that they will have it forever.

Our text in 1 John was a wonderful reprieve by a loving shepherd. It was a good time out to encourage us. At the same time John had a goal in mind. He is going to jump right back into one of the greatest threats to our faith and temptation for us as Christians. But he has shown us that we have no reason or excuse for failure. Because we have been given very important information.

- 1. Our sins are forgiven for Christ's name sake**
- 2. We have power to overcome sin**
- 3. We know the Father and the Son through the work of the Holy Spirit**

I hope we all find comfort and encouragement in this truth this week, because we need it. We all still have a lot of overcoming to do before we live with Christ forever.