

Christian Journey

1 John 2:12-14

Introduction

Communion

In contrast to false teachers and fraudulent Christians whose lives reveal their claim to knowing God is a lie, the believers John writes he views as for real. They are at different points of their life journey, but what they are experiencing as followers of Jesus points to their true identity in Christ.

Their genuine identity is why John is writing them in the first place. Six times in verses 12-14 he will say "I am writing you because." What John describes in these verses is what all believers experience over the course of their spiritual growth.

John's words may strike us as overly repetitive, but there are reasons John says what he does the way he does. Repetition not only aids learning, it strengthens what we already know. Second, the nature of the Christian journey is such that *we should never abandon what we learned at the first as we move from one stage to another*. It's more organic than that. *We develop. We keep building on the foundation. We keep drawing sustenance from our roots*. Disengage a

building from its foundation and it falls. Cut off a plant from its roots and it dies.

Those who avowed the Gnostic heresy that grew strong in the 2nd century saw themselves as advanced, elite, superior, with disdain for the simple. In the name of a higher "knowledge" they ended up denying foundational truths of the gospel.

So let's learn from John what our journey looks like if we truly belong to God.

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. **13** I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father.

14 I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

1. Children (12, 13c)
2. Fathers (13a, 14a)
3. Young Men (13b, 14b)

These words aren't talking about the physical stages of members of the congregation, but

rather spiritual stages. They aren't just directed just to males, but to all believers.

1. Children (12, 13c)

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

13c I write to you, children, because you know the Father.

John has already addressed his readers as his little children at the beginning of this chapter. For that reason some believe he continues to address the whole group that way here, then dividing them into fathers and young men. They point to mixed order John uses—children, fathers, young men—instead of children, young men, fathers—as further suggesting this interpretation. I don't know that it's going to make a great deal of difference in the final analysis, but given the immediate development here, we are going to look at our passage in terms of three different phases of spiritual maturity.

John uses two synonyms for *children*. Both can be translated "little children" because both use what we call a diminutive ending. He may just be varying his vocabulary, but each word does have its own nuance of meaning.

The first speaks of little children as descended from a parent.

The second speaks of little children as under the parents' authority and training.

The parent-child relationship includes both.

God is our Father not just through adoption. We are born ones of God. His spiritual dna is in us. His life in us makes us alive and guarantees our spiritual transformation and growth through the Holy Spirit.

And God our Father is our authority, our protector, our guide. Our submission to Him is a good thing, not just because it honors Him but also because it benefits us. He is the perfect parent.

John highlights two great blessings of those in the early stage of their Christian development that continue on through their lives. The first: ¹² I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

When we first come to Jesus and are converted, one of the first joys we experience is the immense relief of knowing our sins are forgiven, our record is clear, and our conscience is clean (Hebrews). From now on Jesus intercedes for us at the right hand of God.

Our sin is an impossible burden. We cannot shake it on our own. But when we come to Jesus, that burden falls from our shoulders. It does so because He has taken that burden on Himself—and paid for it in full at the cross.

Note the reason for our forgiveness. It is not to be found in ourselves. It is “for his name’s sake.”

The revealed character of God in His Person and Work. He is the One to whom all judgment rightfully belongs, and the One who forgives, redeems, cleanses, and does so on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, who takes our place in judgment.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The second great experience:

13c I write to you, children, because you know the Father.

Not just that they know about God. They know Him. We’ve been reconciled. The barrier is gone. And we have entered into a relationship with God as our loving Father. Jesus Himself led us into this forever family privilege.

We are forgiven. We are loved. We gain these priceless treasures from the beginning. They are the fountain from which all our subsequent Christian experience flows.

What family characteristics would lead you to believe you are born again, that God's life is in you?

Are you living with glad submission to your heavenly Father?

Rejoice in your forgiveness for His name's sake. We sing, "My sins are gone! I've been set free! My God, My Savior has ransomed me."

Treasure knowing God, and grow in that knowledge.

2. Fathers (13a, 14a)

13a I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

14a I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

Twice John underscores that the fathers, those mature in Christ, have extended that knowledge to which they were introduced when they first came to Christ. They have known him who is from the beginning. They have found that God their Father does not change through all the twists and turns of life. Human beings change. They fail. They fall away. They betray. They lie. They falter. They

die. But God remains. He is the steady rock.
The safe place.

“Time hurries on, but in all generations they find a refuge in Him who from everlasting to everlasting is God They are already consciously living in eternity.” John Stott, 97

Psalm 90:1-2

¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. ² Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

This ongoing fellowship with God marks those who are mature in Christ. It steadies them, and they help steady others. Their communion with the eternal One anchors their souls. And those around them find comfort and strength in their shadow.

Maturity in Christ treasures all the more what you learned at the beginning.

“Still, my soul, be still, do not forsake the truth you learned at the beginning.”

Proverbs 3:6 “In all your ways acknowledge—literally, know—Him, and He will direct your path.” He will make a way even where there is none.

But our Christian experience is not just forgiveness, and fellowship. It is also a fight. The reason the fathers are so steady is in part that God has been with them through the battles of life. They have found Him faithful. John's address to the young men underscores the battle that a genuine Christian faces.

3. Young Men (13b, 14b)

13b I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

The enemy is the evil one. The description points to his inherently harmful character and career. He hates, injures, and destroys people. That could be overwhelming to us. We know we are no match for Satan in our own strength. But the Scriptures call us to resist him in the faith. *In Christ we are strong. So much so that we can actually conquer the devil and his schemes. "You have overcome the evil one."*

1 Peter 5:8-9

8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

James 4:7

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Ephesians 6:10-13

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. **13** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

1 John 3:8

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

Verse 14 tells us their secret:

14b I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

You are strong

The Word of God abides in you

You have overcome the evil one

They are in the Bible, and the Bible is in them. God's words are life. They give solid footing. Those whose feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace can do battle royal with Satan.

In the earthly battles Jesus fought, He consistently goes to Scripture with the words "it is written," or "have you not read?" He did so during Satan's temptation in the wilderness. He did so when facing enemies trying to trap and destroy him.

John 5:38

And you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent.

In the history of the church, whenever the Church gives renewed attention to the Word, you see health, revival, and awakenings. When neglect of the Word grows, you see backsliding, corruption, weakness, death.

Jesus in John 6:63

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

Life by the Book

Luther, *A Mighty Fortress*

*Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*

*And though this world with devils filled
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear for God has willed
His truth to triumph through us.*

“His truth”—His Word—take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. A weapon is useless if you don't know how to use it.

In Christ we are more than conquerors. So fight the temptations, the lies. Overcome the evil one. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Conclusion

Is it clear to you that you belong to Christ?
*Are these the experiences of your journey—
forgiveness in Christ, fellowship with God the
Father, and fightings against the evil one?*

Never forget how fundamental these are to your life in Christ from beginning to end—as a child in the faith, as a mature saint, and as a

strong overcomer. *The journey leads home.
The Good Shepherd will get you there.*

Closing Song: Psalm 23

Discussion Questions

1. What are some truths you learned at the beginning of your life in Christ that still give you direction and strength years later?
2. In what ways does your identity as a born one of God who is under His parental authority mark how you typically think and live each day?
3. What has been the effect you feel when you know your sins are forgiven versus when you still feel the guilt of them?
4. What are some ways you sense your knowing God personally, and what practices and patterns have helped you grow in that relationship?
5. What seasoned saints have you known who displayed a settled knowledge of the changeless God, and how has their steady faith impacted you?
6. What does the Bible reveal are tactics of the evil one, and where have you seen evidence that he is at war with you and other Christians?
7. What is the significance of how often the Scriptures teach how to overcome the devil, and how does that direction

help you in your battles against temptations, lies, and other Satanic attacks?

8. What are ways you have found help you stay in God's Word and help the Word abide in you?