

1st John 2: 12 and 13; “Little Children and Fathers,” Sermon # 7 in a series entitled “Behold What Manner of Love”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on June 18th, 2017, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

Let me remind you, that the reason that John wrote this epistle, is given to us, in the 5th chapter, verse 13, where he says – “These things I have written to you who believe in the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the Son of God.” Notice that in the New King James translation it says, “that you may know” and “that you may continue to believe”. I believe that the words “you may continue to believe” are rightly supplied even though they are not in the original Greek. As we think about this verse, we should know that, as believers, we are drawing a reasonable conclusion about whether our own personal faith is real, as we read what John has written here. And then having examined ourselves in this reasonable way, we will then continue to believe in the name of Lord Jesus Christ in regard to everything related to the practical outworking, and learning experience as we grow up in Christ.

What we see, in the verses that I have just read to you, is that there are stages of growth in the Christian life, which John would have us to think about, in relation to our practical experience. And I believe that we should think of them as stages related to where we are in our maturity in living the Christian life. They indicate to us that there is progression in our faith related to our understanding of the truth and whether we have been living righteously in God’s sight. And in thinking about this progression we are led to that place where we can understand whether we are fulfilling the purpose for which we have been called by the Father. Our purpose is not simply to please ourselves. Our purpose in living our Christian life is that God might be honored and glorified, in and through us. The way that we think and live, speak and act, is all important to God. There are three stages of growth in our Christian life that John mentions in verses 12 to 14. They are “children”, “fathers”, and “young men.” We will only have time to look at the first two. And so, asking our Lord to help us, let us consider the first two titles given to us here, which relate to our Christian experience.

1st of all – John speaks of little children.

He says in verse 12 – “I write to you little children, because your sins are forgiven you.” The word in the Greek for “little children” in this first phrase is Teknia (Τεκνία) in the Greek. It is used in verse one of this chapter and in verse 28. It is used also in chapter 3 verse 7, chapter 3 verse 18, chapter 4 verse 4, and chapter 5 verse 21. There is a most definite a sense in which John is referring to all believers when he speaks in these verses of them being little children. There are many things that we do not understand even when we become older and more mature in the faith, and so each of us must continue to humble ourselves throughout our Christian life, and not think that we have attained. But here John is desirous for all believers to understand and especially those who are “babes in Christ”, that they would understand that the Christian life begins with the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins. When we come to saving faith in Jesus Christ it is because we have been born again by the Spirit of God. And we exercise that faith that has been given to us, to believe in God’s Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be saved.

If you look at the second phrase of the passage that we are studying, verse 13, you will find it says this: “I write to you little children because you have known the Father.” And here the word is a different word in the Greek, the word Paidia (Παιδία). It means a child of either sex; an infant, or by extension, a half grown boy or girl. Speaking literally and spiritually, it is referring to an immature Christian. You also find this word used in chapter 2, verse 18. “Little children (or young ones), it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.” So we must understand that what John is saying in these verses includes both senses. There is a sense in

which all Christians are always little children in a spiritual sense. And there is a sense in which, after they are spiritually born again in regeneration, that they will continue growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, eventually, according to the will of God and their own efforts to make use of the grace given to them by Christ, they will grow up to become spiritual young men and fathers. Jesus Himself used this term “little children” in a number of places in the gospels, but I would like us focus for a moment on one place in John’s gospel.

Turn with me over to John 13: 31-38. It says here, “So when Judas had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him.’ “If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.” “Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer.” “You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you.” “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Here we find Jesus using the same word Teknia. You see in this passage that Jesus is trying to prepare his disciples for His having to die, and this would be the way that He would glorify the Father.

There were a number of things about Jesus’ words here that they did not understand at all. They were indeed “little children” in their understanding about the reason why Jesus had come into the world. But He was telling them that God would be glorified in His going to the cross on their behalf, and our behalf. And they would come to know the Father in a greater sense, (that is in His purposes and plans in the salvation of sinners) because of Jesus’ words and His actions at this time; much more than they ever had before. Because of this great and good work of sufferings, which they saw take place, and because He rose from the dead, ascended on high and sent the Holy Spirit to teach them, they would come to know that they were adopted children of the Father. They would come to know the great reality of this truth, because they would eventually come to know, much better, the reality of what His sufferings meant. “I write to you, little children,” John says, “because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.” This knowledge would bring to them eternal comfort and good hope by grace. It would comfort their hearts and help to establish them in every good work. (2nd Thessalonians 2: 17)

Samuel Eyles Pierce says on the verse we are studying – “I write unto you little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.” “He now addresses them because they were pardoned ones of God.” “Thus here is consolation, abounding consolation, increasing consolation for them.” “They were brought to the knowledge of the Father and the Son; they were admitted into fellowship with the Father and the Son; they were in Christ, pure and righteous.” “He was their High Priest before the Majesty in the heavens.” “Their sins were completely taken away, and they were, in their own individual persons, pardoned: so that they could not be in a better state out of heaven.” “Therefore the apostle writes unto them: it draws out his whole heart towards them.” “He expresses himself most affectionately unto them: I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.” “It most clearly appears from hence, one grand part of the gospel ministry is to comfort saints – to lift them up above themselves – to take them out of themselves – to lift them off themselves – to set before them all *which is* revealed of Christ: that by their truly apprehending and receiving the same into their minds, they might be strengthened with all might by the Spirit in the inner man.” (end of quote)

Why is it that the disciples are called “little children” by the Lord Jesus in this place? It is because they did not at that time understand how He was to “glorify” the Father by going to the cross and to His death. They did not understand that Jesus alone could accomplish redemption. They had come this far with Jesus, and yet they thought that they could follow Him on, into this final stage of His obedience; an obedience which He alone could perform. This is evident by verses 36-38. “Simon Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, where are You going?’ “Jesus answered him,

‘Where I am going you cannot follow now, but you shall follow Me afterward.’ “Peter said to Him, Lord, why can I not follow You now?” “I will lay down my life for Your sake.” “Jesus answered him, ‘Will you lay down your life for My sake?’ “Most assuredly, I say to you the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.” I want you to see that it was very evident to Jesus that Peter and the others, just like little children, did not understand what He must do, in order to procure their salvation; let alone the salvation of all of the rest of the God’s elect people in all generations. At this point they did not understand, but they would later.

Look over at John 21: 1-5. “After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself; Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.” “Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’” “They said to him, ‘We are going with you also.’” “They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.” “When the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.” “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Children (the Greek word Paidia once again) have you any food?’” “They answered Him, “No.” “And He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’” “So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.” “Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord.’” “Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment for he had removed, and plunged into the sea.”

Here, we find Jesus appearing to His disciples, in another one of His appearances after His resurrection. He appears to them at the Sea of Tiberias. Peter has been wondering what to do with Himself since the crucifixion. He now thinks that he will go back to fishing, the occupation that he had been involved in before. He is not going to presume that he understands anything about himself, and what he could do for Christ, now that he has denied His Lord three times. But this is where, once again, we see a real lack of comprehension on the part of the disciples. They are like children who have not understood the truth that would guide them, lead them and grant them success in living the Christian life. He would providentially prepare them for all of their successes, and be with them to encourage them in their ministries to Him.

The great lesson that Jesus would teach them here, was that He would be with them in everything. And so, we should be able to conclude that it certainly is true, that all Christians are children in the sense that there are many things that the Lord Himself has to teach us in relation to our faith, and the obedience to His Word, which will glorify God. We have to ask ourselves then, whether we are willing to see ourselves in this way, as children needing to be taught. When we become a Christian our sins are forgiven us for Jesus sake. But we still have very much to learn, that only the Lord Jesus can teach us and lead us into; what we will become, and what we will do for His names’ sake.

2nd – The next title related to our Christian experience which John mentions is fathers.

He says, “I write to you, fathers because you have known Him who is from the beginning.” In verse 14 he says, “I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning.” He repeats this twice to show the stability of character, doctrine, and experience that these believers who fall under this category have. It is the will of God that believers grow up into Christ in such a way that that they are able to exhibit this quality of proven character in their lives, but not many do. Listen to 1st Corinthians 4: 15 and 16. “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” “Therefore I urge you, imitate me,” he says. “For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” So we find here that Paul, as a spiritual father had some real teaching and good example to impart, not only to Timothy but to

every believer in the church at Corinth. There were not many fathers in the church there, but that did not mean that there could not be in the future. They simply needed to follow Paul's example.

You can see what this was in terms of his teaching in 1st Thessalonians 2: 10-12. "You are witnesses," he says, "and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." Speaking to his son in the faith, Timothy, in 2nd Timothy 3: 10 and following Paul says, "But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me a Lystra – what persecutions I endured." "And out of them all the Lord delivered me." "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." "But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

This is how a Christian father speaks and acts. And he doesn't have to be an apostle to be a father in the faith. Jesus said in Matthew 23: 9, "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven." And so we ought rightly to be warned against titles given to men to set before their names so that they would be seen as spiritual in an unbiblical way. But there is such a thing as true spiritual fathers in the Christian church, and it has nothing to do with the priests in the Roman Catholic Church or the Church of England. It has everything to do with Christian maturity. A man of proven character and discernment in spiritual matters is a man who lives out the truth of the Bible. And he does so consistently; not only before men, but more especially in the eyes of God. The way to become a father in the church is to follow the pattern set out for us in 2nd Peter 1: 5-8 where it says, "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love." "For if these things be yours and abound you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the way to become a spiritual father, in the church of the living God.

To know "Him who is from the beginning", means that the father in Christ has come to learn from Christ Himself, and walk with Christ daily, in such a way that he has a good understanding of all the major doctrines of the faith, and is able to present them and explain them from the Bible; handling and dividing the word of God rightly. Further, he is able to minister exhortation, comfort, and encouragement to those whom he is teaching, in a loving and edifying way that will attempt to win the listener to the truth. And to add to this, he is able to sympathize with the spiritual and physical weaknesses of his brethren and others, so that he is always thinking of what would be the best way to help them; either by word, or counsel, or by his own example. In the truest sense of this word, a father is aptly described for us in Hebrews 5: 13 and 14, as one who has partaken of the solid spiritual food of the word; he has aged well in the faith by improving upon all the truth that he has been given, by living out all that he has been taught. And so, by reason of using all that he has been given wisely, his spiritual senses have been trained to discern between good and evil. He now does not simply want to keep all of this knowledge and experience to himself, but to use it faithfully in service to his King. Let us thank the Lord for the many fathers that he has raised up in this church, and pray that he will raise up many more.