

1 John 2:12-14 | Stages of Spiritual Growth

Corporate Prayer

Three groups

- **Little Children** = all believers or new believers (all believers start as new believers)
 - By birth or behavior
- **Fathers** = **mature in the faith** (NLT)
 - Not necessarily to do with age or paternal state
- **Young Men** = **young in the faith** (NLT)
 - Not necessarily to do with age
- Males and female
 - Masculine used to address adults in general
- Addresses each twice and uses repetition

Why is John saying this?

- To encourage and reassure them
 - Difficult times
 - Questions in their minds about own standing with Christ
 - Previous addressing of issues concerning opponents
 - **To know Him = to keep His commandments** (2:4)
 - **To follow Him = to love each other** (2:9)
 - Makes us all nervous
 - In these verses, John pauses to comfort and assure them (2:12)
 - John does not want his readers to think that he doubts their faith
 - He was not calling them to perfection... he was showing them how wrong beliefs about Jesus cause us to lapse in to wrong concepts of following Jesus
 - **(Reason to study Scripture and Theology—Behavior is formed by belief)**

So what does John say here that is of comfort them and perhaps us?

Three groups addressed in the text:

- **Little Children** = all believers
 - **Your sins are forgiven for His name's sake** (v. 12)
 - **You know the Father** (v. 13 in NASB; **14 in NLT**)
- **Fathers** = **mature in the faith**
 - **You know Jesus, who has existed from the beginning** (vv. 13 & 14)
- **Young Men** = **young in the faith**
 - **You have overcome the evil one** (you have one your battle with the devil) (v. 13)
 - **You are strong** (v. 14)
 - **The Word of God abides in you** (v. 14)

Not physical ages but stages of spiritual development

- But that does not mean that age plays no part
- Christians really grow word by word (not day by day)
- But also trial by trial—through the ebbs and flows of a fallen world
- The word and the Spirit work in conjunction with life in this world (**in this world you will have trouble**)

There are 2 kinds of spiritual infants (**little children**) pictured in the NT

- The **first** is an infant **by birth** (just **born again**) (addressed in this text—perhaps)
 - **1 Peter 2:2 (NLT)**
Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation.
 - These grow with proper nourishment (word and Christ)

- Your sins are forgiven...
 - The difference between **forensic** forgiveness and **filial** forgiveness
 - When we sin as a Christian we break fellowship with God, but we are still in the family
 - We do not lose our **sonship**, but we do compromise our close **fellowship** with God when we sin
 - When we practice **1 John 1:9** and confess our sins as Christians (children), the forgiveness we receive is a **filial kind of forgiveness** that restores intimate fellowship
 - But our forensic fellowship remains intact always
 - When John says here, “**your sins are forgiven**” he is referring to **forensic forgiveness** (perfect tense)
- Your sins are forgiven **for His name's sake** (v. 12)
 - In really wanting to bring them encouragement and comfort John adds the little phrase “**for His name's sake**”
 - Name = character (we are saved on the basis of who He is and what He has done for us)
 - Not for our sake
 - = “**Your slate is clean, and it will always remain clean because Jesus died in your place**”
 - I.e. Your salvation is according to His name—not yours
 - Psalm 23:3
He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness **for His name's sake.**
 - Psalm 79:9
Help us, O God of our salvation, **for the glory of Your name;** and deliver us and forgive our sins **for Your name's sake.**
- You know the Father (v. 13 in NASB; **14 in NLT**)
 - John 1:12 (NLT)
But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.
 - Romans 8:15-16 + Galatians 4:6 (NLT)
So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when **he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, “Abba, Father.”**
For his Spirit joins with our spirit **to affirm that we are God's children.**
 - And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, **prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.”**
- The **second** spiritual infant or little child is not an infant by birth but **by behavior** (not in view in the text)
 - People of the flesh (carnal Christians)
 - 1 Corinthians 3:1 (NASB)
And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to **men of flesh**, as to infants in Christ.
 - Been believers for some time but are stunted in their spiritual growth because of their carnality (ruled by the sinful nature)
 - These need repentance and sanctification for growth (conform their lives to Christ and the Word)
 - **Many get stuck here**
- The very young are ruled by emotions rather than understanding
 - Easily excited, frightened, frustrated or distracted
 - Need more mature believers, the Word and life in the Spirit to help them along (in the word)

Young Men = young in the faith (read 13b and 14b)

- You have overcome the evil one (you have one your battle with the devil) (v. 13)
- You are strong (v. 14)
- The Word of God abides in you (v. 14)
 - Busily involved in the battle of Christian living
 - The Christian life is not just enjoying forgiveness and the fellowship with God—but also fighting the enemy
 - The forgiveness of past sins is to be followed by deliverance from its present power (sanctification)
 - **1 John 3:7-8**

o Ephesians 6:10-13 (NASB)

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.**

Young men is being used here metaphorically for people who are younger in the faith

- Metaphors bring something to mind (they show us what something is like)
- Spiritual youth is kind of like youthfulness in general
 - o Energy, excitement, idealism, inexperience, passion, conflict, romance and pride—and **strength**
 - o **The young are strong—youthfulness is characterized by strength**
- John is referencing the **spiritual vitality** of those who are young in the faith
 - o They are young and strong and fight and overcome the schemes of the enemy
- But there is more to their success against the enemy than just youthful zeal
 - o **The Word of God abides in you** (v. 14)
 - o They know the Bible (makes them strong like working out)

Psalm 119:9-11 (NASB)

9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.

10 With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments.

11 Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.

Psalm 1:1-3 (NASB)

1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,

Nor stand in the path of sinners,

Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

2 But **his delight is in the law of the LORD,**

And in His law he meditates day and night.

3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,

Which yields its fruit in its season

And its leaf does not wither;

And in whatever he does, he prospers.

Colossians 3:16 (NASB)

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Because of their attention given to **the word of God** they are **strong** and have **overcome the devil**

- (True in that church—not necessarily all)
- The best way to defeat the devil is to know and do and use the sword!
- Satan has no authority over your life unless you yield it to him
- You do not have to give ground to the devil
- The authority that you have in Christ as one who is united with Christ means that you are **more than a conqueror**
- Don't be a push over for the devil!
- The secret of spiritual growth and strength is the knowledge and practice of the word of God

Allen quote on Page 91-92

Fathers = mature in the faith (read 13a and 14a [14b in NLT])

- o **You know Jesus, who has existed from the beginning** (vv. 13 + 14) (repeated)
- o The Christian life begins with knowing God and it ends with knowing God

Though it is true that all Christians know God by virtue of their new birth—those who are spiritually mature have come into **a deeper knowledge** of God and know with **an intimacy** that only comes with time

- With time and trials
- Trials and failure
- Failure and success
- Success and pain
- Pain and joy in seeing God's steadfast love through it all
- **Epignosis**

The one **who has existed from the beginning** =

- "The immutable eternal God who does not change with the advancing years, but who is forever the same. Time hurries on, but in all generations they find a refuge in Him who from everlasting to everlasting is God. They are consciously living in eternity." –Stott
- They have settled in light of God's sovereignty
- They have progressed into **deep, peaceful, trusting communion** with God

Psalm 90:1-2 (NASB)

1 Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.

2 Before the mountains were born and You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

- They have a sort of **settled wisdom** that comes from seeing God prove Himself faithful over and over again through the ups and downs of life

Psalm 68:19 (NASB)

Blessed be the Lord, **who daily bears our burden,**
The God who is our salvation.

Psalm 68:19 (NLT)

Praise the Lord; praise God our savior!
For each day he carries us in his arms.

...

Are you a new believer?

- Enjoy Jesus and forgiveness and knowing the father
- Don't get stuck
- Nourish yourself on the word

Are you young in the faith?

- Fight the good fight
- Stand firm in Christ (and your) victory
- Let the Word of God dwell richly in you

Are you mature in the faith?

- Thank you for your steady faith in the faithful, eternal God
- It brings peace and stability to us who are still not fully mature
- We rejoice in your settled trust in the Father
- You are spiritual fathers and mothers in the church
- The babies and the young men and women need you—especially now