

— 1 John —  
Lesson #7 Chapter 2:12-17

This week's passage contains much soul-encouragement and heart-piercing exhortation. May you be strengthened, humbled, and blessed in your study!

1. John seeks to encourage his readers after his piercing comments in the previous section. Verses 12-14 can best be seen as an aside or pause in the apostle's teaching. John wants his readers to know how dear they are to him. Leon Morris explains this section best when he writes, "Considerable ingenuity has been expended on the way we should understand these terms (referring to children, fathers, young men)." And "it is best to regard the division as a stylistic device, adding emphasis."<sup>1</sup>

Rather than getting stuck trying to figure out the groupings for the different people mentioned in these verses or the reason for the tense changes, what do we know *for sure* about those to whom John writes his letter? List what you learn from verses 12-14.

Leon Morris notes, "Two sequences, each with a threefold address, to *children, fathers, and young men* now follow. Considerable ingenuity has been expended on the way we should understand these terms and on the change of tense from 'I write' to 'I wrote' (in the Gk. of vs 13c, 14). It may be argued that knowledge accords with fathers (those old in the faith), and strength with young men. But as all the qualities ought to be found in all believers it is best to regard the division as a stylistic device, adding emphasis. 'All Christians are (by grace, not nature) children in innocence and dependence on the heavenly Father, young men in strength, and fathers in experience' (C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles* [Hodder, 1946], pp. 38–39). *John's readers have the forgiveness of sins, the knowledge of God, the word of God abiding in them, and victory over the evil one* (italics added)."<sup>2</sup>

While Leon Morris says the tense changes in verses 12-14 can be attributed to writing style and emphasis, William Barclay provides a further plausible reason for John's change in tense in verses 12-14. He writes, "A more likely explanation is this. When John says *I am writing*, he is thinking of what he is at the moment writing and of what he still has to say; when he says *I have written*, he is thinking of what has already been written and his readers have already read. The sense would then be that the whole letter—the part already written, the part being written and the part still to come—is all designed to remind Christians of who and whose they are and of what has been done for them. *For John, it was of supreme importance that Christians*

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<sup>1</sup> Leon L. Morris, "1 John," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1402.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

*should remember the status and the benefits they have in Jesus Christ, for these would be their defense against error and against sin (italics added)."*<sup>3</sup>

2. Why did John take the time to encourage his readers (as he does in verses 12-14)? See 1 John 1:6-8; 2:3-6, 9-11 to be reminded of the issues he was tackling in his letter. Now consider *why* John gives the assurances he does in verses 12-14.
  
3. Let's take some time to examine each group and consider what John desires to convey about them. In 1 John 2:12, John writes to his beloved children in the faith. He frequently addresses his readers as *children* in this letter (see 1 John 2:1, 12, 13, 18, 28; 3:1, 2, 7, 10, 18; 4:4; 5:2, 21). According to verse 12, what do we know about this group?
  
4. *Based on his description* of children in verse 12, how would you describe his readers? See John 1:12; Acts 10:43; Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:7 to form your answer.
  
5. John uses two different words for children in verses 12-14. In verse 12 the term indicates family relationship and is like calling them "wee bairns" as the Scottish used to do. In verse 13, John uses a word that indicates the "training of children." It carries with it the idea that children need discipline and instruction. In verse 13, what do we learn about the children who need guidance, teaching, and training? How would that information about them in verse 13 encourage John's readers, in light of the word's meaning?
  
6. How is the reminder that all believers are children (see again John's use of the term in this epistle: 1 John 2:1, 12, 13, 18, 28; 3:1, 2, 7, 10, 18; 4:4; 5:2, 21) an important one for us to grasp and seek to abide by? What are some general characteristics of children that are necessary when it comes to knowing the Lord?

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<sup>3</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, 3rd ed., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 57.

7. After addressing his readers as children, John expands his encouragement to “fathers.” What do we learn about those who are *fathers* in verses 13-14? The word “know” here means to know the Lord in a relational, intimate, and experiential way. See also Luke 10:22; John 8:19, 54-55; 14:7, 9.
  
8. What do we learn about the God the fathers know? For a look at a few verses on this topic, see Deuteronomy 33:26-27; Psalm 33:6-12; 90:1-2; Isaiah 43:10-13; Jeremiah 9:23-24; John 17:3; 1 John 2:13-14.
  
9. What is it about being a *father* that is true, or should be true, for all believers? See also John 14:7; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 3:10; Hebrews 5:13-14; 1 John 2:3, 4, 13; 5:20.
  
10. What do we learn about those who are *young men* according to verses 13-14?
  
11. Why would these characteristics be essential for all believers to possess? See Psalm 119:9-11; John 16:33; 1 Corinthians 16:13; Ephesians 6:10-12; 1 Peter 1:22-25; 1 John 4:4; 5:4-5.

“The source of their strength is not innate but has been imparted to them. ‘The Word of God’ refers not to Christ but rather to the message of God as brought by Him and now embodied in the inspired Scriptures. Strength is imparted as God’s Word ‘abides,’ is at home, in the mind and will and finds expression in daily conduct. King justly remarks, ‘All big Christians have been Bible Christians; all who have been greatly blessed to others have been themselves steeped in it.’” ~D. Edmond Hiebert<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, “An Expository Study of 1 John Part 3 (of 10 Parts): An Exposition of 1 John 2:7–17,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (1988): 432.

“To sum up all, I can imagine John, at the point at which he has arrived in the composing of this letter, — the point of enforcing the brotherhood of believers and its antagonism to the world, — *pausing to ask himself, will these counsels of mine be understood and obeyed? Will those to whom they are addressed receive them as they are given, in faithfulness and affection?* He is moved to make an earnest, and what may be a last appeal to them.” ~Robert S. Candlish (italics added)

Candlish further imagines John writing, “What I am writing to you, I write in the fulness of my heart. I know that you believe in Jesus; I give you all credit for being Christians indeed. I appeal to you, by all the motives and considerations that should weigh with you as such. I appeal to you in every view of your Christianity, as little children, fathers, young men. And by all that is implied in your being little children, fathers, young men, I beseech you to hear me. So ‘I write unto you.’ Take kindly what I write unto you, as little children, fathers, young, men. . . . Be persuaded to give heed to what I write or have written; to love the brotherhood; and not to love the world.” ~Robert S. Candlish<sup>5</sup>

12. John now continues to instruct his “little children” about temptations they may face. What command does he give in verse 15?
  - a. Why is it important to heed this command according to the end of verse 15?
  - b. What does the end of verse 15 teach us about our relationship with the Lord? See also Matthew 6:24; Mark 12:30; Luke 16:13; James 4:4.
13. Describe what it looks like to love the world based on this small sampling of verses: John 15:19; Galatians 1:10; 1 Timothy 6:9-10; 2 Timothy 4:10; 1 John 3:17; 4:5.
14. What are some ways we can turn away from the world and its enticements? See Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 6:14; Colossians 3:1-5; 1 John 5:4-5.

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<sup>5</sup> Robert S. Candlish, *First Epistle of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, reprinted 1979, originally 1877), 141-142.

15. What things are in the world according to verse 16? Where do these things come from?
  
16. Loving the world and the things of the world means prizing the things our flesh desires. What does God want us to understand about our flesh, its desires, and loving Him? See Mark 4:19; Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:16, 19-26; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Peter 2:11; 1 John 2:15-17.
  
17. When do the things we *see* become a danger to our hearts and our love for God? See Genesis 3:6; 6:2; Joshua 7:20-21; Job 31:1; Psalm 119:36-37; 2 Peter 2:13-15.
  
18. The boastful pride of life is a trap any of us can fall into. What do you learn about this particularly tricky temptation and how to escape it from Psalm 49:5-6; 10-13, 16-20; 52:1-9; 127:1-2; Proverbs 27:1-2; James 4:13-17?
  
19. James 4:1-10 contains similar admonishments. What do you learn about love for the world from James? What is James' answer for turning away from a love for the world?
  
20. What do we know about the world according to verse 17? What contrasting picture is provided in verse 17?
  
21. What do we know about those who do God's will? See Matthew 7:21; Mark 3:35; 1 Peter 4:2; 1 John 2:17.

22. How would understanding the truths contained in verse 17 help us live differently?

“Here is the true answer to the craving for permanence in the human heart. It is realized in ‘the one doing the will of God’. The present active participle characterizes him as actively engaged in doing God’s will rather than pursuing the fleeting lusts of the world.” ~D. Edmond Hiebert<sup>6</sup>

“Say then, brethren, whether this world is worthy of a Christian’s affections? I do not hesitate to say, it is not: for it affords nothing that is capable of satisfying an immortal soul; and the poor gratifications it does afford, are all perishing even whilst they are in our hands.” ~Charles Simeon<sup>7</sup>

“Stop considering the world precious with the result that you love it, and the things in the world. If anyone as a habit of life is considering the world precious and is therefore loving it, there does not exist the love possessed by the Father in him. Because everything which is in the world, the passionate desire of the flesh, and the passionate desire of the eyes, and the insolent and empty assurance which trusts in the things that serve the creature life, is not from the Father as a source but is from the world as a source. And the world is being caused to pass away, and its passionate desire. But the one who keeps on habitually doing the will of God abides forever.” ~Kenneth Wuest<sup>8</sup>

“The answer to the lusts of the flesh (1 John 2:16) is to cultivate the desire to see Christ.” ~Rick Goertzen

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<sup>6</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1991), 104.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae: James to Jude*, vol. 20 (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1833), 402.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader*, vol. 13 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 128.