

Sermon Notes

Series on First John
First John 2:12-14
“We Are Forgiven”

John A. Eastman
Lesson #5, 01/13/08
Grace Community Bible Church

Introduction: When we read today’s three verses, immediately the repetitive nature of this passage stands out as the Apostle John repeats the phrases, *I am writing to you* or *I have written to you*—six times! The first three phrases, *I am writing* are in the present tense and the last three, *I have written*, are in the past, a Greek aorist past tense. Therefore, some Bible teachers have suggested that the latter three refer to a previous letter John wrote and that the first three refer to this epistle. Dr. John R. W. Stott adds this: “Law makes the ingenious suggestion that ‘the author was interrupted’ at the end of verse 13 and that, when he resumed, he repeated what he had just written, changing the tense of the verbs from the present to the aorist! But this is pure conjecture. The aorist of the second trio is probably an epistolary aorist referring to the present Epistle, in which case there is really no difference in meaning between the two tenses. He first ‘writes’ and then confirms what he ‘has written’. [Stott, John R. W., *The Epistles of John*, Tyndale Bible Commentaries, Eerdmans, pp. 95-96.] John also designates three groups of people, *children*, *fathers* and *young men*, which he addresses twice. The commentaries are replete with various explanations as to the meaning of these three designations and few are in agreement. Here are some explanations about these three designations that I found: (1) *Children*, *fathers* and *young men* refer to those who physically fall into this category. But the question then arises, why aren’t the mothers and the young women also mentioned, his female readers? (2) The three designations refer to those recipients of John’s letter who were in various stages of their spiritual development, *children*, *fathers* and *young men*. Augustine held this view. These Bible scholars make the comparison of God’s family to every human family which has members of different maturity. The *children* would then refer to fairly new believers; *fathers* would refer to the more mature believers and *young men* would be a reference to all those in between! But if this is the case, then why did the Apostle John cite them in this quirky order? (3) Some Bible teachers believe that the term *children* refers to all Christians and then John further subdivided *little children* into two units of *fathers* and *young men*. This view was held by many of the Greek church fathers as well as Calvin and Luther. The *fathers* and the *young men* would then correspond to Paul’s *infants in Christ* (1 Corinthians 3:1) and *mature/complete in Christ* (Colossians 1:28). (4) Still others believe that these three designations refer to how long someone has been a Christian. Similarly, some then conclude that the *fathers* would be the leaders of churches, as *fathers* connotes somewhat seasoned experience with God. (5) Others believe that the Apostle John uses these three stages of life to describe qualities typical of each age group that ought to characterize all believers; so that all the designations refer to John’s readers at various points in their lives. The three are representative of all Christians. All Christians ought to be *children* in a certain sense; all Christians ought to be *fathers* in a certain sense and all Christians ought to be *young men* in a certain sense. Dr. Plummer adds that “there is something to be said for the view that all S. John’s readers are addressed in all three

cases, the Christian life of all having analogies with youth, manhood, and age; with the innocence of childhood, the strength of prime, and the experience of full maturity.” Plummer, Alfred, The Epistles of S. John, Cambridge University Press, p.98.] Another question that might be difficult to answer conclusively is whether the Apostle John meant that he was writing because the stated condition was true of each one of these three designations or so that or *because* the condition might become true of them. The Greek particle [οτι, hoti] can be understood in both ways. Interestingly, let me state that mere physical age distinctions was not John’s intent is evident from John’s use of *little children* [τεκνία] elsewhere in his writings to include all his readers, all Christians (2:1, 28; 3:18 & 5:21). Whenever John uses this phrase, *little children*, he uses it as a term of endearment. Let me make this observation as the Apostle John has been teaching us about the Lord Jesus Christ and how we are to live as Christians. John now abruptly stops, pauses, and digresses for these three verses in order to give his readers encouragement; to motivate believe to cultivate intimate fellowship with God. The Apostle John is giving us encouragement about our standing in Christ so that we keep on keeping on in the faith. Just as any good pastor, the Apostle John doesn’t want believers to be discouraged and so here he is encouraging brothers and sisters. Therefore, consider these three verses as stating six encouragements about ourselves so that we keep on keeping on in our walk with Christ. All six of these are true of all Christians of all times and not just true of some Christians at some stage in our Christian experience.

#1 SINS: OUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN, 2:12

Verse 12: Again, I remind us that John uses the diminutive title, *little children*, to convey the author’s expression of endearment, love and care for his readers. This title, *little children*, [Greek is τεκνία] like the cognate Greek verb [τικτω, “to be born”], emphasizes the closeness of one’s birth relationship, here focusing on the family of God. This Greek word also suggests that there are times when believers especially are dependent on God and spiritual teachers. So, John is reminding us of who we are in Christ and the confidence that this relationship with Christ brings. As stated in the opening remarks, physical age distinctions are not meant by John since this Greek word for *children* is used elsewhere to include all John’s readers, 1 John 2:2, 28; 3:18; 5:21). One of the most fantastic truths as well as foundational doctrinal truth of Christianity is that we can know that our *sins* are *forgiven*. One of the most critical needs of a child is his/her security; to know that they are safe with mom and dad or grandparents. The Apostle John is affirming that as Christ’s *little children*, the ground of our security is that our *sins have been forgiven*; something true of every Christian! John’s use of the Greek perfect tense denotes the past experience of having our *sins forgiven*, leading to the present state of knowing with absolute confidence that we stand *forgiven* in Christ. That our sins have been and remain *forgiven* is confidently encouraging! By Christ’s substitutionary death for our sins, that He died in our place resulted in our sins being forgiven. World religions try to answer this question; what do I have to do to have my *sins forgiven*? Check out Job’s question in Job 9:2. People search to find out ‘what do I have to do so that when I stand before God, so I won’t be turned away.’ Christian, praise God! Shout hallelujah *because your sins have been*

forgiven you! It's a done deal! When a person comes to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, He forgives our sin. Consider a few exciting verses that affirm this wonderful foundational truth; *our sins have been forgiven* (Psalm 103:12; Matthew 1:21; 20:28; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:7-8; 4:32; Colossians 1:13-14; Hebrews 9:22; 1 Peter 3:18 etc.) We often sing the praise chorus; "I'm forgiven, because You were forsaken. I'm accepted; You were condemned. I'm alive and well, Your Spirit lives within me; because You died and rose, again. Amazing love! How can it be? That You my King would die for me! Amazing love! I know it's true; it's my joy to honor You; in all I do; I honor You. The Apostle John then proceeds to answer "why" God *forgives* our *sins* and asserts that it's all for God's glory and honor—for *His name's sake*, a phrase, often used in both Old and New Testaments (Psalm 23:3; 25:11; 31:3; 79:9; 109:21; Jeremiah 14:7, 21; Ezekiel 20:44; and in the New Testament almost always in the context of persecution, Matthew 19:29; Luke 21:17; John 15:21; & Acts 9:16). God's *name* is at stake when He *forgives* our *sins*; its God's character and work at stake. A name represents someone; here specifically the very name of God. God *forgives* us, not because of any merit on our part, but solely on the work of Jesus Christ who took our penalty at the cross and died in our place for our *sin*. The reason that we are saved is because God is gracious and merciful—we don't really deserve salvation, let alone the *forgiveness of sins*. God *forgives* us to display His merciful character; read this fantastic passage Micah 7:18-19. Then Isaiah 43:25 asserts that God forgives sin for His own sake. Consider reading Ephesians 1:4-6 where Paul declares that God chose us—to *the praise of His glory*, not ours. But, the opponents in John's day were saying that they had no sin—read 1 John 1:8 & 10. We've all heard people today say something like this; 'well, I'm really not a bad person. Sure, I make errors in judgment and mistakes, but I'm not sinful.' As in the Apostle John's day, likewise in ours; there are those who deny acts of sin. But, we are all sinners, which is what Paul declares in Romans 3:23? But when we sin, and we will, remember God's gracious mercy toward us, that when we confess our sin, *God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*—1 John 1:9. As a result of all of God's grace and mercy, we should respond by *glorifying God* in our bodies—1 Corinthians 6:20.

The 2nd foundational truth that should encourage believers like us:

#2 SAVIOR: WE KNOW JESUS CHRIST, 2:14a

Verse 13: John addresses the spiritually mature believers by the title, *fathers* [Greek is πατερες, pateres]. A relationship with Christ over a period of years usually brings maturity and stability to one's Christian experience. Maturity is marked by one's *knowledge* of Jesus Christ. In addition read Philippians 3:8-10. Maturity is a process. Another characteristic of those who are *fathers* is that Scripture speaks of *fathers* leading others to Christ. In 1 Corinthians 4:15 Paul calls himself a *father* to the Corinthian believers because he had led them to Christ. Perhaps the Apostle John perceives that those who lead others to Christ can be titled a mature *father* because of this experience of leading others to Christ. The phrase, *from the beginning*, is always used by the Apostle John in reference to Jesus Christ; cf. 1 John 1:1 & John 1:1. Taken alone, this designation might denote God the Father as the immutable 'I am,' but Plummer clarifies with this

comment: John “never speaks of the First Person of the Godhead under any designation but ‘God’ or ‘the Father.’” [Plummer, Alfred, *The Epistles of S. John*, Cambridge University Press, p. pp]. With this phrase, *from the beginning* (v.13a), John is making a Christological statement, affirming the eternity of Christ. Anyone who denies the deity and eternity of Christ cannot be a believer. The doctrines of the Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Islam and other false teachings—all deny the deity and eternity of Jesus Christ. John writes that we can *know* Him who *was from the beginning*. Paul affirms in Colossians 1:16-17, that Jesus Christ is the Creator who made all things. We are to be encouraged that because Jesus Christ has been around *from the beginning*, because He created this earth, and because He is *holding* it together. Don’t lose sleep over global warming! Jesus Christ has it under His control! Don’t worry about running out of water, food, chocolate oil, or energy, He’s got those things under His control too. John’s use of the verb *know* in the Greek perfect tense suggests a past *knowledge* of Jesus Christ that has remained and become stronger and deeper. The Lord Jesus Christ ought to be the central person in believer’s lives. Be encouraged that, though He is the God of the universe, we can talk to Him in prayer and trust Him for all eternity.

A 3rd reason John writes to encourage us:

#3 SATAN: WE HAVE BEEN VICTORIOUS OVER SATAN, 2:13c

Verse 13 (continued): The Christian life is not only enjoying the benefits of Christ's death such as the *forgiveness of sins* and not only a *knowledge* of Him that affects how we live and breath; but the Christian life is also a battle against Satan. John’s designation of these saints is that they were experiencing victory *over the evil one*. Four other times in this same little epistle, John speaks of *the evil one*—1 John 2:14; 3:12; 5:18 & 5:19. Satan, who fell from heaven; who tempted Adam; who tried to tempt Jesus and is the same one whom we identify in what’s generally called the Lord’s Prayer; *and deliver us from the evil one*—Satan! The Bible states this about Satan’s character: **(1)** He is a murderer, John 8:44; **(2)** He is a liar, John 8:44; **(3)** He is a confirmed sinner, John 3:8; **(4)** He is an accuser, Revelation 12:10; **(5)** He is an adversary; *the evil one* is viciously seeking to devour us, 1 Peter 5:9; *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* But, be encouraged! Satan is a defeated foe (read John 12:31; 14:30 & 16:11) and he’s on the run (read 1 Peter 5:9 & James 4:7). The Apostle John’s use of the Greek perfect tense, *have overcome the evil one*, doesn’t mean that our battle is done! But, having encountered Satan, we stand assured of victory through what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. Satan wreck havoc with us by sin as we all struggle with sin. But, John writes that *we have overcome the evil one*, so be encouraged! But we say; ‘how can we overcome Satan? It doesn’t feel like we are winning this battle sometimes.’ How? The answer lies in the death of Christ for by His death, Satan no longer has power over us; Satan’s judgment at the cross is stated in John 12:31 with his final casting into the Lake of Fire stated in Revelation 20:10. In Romans 6:6-7, Paul writes that we are set free—we didn’t do it but Christ did it for us. As believers, we also have the intercessory work of Christ, John 17:15. Christians must always be on guard, 1 Peter 5:8 and use our armor, Ephesians 6:10-18. The ability to *overcome the evil one* does not come

from our own strength but from God who makes provision for us, as He gives us the enablement and the victory; read 1 Corinthians 10:13 & Galatians 3:13-25. The renown Greek scholar, F. F. Bruce notes that ‘of the 28 occurrences of the verb *nikan* (“to conquer”) in the New Testament, 24 are in John's writings, and the noun *nike* (“victory”) appears only in 5:4 in the New Testament. Thus the victory motif is peculiarly Johannine.” [Bruce, F. F., The Epistles of John, Fleming, p. 59].

Here’s a 4th reason John writes to encourage us:

#4 SECURITY: WE KNOW GOD THE FATHER, 2:13c

Verse 13 (continued): This sentence actually begins another triad and we notice some changes. (1) Up until this phrase, John has employed the present tense, *I am writing* [γράφω, grapho] but now he uses the aorist tense, *I have written* [εγράψα, egrapha]. John’s reason for this change isn’t clear yet some Bible teachers have offered suggestions: (a) John, as an old man, realized that he might be dead when his readers receive this epistle, so he changed to the aorist to urge them to receive it as his final testimony to them; (b) The present tense refers to 1 John and the aorist to the Gospel of John; (c) John was interrupted after he wrote the first part and when he resumed he used the aorist. I like Burdick’s analysis; “The reason for repeating the triplet was to place particular emphasis on the author’s confidence in the genuineness of his reader’s salvation experience (emphasis mine). And in order to avoid the monotony of mere repetition, John used the epistolary aorist in the second triplet instead of the present tense.” [Burdick, Donald W., The Epistles of John, p. 175]. (2) The Apostle John uses a different Greek word for *children* [παιδια, paidia] than he used in verse 12 [τεκνια]. παιδια, is used elsewhere in the Bible only in 1 John 2:18 and John 21:5. The difference in meaning is in its emphasis as it means “taught ones.” Our English word pedagogy, which involves instruction, has that same Greek word as its root. Barker writes, “If a difference in emphasis is intended, the use of τεκνια emphasizes more the relationship, the dependence or weakness of the infant, while παιδια stresses the immaturity (subordination) of the child, the need to be under instruction or direction.” [Barker, Glenn W., The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, New Testament, p. 320]. John then adds with much assurance that not only do we *know Him who has been from the beginning*, Jesus, but now here at the end of verse 13, John declares that we *know the Father* (read Jesus’ words in John 14:7 & later on in this same epistle 1 John 2:23-24.) We’re not standing outside looking in but we are a part of the family of God—He’s our Father. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day had a real problem with Jesus when He called God His Father (John 7:14-32); when He didn’t condemn the woman caught in adultery but said *go and sin no more* (John 8:1-11); when He claimed to be *light of the world* indicating that He was God (John 9:12-19) etc. The Pharisees, the religious leaders were baffled by His claims and in John 8:19 their question is recorded, “*where is Your Father?*” To which Jesus replied, “*You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also.*” Read also Galatians 4:6-7. Unlike human fathers, our heavenly Father won’t trick us, leave us, deceive us, let us down, and won’t promise something and not come through. God the Father always delivers. Be encouraged

by this kind of a personal, intimate, genuine relationship with the God of the universe who loves us so much that He has made us *an heir* to the throne.

Here's a 5th reason John writes to encourage us:

#5 STRENGTH: WE KNOW THE WORD OF GOD, 2:14

Verse 14: John's assurance concerning their mature *knowledge* is repeated here. Again, John desires that Christians be encouraged and cites three reasons for that possibility: **(1)** you are already *strong*; the Greek literally reads, *strong you are* [ισχυροί εστε], denoting the vitality of youth. The adjective places stress on the actual power that believers possess rather than on the mere principle of power or strength. Elsewhere the Bible states that we are simply *jars of clay* (2 Corinthians 4:7), that is, merely weak vessels, easily broken. But our weakness shows God's power for it is only He who makes us *strong* (2 Corinthians 12:10). **(2)** This second one is introduced by the Greek connective και as John now states the source of the believer's strength, namely, *the Word of God* which *abides in you*, the written Word. Such strength is not innate, but comes from *abiding in the Word of God*; that is, we are comfortable with God's Word, at home with it, know it in the head and heart so much so that it finds expression in how we live (read Psalm 119:9-11). We come to the Word of God and say, 'God, teach me! What do you want to tell me about this passage?' This process of spiritual growth through the Word is called sanctification (read Acts 20:32 & cf. 1 Timothy 3:16—the AWANA verse.) **(3)** For the 2nd time John writes that *you have overcome the evil one* and prefaces it by another use of the Greek connective και, indicating the place that the Word of God has in *overcoming* Satan. The familiar and fantastic passage on the armor of God is Ephesians 6:10-17; God's provision for withstanding Satan's assaults and attacks. In 6:17, Paul identifies the weapon at our disposal for *overcoming the evil one* as the *Word of God*. Satan cannot resist the Word of God as proven in the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11.

Conclusion: Do you feel spiritually weak or succumb to sin more than you'd like? Be encouraged in what God provides for us, His Word, so that we can win. Numerous passages relate to the process of spiritual maturity about which John writes: (1) *Walk in newness of life*—Romans 6:4; (2) *Be transformed by the renewing of your mind*—Romans 12:2; (3) *Cleanse ourselves...perfecting holiness*—2 Corinthians 7:1; (4) *Grow up*—Ephesians 4:7; (5) *Press on toward the goal*—Philippians 3:14; (6) *Walk in Him...rooted and now being built up and established in your faith, just as you were instructed*—Colossians 2:6-7; (7) *Flee...and pursue righteousness*—1 Timothy 6:11; & (8) *Grow in the grace and the knowledge*—2 Peter 3:18.

Note: It is my prayer that these printed notes will encourage serious Bible students to do further study on this passage. If you find any typos, errors or have any questions, please contact me. Thank you. Pastor John A. Eastman