

Three Stages In The Christian Life

1 John 2:12-14

Study #5

(Not entirely original with me)

INTRODUCTION:

1. Having charged his readers to observe an “old, yet new” commandment to love one another (**1 Jn2:7-11**), John takes a moment to specifically address various members of his reading audience- **1 Jn 2:12-14**
2. This section is rhythmical, almost lyrical, and raises a number of questions:
 - a. Why did John use the present tense, “I write” {**grapho**}, in the first three clauses, and “I have written” {**egrapsa**}, epistolary aorist, in the second three?
 - b. To what writing does he refer in the first instance? In the second?
 - c. What is the meaning of the word “children” in the first clause of each of the divisions?
 - d. Why did he use the word **teknion** in the first reference to children, and **paidion** in the second?
 - e. In what sense is the reference to “fathers, children, young men” to be taken, literal or figurative?
3. Many and various answers have been given to these questions; without going into detail, I believe the following answers to the above questions have merit...
 - a. We have here a simple form of Hebrew parallelism, where the same thing is being said for the sake of emphasis
 - b. In both instances, the writing to which John refers is this very epistle
 - c. Unlike **1 Jn 2:1,18,28; 3:7,18; 4:4; 5:21** where “children” appears to be a term of endearment for all believers, in **2:12,13** “children” seems to refer to a specific class of Christians
 - d. Any distinction between **teknion** and **paidion** is likely not significant, since John uses both as terms of endearment in this epistle when speaking of all believers - cf. **1 Jn 2:18** (**paidion**) with **1 Jn 2:28** (**teknion**)
 - e. Taken literally, the terms “fathers, children, young men” would leave out many Christians (old men, old and younger women); therefore I take the terms to be figurative
4. With this understanding, I believe we find John addressing three basic groups of Christians, who are at different stages in their Christian life

I. THE STAGE OF INFANCY

A. IN WHICH CHRISTIANS ARE “LITTLE CHILDREN”...

1. Both terms used by John normally refer to small infants
 - a. **teknion** {**tek-nee'-on**} - diminutive of tekna; an infant
 - b. **paidion** {**pahee-dee'-on**} - neut. diminutive of pais; a childling (of either sex), i.e. (prop.) an infant, or (by extens.) a half-grown boy or girl (cf. **Mk 5:39-42**)
2. Those who are new Christians, or immature Christians, are thus spoken of as “babes in Christ” - cf. **1 Co 3:1; Ga 4:19; He 5:12-13**

3. This can be a difficult time, in which a Christian...
 - a. Is still more carnal than spiritual - **1 Co 3:1**
 - b. Can be a source of anxiety for those trying to lead them along - **Ga 4:19**
 - c. Needs to focus on the “milk” of the Word - **He 5:12-13**

B. NEW CHRISTIANS CAN TAKE ENCOURAGEMENT FROM JOHN...

1. Because their sins have been forgiven in Christ! - **1 Jn 2:12**
 - a. Forgiveness is not based upon maturity or perfection
 - b. But upon the blood of Jesus, and upon our willingness as Christians to confess our sins
- **1 Jn 1:9**
2. Because they have “known the Father” - **1 Jn 2:13**
 - a. I.e., they have fellowship with the Father, which is John’s definition of “eternal life” -
Jn 17:2-3
 - b. They may be “babes”, but they have “eternal life” in Christ! - cf. **1 Jn 5:11-12**
 - c. And John wants them to continue to believe! - **1 Jn 5:13**

[When a “babe in Christ” feeds upon the milk of the Word, making good use of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ, remaining in fellowship with the Father and sharing in “eternal life”, it will not be long before they enter...]

II. THE STAGE OF YOUTH

A. IN WHICH CHRISTIANS ARE “YOUNG MEN”...

1. As explained previously, I take the expression “young men” figuratively
2. It refers to all, male or female, young or old chronologically, who are “strong in the Lord”
3. I.e., all “who have overcome the wicked one” - **1 Jn 2:13,14**
 - a. Not that they are perfect, or without sin - cf. **1 Jn 1:8**
 - b. But that their faith has had time to be tested, and they have demonstrated that they are truly
“born of God” - cf. **1 Jn 4:4; 5:4-5**

B. THE SOURCE OF THEIR STRENGTH IS THE WORD OF GOD...

1. Only as the Word of God “abides” (remains) in them are they strong - **1 Jn 2:14**
2. Even as David saw the value of letting the Word of God abide in his heart - **Ps 119:11**
3. For this reason, then, we need to heed the admonition of Peter - cf. **1 Pe 2:2**

[As one demonstrates time and again that they are strong in the Lord, they progress to the final stage of the Christian life...]

III. THE STAGE OF MATURITY

A. IN WHICH CHRISTIANS ARE “FATHERS”...

1. Again, I take the term “fathers” figuratively

2. It likely refers in this passage to Christians, male and female, who have reached the highest stage of the Christian life
3. The term “fathers” suggests...
 - a. They have had experience, having progressed through earlier stages of the Christian life (infancy, strength)
 - b. They have even produced spiritual offspring, by leading others to Christ - cf. **1 Co 4:14-15**

B. THEY “HAVE KNOWN HIM WHO IS FROM THE BEGINNING”...

1. The reference is likely to Jesus, who “was from the beginning” - **1 Jn 1:1; Jn 1:1-2**
2. Is there a distinction being made by John?
 - a. “Little children” have known “the Father” - **1 Jn 2:13**
 - b. “Fathers” have known “the Son” (who was from the beginning) - **1 Jn 2:13,14**
3. If so, perhaps it is this:
 - a. As babes in Christ, it can be said that even in our infancy we can “know” the Father, that is have an intimate relationship with Him and experience the eternal life which He gives
 - b. But only with time, and with opportunity to “walk just as He walked” (**1 Jn 2:6**), can it be said that one has truly come to “know” Jesus
 - 1) Therefore the admonition of Peter to “grow in the...knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” - **2 Pe 3:18**
 - 2) Which knowledge comes only as we develop the Christ-like graces found in **2 Pe 1:5-8**

CONCLUSION:

1. The Christian life has much in harmony with physical life...
 - a. There are definite stages in life
 - b. Only through “growth” does one pass from one stage to the other
 - c. But when growth does not occur, that is a sign of a serious malady!
2. There is a major difference, however...
 - a. Physical growth usually occurs without much effort on our part
 - b. Such is not the case with spiritual growth!
3. These verses that have served as the basis of our text, while they are difficult in many respects, they ought to clearly impress upon our minds several truths...
 - a. There are different stages in the Christian life
 - b. In each stage there are blessings to be enjoyed
 - c. But little children need to become young men, and young men need to become fathers

May God grant us the grace needed to grow as we should, and enjoy the full blessings in each stage of the Christian life!

(Material from Mark A. Copeland)