

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Danger of Distraction

by Dan Trygg

“I write to you, little-(dear)-children, because your sins have-been-forgiven you (and they remain forgiven) on account of His name. ¹³ I write to you, fathers, because you have-experientially-known the One from the beginning (and that still affects you). I write to you, young men, because you-have-overcome the evil one (and that victory remains in effect). I wrote to you, children (ones-under-training), because you-have-experientially-known the Father (and that still affects you). ¹⁴ I wrote to you, fathers, because you-have-experientially-known the One from the beginning (and that still affects you). I wrote to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you-have-overcome the evil one (and that victory remains in effect). ¹⁵ Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If ever anyone might-be-loving (preferring) the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world, ...the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pretentious-pride of everyday-life..., is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷ The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one doing the will of God abides unto the Age.”

1 John 2:12-17

Remember that John himself had heard, seen, and touched the Word of Life, ...and this experience had impacted the remainder of his life. It was his desire to proclaim the “age-type life”, which had been with the Father, and was made visible and tangible in the person of Jesus. Through this, *he hoped that they, too, would come to have a shared participation with him and other believers*, ...with those who also had come to have a participation with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ (1:1-4). In 5:13, he would write, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have ‘age-type life’ (life of the age-to-come)”. John himself had experienced the life of God through Jesus Christ, which had transformed him. **It was his purpose to help other believers come to see that they, too, had come to know the life of God, as he had. Throughout the letter, he attempted to help people recognize what the signs of the genuine life from God would be like**, ...as well as what are false beliefs and indicators of a lack of abiding in the “age-type life” that comes from God.

For example, God is Light, ...there is no darkness in Him at all. **So, if we are “sharing in” and “abiding in” His life, we should be walking in the Light as He does.** We should look like Him, not like the darkness. Furthermore, when we are in the Light, then we can freely and openly share with one another without fear or pretense, and we can share in a common-union to be found only in Him. If we walk in darkness, then we are not “doing the truth” (1:5-6).

We all have sin within us, and have chosen sin in the past, but John wants us to know that it is possible not to sin, ...even though it also remains a possibility for us to still choose sin. If we *do* sin, we can confess our sins, and God will forgive and cleanse us, because Christ became the satisfactory sacrifice for our sin, and for any who would call upon Him. He will stand up for us as our Advocate, when we need a defense (1:8-2:1).

We know that we have come to know Him, if we find a new ability to obey God. Those who do not obey, are led astray. **If we abide in Him, we will walk as He did. The love of God will produce obedience in us** (2:3-6).

Another sign that the Light of God is in us is a newfound ability to love others. There is a process at work within us who have this “age-type life”. It pulls the darkness aside, and causes the Light to shine forth. This Light is made visible and tangible by acts of love. Abiding in the Light will cause us to be careful not to cause others to stumble over our selfish choices. Those who walk in darkness, are lost and spiritually blind (2:7-11).

This brings us to our passage for today. It seems very simple, and almost repetitive. What is John getting at? Unfortunately, our English translations are not able to be as vivid as the original Greek words. We miss some of the nuances that John included, but which are not so obvious to us in English. Remember the preceding context. **John is trying to help us see what is genuine from what is not, ...and where we are in the process of our growth.**

The first thing we can notice is there are three groups of people being addressed: children, fathers and young men. These seem to be referring to different stages in spiritual maturity. The word for “children” changes from the first time it is used. The first occurrence is “little-children”, a term of endearment and familiarity. The second time, John used a different word, one that means “ones under training”. Clearly, this was intentional, and brings out the common theme of becoming mature. **So, it would seem that John was writing to new believers**, who have recently come to have their sins forgiven, ...seasoned and mature believers, who had the advantage of long experience in their faith, and had led others to Christ (hence, “fathers”), ...and believers who are younger in age, but who have been through spiritual conflicts and have been victorious against the enemy.

Next, we notice the repetition of the verb to “write”. The first three times, it is “I write”, but in the next three occurrences it is “I wrote”. Why does John move from the present tense to the past tense? **This technique serves as a way to accentuate the repetition, and underscore the differences in what was communicated between the first set and the second set.** Notice that there are minor changes in the message in some of the repeated messages.

For example, the “dear children” are changed to “ones under training”, and the focus has changed from being ones whose “sins have been forgiven” to ones who “have come to know the Father”. These verbs are in a tense that indicates that these actions happened in the past with ongoing effect. In other words, their sins were forgiven (and they remain forgiven), and they came to experientially-know the Father (and that experience has ongoing impact in their lives). You can see why **John may have felt the need to write to them, to assure them of their experience, and to focus them on their relationship with God.**

By contrast, John wrote *the exact same reason* for writing to the fathers *both times* he mentioned them. They “have experientially-known the One from the beginning”. Again, the verb indicates that **they came to experientially-know God at some time in the past, and this encounter had ongoing impact in their lives.** The phrase, “the One from the beginning” may be a way of referring to Jesus as “the Word of life”, Who was “from the beginning” (cf. 1 Jn. 1:1), or it could just be referring to the longevity of their experiential-knowledge of God. **This reference to time, and using the title of “fathers”, seems to emphasize maturity and wisdom gained by walking with God over time. This was their strength, and needed to be communicated to them, and to the others in the group.**

The third group are referred to as “young men”. **Both statements emphasize that they “have overcome the evil one”. The second instance added, “...because you are strong and the word of God abides in you...”. This would seem to be the basis for their defeat of the evil one. Again, the verb tense indicates that they defeated the enemy in the past, and that this victory continues to hold fast.** This is not ruling out other potential skirmishes with the enemy. It is referring to a past contest, where they soundly defeated the devil, and the impact of this particular victory remains in their lives. **I would suggest that it refers to escaping the authority of the adversary, when they came to stand in the truth of the gospel (cf. Col. 1:13). The point is that they are strong in the truth, and are able to resist the enemy with the Word of God.** They defeated him in the past, so they should be able to stand against him in the future.

So, we have three different kinds of individuals, ...new believers, ...mature and experienced believers who have led others to Christ, ...and healthy, strong believers who are equipped to stand in the truth and overcome Satan. What do they have in common? They all have had an experience that has influenced their life with ongoing impact. The thrust of these perfect tense Greek verbs is that the experience of knowing God has profoundly and lastingly affected them. **No matter what stage they are at in their spiritual journey, this is the foundation for growth, stability and spiritual readiness.** While that past impact continues to reverberate in their lives, **they are to abide in that knowledge, life and empowerment that has been introduced into their lives. They will be tested.**

The first test John mentions comes from the world system that surrounds us. When John wrote, “Do not love the world, or the things in the world...” he was not talking about the planet, animals and people. **He was talking about a spiritual/political system that has infected and permeates this planet, and especially the social, commercial, and political values that attempt to influence us.** The Greek word for “world” here is *kosmos*, which means “an organized system of things”. Jesus said that **Satan is “the ruler of this world-system”** (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). So there is the natural world, which includes all created things, ...and **there is an evil influence that works through natural and human events to try to direct people to make choices that are opposed to God’s purposes for them. This can lead to sin, bondage, damage and death.** God so loved the people and the planet that He sent Jesus to set us free from the devil’s evil influences (Jn. 3:16; 12:31; Col. 2:14; Heb. 2:14,15; 1 Jn. 3:8).

So, we should not be surprised to read that John would say, “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” You might say, “I thought you said that God loved the world. Why are we commanded to *not* love it?” **The key to understand this is in the term for “love”, and how John is using it here. It is the Greek word, agapaō, the verbal form for agape-love. Agapē is not about affection, delight, or desire. It is a choice. It is a “choice-to-prefer”. If we put that into the verse, it makes more sense, “Do not choose-to-prefer the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone chooses-to-prefer the world, the preferential-choice of the Father is not in him.** For everything in the world, ...the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the boastful-pride of everyday life is not out-from the Father, rather it is out from the world. **And the world-system passes away, and the lusts of it, but the one doing the will of God abides/remains unto the age.”**

So, we have a choice. We can choose to invest in the values, attractions and advertisements of the world-system, ...OR, we can choose to prefer to invest in our Heavenly Father, and what He wants us to be doing with our lives. We can’t do both, ...because these are diametrically opposed. Like Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate (disregard) the one and love (choose-to-prefer) the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You are not able to serve God and Mammon (wealth, money)” (Matt. 6:24).

Even though these three groups of people, at different stages in their spiritual journey, have had life-changing experiences, ...things that happened in the past with ongoing effect..., and John does not indicate that those can be erased or nullified, nevertheless **we all have choices to make that will either deepen our relationship with God, or draw us away from it. The world-system, with its temptations, is a distraction that will keep us from what is Life, indeed.**