

“Living with Eternity in View”

1 John 2:12-17

March 4, 2018

Let's begin today with a question: What's up with 1 John 2:12-14? At first glance, these verses are a little confusing. Who is John writing to? Is he only writing to children, fathers, and young men? What about mothers and young women? Is this some kind of a guys only+fraternity club? In a somewhat poetic way,¹ that is different from the rest of his letter, John is actually saying something pretty important here. But, to our modern ears, it throws us for a bit of a loop. Whenever we run into confusing passages, it helps to consult with some good Bible commentaries that help us to think carefully about the text. These are written by godly men and women who have studied the issues more deeply than most of us get to.

This gender concern does have a solution. The fact that the readers are addressed as fathers and young menq both masculine terms, reflects a first-century way of speaking, but does not exclude female readers.² In other words, 2,000 years ago, this is just a simplified way of referring to an older generation of people and a younger generation. In today's vernacular, we would make efforts to articulate this a little differently. But, in that particular time and culture, John's readers would have understood his meaning and not been offended by this kind of verbiage. The above said, there's still some debate over what the significance is for these various forms of address: children/fathers/young men. Most of the commentaries I consulted, were hesitant to be overly adamant about John's exact meaning here. And so, we should also hold our conclusions somewhat loosely. But, let's take a crack at it anyhow.

One commentary states: It is possible that John's intention was to address his entire congregation from two standpoints . that of chronological age (children,+young men,+fathers+) and that of spiritual age (novices in the faith, those whose faith is vigorous and who are responsible for the work of the gospel, and those whose knowledge and experience in the faith are the foundation of which the community exists).³ A reference to their spiritual level of maturity is certainly a possibility. But, it's not convincing to me for at least two reasons.

1) First of all, all throughout 1 John, the Apostle John refers to ALL of his readers as his children. In fact, in our very first sermon on 1 John, we noted that John has a close spiritual relationship with his readers. He refers to them as his children+9 different times in this letter. He does this throughout chapter 2 and also in chapters 3, 4, and 5.⁴ Therefore, it seems unlikely that John is referring to their level of spiritual maturity when he calls them children. He clearly uses the term children+in describing his affectionate bond with all of his readers. He views himself as their spiritual father.

2) The second reason that it seems unlikely, that John is referring to their level of spiritual maturity, is because of the various descriptors he uses: For example, in Verse 12: your sins have been forgiven+Verse 13: you know him who is from the beginning+& you have overcome the evil one+Verse 14: you know the Father+& you are strong, and the word of God lives in you.+All of these descriptors describe every Christ-follower, not just those who are at a certain level of spiritual maturity.

1 John 2:12-14 urges every believer to live with confidence. In other words, Christ-followers, at every level of spiritual maturity, have had their sins forgiven. Every Christian knows him who is from the beginning+(that's Jesus). In Christ, all of us have overcome the evil one. We know the Heavenly Father and we are strong because God's Word lives in every single believer.⁵ Therefore, I would tend to agree with a different commentary: It is more likely that when the author addresses the childrenq

¹ The fact that the passage is kin to poetry makes us think twice before insisting that so literal a meaning must be given to the words (Barclay, William, *The Letters of John and Jude, Rev. Ed.*, Westminster, Philadelphia, PA, 1976, p. 52.)

² Kruse, C. G. (2000). *The letters of John* (p. 88). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.

³ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 12*, (1, 2, 3 John: Glenn W. Barker), Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1981, p. 319.

⁴ The first time is in 1 John 2:1, then in today's text verses 12 & 14. Just a few verses later in verse 18 and then again in 2:28. He calls them children again in 3:7 and 3:18. Then again in 1 John 4:4 and finally, in his closing word to them in 5:21, where he calls them his dear children.+

⁵ John's wider meaning [is that] the blessings of each group are the blessings of all the groups and that each of us finds [ourselves] included in all of them.+ (Barclay, William, *The Letters of John and Jude, Rev. Ed.*, Westminster, Philadelphia, PA, 1976, p. 53.)

he is addressing all his readers δ and that these readers fall into two δ different groups: those who may be described as δ young men δ and those who may be described as δ fathers δ .⁶

We could then summarize it this way: δ Children δ refers to all Christ followers. δ Fathers δ refers to older Christians. δ Young men δ refers to younger Christians.⁷ And, all of these terms are co-ed.⁸ Now, that we have a better understanding of the philology⁹ behind this text, let's read it again, with a little clearer understanding. 1 Jn. 2:12-14:

I am writing to you, dear children, (all Christ-followers) because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I am writing to you, fathers, (older Christians) because you know him who is from the beginning. (i.e. some of these older saints may have even been alive when Jesus walked the earth¹⁰) I am writing to you, young men, (younger Christians) because you have overcome the evil one. (i.e. even though you are young, you need not fear the devil)¹¹

Then, John uses a kind of poetic repetition to give greater emphasis: I write to you, dear children, (all Christ-followers) because you know the Father. (the key to EVERYONE's faith is our connection to the Heavenly Father) I write to you, fathers, (older Christians) because you know him who is from the beginning. (reinforcing what he said earlier, chronologically, your lifespan crosses much nearer to the time when Jesus walked the earth) I write to you, young men, (younger Christians) because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (despite your youth, your generation has all the spiritual power it needs)

Now, that's my rendering of this text. Others may differ slightly on some of the particular nuances. Regardless, at this point in his letter, John seems to be giving a bit of an encouraging summary, before jumping into his next topic. Ultimately, here is the main point: John uses this poetic repetition as his way of giving them a bit of a pep talk.¹² He declares his confidence in their genuine faith and his assurance about their standing as true believers.¹³ You're forgiven! You're strong! God's Word lives in you! You've overcome the world!

John's genuine compliments toward his readers in vv. 12-14 now serve as the basis for him to exhort them in 1 John 2:15,¹⁴ δ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. δ ¹⁵ The word δ world δ here is not referring to God's good creation. This is talking about δ worldly attitudes or values opposed to God. δ ¹⁶ The world system δ which is controlled by Satan and organized against God. δ ¹⁷ 1 John 5:19 talks about this, δ the whole world is under the control of the evil one. δ In one sense, this world we live in, is an δ earthly system controlled by the power of the evil one, that has aligned itself against God and his kingdom. δ ¹⁸

As Christians, if we begin to love this world, we threaten to compromise our own faith. We can't ride the fence on this one. We have already pledged our allegiance and our love for God, which automatically means, that we have declared our opposition to the ways of this world.¹⁹ Jesus says it this way in John 15:19, δ if you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. δ

⁶ Kruse, C. G. (2000). *The letters of John* (p. 88). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.

⁷ C. Spicq, *La place ou le rôle des jeunes dans certaines communautés néotestamentaires* RB 76 (1969) 525. 26, seems to adopt a similar view, saying that the author attributes appropriate characteristics to the old and the young. The old have the experience and knowledge of the truth appropriate to their mature years, and the young have the vigour, valour, and militancy usually attributed to them. (Quoted in Kruse, C. G. (2000). *The letters of John*. Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.)

⁸ My opinion is challenged somewhat by the Greek, which does offer some good support for rendering the term δ πατήρ δ as parent, i.e. co-ed. However, the term δ νεανίσκος δ for young men is less likely to be rendered as a co-ed term.

⁹ Philology is a great word! It the study of how languages develop over history.

¹⁰ See 1 John 1:1, referring to the historical Jesus they're known since He became flesh. But also consider the further connection back to John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1, referring to the same Jesus who existed with the Father before time began.

¹¹ Consider 1 Timothy 4:12.

¹² See footnote in *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2127.

¹³ *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2564.

¹⁴ Kruse, C. G. (2000). *The letters of John* (p. 93). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.

¹⁵ In total, 1 John will address three threats to humankind: sin, sod, and Satan. Sin was mostly covered in chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2. Sod, i.e. the world system, is covered in 1 John 2:15-17. Satan is considered in 1 John 4.

¹⁶ *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* 2015, p. 2564.

¹⁷ See *NIV Study Bible* 2011 footnotes on pp. 1761 and 2127. See also James 4:4.

¹⁸ Akin, D. L. (2001). *1, 2, 3 John* (Vol. 38, p. 108). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹⁹ Akin, D. L. (2001). *1, 2, 3 John* (Vol. 38, p. 109). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Love for the world is further articulated in 1 Jn. 2:16, "For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.+All of these are distractions. John is urging themō

Don't be sidetracked by the things of this world. Lust of flesh+is not talking about the skin that covers our bones. It's talking about the sin nature that exists within all of us. John zeroes in on 2 particular aspects of this lust: lust of the eyes and the pride of life.²⁰

1. Lust of the eyes are sinful cravings that are activated by our sight. Here we might think of King David's sinful response to seeing Bathsheba taking a bath.²¹ Or, we could go back to "the oldest trick in the book,+Genesis 3:4-6, "You will not certainly die,+the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.+This is why TV and Internet are such powerful forces. They access the human heart and the human soul through the gate of the eyes. And once certain things are seen, they are impossible to un-see. They stick with us and churn around in our thoughts. The things we've seen can compel us to lust after sinful things and to covet that which is not ours to have. The next thing we know, the trap springs shut, and that thing which we've come to possess has now come to possess us. We just had to have it, we wanted to own it; now it, owns us. It could be something sexual or some item of greed or some other type of inappropriate self-indulgence.

Now, luxury, comfort, and play can all be fine things for the Christian. Most possessions can be neutral and used for God's good purposes. Things don't necessarily have to be consumed for our own selfish purposes. Whether it be a house, fishing boat, car, or whatever else, whatever else I've failed to list and you are hoping I won't put in this list, it all belongs to God. If we steward things accordingly, for His purposes, they can be holy and good. But, all the pleasures that we see before our eyes can also become our driving ambitions and our idols for worship.

Jesus sets the perfect example for us, of how to resist the lust of the eyes. Mt. 4:8-10 says, "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you,+he said, "if you will bow down and worship me.+Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."

The 2nd aspect of this lust of the flesh, is the pride of life.

2. The Pride of life is the sinful puffing up/boasting in our material possessions. It's the self-important ego that displays "arrogance in word and deed."²² One Bible commentator explains it this way: "Pride of life will be reflected in whatever status symbol is important to me or seems to define my identity. When I define myself to others in terms of my honorary degrees, the reputation of the church I serve, my annual income, the size of my library, my expensive car or house, ò and in my boasting show myself to be only a pompous fool ò then I have succumbed to what John calls the pride of life."²³ Another person summarizes it this way, "My reputation, my public image, matters more to me than the glory of God ò [then] the pretentiousness of life has become the object of my idol-worship."²⁴ At this point, Mark 8:36 comes to mind, "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?+

The Bible uses a very interesting name for God. Ex. 34:14 says, "Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.+Do you ever think of God's name as "Jealous?+God says this to Moses shortly after the incident where God's people had been found worshipping the Golden Calf. Moses had gotten so angry that he broke the original set of stone tablets at the foot of the mountain. Now he was receiving the new set, and God makes it clear, my name is Jealous. We serve a jealous God, He will tolerate no rival.²⁵ It turns out that "Jealousy is part

²⁰ Lust of the flesh is a general category with 2 subcategories See note in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, 2015, p. 2564

²¹ Consider Ecclesiastes 2:10-11.

²² = "arrogance in word and deed+(Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 40). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

²³ Glenn W. Barker in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, p. 322.

²⁴ Bruce quoted by Glenn W. Barker in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, p. 322. See also Romans 1:25.

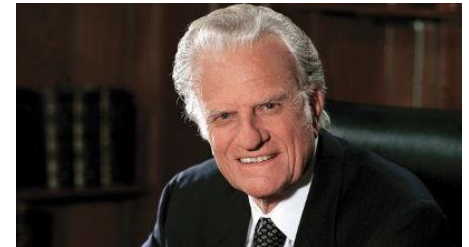
²⁵ Consider the very last verse in 1 John, 5:21.

of the vocabulary of love²⁶ because it speaks to zealous devotion and allegiance. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to be careful that our devotion to God doesn't get sidetracked by the things of this world.

1 John 2:17, concludes this section by saying, "The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever."²⁷ The *ESV* may capture the verb tense a little better, "And the world is passing away along with its desires" ²⁸ "Because of all that has been set in motion by God through the coming of Jesus Christ, the world is passing away and its days are numbered."²⁹ You see, the closer we get to Jesus' return, the less value the things of this world will have for us. These trifles and trinkets to which we cling, will have absolutely no value or purpose in the life to come.³⁰

Any devotion or commitment to worldly things is without meaning because it's an investment in what's passing away.³¹ Committing ourselves to worldly things is like clinging to a useless penny stock. I found one in my dad's safety deposit box when he passed away a few years ago. Most of these old penny stocks now have absolutely no value, the companies aren't even around anymore! This is a good object lesson, there is no future in worldly things. This is why we need to **Live with eternity in view** What is it in your life and daily activities that will outlast this world? (Not just outlast your life, but outlast this world.) What desires are you focusing on that won't pass away with time? When this world comes to an end, what impact will remain for eternity? There are only two things in this world that are eternal. Do you know what they are? God and people. That's it. This is why we are told to love God and love people, not love the things of this world. Nothing else will last. It's all going to pass away.³² There will come a time when the world which is passing away will have passed away, but those who do the will of God will not have passed away with it, for they will remain forever.³³ In verses 15-17, John is urging his beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, "Don't live with worldly lusts in view, live with eternity in view. Pursue the lasting things of God."³⁴

Let me leave you with one final testimony regarding living with eternity in view. Rev. Billy Graham lived for 99 years. He died and went to be with the Lord about a week and a half ago. Were you able to watch his funeral on TV? Billy Graham once said, "Happiness doesn't depend on abundance. Happiness depends on something else. It depends on something deeper. I don't care how rich you get or how powerful you get, there will be no peace in your heart if you don't know God. I'm looking forward to that day when I'll see Christ face to face. You don't get eternal life when you die, you get it right here and now."³⁵



I couldn't agree with Dr. Graham more. Eternity has already begun for each Christ-follower. **And we need to live with that eternity in view!**

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on March 4, 2018 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*

²⁶ *NIV Study Bible*, 2011, p. 126.

²⁷ The author depicts the world's passing as an ongoing process. + Kruse, C. G. (2000). *The letters of John* (p. 96). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.

²⁸ Compare this with 1 Corinthians 7:31 and 1 John 2:8.

²⁹ Kruse, C. G. (2000). *The letters of John* (p. 96). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.

³⁰ It's like the game pieces from Monopoly. All the houses, hotels, and paper money just go back in the box.

³¹ It's worse than investing in a depreciating asset, like your car. As soon as you drive a new car off of the sales lot, its value depreciates. It's already worth less than what you paid for it.

³² See Revelation 21:1.

³³ Kruse, C. G. (2000). *The letters of John* (pp. 96. 97). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.

³⁴ By now, some of you may already be thinking of those famous words by Jim Elliot: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

³⁵ Taken from an online video segment "Eternal Life . Now!"