

1 John 2:12-14
“Three stages of maturity”

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I. Intro

It's been a few weeks since we were in the apostle John's first letter, and we left off with the second of two “two personal tests” to indicate to ourselves our position as true believers of Christ. They indicate the transformative work of Christ seen two ways.

Test 1: 2:3-6 Obedience

Test 2: 2:7-11 Love

We have spent time looking the progression of Christian maturity as seen in our motivation in obedience:

- A. **Baby Christians**: View obedience as a “have to” as if they are a “slave” responding to a master.
- B. **Immature Christians**: View obedience as a “need to” as if they are an “employee”.
- C. **Mature Christians**: View obedience as a “want to” because the relationship between God and him is one of love.

Then we noticed that in chapter 2 verses 7-11 John wrote this example consisted of three parts!

- 1. Vs. 7-8 The commandment: Where John wrote of three reasons for it: Remind, Renew and Rekindle.
- 2. Vs. 9 The false claim: Where John records three aspects to this false claim: The profession, the example, and the outcome.

3. Vs. 10-11 *The contrast*: Is stated both in the positive in verse 10 and the negative in verse 11.

It is clear that **John wanted his readers to evaluate their true position** as his goal was the same as Jesus'....our maturity and spiritual growth! It is what this section is addressing the **three different stages of growth with an appeal to each**. The challenge is, "*Who are these different stages of maturity in this passage?*"

- *John makes six statements about the readers, he does so by arranging these statements in two sets of three statements each using the male gender specific.*
- *In each of these sets the first remark is addressed the "dear children" but a different word in the Greek is used in each case.*
- *Secondly he address the "fathers".*
- *Third to the "young men".*

The question on this passage is, "**How did John intend his readers to look at these three stages of Christian maturity?**" It seems to me reading these verses that **John identifies these natural stages of Christian maturity this way:**

1. **Children**: John identifies them as "**LEARNERS**": Those who have recently come to knowledge and faith in God that has resulted in their knowledge that their sins are forgiven, vs 12.
2. **Young men**: John identifies them as "**SOLDIERS**": Who he declares in verse 13 and 14 are bearing the brunt of spiritual warfare.
3. **Fathers**: John identifies them as "**EXPERIENCED**": Who John says by life and encountering the Lord throughout it have acquired spiritual wisdom. They have a knowledge of God that is not mere intellectual it is personal and experiential. They have

lived enough life to know that life isn't fair

The use of the phrase "*I write*" (**used three times**) and "*I have written*" (**used twice**) suggests to the reader **two things**:

- A. **The lacking in maturity is NOT a problem when we have "*recently come to knowledge and faith in God*".**
- B. **It is a problem however and the reason for the Apostles appeal if when we are still at that level of maturity when we ought have grown beyond it.**

As a whole this section is beneficial no matter where the Christian is in their maturity as there is **no such thing as far as maturity is concerned as standing still. The only way in the Christian life to not become more worldly is to keep growing in our maturity! We all begin as little Children we just must NOT stay that way!** For sake of continuity, we will examine this passage in terms of the three **natural stages of Christian maturity** but to do so it will be necessary to take the passage apart and not follow it chronologically, instead along the lines of "**Children**", "**Young Men**" and "**Fathers**".

II. Vs. 12, 13c Little Children

1. Vs. 12, 13c "**Little Children**": John's first remark is in what he calls them as "LITTLE" is a term of endearment that literally means "little born ones". This is also an expression of "Spiritual life" and because of this fellowship with God. They are described with the positive characteristics of understanding that they are forgiven as well as the basis of that forgiveness, "His names sake" (vs. 13). They are keenly aware that their pardon is both complete and permanent and it is based completely upon God and nothing to do with their works. Then in verse 13c they are said to "know the Father" which goes beyond the introduction through the means of divine revelation that led to understanding their

forgiveness and onto a real experiential relationship with God has their personal Heavenly Father. As beautiful and natural as this relationship is, it is nonetheless incomplete and immature. “**Little children**” are still in need of teachers to feed them the pure milk of the word. Clearly John writes to these “*Newborn Ones*” to assure them that he was writing NOT because he had doubts of their salvation, he hadn’t any but he did want to encourage them to continue on in their fledgling faith and grow on into maturity!

III. Vs. 13b, 14b Young Men

2. Vs. 13b, 14b “**Young Men**”: here we see that John’s statements are much more in-depth in comparison to his remarks towards “**Little children**”. First their characteristics are described “strong”, and the Greek word has the strength as not natural but rather bestowed. Notice John does not encourage these “*Young Men*” to “work out” instead he states that they ARE STRONG! John assures them that they are **NOT lacking** in this area and have enough “*strength*” to defeat satan’s attacks. They don’t need to say “more power” they need only apply the strength they already have been given to defeat the enemy! Secondly John tells them why they can have confidence in their strength being more than efficient in verse 14b as “**the word of God abides in them**”. These young men have applied the gospel and assimilated it’s demands in obedience to its precepts. Such characteristic is for the purpose of “**conflict**” John declares as twice tells them not only who they are doing battle against as well as the inevitable outcome of “**overcoming victory**”. **There is no mystery as to the purpose of the Christian life, and *no Christian life is worthy of the name “Christian” that cannot face conflict and realize that it has not only the power to wage the “fight of faith”, but the God given strength to “WIN”!*** Furthermore, the victory is assured as we are to merely “overcome” which suggests that the enemy has already been defeated and we are called only to “abide” in the victory

afforded us in Christ. The secret for such “abiding victory” is allowing the continuance and growth in the word of God! **The Word of God is both “food for our souls” and a “sword for the warriors”** that we are called to be! The Christian needs to be preoccupied **with God’s Word three ways: Attention, Intention and Retention!**

IV. Vs. 13a, 14a Fathers

3. Vs. 13a, 14a “**Fathers**”: This reference appears to be in connection to those who have continued on into maturity and become “fathers” of the community of faith. They are called so no doubt due to their application and obedience to the faith which has also taken time and experience to develop. They are described as “Have known” and such experience has had the natural outcome as they only grew in what they had experienced from “the beginning”. They didn’t need more they only need to continue to apply more of Jesus. Notice that this maturity is seen in a relationship to Christ and not in the work of Christianity! Our growth is in the areas of fellowship with God and our fellow Christians and not in titles and efforts! The “Fathers of the faith” are not those who possess the largest resumes but instead those who look more like the ONE they are privileged to serve! To these “Fathers” the world’s glow and trinkets has no attraction to allure him. The father sees these things as “*temporary toys*” and like Paul said in 1 Cor 13:11 “***When he became a man. he put away childish things***”!