

Spiritual Maturity

1 John 2:12-17

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7/26/2026



1 John 2:1-11 Summary: Describes the test of knowing Jesus as Savior... obedience and loving fellow Christians.

Applications from this passage...

- Jesus is our Advocate with the Father
- Loving the brethren is essential

1 John 2:12-14 – Their Spiritual State

¹² I write to you, *little children*, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³ I write to you, *fathers*, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, *young men*, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, *little children*, because you have known the Father. ¹⁴ I have written to you, *fathers*, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, *young men*, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.

Who are the *little children*?

We each begin the Christian life as *little children*.

- When we are in this state spiritually, it is enough for us to know and be amazed at the forgiveness of our sins and all it took for God to forgive us righteously in Jesus Christ.

In what can the *little children* rejoice?

That their sins are forgiven. If we do not rejoice in this, something is wrong.

- We probably fail to see the badness of our sin and the greatness of His forgiveness.
- When we see how great our sin is, and how great the cost was to gain us forgiveness, we are *obsessed* with gratitude at having been forgiven.

What does it tell us that even the newest and youngest Christians are forgiven?

God's forgiveness does not come by degrees.

- They will never be "more forgiven."
- Forgiveness is God's gift, not man's achievement.

Note it well: *forgiven you for His name's sake*. The reasons for forgiveness are not found in us, but in God.

v13 – Who are the fathers?

Just as there are *little children*, there are also parents. These are men and women of deep, long spiritual standing. They have the kind of walk with God that doesn't come overnight.

What does it mean, "*you have known Him*"?

This is in what spiritual maturity has its roots. It is not just an intellectual knowledge, but more so in the depth of fellowship and relationship we have with Jesus.

- There is no substitute for years of an experiential relationship with Jesus.

Who are the *young men*?

As much as there are *little children* and *fathers*, so also there are men and women who are no longer little children, but still not yet parents.

- They are the "front-line" of God's work among His people.
- The proper attribute of youth is, to carry on the active parts of life — if soldiers, to be engaged in all active service.

What does it mean the young Christians have *overcome the wicked one*?

They are engaged in battle with *the wicked one*. We don't send our little children out to war, and we don't send our old men to the front lines.

- The greatest effort, the greatest cost, and the greatest strength are expected of the *young men*.

Why do so many new Christians fail to mature?

They stay in spiritual childhood seeking to avoid the spiritual warfare. This is like being a draft-dodger.

- Children don't fight in wars, but we expect it of adults.

What does it mean to *overcome the wicked one*?

These *young men* have overcome the spiritual foes that would seek to destroy their spiritual life.

- They know what it is to battle against Satan and his emissaries as a partner with God.

What does it mean to *have known the Father*?

In the first stage of spiritual growth, we sink our roots deep in the Fatherly love and care of God.

- We know Him as our caring Father, and see ourselves as His dependent children.

What is the significance of the different Greek words used for little children in verses 12 & 13?

- In verse 12, *teknia* has more of an emphasis on a child's relationship of dependence on a parent
 - We are dependent on God for forgiveness
- In verse 13, *paidia* has more of an emphasis on a child's immaturity and need for instruction.
 - New Christians grow spiritually as they experience a relationship with God

v14 – Why is it repeated that fathers have known God from the beginning?

The repetition of the same idea from 1 John 2:13a shows that the importance of maturity should be emphasized.

If the fathers are mature Christians, why is John writing to them?

For encouragement... mature Christians know that they will never be mature enough that can just rest on their laurels. Spiritual growth is a life-long journey.

- Paul, in Philippians 3:8 said he counted all his previous spiritual achievements as rubbish, compared to the surpassing greatness of just knowing Jesus.

Why did John write to the *young men*?

Again, the repetition of the idea indicates emphasis.

- The *young men* [have] overcome the wicked one, and they have done it through the strength that comes to them through the *word of God*.
- God's Word is our source of spiritual strength.

What does it mean *the word of God abides in you*?

Christians who have some measure of spiritual maturity, were known by the fact that God's Word *lived* in them. The Word of God had made itself at home in their hearts.

In which spiritual growth group should we identify?

We should not want to stay in the little children category for long. And if we consider ourselves among the fathers, we may be inclined to leave the spiritual warfare up to others. The young men category is certainly where we should consider ourselves.

1 John 2:15-17 – Do Not Love the World

¹⁵ *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* ¹⁶ *For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.* ¹⁷ *And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.*

What does it mean to *love the world*?

John points out a specific area of sin that especially threatens our fellowship with God: worldliness, to *love the world*.

- The *world*, in the sense John means it here, is not the global earth. Nor is it the mass of humanity, which God Himself loves (John 3:16).
- Instead, it is the community of sinful humanity that is united in rebellion against God.

When you think of the world rebelling against God, what comes to mind?

Genesis 11 speaks of human society's united rebellion against God at the tower of Babel.

- At the tower of Babel, there was an *anti-God leader* of humanity (whose name was Nimrod).
- There was *organized rebellion against God* (in disobeying the command to disperse over the whole earth).
- There was *direct distrust of God's word and promise* (in building a water-safe tower to protect against a future flood from heaven).

How does the promise of the world differ from God?

The world's progress, technology, government, and organization can make man *better off*, but not *better*.

- Because we like being better off, it is easy to fall in love with the world.

What is the lesson of the tower of Babel?

This shows us that the world system — as impressive and winning as it appears to be — will *never* win out over God. The Lord defeated the rebellion at the tower of Babel easily.

- The world system will *never* win out over God.

Why is it so easy to love the world?

Certainly we are in the world so this makes it easy to love the world's way of doing things.

- It is all-too easy to get caught up in the world's secular, anti-God or ignoring-God way of doing things that characterizes human society.

What is the love the world wants from us?

This love is expressed in time, attention, and expense.

- We are encouraged and persuaded to give our time, attention, and money to the things of this world instead of the things of God.

What rewards come from loving the world?

You may find a place of prestige, status, honor, and comfort. The world knows how to reward its lovers.

What is the problem with the rewards of this world?

At their best, the rewards of this world last only as long as we live. The problem is that though we gain prestige, status, honor, and comfort of this world, we lose the eternal prestige, status, honor, and comfort of heaven.

What does it mean to love *the things in the world*?

This isn't so much a warning against a love for the beauty of the world God created...

- Instead, it is more of a warning against loving the material things which characterize the world system.

How does the world buy our love with things?

Cars, homes, gadgets, and the status that goes with all of them, can really make our hearts at home in the world.

What is revealed if a Christian loves the world?

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him: Love for the world is incompatible with love for the Father.

- If someone claims to love God and yet loves the world, there is something wrong with his claim to love God.

How have Christians sought to avoid the temptation to love the world?

At one time it was thought that if you were a really committed Christian who wanted to love God instead of the world, you would leave human society and live as a monk or a nun in a desolate monastery.

What is the problem of monastic lifestyle?

This and other approaches that seek to take us *out of* the world, have two problems...

- We cannot avoid bringing the world with us into our monastery.
- Jesus intended us to be *in the world* but not *of the world* (John 17:14-18).

How else can we represent Him?

v16 – How is the love of the world described?

The character of the world expresses itself through the *lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*. These

lusts seek to draw our own flesh away into sin and worldliness.

What is *the pride of life*?

The idea behind *the pride of life* is someone who lives for superiority over others, mostly by impressing others through outward appearances — even if by deception.

- Most advertisements appeal to *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*.

Why did John highlight these three particular appeals of the world?

John may have in mind the first pursuit of worldliness, that of Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6).

- When Eve took of the forbidden fruit, she *saw that the tree was good for food*. She thought about how good the fruit would taste, how it would satisfy her flesh. ...This is the *lust of the flesh*.
- Eve also saw that the fruit *was pleasant to the eyes*, how pretty and desirable it was pleasing her artistic sense. ...This is the *lust of the eyes*.
- And Eve believed that the forbidden fruit was *desirable to make one wise*. How smart the fruit would make her! How her husband would admire her! ...This is the *pride of life*.

How are these three aspects of loving the world not of the Father?

Even though these three aspects of loving the world satisfy something in us, they are still sin.

God gave us a fleshly nature, so what is wrong with satisfying our physical needs with what feels good?

It is not in God's nature to influence us through the *lust of the flesh*.

- He has given us guidelines for this to keep us out of trouble.

God gave us an appreciation of beauty, so what is wrong with being attracted to what appeals to us?

God always looks beyond the outward appearance, and it is not in God's nature to influence us through the *lust of the eyes*.

- Again... God has given us guidelines for this to keep us out of trouble.

God gave us a desire to accomplish things and to be wanted, so what is wrong with pursuing this?

It is not in God's nature to influence us through *the pride of life*.

- God gave us guidelines to keep us out of trouble.

How do we distinguish what is of the Father versus what is of the world?

We rarely appreciate how much the world dominates our thinking. We should rigorously measure our habits of thinking to see if they are more aligned with the world or with God our Father.

- Is our standard for success worldly or godly?
- Is our standard for what makes a person of the opposite sex appealing worldly or godly?
- Is our standard for spirituality worldly or godly?
 - There is a worldly spirituality out there, and many people embrace it.

This shows how great our need is to *not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind* (Romans 12:2).

v17 – What is the significance of remembering that *the world is passing away*?

This reveals the folly of worldliness. What we invest into the world we invest into what cannot last because *the world is passing away*.

- As we saw with the example of the tower of Babel, the world *never* wins out against God, though by some appearances it does.

How did the account of Lot in Sodom reveal the significance of *the world is passing away*?

While Lot attached himself to a true spiritual man, Abraham, he was selfish and chose for himself what seemed the most lucrative, without considering the spiritual implications of what he was doing.

- He became financially prosperous, but pitched his tent toward a wicked, worldly city — Sodom.
- After a while, he was sitting in the gates of the city as one of Sodom's civic leaders. He had worldly status, influence, wealth, and comfort.

Yet, it was all taken away in a moment when the judgment of God came upon Sodom and Gomorrah.

- Lot put all his eggs in the wrong basket, and was burned by the fact that *the world is passing away*.

How is it that *he who does the will of God abides forever*?

This stands in strong contrast to the passing world. Because some things are *forever*, it is much wiser to invest our lives into that which cannot be lost: doing *the will of God*.

How are we in regular contact with 3 eternal things?

The Holy Spirit of God, the people around us, and the eternal words of God's Word.

- Time, attention, and expense put into those things pays *eternal* rewards.

What applications do we see from this discussion?

- Spiritual growth is important
- Loving the world is deadly