

—{1}. **1 John 2:12–14** **A Message for All Ages**

A. Introduction

1. the attitude towards age

a. in many societies of the world – the Chinese, the North American native peoples, the Semitic races

(A) there is a reverence and respect paid to the elderly

(B) the wisdom of the elderly is greatly valued

(C) this reflects the wisdom recorded in Proverbs 16:31, “A gray head is a crown of glory; It is found in the way of righteousness.” (NAS)

b. at one time this was somewhat the case in western society

(A) as a child, I was told to ‘respect my elders’

(B) but the centre of attention of much of our society today seems to be children; which is seen by

(1) parents taxiing them to practices and games at all hours and distances

(2) the guilt that is laid upon parents who do not provide every last luxury to their children; that they have somehow failed their children

(C) but the elderly are otherwise considered – Holland has laws that permit voluntary euthanasia of the elderly and was considering, and may now have passed, laws permitting their involuntary euthanasia

(D) I am reminded of the story of the man who complained that when he was a youngster he was told, “Be quiet, we’re talking.” by his parents and now he is told, “Be quiet, we’re talking.” by his children; “when,” he asks, “do I get to speak?”

c. but God is a God who loves those of all ages – and, as our text today reveals – the message of God’s word is a message for all ages

2. the Text 1 John 2:12–14

a. ¹² I write to you, dear children, because your sins are forgiven through His name. ¹³ I write to you, fathers, because you have know the One who was from the beginning; I write to you, youths, because you have conquered the evil one. ¹⁴ I wrote to you, little children, because you have known the Father.

I wrote to you, fathers, because you have known the One who was from the beginning. I wrote to you, youths, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you and you have conquered the evil one.

b. let me make some preliminary comments on the text

- (A) in addressing each group, John says "I write" pointing to the words that he then just about to write
- (B) the last three times, John says "I wrote;" he points back to the words that he has just now written
- (C) John's repeating himself is no accident; it is deliberate, intentional; it is made for emphasis
- (D) the progression in his words underlines his purpose...
 - (1) they are first to the very young
 - (2) and next to the elderly
 - (3) finally to those who fall between these two groups
- (E) what the Holy Spirit has to say through John applies to Christians, is a message for all ages

3. there are two basic approaches to this text

a. the first spiritualises it – and many noted commentators and preachers follow this approach:

- (A) distinguishing those who are young in the faith
- (B) from those who are growing in the faith
- (C) and likewise from those who are mature in the faith
- (D) indeed, such an approach has much to merit it, and the verses can profitably be examined with that in view

b. but I would like to take John's words at their face value

- (A) that he is speaking to three distinct age groups
- (B) believers in each age group have a distinct level of spiritual literacy and of spiritual knowledge
- (C) in Christ's church, Christians of all ages are worthy of being directly involved, of taking part, of contributing
- (D) that the gospel is a message for all ages
- (E) that the Holy Scriptures are a message for all ages

c. Satan attacks your seeking to serve with discouraging words

- (A) 'You're just a child ...'
- (B) 'Aren't you rather old ...'
- (C) 'Do you have enough experience ...'

(D) but John's words should encourage those of all ages

B. Words to Children 1 John 2:12, 13c (NAS)

1. ¹² I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³ ... I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.

2. the simplicity of the gospel

a. there is always a temptation to make the Gospel obscure

(A) demanding that people dot our eschatological "i's" and cross our theological "t's"

(B) doctrine is important – theology is the culling of truth from the Bible, rigorously comparing and ordering it, so that false teaching may be clearly revealed – source of heresies, cults and isms

(C) nevertheless the gospel message is simple, so simple that a young child can hear and believe and be saved

(D) and if you add human works of any kind, no matter how cleverly disguised, then you deny that it is God, not man, who is the Author of salvation; it is by grace

b. the good news is that sins are forgiven because of Christ

(A) so there needs to be a recognition of sin; as Peter said: "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38 NAS)

(B) they are forgiven for His name's sake, His Person, His work: "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12 NAS)

c. and those who are so forgiven become part of God's family

(A) "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name," (John 1:12 NAS)

(B) "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Galatians 4:6 NAS)

d. these are truths that a child can understand

- C. Words to the Mature 1 John 2:13a, 14a (NAS)
1. ¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. ... ¹⁴ I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. ...
 2. the fathers, those of more mature age – when John wrote this he was probably more elderly than those to whom he was writing (no wonder he begins this chapter, ‘My little children!’) – the “fathers” are those who have experienced life
 - a. who have had children
 - b. who have seen them grow up
 - c. who have experienced the attendant joys and heartaches
 - d. who have know life’s trials and tribulations
 - e. but, who through it all, have known
 3. “Him who has been from the beginning”
 - a. to understand that phrase you have to go back to the first verse of the book: “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested...” (1 John 1:1-2a NAS)
 - b. John is talking about the Jesus, the Christ
 - (A) the second Person of the Trinity
 - (B) the Son of God, the Word of Life
 - (C) and the ‘beginning’ in this case is when John first met this Jesus, and heard from Him the word of life, and came to know Him as his own Saviour
 - c. so from fathers, Christian parents, we can hear the witness of those who from the time that they first met Jesus Christ and recognized Him as their Saviour
 - d. have walked with Him through life and know Him today in a fashion made richer and deeper by that walk
 - e. their testimony has been expressed by the hymn-writer
 - I’ve had many tears and sorrows
 - I’ve had questions for tomorrow,
 - There’ve been times I didn’t know right from wrong;
 - But in ev’ry situation

God gave blessed consolation
That my trials come only to make me strong.
Through it all, through it all,
I've learned to trust in Jesus,
I've learned to trust in God;
Through it all, through it all,
I've learned to depend upon His Word. —{2}.

f. these are truths that only experience can understand

D. Words to the Young 1 John 2: 13b,14b (NAS)

1. ¹³ ... I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. ...¹⁴ ... I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

2. the word for young men

- a. is used of the rich young ruler (Matt 19:16ff, Lk 18:18ff)
- b. is contrasted with 'elders' (Acts 2:17)
- c. can also be translated 'youths' and though a masculine noun, it is like 'children' and does not emphasize gender
- d. in terms of age, it roughly encompasses teens through 30's
- e. and in these John notes three distinctives:
 - (A) their strength
 - (B) their possession of God's word
 - (C) their overcoming of the evil one

3. their strength

- a. Proverbs 20:29 tells us, "The glory of young men is their strength, And the honour of old men is their gray hair." (NAS)
- b. these years are years of vigour, of activity, of decision
- c. but, the strength that I think that John has in mind, given the context, is that exhorted in Ephesians

6:10, "Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might." (NAS)

d. and such God-given strength is needed in these years

(A) years in which one's horizons are broadened and many new acquaintances are made – some who would seek to lead the believer away from faith

(B) years in which one is free for the first time of the moderating restraints of parents and home

(C) years in which many life decisions are made

(1) concerning education and career

(2) concerning a life partner

e. this strength is to be found in ...

4. their possession of God's word

a. the simplicity of the gospel still applies

b. but with maturity comes the need to feed more fully, to drink more deeply of God's revealed truth

c. that it may be applied to living in changing circumstances

d. of meeting the new pressures of a new peers (that's a thing that will pass away; **A woman was asked the benefits of living to the age of 102 and she said "there is very little peer pressure at my age!"** ^{3})

e. the Psalmist testifies,

(A) "Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee." (Psalms 119:11 NAS)

(B) and says of God's man, "The law of his God is in his heart; His steps do not slip." (Psalms 37:31 NAS)

f. while Paul exhorts, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16 NAS)

g. this possession of God's word is what empowers

5. their overcoming the evil one

a. this is not a once for all event – "alright, I have now won the victory and the battle is over" – temptation does not diminish with age ... it just changes its form

b. nor is it the attainment of sinless perfection – John covered that in the first few verses of the book – sin is ever with us

- c. but, in the matter of the battle over the life walk, the decision has been made and undertaken: "*When Thou didst say, 'Seek My face,' my heart said to Thee, 'Thy face, O LORD, I shall seek.'* ... Teach me Thy way, O LORD, And lead me in a level path, ..." (Psalms 27:8, 11 NAS)
 - d. so that though there be failures, as temptations may come, they will be opposed by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit – these are truth addressed to those with the vigour of youth
6. such a young man was Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage (and eventually a martyr), {who} wrote to his friend Donatus: "This is a cheerful world as I see it from my garden under the shadows of my vines. But If I were to ascend some high mountain and look over the wide lands, you know very well what I would see: brigands on the highways, pirates on the sea, armies fighting, cities burning; in the amphitheatres men murdered to please the applauding crowds; selfishness and cruelty and misery and despair under all roofs. It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are the Christians — and I am one of them." ^{—{4}}.

E. Conclusion

- 1. In our Christian assembly, we should not make the mistake
 - a. of demanding from children an articulation of their faith that can only come with adulthood: as Paul say in 1 Corinthians 13:11, "*When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.*" (NAS)
 - b. nor that of expecting in young adults the maturity which is the result of years and variety of experience, such as is expressed in David's words in Psalm 37: 25, "*I have been young, and now I am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Or his descendants begging bread.*" (NAS)
 - c. but should rather value those of every age for the reasons that John has given to us as well as valuing
 - (A) the children for their promise of the future
 - (B) the young adults for their enthusiasm to serve
 - (C) the elderly for their testimony to God's faithfulness

2. we have a great privilege in this church
 - a. we are not very large
 - (A) not so large that we can have finely graded Sunday Bible classes, segmenting us into homogenous groups by age, gender and so on
 - (B) not so large that we need to have multiple services, each targeted to different preferences – traditional, contemporary, formal, musical
 - b. but large enough that those regularly attending
 - (A) span over 90 years in age
 - (B) so that we can share and learn from the experience of others in the midst of this diversity

3. and here we may discover
 - a. that Christian fellowship spans all age groupings: as Pastor Ray Stedman has expressed it, “In this first letter his primary concern has been to restore to Christians, in every age and place, that intimacy with, and restful confidence in, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself which John calls fellowship.” ^{5}.
 - b. that no matter what our age, there is much about God’s truth that we have yet to understand
 - c. but that nevertheless, God’s Holy Scriptures have much to say to us, much to encourage us, much to promise us
 - d. so that we can rejoice together as His people praising Him

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Various English versions of the Holy Bible are used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in [square brackets]. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
NAS	New American Standard version © 1975 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

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2. “Through it All” by Andraé Crouch, © 1974 by Manna Music, Inc.
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