

1 John Chapter 2 (vv.12-23)

The Family of God [2.12-27]

This section distinguishes the family of God by dividing them into a *threefold* stage of spirituality – fathers, young men and infants. The word ‘fathers’ naturally implies spiritual *maturity* and *authority*, whilst the ‘young men’ are those of middle-age characterised by spiritual *vigour* and *zeal*. ‘Little children’ (*paidion*, vv.13, 18) describes spiritual *infants* in God’s family and translates a different word to ‘little (dear) children’ in vv.1, 12 (*teknon*). *Paidion* is suggestive of training, instruction and education – exactly that which John now passes on to the youngest of these believers.

John is commending the orthodox Christianity of his readers in contrast to the false profession he has described, but the test of **love** (2.3-17) is not lost. He now moves from a *positive* (vv.3-11) to *negative* appeal in relation to love, warning the young men what not to love (vv.15-17). The third and final *doctrinal* test of **life** is introduced in v.23 (cf. v.25). **v.12:** Before addressing the believers in groups, John refers to the entire Christian family as ‘little (dear) children’ (*teknon*). Their sins had *been* and *remained* forgiven for ‘his name’s sake’, i.e. the Lord Jesus (cp. 3 John 7, cf. Luke 24.47). God forgives our sins, not because of anything we are, but because of what God has found in Christ and his work.

Fathers (vv.13a, 14a)

v.13: The high-water mark of spiritual experience is to ‘know’ the *eternal* Christ. Day by day the ‘fathers’ had lived in the enjoyment of a personal relationship with Him. To get to know Christ, time must be spent with Him. *Learn* about Him. *Listen* to Him. *Watch* Him. *Commune* together. Nothing can be added to this statement and thus John repeats it (v.14a).

Young Men (vv.13b, 14-17)

v.13: They had ‘overcome the wicked one’ (3.12; 5.18-19) – a possible reference to a particular attack of the devil in the guise of false teachers (v.19). **v.14:** The victory was gained through spiritual strength received from the word of God. They had remained faithful to the apostolic teaching received from the beginning. The scriptures had a permanent dwelling-place in their hearts and controlled their lives. *Smith: It is not simply that they grasp the meaning of the word of God, or that they have stored it in their memory, but that it forms their thoughts, holds their affections and governs their actions.* **v.15:** It was whilst the young men were enjoying victory over the ‘wicked one’ they were at their most vulnerable, hence the warning regarding the world (2 Timothy 4.10). It was not given to the fathers – they knew Christ so intimately the world did not appeal to them as it once did. The Apostle Paul is a great example of a spiritual father who learned what it meant to love the things of God rather than the things of the world (Philippians 3.3-11). The word translated ‘world’ (*kosmos*) carries the thought of *order* and *arrangement*. *Kosmos* is used of the world of *nature* which displays God’s glory (John 1.10) and the world of *sinners* God loves (John 3.16). But, here, John is thinking of the world *morally* – a system originated by Cain (Genesis 4.16-24) and governed by Satan (1 John 5.19). This wicked system is designed to make mankind *content* and *comfortable* without God. Its principles are antagonistic and contrary to divine order (anti-God), e.g. a lack of sanctity for life and disregard of monogamous marriage. There are many symbols of the world in the OT, for example: Sodom represents the world *morally*; Egypt (politically); Haran (commercially); Babylon (religiously); Moab (socially) and Jericho (hostility). Each is also associated with a spiritual overcomer.

Thus, the Christian is not (imperative) to be ‘loving’ (*agapao*) the world. This is a matter of the will (choice). We use the world, and on occasion, may *enjoy* aspects of the world, but we do not **love** it. *Vaughan: It is to court the world’s favour, follow its customs, adopt its ideals, covet its prizes, and seek its fellowship.* The devil uses the world to encourage mankind to live for the temporal and transitory (this world) rather than the eternal and everlasting (world to come). If a person is *habitually* and *persistently* making the world their object of love, then they cannot love the Father (cf. Matthew 6.24) – they are mutually exclusive. Where one is, the other cannot be. Thus, the world’s social, commercial, sporting scenes etc. must not dominate our thinking and activity for it robs God of the worship that is rightfully His. Love for God is not ‘in’ such a person, i.e. not a motivating reality in his heart and life. ‘Love of the Father’ could also be *objective*, i.e. the Father’s love for the believer is not an enjoyed daily portion.

v.16: Believers should not love the world for three reasons. **1.** It *denies* the Father of love (worship) that is rightfully His (v.15b). **2.** It is *alluring* and *appeals* to the flesh (v.16). **3.** It is *transient* and *temporal* (v.17). John explains why love for the world and the Father are incompatible – they are of different spheres. All that is ‘in the world’ springs from (*ek*) the world (as a source) not the Father. The Father (and born ‘from above’ believers) belong to *another* world. This sphere is characterised ‘*not by lust that seeks its own gratification, but by love that seeks the good of its object. It is not a world that seeks to gratify the sight, but where Christ is the all-satisfying Object. It is not a world that boasts in its own wisdom, but one that is characterised by the lowliness that delights to sit as a learner at the feet of Jesus*’ (Smith).

The world (collectively) contains and promotes *three* personal attitudes (principles) which are utterly foreign to the nature of the Father. The world bears no likeness to Him whatsoever.

- Lust of the **flesh**. The word 'lust' is a 'great desire' or 'passionate craving' for something either *good* (Luke 22.15) or *evil* (Galatians 5.16). 'Flesh' refers to the natural desires of fallen man under the influence of indwelling sin. It is the tendency to live for self – I, me and my – not God. Lusts of the flesh are generally *physical* desires for sensual pleasures which may relate to sex, alcohol or drugs (cf. Galatians 5.19-21).
- Lust of the **eyes**. The craving to acquire and accumulate stimulated by what is seen. The examples of Achan (Joshua 7.21) and David (2 Samuel 11.2) are pertinent. In a world full of screens and advertising the attitude of Job is wise: 'I made a covenant with mine eyes' (Job 31.1).
- **Pride** of life (*bios*). The proud display of life's possessions or achievements – celebrating personal possessions, abilities and/or achievements. Involves a vain trust in one's own resources, denying any dependence on God.

Note. These are exactly the principles which Satan presented to Eve (Genesis 3) and the Lord Jesus (Matthew 4; Luke 4).

v.17: A *final* reason not to love this satanically energised world-system is that it 'passeth away' or 'passeth by' (as a flamboyant parade) together with its lustful desires. Ultimately, the spectacle will be gone, and those who lived for such a world will face eternal disappointment and doom. In contrast, those who seek to live *for* and *according* to the will of God (cf. 3.23) have eternal life and 'abide forever'. For which world do we live? For time or eternity? For self or Christ?

Little Children (v.13c, 18-27)

v.13: Young in the faith as they were, the 'little children' had still come to know God in His character as Father! To call upon Him as such is the birth right (and privilege) of the youngest believer (Romans 8.16; 1 Peter 1.17). **v.18:** Those who were young in the faith were particularly susceptible to these false teachers who were 'antichrist' in character. Thus, John carefully warns against the 'seducers' (vv.18-19, 22-23) and describes the spiritual resources God has provided to resist them (vv.20-21, 24-27).¹ According to John, it was 'last hour' in *character* (no definite article). The last hour will be marked by the coming of the Antichrist, but the characteristic state of that last hour was already evident in John's time as indicated by the presence of many 'antichrists'. Alternatively, John is characterising the entire period between the Lord's first and second advents (i.e. the present age) as the 'last hour' (which suggests brevity and imminence). The Antichrist (2.22; 4.3; 2 John 7) will be one of the great trinity of evil during the tribulation. The prefix 'anti' signifies one who stands *against* or *instead* of Christ – he will oppose Christ by seeking to take His place (counterfeit). Though this individual will certainly come at the end of the age, there were many displaying the same antichrist spirit in John's day.

- Character. They were not only 'antichrist' but 'seducers' (**v.26**), seeking to lead the 'little children' away from the truth by denying that Jesus was the Christ (v.22).
- Course (**v.19**). These individuals had once taken the place of Christian profession amongst the believers to whom John was writing (cf. Acts 20.29; 2 Peter 2.1, 13). But they 'went out' (cf. John 13.30) of their own accord, indicating a denial of the faith. Their actions betrayed their different spiritual origin – they were not 'of (*ek*) us' suggesting they were apostates that did not belong to God's family. If they were truly born again, they would have remained – endurance is the hallmark of the saved. But a divine hand was at work. God used their departure to 'reveal' (manifest) their true nature – all those that went out were 'not of us' (i.e. genuine believers).
- Confession (**vv.22-23**). The heresy they taught denied that 'Jesus is the Christ'. The real test of any Christian profession is how they stand in relation to the truth of the Person of Christ. This is not merely a denial of the Lord Jesus as the true and promised Messiah of the OT, but a denial of His eternal sonship (as v.23 shows) and therefore His deity (cf. 5.1, 5; Matthew 16.16). The chief protagonist was Cerinthus, a contemporary of the Apostle John, who taught that Jesus was a mere man upon whom the Christ spirit (an emanation from deity) came. A person who teaches such things is 'the liar', i.e. the epitome of a lying deceiver. He is also the embodiment of the spirit of 'the Antichrist' for he denies the Father and the Son. This second denial (Father and Son) is implicit in the first (Jesus is he Christ). If a person has denied the Christ (and all it signifies in relation to His sonship), then he denies the Father. *EW Rogers: To deny the Son is to deny the Father, for the Father cannot be as such unless there is also the Son. The eternal Fatherhood of God presupposes the eternal sonship of Jesus.* **v.23:** The acid test of reality is the confession or denial of the Son. Christ is the touchstone (Matthew 22.42). *Leckie: We cannot honour God more than by honouring His Son; there is none so precious to God as He is* (cf. John 5.23; 16.27). To 'deny' (reject, disown) the Son is to prove one has no relationship with the Father (John 14.6). To 'acknowledge' (confess) the Son is to prove one's fellowship with the Father. To confess the Father but deny the Son is worthless – step forward Muslims, Mormons, Christian Scientists, Orthodox Jews and Jehovah's Witnesses! One cannot deny the Son and retain the Father.

¹ See the next set of notes (5) for vv.20-21 and v.24 onwards.