

INTRO

Children of God, in our day, the church continues to give itself over to greater worldliness. There is much temptation for Christians in our age to go along with the demonic doctrines and devilish practices of the ruler of this world. Christians are being deceived into following the course of this world, and are choosing to walk in darkness instead of walking in the light.

Now before John warn us about loving the world, John states his purposes for writing to different groups within the church. This section is quite strange and different than anything else in the letter, and so there is endless speculation as to why he in fact did this. I'm not going to explore all that right now.

What we need to see is that John addresses three groups in the church. He addresses children, fathers, and young men. The children represent the future, the fathers represent the past, and the young men represent the present. In order to be protect the church against worldliness John needs to provide teaching for the past, present, and future of the church.

And what John says to each group he says almost the same thing twice. I think the reason he duplicates the message here has to do with the scripture that says every matter must be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses. This is why Jesus in John's Gospel frequently says, Truly, truly I say to you. He is establishing his testimony upon the double witness of the truth. This is also I think one of the reasons of the chiastic structure, in which there are duplicating themes and stories which bear witness to the truth of it.

The message can be summed up as forgiveness, knowledge, and victory.

CHILDREN

The first group John addresses is the children. But when he calls them children, he uses the word **teknia** – which refers to children who are of the same family and who have the same parents – they share the same DNA, essentially. The same DNA we share with one another is the Holy Spirit. So just as he addresses the whole church as children throughout this letter, he is addressing the whole church here and he addresses them as the children of God.

In order to persuade the church to not love the world he tells them the most important thing there is to know. He says, “*I write to you children because your sins are forgiven for his name sake.*” And here he reiterates the point that he made previously, that forgiveness of sins is the foundation of fellowship that they have with one another which makes them members of the same divine and spiritual family of God.

When he addresses the **children** the second time, he says something a little different. First off, he doesn’t call them teknia, but instead the second time he calls them **paideia**, which emphasizes the discipline and training that children go under. “I write to you paideia, because you know the Father.”

There is a common assumption in much of the church which suggests that our children do not know God, but they need to come to know God, and when they have been trained up sufficiently, then they will know God.

But Scripture indicates otherwise. Jeremiah 31, the passage prophesying the New Covenant, the Lord says, And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more.”

John already spoke to the whole church as children and told them their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. And now based upon the fact their sins are forgiven, even the least of them, the children, the paideia know the Father. John says that the children already know the Father and that is based upon the forgiveness of sins.

Now the idea behind the word Paideia was really important in the ancient Greek world. Paideia meant more than just formal education. In the ancient world, "the paideia was all encompassing and involved nothing less than the enculturation of the future citizen." It was brought about the trivium and the quadrivium, and through the passing on of the history of the people through songs and epic poems and through art all of the statues of the gods. Through wrestling and the Olympic games. Through religion and the statues and the art and the architecture, all of it was Paidiea. A child was enculturated in all areas of life, "when he was in the classroom receiving instruction, and when he walked along the streets of his city going to and from school, and when he walked to the temple of the gods of his people."¹

And so I think because John refers to the children as Paideia, John is intimating that the children already know the father *because of* the training and discipline and enculturation they have been brought up in. They know the Father through the paideia, the enculturation of the church, which is foremost founded upon the forgiveness of sins.

So, not only are we members of the same family by the same spiritual DNA, but we are also members of the same household because we undergo the same spiritual discipline and training and teaching and enculturation. We are family by nature and by nurture.

FATHERS

¹ Doug Wilson, *The Paidiea of God*, 11.

Next John talks to the **fathers** in the church. He is probably referring to the teachers and leaders and elders of the church. And he writing to them because they “know him who is from the beginning” - referring to Jesus Christ. The fathers know him who is from the beginning – which I think means that the Fathers are seen as ruling the church in the orthodoxy of the knowledge of God and in the truth of the eternal existence and deity of the Son.

The fathers continuance in the light of their knowledge of him who is from the beginning depends upon their holding firm to the deity of Christ. I think that is what is being presumed here. There is no greater route to maturity and there is no more stabilizing doctrine that must be preserved in the life of the church than to believe the orthodox faith of the eternity of the Son of God.

And because they know him who is from the beginning, they help to provide stability and permanence and continuance of the truth of Christ in the life and doctrine of the church, so that the children can be disciplined and raised in that. This is a part of the paideia of Christ.

YOUNG MEN

Finally talks to the **young men**, and he tells them that they have overcome the evil one. He then fills that out further and says, “I wrote to you young men because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”

The young men, first of all, are the warriors of the church. The children cannot fight yet. They need to be raised up in it. The Father’s are too old to fight, but they have to maintain the truth. But the young men, they have to fight. The battle of our days needs to be fought by the young men. Now a young man is anyone from 20 to 50, maybe even to 60. From 50 or 60 on up you are no longer a young man, but pass on to elder status.

So, if you are under the age of 60 the most, you are a young a man, and John says that you have overcome the evil one. The battle is done. The victory is won. Your fighting and battle and strength is based upon the fact that the victory has already been won by Jesus Christ on the cross, however that victory has continuing effects. Victory is not in the future. Victory is in the past, and we are strong by faith in that victory that Christ won when the word of God abides in us. This is how we overcome the evil the evil one, as Jesus did - by the word. John speaks of our overcoming the evil one in past tense by the word because the devil has already been defeated by Christ.

Now what all this leads us to believe is that the life of the family of God in the church is a life lived in the knowledge of God who has forgiven our sins and has defeated the evil one. He gives us strength through his word to continue in that victory, and that knowledge and training in the word and walking in victory over the devil is the bulwark we need to not love the world.

In fact, if we are to be deprived of this spiritual strength and vitality and victory, and forsake the blessing of eternal life which comes from the knowledge of God and the grace of the forgiveness of sins, then we will love the world. Which hI think is what happens with many children in the churches. There is no sufficient paideia, enculturation into the faith, the elders and fathers of the church are not holding firmly onto orthodoxy, and the young men don't fight based upon the victory of Jesus, and are not abiding in the word.

Which is why, children of God, we do what we do here in our church. In order to help us all grow in the knowledge of God through the enculturation and training of the faith, which is passed on down through the liturgy and the songs and the lessons and fellowship and the sacraments, we need the fathers preserving orthodoxy, we need children being raised in the knowledge of the Father through being told over and

over and over again their sins are forgiven. And then we need to encourage our young men to get after it.

Through the fathers stability in the orthodox and apostolic faith, we disciple and train our children in the paidea of Christ, where they come to know God as their father, and through encouraging our young men to be strong and to live in the victory of Christ's defeat of the devil, by abiding in the word of God, this family of faith will hopefully be able to resist the love of the world.

DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD

After providing that foundation John says,

“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. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

In order to destroy the church the devil has to create a false paideia to train us up in. the Paidiea of the world. And this is exactly what the devil does, and he trains us through the appealing to our strongest desires - the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

This false trinity of desires is really just a reiteration of the deception that drew Eve away from following God. Eve saw that the tree was good for food (lust of the flesh) it was a delight to the eyes (lust of the eyes) and it was good to make one wise (pride of life). The devil is still tempting us with these same desires today. He has not changed his approach in thousands of years, because they work. It appeals to something deep within us, something deep within our sin nature.

These primeval sins and desires have taken such root in our fallen race that now the world system basically operates by perpetually appealing to

these three sins. This is why John says: “For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not from the Father, but is from the world.”

When John speaks of the world, he uses that word in a few ways throughout his writings. World can mean the actual physical creation, the earth. World can also refer to the people who inhabit the world. God created the world and he called it good. John also tells us that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, so that whoever would believe in him would have everlasting life. Therefore John is not talking about the world of the physical creation nor is he talking about the people in it. God loves the creation, and he loves the people in it.

Rather when John speaks of the world here, he is referring to humanity organized in sinful hostility and rebellion against God. In the first century that took the form of the Judaism which set itself up against Jesus to kill him and his apostles. Later it would become Rome. But in total, the world, in this negative sense, refers to any religious, cultural, political, social, economic, or ideological system organized in opposition and rebellion to God.

The chief rebel and ruler of this world, of course, is the Devil, which is why Jesus calls him the ruler of this world. For example, in John 12:31 he says, “Now is the judgment of this world, now will the ruler of this world be cast out.” And again in John 14:30, Jesus says, “...the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me.”

So, if you love this world, this world that is ruled by the devil, then the love of the Father is not in you. And that is because you have filled your soul with sinful desires to satisfy the lust of your flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life. Those who give themselves over to the world’s *paideia* fall in love with the world and are fascinated by it and addicted to its ways. Those who love the world are in a perpetual state of Eve’s

deception and rebellion, and have placed themselves under the dominion of the devil. You cannot love the Father and have eternal life abiding in you if you live in such a way that you are constantly trying to satisfy those Satanic lusts and pride by allowing yourself to be enculturated by the world

Where are these three vices found in our world today?

The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life are often found together, intertwined, and looped together like a celtic knot. But the lust of the flesh is chiefly satisfied through sex and food and drink and other physical pleasures. Now I do not mean to say that all sex and all food and all drink and all pleasure qualifies as seeking to satisfy the lust of the flesh. By no means. God made these things to be received from his hand with thankfulness. And he created our bodies to experience pleasure. But the pleasure derived from such fleshly pleasures is meant to turn our hearts back toward God in thanksgiving and praise.

However, we are often tempted in this world to eat and drink in excess, and to satisfy our sexual desires outside of the prescribed way of marriage that God ordained. We live in this world of the therapeutic, in which we seek to maximize our comfort and minimize our discomfort at all costs. And so, through over eating, and over drinking, through pain killers and drug use, and binge watching TV and mindlessly scrolling through our phones, by looking at porn and seeking as much pleasure as we can, with as minimal effort as possible, we become gluttons, and drunkards, and fornicators and addicts.

We turn the gifts of God into our God and we live for its sake. Which is really just another way of saying we live for ourselves, and we idolize ourselves, living for the sake of our own pleasure. This is what happens when we idolize the gifts and move from using them to abusing them.

As St. Paul says in Phil. 3:17ff – “*17*Join one another in following my example, brothers, and carefully observe those who walk according to the pattern we set for you. *18*For as I have often told you before, and now say again even with tears: Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. *19*Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and their glory is in their shame. Their minds are set on earthly things.”

“Their god is their belly” could refer to their actual belly, but some commentators have said that belly is a euphemism for their sexual organs. Either way, those who live merely for the sake of satisfying their belly, their belly has become their god. They have set their minds on earthly things, that is worldly things, and their end is destruction.

In this world in which we live, all manners of sexual perversity are used to sell things that people want. And sexual perversity is now advocated and protected by the government. It has become the highest expression of our autonomous selves to have sex with whoever or whatever we want, and the right to indulge in that, shall not be infringed upon. But not only that, it is even mandated that others must also celebrate such perversity.

With such pressure from the world and its governing authorities, and with the influence that comes through from liberal media – movies and shows and music, and also from businesses who use their power of advertisement and the influence upon the culture, it is hard to not be influenced by the world. Businesses fly their rainbow flags and stand in solidarity with the LGBTQ. And so there are real societal and commercial and legal benefits of supporting such things as PRIDE Month. Pride month. We literally have a month celebrating the greatest sin of them all.

Now, if you are caught up in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, then you are most likely addicted to porn, to sex, to alcohol, to overeating, to technological addiction, to drugs, and even to the pleasure that comes from esteeming yourself more highly in your eyes than you actually are. If your standard operating procedure is to live

within these sins, and more, then you need to understand that Paul says you are an enemy of the cross of Christ. And John says the love of the Father is not in you.

Now the worst of all of it is actually the pride of life. Pride of life, or vainglory, is the chief of all the sins and the source of the downfall of the devil himself. And in our world we are taught to be self obsessed. We live in the most narcissistic society ever, in which we live for ourselves only, and even when we do good deeds, we need to perform our good deeds for the world to see so that we can virtue signal that we are better than others. Or we post things on Instagram and facebook and twitter and have to see how many likes we got, because our sense of self worth is wrapped up in whether people agree with us. We need that dopamine hit.

We need to boast of how great we are so the quickest way to do that is tear someone else down. Or we can create false sanctified versions of ourselves online so we can pretend to be something we are not or wish we were so we can have a sense of being better than we actually are, which would make other people to be jealous or envious of us, and wish they had what we have. And thinking that you have something that other people want makes you more boastful and arrogant and prideful and is just another way in which the world has infiltrated your thinking.

We need to be careful, children of God, as we engage in our daily activities and habits and ask ourselves why am I doing this? What true spiritual gain am I getting from this? What virtues or vices am I cultivating in doing this? Do these things make me more infatuated with myself and am I being filled with more pride of life and vainglory? Or will this enable me to serve others more faithfully and to know God more truly?

Why am I pouring myself an extra drink? Why am I getting that third serving of food? Why am I scrolling through social media? Why am I watching this TV show or movie, or listening to this song? What kinds of

desires are being awakened in me as a result of these actions that are so commonplace among us in this world today?

Paul says we should meditate on those things which are lovely, true, honorable, right excellent and beautiful. Our desires should be desire for fellowship with God in Christ, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, desiring to grow in the wisdom of Christ, desire for the praise that comes from God and not man. A desire to know the truth, goodness, and beauty.

Now I know that when I say that there is a sense in some of you in which you think, yeah...I think you're taking this a bit far. Lets not get too out of hand here with this Christianity thing. And so, you think that you can still flirt with the world and still also follow Christ. You still want to be a Christian, of course, but you have Christian freedom which allows you to engage in all sorts of activities which God isn't going to judge me for, right? Right???

But John says, don't love the world or things in the world - and we immediately start scurrying around trying to rationalize certain behaviors and find loop holes in God's plan of sanctification. We don't want to seem like we are too extreme as a Christian. We want to be, you know, a cool Christian. Which, I tried to do, by the way, when I was in the Navy. It doesn't work out. If you try to be a cool Christian all that means is you stop living according to the truth, you lower your standards for your own moral goodness, and make accommodations for this sin or that sin or this heresy and that false teaching. You would like to think that by not being so Christian, that you can win the other side over to Christ. But this is a lie of the devil. This is only a one way street, and that street runs away from Christ. You never win anyone to Christ by acting more like the world.

You can only flirt with the world for so long until you have blinded your mind completely to what you have been doing to whole time – you haven't been flirting with the world, you have been committing adultery with the world. James says, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God. Therefore, whoever makes himself a friend of the world is an enemy of God." (James 4:4).

We must therefore be determined from the outset to not be deceived as Eve was, and make rationalizations for why we can continue to engage in these types of behaviors and practices and habits. We need to vigorously resist the temptation to qualify and define John's warnings out of existence. We must not turn "do not love the world" into, "I'm gonna do it my way."

And why would we seek to do love the world any way? The world is passing away along with its desires. So do not cultivate those worldly desires. But cultivate those desires that will abide for ever in the will of God. In this you will love God and overcome the evil one. Amen.

