

Lesson 6 – 1 John 2:12-17

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Review/Introduction

John is writing so we might know that we have eternal life (1 John 5:13); so they may see the objective truth and subjective evidences that give assurance of salvation. Both objective truth and subjective evidence go hand-in-hand. John is making it very clear that a profession of possessing salvation without the evidences that flow from salvation is self-deception.

He is doing this by presenting tests to determine if true saving faith has been exercised or are the readers (and ultimately us) deceived. It is actually commanded in Scripture to examine yourself to ensure you have exercised true saving faith.

⁵Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? (2 Corinthians 13:5)

John presents his tests in four spirals laying out doctrinal and conduct tests or evidences of true, real, actual regeneration. We are in the first spiral.

II. Evidence of true saving faith – Spiral 1 (1:5-2:17)

A. Doctrine – Hold fast to truth – The way of salvation from sin (1:5-2:2)

B. Conduct – Obedience (2:3-6)

C. Conduct – Love (2:7-11)

D. Conduct – Sin (Don't love the world) (2:12-17)

The Scriptures are clear that true salvation is accompanied by a changed life. Those who are truly saved be progressing in sanctification because of God's work in their life. They will also have a desire to know their Redeemer more and will desire to grow in that relationship. The accompanying truth is that we are commanded to work hard at that growth and by doing so display the subjective evidences of salvation.

¹²So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling;** ¹³**for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.** (Philippians 2:12-13)

¹⁰Therefore, brethren, **be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;** ¹¹for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. (2 Peter 1:10-11)

Last week, we looked at the subjective evidence of salvation – love (or not hating). If you are regenerate then love for those that cross your path, believer and unbeliever, is an outflow of your connectedness to Christ. Conversely, hate is a characteristic of the one who is in darkness, walks in darkness, and is deceived about their final state.

Today, we look at another aspect of love – what not to love.

Spiral 1 – Conduct – Do not Love the World (2:12-17)

1. Encouragement (2:12-14)

¹²I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. ¹⁴I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been 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 evil one.

¹²I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. ¹³I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. ¹⁴I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (ESV)

John has been announcing warnings to his readers regarding professions of possessing salvation without the evidences that flow from salvation.

In chapter 1, John warns against believing the wrong things at the heart level about sin.

⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

In chapter 2, John warns against a profession of salvation without the accompanying keeping on keeping Christ's commands.

⁴The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

^{5b}By this we know that we are in Him: ⁶the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

In chapter 2, John also warns against a profession of salvation without the accompanying lifestyle of love.

⁹The one who says he is in the Light and *yet* hates his brother is in the darkness until now.

¹¹But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

John has just spoken in strong, extreme, black-and-white terms: if you are not changed, then you have not been saved. Specifically, how could anyone possibly love like Christ? God is not cold and uncompassionate. He is our Shepherd, so the Holy Spirit writes through John to encourage the brethren. Just like he did in 2:1-2, John now addresses our concerns. "I say I have that I have come to know Him, but don't *always* keep His commands". "I say that I am in the light, but I don't love *perfectly*". So, John inserts this short section to encourage his beloved children who may have been troubled by what he had written.

First, let's define the characters in this illustration...

“Little children” in verse 12 is literally my “born ones”. It designates a little child in age but is used by Jesus and John (John 13:33; 1 John 2:1; 2:12; 2:28; 3:7; 3:18; 4:4; 5:21) to address those who are true followers of Jesus. It is a form of familiar, tender, affectionate address to speak of one kindly even if they were adults.

“Children” in verse 13 is a little child of either gender ranging from an infant to children who are older. While “little children” (v12) can indicate a child young in age, “children” (v13) indicates a child young in experience and in need of training and discipline.

“Fathers” is literally the one who imparts life; the one who brings into being and passes on the potential for likeness. It suggests both maturity and authority.

“Young men” generally describes men in the prime of their life, still in child rearing years, between 20-40 years old.

Commentators are split as to whether this illustration is referring to physical age or spiritual age, but the context favors spiritual ages/stages.

John starts with all believers in his address to “little children”, moves to mature believers who have a deep communion with God and are looked to for guidance, then describes “young men” who in the prime of spiritual growth, and then describes spiritual babes in Christ.

So, the layout of this passage would go like this.

All - little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake.

Mature - fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning

Growing - young men, because you have overcome the evil one

Babes - children, because you know the Father

Mature - fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning

Growing - young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

John wants his readers (and us) to get this clearly so he emphasizes his point with the present/past tense repetition. John is trying to tell his readers that you all are growing, you all are in a process, you all are truly saved. If you have been changed and are, therefore, in the process of change, then you are a child of God; so be encouraged. Process is required, not perfection.

Let's look at the groups again.

“Little children” are all believers whose “sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake”. All believers have been forgiven, but interestingly it isn't about us. How arrogant to think that our forgiveness is about us! Our forgiveness is about God. It is about His glory. It is about the demonstration of His excellencies in forgiving wretches like us. This is not a new concept.

²⁵“I, even I, am the one who **wipes out your transgressions for My own sake**, And I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43:25)

⁸You have not heard, you have not known. Even from long ago your ear has not been open, Because I knew that you would deal very treacherously; And you have been called a rebel from birth. ⁹**“For the sake of My name I delay My wrath, And for My praise I restrain it for you,** In order not to cut you off. ¹⁰“Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹**“For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.** (Isaiah 48:8-11)

❖ Who gets the glory for your salvation and sanctification?

Babes in Christ (children) “know the Father”. The young in Christ know that they are in an intimate relationship with the God. There is no question about this. They may not understand much about the deep truths of God’s word, but they know that their sins have been forgiven

²⁴So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, “Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵He then answered, “Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” (John 9)

Big growers (young men) “are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one”. Those who are maturing are doing so because God is at work in them through His word and they, themselves, are also working.

¹²So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling;** ¹³**for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.** (Philippians 2:12-13)

¹Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, ²**like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,** ³if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. (1 Peter 2:1-3)

The maturing have overcome the evil one through the word of God. We know Jesus overcame the evil one at His temptation through the word in Matthew 4.

⁹How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping *it* according to Your word. ¹⁰With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. ¹¹Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You. (Psalm 119:9-11)

We must also not forget that He was fully empowered by the Spirit. It is no different for us.

¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but **be filled with the Spirit,** ¹⁹speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; (Ephesians 5:18-20)

¹⁶**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)

❖ Are you saturated with the word of God?

The mature (fathers) “know Him who has been from the beginning”. “Know” means to acquire information through experience and implies an intimate, personal relationship with Him who has been from the beginning. The mature have experienced Christ in all phases of physical life and an intimate, personal relationship has developed. Everything for the mature is about Christ. The mature have a defining characteristic finely honed by the Scriptures.

¹³For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴But solid food is for **the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.** (Hebrews 5:13-14)

❖ Is everything in your life about Christ?

John’s point is clear: all true believers are in the process of being progressively sanctified. Wherever one is at in the spectrum of maturity, if you are a true believer, your sins are forgiven and you will be growing in sanctification, but don’t sit on your laurels.

❖ Are you growing?

2. What do you love? (2:15)

¹⁵Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (ESV)

John now changes his mode of address from the hypothetical professors who “say” to direct address of his beloved ones. He will pick the “if someone says” address back up in 4:2 when he again talks about love.

John is again developing a contrast. The focus of the mature and maturing’s is all about Christ and the love of Christ. Those that do not know the Father, love the world instead of Christ. So, John is commanding and encouraging his beloved little children to make sure they are not loving the world.

As we have seen, “love” is a choice of the will to give of oneself to serve someone or, in this case, something. Previously, we are commanded to love God and love people. Now, we are commanded to “not love” the “world”.

James also tells us that friendship (bond of affection and cooperation) with the world is hostility with God.

⁴You adulteresses, do you not know that **friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.** (James 4:4)

“World” means something that is well-arranged. It often means the earth or its people. But John’s use of “world” varies based on context (i.e., John 3:16 and 1 John 2:2 referring to the totality of human-kind). Here in 2:15, John is using “world” in a moral or ethical sense. Here, “world” is a system that is radically alienated against the Creator.

Satan is currently referred to as the “god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4) and “ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 16:11). Currently, the whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). “World” is the current world system that belongs to Satan. The “world” is his worldwide system of deception and wickedness that leaves God out and is opposed to Him (1 John 2:15-17; James 3:15-17). Satan’s aim is to make the values of this godless system seem attractive; appealing to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life to entice people to sin.

Worldly philosophies are not from the Father. In fact, James contrasts worldly wisdom and God’s wisdom in James 3:15-17.

¹⁵**This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.** ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. (James 3:15-17)

Paul makes it clear that this is how believers “formerly walked”.

¹And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in which **you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air,** of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. (Ephesians 2:1-2)

We are not to “love” Satan’s world system, but we are also to not love “the things in the world”. We have to be so very careful here. Our fleshly, legalistic minds could make a long list of the “thing that are in the world”. All the dos and don’ts that we hold personally and then tell others that they must observe too. Thankfully, John understands this and tells us in the next sentence what those “things” are – “all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life”.

John now gives his black-and-white statement – “if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him”. This isn’t some new, out-of-the-box idea. Jesus taught this in the parable of the soils Mark 4, Matthew 13, and Luke 8. In the explanation of the parable, there is only one heart that is regenerated – the one that bears fruit, not the one that loves the world.

¹³And He said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴The sower sows the word. ¹⁵These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. ¹⁶In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky *places*, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; ¹⁷and they have no *firm* root in themselves, but are *only* temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, ¹⁹but **the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.** ²⁰And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” (Mark 4:13-20)

The love of the world and the things that are in the world is a slippery slope. The grammar used in the phrase “do not love” could be “stop loving the world that you started to love” or “don’t begin loving the world”.

Either way, John's previous point of growth via the word of God is the solution.

²And **do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

❖ **Do you love or have bonds of affection and cooperation with the world?**

3. Characteristics of the World (2:16)

¹⁶For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

¹⁶For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. (ESV)

John now wants to clarify “the things in the world”. “All” means all without exception. “In the world” means in the sphere of the world. Clearly, the dominate characteristic of the current world system is sin. John describes that dominate characteristic by providing the summary method of attack of the world system in the three statements: “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life”.

The Greek word translated “lust” (“desire” by the ESV) simply conveys the idea of “having one’s passion toward”. It is a neutral term denoting the presence of strong desire (whether it is good or evil is determined by the context). It is used in a positive sense to mean “earnestly desire” and refers to God given desires which are fulfilled in a God honoring way.

¹⁵And He said to them, “I have **earnestly desired** to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; (Luke 22:15)

²³But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the **desire** to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better; (Philippians 1:23)

⁷But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with **great desire** to see your face. (1 Thessalonians 2:17)

However, most often, “lust” is used negatively to describe strong desires which are perverted by the totally depraved sin nature. For the believer, they are set free from the power of sin over their life and do not have to give in to the depraved strong desires.

¹⁶But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the **desire** of the flesh. (Galatians 5:16)

²⁴Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and **desires**. (Galatians 5:24)

⁵Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil **desire**, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. (Colossians 3:5)

¹¹For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹²instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly **desires** and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, (Titus 2:12-13)

“Flesh” refers to the totally depraved nature which impacts the reason, will, and emotions. It is totally orientated toward self, inclining to sin, opposed to God, moving us towards self-sufficiency, independence from God.

“Boastful pride of life” refers to arrogantly and shamelessly taking credit for the provision of life’s needs.

“The lust of the flesh” is the desire to do something apart from the will of God.

“The lust of the eyes” is the desire to have something apart from the will of God.

“The boastful pride of life” seeks after and takes glory that belongs to God alone.

The specific manifestations of these three characteristics are different for each person, but typical areas are sinful sexual activity, materialism, and striving for control in one’s life.

Paul told the Corinthians that he was not “ignorant of Satan’s schemes” (2 Corinthians 2:10). We also need to be aware of the ways that Satan uses these characteristics to lure us to sin.

❖ What is your Achilles heel?

The lust of the flesh and eyes and boastful pride of life are all areas of sin, none of this is from the Father but from the world’s system. There is no place in the believer’s life to be attributing sin as coming from or approved by God.

❖ Are there sins that you justify as being approved by God?

4. Temporal verses Eternal (2:17)

¹⁷The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

¹⁷And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (ESV)

The current world is passing away (literally is being passed away). It will cease to exist. God is passing the world and sin away. Everything is hastening to the consummation of the ages – the day of the Lord. The world is temporary. It is all going to burn.

⁷But **by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.** ⁸But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. ¹⁰But **the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.** ¹¹Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹²looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, **because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!** ¹³But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, (2 Peter 3:7-17)

The world and the things in the world are all going to burn, but people are one-way-eternal (Only God is eternal in that He existed from eternity past to eternity future. People come into existence and then live forever; they are one-way-eternal). Those that surrender their life to Christ and therefore love Christ and not the world will live in His presence for eternity. Those that reject Christ which is demonstrated by loving the world will live separate from Him for eternity in conscience hell, the lake of fire.

⁸dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9)

¹³And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds.

¹⁴Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:13-15)

Here then is the overarching principle – love people who are eternal, don't love the world which is temporal.

❖ **What do you love and how is that demonstrated in your life?**

Conclusion

John is writing to present tests of true saving faith. The purpose is to ensure that his readers know if they have eternal life (actual, true, real regeneration) or not. Today's passage looked spiritual growth and not loving Satan's world system. Love the things that are eternal (people) not the things that are temporal (Satan's world system).

Additional Study

1. Each time you come to the Scriptures, pray for the Spirit to give you understanding.
2. Read 1 John once this week a chapter at a time (one chapter a day for five days).
3. Pray that God would show you personal applications from today's passage.
4. Read today's passage noting repeated words/ideas and ask yourself what John means.
5. Re-read the notes from today and contemplate the thought questions.