

1 John 2:12-14 Answers Stages of Maturity

Introduction: 2:12-14 is in stark contrast to what came before it. Up to this point in his letter, John has been dealing with false professions: 1:6, 1:8, 1:10, 2:4, 2:9. At this point, however, he takes time to reassure his readers of his confidence of their salvation (in contrast to the false professors). John is sure his readers are genuine.

******To what three categories of believers did John write in 2:12-14?** John wrote overall to little children, then specifically to children, fathers and young men.

1. Who did John mean by children, fathers and young men (2:11-14)? See 2:1, 18, 28. Since several other places in this letter John addressed all his readers as “little children” (*teknion*, 2:1, 28), perhaps little children here in 2:11 (*teknion*) simply refers to everyone in the church. By contrast, the word children in 2:18 is from a different word (*paidion*). *Teknion* (“little children”) tends to refer to kinship or family relationship whereas *paidion* (“children”) is related to a verb that means “to train children”; thus *paidion* tends to have a flavor of subordination and discipline.

Thus these three groups may represent three stages of spiritual maturity (children, young men, fathers). Perhaps Augustine was right when he said John wrote with reference to the innocence of childhood, the strength of youth and the mature knowledge of age (Coleman & Peace, p. 26).

2. Doubtless feminists are chagrined John did not have young women or mothers as a category. Why did John leave out young women and mothers (2:11-14)? If “little children” refers to everyone in the church, they are not left out. Also, **1)** Just as the word brothers in Greek can refer to both men and women, so too John might have used the categories of children, young men and fathers to refer to the spiritual stages of both genders. **2)** It is also possible John focused particularly on the men since they are designed by God to be the leaders in the home and in the church.

Observation: There is to be progress in the Christian life. We are not to remain as babes. Even Jesus grew:

ESV **Luke 2:52** . . . Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

3. Why did the ESV inset 2:11-14 as if it were poetry? These verses contain unusual parallel clauses and seem to stand alone.

Literary Purpose: The purpose of 2:12-14 seems to be to assure the readers of their Christian status. It also provides the basis for the upcoming command of 2:15-17 not to love the world (Marshall, p. 134):

ESV **1 John 2:15** Do not love the world or the things in the world.

2:12

What trait of the little children did John bring out (2:12)? Their sins are forgiven. This is true of everyone who belongs to Jesus.

4. Based on 2:12, what is the reason/basis for the forgiveness of our sins? We are forgiven for his name's sake. Ultimately, salvation is not about us, it is about God's glory.

ESV **Revelation 5:9** . . . by your blood you ransomed people for God . . .

All Christians have their sins forgiven. Forgiveness is the starting point of salvation, the starting point of a right relationship with God.

5. Why was it not belittling for John to refer to grown adults as little children (2:12)? **1)** In terms of years, John was very old when he wrote this, whereas most all of them were relatively young compared to John. **2)** In terms of experience, John had seen and known Jesus personally, in person, in the flesh — something none of them had ever experienced (1:1-3).

John may have referred to them as children to remind them of the importance of instruction and of the need for teachers such as John.

2:13a

What is true of those John called fathers (spiritual adults, 2:13a)? John stated that the fathers knew him who is from the beginning.

Who is him who is from the beginning (2:13a)? See 1:1. Based on 1:1-4, his is clearly a reference to Jesus. In another letter John wrote:

ESV **John 1:1-2** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

6. Why did John describe Jesus as him who is from the beginning (2:13)? See 1:1-2 and *John 1:1*. Jewish people already believed that God the Father existed from the beginning; John stressed the fact that Jesus did also. If you know the Father, you know the Son; they are a package deal.

7. In what sense might fathers know Jesus in a way that children and young men do not (2:13a)? Even though ever believer has his sins forgiven, the more mature you are the better you will know Jesus. It is a growth process.

ESV **John 14:21** Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

The verb for “know” (2:13a) is in the perfect tense, which refers to something that happened in the past but that has presently abiding results. As such, it indicates a mature, well-rounded knowledge of God.

Paul’s goal:

ESV **Philippians 3:10** that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

2:13b

What truth about young men did John bring out in 2:13b? They had overcome the evil one (Satan).

8. In what sense have young men overcome the evil one (2:13b)? Young men fight many battles against evil and are engaged in spiritual warfare. They stand firm in resistance to the devil’s temptations.

ESV **James 4:7** Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

9. As a category, how are young men different from little children (2:11,12)? In a very real sense, all believers overcame the evil one when we were born again, transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. However, too often with little children, Satan’s dealings with them are like taking candy from a baby! In contrast, the young men have matured enough to begin to learn the devil’s schemes and how to resist him.

ESV **2 Corinthians 2:12** . . . we are not ignorant of his [Satan’s] designs.

If you live the defeated Christian life, you may be a baby Christian rather than a young man.

2:13c

John first stated that the little children had their sins forgiven (2:12). What did he say about children in 2:13c? They knew God the Father.

10. John stated in 2:13a that the fathers knew Jesus and now in 2:13c John stated that the children knew God the Father. What is the difference? See 1:3. Though there probably is great overlap in these categories, it is true that a child is most initially aware of and focused on his father and mother. The parent/child relationship is primary to him.

ESV **Romans 8:15** . . . you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

ESV **Matthew 6:9** Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven . . .”

2:14a

What truth about fathers did John repeat in 2:14a? The fathers knew Jesus.

11. In 2:14a, why did John repeat about fathers exactly what he wrote about fathers in 2:13a? It clearly is for emphasis.

2:14b

What new information did John write about young men in 2:14b? Whereas in 2:13 he simply stated the young men had overcome the evil one, in 2:14 he added in that they were also strong and that the word of God abided in them.

12. In what sense were the young men strong (2:14)? They were strong in their overcoming of Satan.

ESV **Ephesians 6:10** . . . be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

ESV **James 4:7** Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

This reminder of their strength was probably to prepare them for the command that follows:

ESV **1 John 2:15** Do not love the world or the things in the world.

It can be as hard to resist the world as it was for ancient sailors to resist the mythological songs of the Sirenes.

13. What does it mean for the word of God to abide in someone (2:14)? It means that person knows what it says and lives by it. Abide and abode are related words. These young men were not only at home in the Scriptures, but they had God's Word at home in their hearts (it abided in them) and it gave them victory over Satan.

ESV **Psalms 119:11** I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

ESV **1 John 2:5** . . . whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.

Application: *Does God's word abide in your heart? Have you stored it up there?*

ESV **Colossians 3:16** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . .

So What?

14. What overall confidence did John express in his readers in 2:12-14? John was confident his readers **1)** had their sins forgiven, 2:11, **2)** knew Jesus (the one who was from the beginning), 2:12, **3)** had overcome the evil one, 2:13a, **4)** knew the Father (2:13b), **5)** were strong, 2:14b and **6)** had the word of God abiding in them, 2:14c).

Would you categorize yourself as a child, young man or father? (Rhetorical).

Application: In your life you should see a progression of fellowship with God, progress in your walk with God.

Small Group Discussion Questions: Ask everyone to divide up by gender into groups of three and discuss the following questions for 10-15 minutes:

15. Which of the characteristics listed in 2:12-14 do you need to improve upon?

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session (30 minutes of teaching and 15 minutes of group discussion) and are based on the text of the ESV.
- You can hear this lesson being taught at www.SermonAudio.Com/NTRF.

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