

only broadcast the truth of God but we also show ourselves to be His servants, willing to do God's work God's way.

**12–13a I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. I 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.**

In this first direct appeal to his readers, John makes his address to all believers, then to fathers, and then to young men, repeating the phrase "I am writing to you" (γράφω ὑμῖν) as he addresses each group. The repetition of the phrase "I am writing to you" is important because it emphasizes that what John is writing is something permanent—something that can be referred to over and over again. The spoken word is more easily forgotten, but the written message can be read and considered time and time again.

*little children* (τεχνία, *teknia*) – This is a term John uses throughout the epistle when addressing the whole community of believers. We find *teknia* used this way six times: 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21. It is understandable that John, who identifies himself as "the elder" (ὁ πρεσβύτερος) in his second epistle (2Jn 1:1), would address those younger than he with the endearing term "children," especially because they would have considered him as a spiritual father and an elderly shepherd who had taught them and led them in the path of truth.

*because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake.* – The Greek gives way to various translations. The Greek phrase ὅτι ἀφέωνται ὑμῖν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι, beginning with the particle ὅτι (*hoti*), could be understood as "because your sins have been forgiven" or "that your sins are forgiven." The grammatical and exegetical question is whether the particle *hoti* introduces the *cause* for writing or the *content* of the message written. Or to put it another way, is John indicating that what *caused* him to write this epistle was because their sins have been forgiven, or is the *content*, the *message* he is emphasizing in his writing, that their sins have been forgiven? While the grammar could go either way, it seems to me that the context itself favors the idea of *content* rather than *the cause*. He is writing to assure those who have put their faith in Yeshua, that their sins have been forgiven.

Indeed, having just written in the previous context about those who claim to know God but whose lives are marked by sin, and thus are liars and do not have the truth, in this direct appeal to his readers John first emphasizes the reality of God's grace in forgiving sin. He has previously emphasized God's grace in forgiving sinners in general (1:7,

9; 2:1–2) but here he applies it directly to the community of believers to which he is writing: “*your* sins have been forgiven.” It is always the enemy’s strategy to attack the followers of Yeshua by hoping to make them doubt the promise of God that their sins have been forgiven. Such attacks are countered by wielding the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God (Eph 6:17), for the word of God, inspired by the Spirit, is established as God’s truth revealed to mankind, and therefore forms the sure foundation upon which a true knowledge of God resides.

We find Yeshua using the phrase “your sins have been forgiven” a number of times, and it is likely that John has these words of the Messiah well in mind when he affirms this cardinal truth to his readers. When four men brought a paralytic to Yeshua, hoping that he might be healed, we read:

And Yeshua seeing their faith said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” (Mk 2:5)

And regarding the harlot who entered the Pharisee’s house to anoint the feet of Yeshua, we hear Him say: “Your sins have been forgiven.” (Lk 7:48).

The wonderful reality of the Gospel is herein stated: God, in His grace, without in any way diminishing His justice and righteousness, has forgiven the sins of those who believe in His Son, Yeshua. And He has forgiven all of their sins once for all. “Sins have been, are, and remain forever forgiven.”<sup>1</sup> As the hymn writer has so amply put it:

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!<sup>2</sup>

But note carefully how John emphasizes the *means* by which one’s sins are forgiven: “...your sins have been forgiven you *for His name’s sake*.” It is “on account of His name” that sins are forgiven and forever erased from the Almighty’s “book of memory.” But what is meant by “for His name’s sake,” or (more literally) “because of His name”? How is it that “because of His name,” our sins have been forgiven? Here we recognize once again that within the Semitic world, one’s “name” is a revelation of the person’s character and also of their accomplishments. We have a similar idiom in English when we say “he made a name

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1 Kistemaker, *1John*, p. 266.

2 “It is Well With My Soul,” by Hartio G. Spafford

for himself.” Thus, while John could just have well written “your sins have been forgiven on account of Yeshua,” his use of “on account of His name” brings into focus both the incarnate Son of God as well as His accomplished work of redemption for His people, through His sacrificial death, proven to be efficacious by His resurrection, and applied to all who are His through His intercession on their behalf. Thus, when God forgives the sinner, He is both just and the justifier of the one who believes in Yeshua (Rom 3:26).

*I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning.* – Having addressed the community as a whole, using the endearing term “little children,” John now addresses what appears to be two distinct groups: fathers and young men (πατήρ/νεανίσκος, *patēr/ neaniskos*). Some have suggested that both in vv 12-13a and the parallel in v. 14, John first addresses the whole community using “little children” (*teknia* in v. 12; *paidia* in v. 14), then directs his attention to the elders of the community, referring to them as “fathers,” and next, to the deacons whom he calls “young men.”<sup>1</sup> Others take “fathers” and “young men” simply to be representative of older members of the community on the one hand, and the younger adults on the other.<sup>2</sup>

But it is interesting that John, after addressing the whole community by referring to them with the endearing name “little children,” then goes on to address only males: “fathers” and “young men.” In this regard, it seems likely that John does have in mind those men who have accepted the responsibility of leadership within the community, and who therefore would be those whose duty it was to care for and nurture the community as a whole. While John’s words clearly have value for the whole community, the fact that he addresses only men after first speaking to the community as a whole, would seem to strengthen the interpretation that by using the terms “fathers” and “young men,” John has in mind the community’s designated leaders.

He recognizes the spiritual maturity of the “fathers” by noting “*you know Him who has been from the beginning.*” The word “father” presumes a position of leadership which takes seriously the responsibility to nurture the spiritual growth of those under his care. That these older, mature men (elders) are identified by John as those who “know Him who is from the beginning,” indicates that their confession

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1 See J. L. Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* in *Black’s New Testament Commentary* (Black, 1973), pp. 70–71; I. Howard Marshall, *1John*, p. 137.

2 Calvin, *1John*, p. 183; Yarbrough, *1John*, pp. 113-14; I. Howard Marshall, *1John*, p. 138.

of Yeshua comes from a firm agreement with the Scriptures that Yeshua is without beginning and without end, meaning that they affirm His equality with the Father as being the incarnate Eternal One. This is a strong statement of Yeshua's deity (which reminds one of the opening of John's Gospel), clearly marked by John as an essential aspect of faith for those who qualify to be leaders over the *ekklesia* Yeshua promised to build (Matt 16:18f). And it is the responsibility of the elders within any community to pass the truth of the Gospel, centered upon Yeshua, to the next generation of men who will assume positions of leadership in due time.

But we should also note that the word "know" in the Scriptures (Hebrew יָדָע, *yāda'*; Greek γινώσκω, *ginōskō*), when speaking of knowing a person, means far more than to be acquainted with someone or to know facts about another person. Rather, within the Semitic world in which the Scriptures were written, to "know a person" meant to have a close, intimate relationship with that person. Thus, when John writes that the fathers "know Him who has been from the beginning," he is emphasizing that they have a close, personal, faith-relationship with Yeshua. Their faith is both relational and intellectual, being based upon what they know to be true.

*I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.* – It is clear that as John is writing to believing communities, he is well aware of the errant teaching that is affecting many who confess to be followers of Yeshua but are being led astray into error. Remember that teachers of Gnostic doctrines denied the very incarnation of Yeshua Himself. Far from the *zeitgeist* of our post-modern society, John did not consider such disparate teachings as "just another point of view." He considered them, as we should, to be the work of the evil one. Granted, people may be led astray due to their own ignorance or immaturity, but those who presume to take upon themselves the responsibility of teaching others must be diligent to make sure that what they teach clearly aligns with the Scriptures.

In the face of a growing body of false teaching during the late 1st and early 2nd Centuries CE, there were those who remained true to the "faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 1:1), that is, the faith written about by Moses, affirmed by Israel's prophets, and verified by Yeshua and His apostles. Thus, these "young men," some who undoubtedly had accepted the responsibilities of service<sup>1</sup> within the community, had resisted the heretical teachings of the growing

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1 διακονέω, *diakoneō*, "to serve, assist, take care of; διάκονος, *diakonos*, "deacon."

factions, remaining steadfast in their confession of Yeshua as the “Word made flesh,” Who, in the mystery of godliness, is the eternal One Who died, rose again, ascended on high, and Who is the promised Messiah of Israel’s prophets. In standing against the evil one and those who were his agents to spread falsehood, they had shown themselves worthy to serve others and in so doing, to encourage them in their faith in Yeshua. And, in serving others, they were fulfilling the very commandment of Yeshua when He taught that loving one another is a primary characteristic for identifying those who are His true disciples (Jn 13:35).

**13b–14 I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I 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.**

Using the same pattern or sequence, i.e., children, fathers, young men, John reiterates what he has just written, but with some interesting additions, which might be viewed as further explanations of what he wrote in his previous appeal (vv. 12–13a).

There are, however, some interesting differences. First is that in the previous verses the verb “to write” (γράφω, *graphō*) is in the present tense (i.e., I am writing), while in these verses the same verb is in the aorist (past) tense (i.e., I have written). It may be that when John writes “I have written,” he is referring to his Gospel which they had already received and which may therefore have been foundational for their initial confession of faith in Yeshua.<sup>1</sup>

We may note secondly that he uses a different Greek word for “children” here than he did in v. 12. There he used *teknion* but here he uses *paidion* (παιδίον). While some would make a distinction between the two words,<sup>2</sup> *teknion* being often used as a term of endearment, while *paidion* bearing more the sense of age, it seems clear that the two terms as John uses them are essentially equivalent.<sup>3</sup> Thus, he once again addresses the community as a whole, and affirms that they “know the Father” (ἐγνώκατε τὸν πατέρα, literally “have known the Father”). As noted

1 On the question of whether the Gospel of John is prior or anterior to 1John, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (IVP, 1973), pp 881–83. See also Plummer, *The Epistles of St. John*, pp. 98f.

2 See the remarks of Calvin, *1John*, p. 181.

3 See Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based upon Semantic Domains* (UBS, 1988), §9.46, p. 110.

above, to “know the Father” means to have a genuine, saving relationship with the Father through faith in His Son, Yeshua. This, combined with the statement that their “sins have been forgiven” in the initial appeal (v. 12), is a strong affirmation by John that the fruit of their lives is proof of their genuine salvation.

John’s second statement to “the fathers” is an exact duplication of what he wrote previously (v. 13a), and thus is emphasized by means of repetition. The eternality of Yeshua, which necessitates His divine nature and oneness with the Father and the eternal Ruach, is for John a core and essential truth without which the Gospel fails.

*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.* To the young men John affirms their strength, not the physical strength of youth, though this is valuable to the community, but spiritual strength, even as Paul writes when he admonishes us to put on the full armor of God:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.  
Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. (Eph 6:10–12)

The young men in the community had, as John wrote in v. 13, “overcome the evil one.” And here John describes the means by which such a victory was won, namely, “the word of God abides in you.” Since John uses “word” (*logos*) as a name for Yeshua, and also uses *logos* in its common sense of the written word of God, we may wonder whether John’s meaning here is that “Yeshua abides in them” through the presence of the Ruach, in accordance with Yeshua’s promise that He would be “with them to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20), or whether John means that the written word, the Scriptures, abides in them. Given what John has written in his Gospel and in Revelation, it is clear that by the phrase “word of God” in our text he means the Scriptures. Note the following:

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (Jn 15:7)

I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. (Jn 17:6)

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (Jn 17:14)

I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Yeshua. (Rev 1:9)

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; (Rev 6:9)

Indeed, it is by the word of God that we grow more and more to know Him and to become conformed therefore to His righteousness, that is, to the very image of His Son, Yeshua.

As Plummer notes regarding John's description of the "young men" and their victory over the evil one:

This is the secret of their strength and the source of their victory. They conquer because they are strong, and they are strong because God's word is ever in their hearts. They have God's will, especially as revealed in Scripture, and in particular in the Gospel, as a *permanent* power within them: hence the permanence of their victory.<sup>1</sup>

... and you have overcome the evil one. It is interesting and a point to emphasize that all of the verbs in vv. 12–14 are in the perfect tense except for the verb "abides" in the phrase "the word of God abides in you" in v. 14, which is present tense. The perfect tense in the Greek pictures an action that is completed in the past but which continues to have its due effect in the present. John writes here as though the evil one has been overcome in a permanent way, and this is true, for in the death of Yeshua the utter defeat of the enemy is secured. Yet it is because the victory is secure that we are enabled and emboldened to fight the enemy now, knowing that if we do so through the power of the Ruach, wielding the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, we resist the devil so that he retreats in defeat.

Let us note, by way of summary, the other perfect tense verbs in our pericope and see the import they carry.

v. 12 – "your sins have been forgiven" – Forgiven through the finished work of Yeshua, having died once-for-all time, never to die again. And His death means that our sins, all of them,

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1 Plummer, *The Epistles of St. John*, p. 101.

are forgiven for all time, for the power of His atoning death remains active for all time.

v. 13 – “you know Him” – Literally, “you have known Him.” At a point in time, through the work of the Ruach, those drawn to faith come into a saving relationship with God through faith in His Son, Yeshua, and that saving relationship, based upon that act of faith, remains active throughout one’s life.

v. 13 – “you know the Father” – Literally, “you have known the Father.” The right-standing with the Father (justification), gained through faith in Yeshua, secures the indwelling presence of the Ruach, by Whose power the covenant relationship with God is maintained in the child of God forever.

John knows that the false teachers are a real threat to those who are seeking the truth, and who are gathering together with the communities of The Way. He is therefore reminding them in this epistle to be watchful and to know what is the true character of genuine faith in Yeshua. But he also wants them to know that their salvation is secure in Yeshua, and that their spiritual strength rests upon a sure foundation which cannot be moved. Thus, in this pericope, he appeals to his readers to remember who they are in Messiah and to rest assured of their salvation, putting away fear and growing in faith that He Who has begun a good work in them will bring it to completion with a view to His return (Phil 1:6).

**15–17 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, because all that is in the world (the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the arrogance produced by material possessions) is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away with all its desires, but the person who does the will of God remains forever.**

In the previous paragraph John has reminded us of a number of fundamental truths which undergird the life of faith for every believer in Yeshua:

1. *your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake* – Our sins, all of them, for all time, have been forgiven because Yeshua, through His death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession