

Sermon for July 16, 2017 - 6th Sunday after Pentecost

1 John 2:12-17 (Evangelical Heritage Version)

Theme: Men of God:

- 1) *Recognize the blessings you have in Christ,*
- 2) *Love Him and not the world.*

¹² *I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven because of his name.*

¹³ *I am writing to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the Evil One. ¹⁴ I have written to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God remains in you, and you have overcome the Evil One. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, boasting about material possessions—is not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.*

I sometimes wonder what kind of man my wife and children see in me. Are they able to see Christ and his self-sacrificing, forgiving love towards others exemplified? Or do they see someone who puts himself above all else? Do they see someone who genuinely loves both the LORD and them, or a hypocrite, who acts one way in public and another way at home?

Do you know what the sad thing is? The fact that I even think about this tells me that I am not always living my life the way God wants me to live. I know that I have a problem. It's the same problem we all have: we inherited from our first parents a corrupt, sinful nature that is utterly selfish. It longs and lusts after the pleasures of this world. It wants to doubt, rather than believe. The devil and sinful world know this about human nature, so they do their best to exploit it – trying to lead us away from our God-given responsibilities to chase after vain experiences and things that have no real value.

This is why I consider our sermon text to be like a refreshing splash of cold water – waking us up to the reality, hope and blessed responsibility God has given us to say no to the world and pursue Him in everything. Why? Because of who we are and what God has done for us in Christ. With the aged apostle John as our guide, let us consider these things, under the theme: **Men of God:** 1) *Recognize the blessings you have in Christ,* 2) *Love Him and not the world.*

Part One: Recognize the blessings you have in Christ.

Our sermon text was written by the apostle John in his elder years to the Christians in what is now modern-day Turkey. One of the problems facing these believers was the idea that, as long as we claim to know Christ, we can live however we want – even in opposition to the Ten Commandments. This kind of false Christianity is popular in our world today, where people seem

more interested in finding a Church home that matches their opinions on the Bible, rather than one that teaches exactly what God's Word says – even if it goes against their opinions.

John warns that anybody who claims to follow Christ but refuses to believe and do all Christ commands is a hypocritical liar. But, having lived a very long life on this earth, the aged apostle also knows how tempting the world is to Christians. He understands the urges of the sinful heart and how hard they are to overcome. This is why he reminds all Christians in general (and men in particular) of who they are and the blessings God has given them through faith in Christ so that they can overcome the temptations of the world.

Before we go on, I should address the question who John is talking to in our text when he uses the terms “children,” “fathers” and “young men.” The context of the epistle shows that the term “children” refers to all Christians – male or female, young or old. We are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

But (even though everything John writes certainly applies to women as well as men) “fathers” seems to specifically refer to men who have the role of being spiritual leaders: men who have matured in their faith and have the responsibility of sharing what they've learned with those God placed under their care – whether that be in the Church or the home. “Young men” seems to refer to men who have not matured to the point of being “fathers.” They are still learning to apply their faith as they experience life. Someday they will be given the responsibilities God has given more mature men in the Church, society and home, but right now they are still battling the desires that come with youth and learning from their experiences.

John says: ¹² *I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven because of his name.*

Forgiveness is the heart and core of the Christian faith – something that not only brings all Christians the greatest comfort, but also the greatest motivation to keep God's commandments. Just think: God loved you so much that he sent his one and only Son to die on the cross in payment for all your sins. Through repentance and faith you have been clothed with this forgiveness. You are a new person – loved by God and an heir of heaven - who can say with St. Paul: *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*ⁱ

John continues: ¹³ *I am writing to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.* Through faith in Christ, all Christians – especially those God has called to be leaders in both the Church and home – know who the one true God is, and what Jesus has done to save us. It's this knowledge of Christ that we – fathers – have been charged with sharing with our families. Think about the honor God has bestowed upon you by giving you this blessed duty – and, as you seek God's help in prayer, let the thought of it move you to faithfully fulfill this responsibility through the continued study and sharing of God's Word.

I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the Evil One. As a man transitions from youth into adulthood, he certainly faces a lot of changes. And don't think that the devil doesn't take notice. He does everything he can to try to lead us away from Christ – enticing us

with strong lust and temptations as our mind, body, will and emotions continue to develop. Left to our own, we certainly would fall. But – even if we have fallen in the past – the victory remains ours in Christ. Jesus has paid for our sins in full. His resurrection proves it. His victory over sin is our victory. How so? Through faith in Jesus, we are clothed with Christ – and the righteousness he earned by means of his perfect obedience to God’s law in our behalf. And because God credits Christ’s righteousness to us. We now have every reason to say no to the devil and live for God.

And because it is of the utmost importance that every Christian remember what he has and is in Christ, John repeats his encouragement: ¹⁴ *I have written to you, little children, because you have known the Father.* To know Jesus is to know God, because he and the Father are one. This is the truth that God especially wants the spiritual leaders he placed in the Church and home to both be reminded of and to remind others of, so John continues: *I have written to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.*

I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God remains in you, and you have overcome the Evil One. Yes, there is only one weapon that can help us overcome the devil. Do you know what it is? It’s the same weapon Luther sang about in his famous hymn “A Mighty Fortress,” and that Jesus used when he faced the devil in the wilderness. The weapon is God’s Word, regarding which Jesus once said: *“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*ⁱⁱⁱ

With God’s Word at our side we are certainly strong. Why? Because the Holy Spirit stands with us as we dwell in his Word - setting us free from every accusation the devil throws our way. How does he do that? By pointing us to Christ and the forgiveness we have in him. And the more we meditate on the wonderful relationship we have with God through faith in Christ, the easier it becomes to keep the aged apostles’ injunction . . .

Part Two: Love Him and not the world.

¹⁵ *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.*

Now understand John’s injunction correctly: he is not saying that we should hate the earth and all that is on it. God himself created the physical world and established many of the wonderful things we use in life. There is nothing wrong with loving nature, having hobbies, pursuing science, finding companionship and enjoying all the wonderful blessings God himself has given us on this earth. No, God wants us to use and enjoy these things to his glory and praise.

Understand, then, that when the apostle repeats Christ’s command to “not love the world,” he is speaking about the sinful corruption of the things God created for his glory and our good. St. John explains: ¹⁶ *For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, boasting about material possessions—is not from the Father but from the world.*

Selfish lust and greed drive our society. Want proof? Just turn on the TV or radio and you’ll find proof enough! Our western society has been called the “me” generation – and it doesn’t take a

rocket scientist to figure out why. Instead of believing in the objective truth of the Bible, our generation claims that there is no objective truth. Truth has become whatever makes me feel good and fulfills my ideas of how things should be. I should have the right to live in my own way, following my own rules and achieving as much as I can for myself. Personal happiness and fulfillment are king! And if horrible suffering affects my quality of life? Well then (our godless society claims) I should have the right to end my life on my terms.

But here's the truth about living such a life: it's all a lie! None of the things we lust for will last. None of them will rescue us from the condemnation that is coming upon this earth because of sin. ¹⁷ *The world and its desires pass away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.*

Yes, the person who does the will of God will live forever. This invites the question: what, exactly, is the will of God? Jesus answered that question for us, when he once said: *"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."*ⁱⁱⁱ

Now understand this correctly. Jesus is not saying one can simply claim to believe in Christ and go on living however he wants. John was combating that very false idea when he wrote our text. No, to believe in Jesus also includes being repentant of all sin – being truly sorry that we have caused a break in our relationship with God - and, with God's help, doing all we can to avoid sin. To believe in Jesus is to treasure the forgiveness God has graciously given us in Christ – not using it as a license to sin, but as the very reason to avoid sin - because you now know how much God loves and treasures you.

Brothers and sisters in Christ. When I reflect on my life in the light of God's law, I see how I have often failed as both a father for my family, and spiritual leader for our Church. I know how much my sinful heart desires the vain, materialistic things of this earth just like the rest of the world. But what joy the Gospel gives me: my sins are all forgiven by the one who made me his own at my baptism. His forgiveness has given me victory over this world, and his Word shows me my true purpose in life on this earth: to glorify him.

I belong to God – and so do you. Let this truth guide your lives, men of God, as you lead your children, grandchildren and all entrusted in your care on the paths of righteousness. Let these truths lead all of us – men and women alike – as we fulfill the various, blessed roles God has given us - all to the glory of his name. Amen.

ⁱ Galatians 2:20 NIV84

ⁱⁱ John 8:31-32 NIV84

ⁱⁱⁱ John 6:29 NIV84