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A Letter to Dear Children, Part 5

I Write Because

Text: 1 John 2:12-14

Clearly, John loves these people to whom he writes. He will say some very harsh things to them. He will say that if you fail to love your colleagues, you're walking in darkness (2:11). He will say that if you love the world, God’s love is not in you (2:15). He will say that if you say you have no sin, you are a liar (1:8).

Everybody of believers has an assortment of people in it. There are spiritual babies, adolescents, middle aged saints and seasoned, more mature, lovers of Christ.

In addition to the harsh truth he articulates, John wants to encourage his readers, whatever their stage of maturity.

John Stott (*The Epistles of John* [Eerdmans], p. 98) explains, “John is laying emphasis on the assured standing into which every Christian has come, whatever his stage of spiritual development.”

1. Addressee: little children- Because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake (12). This is the most general of the addresses. *Teknia* is the Greek word for children. All believers are children of God. We are saved/converted/transformed/regenerated for the sake of God’s name(reputation). As John celebrates the fact of their faith, John also reminds these readers that they are not the centerpieces of their own salvation. They are saved for God’s glory. They are to display *His* glory and *His* light.

Cf. Psalm 25:11

*For Your name’s sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great.*

Psalm 79:8-9, a psalm of Asaph:

***8***

*Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!*

*Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us,*

*For we have been brought very low.*

***9***

*Help us, O God of our salvation,*

*For the glory of Your name;*

*And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,*

*For Your name’s sake!*

2. Addressee: fathers- Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. (13a)- This speaks to those who are, perhaps, more mature. They are leaders, elders (older), the more mature.

3. Addressee: young men- Because you have overcome the wicked one(13b). This is a reminder that as you walk with God, you are not immune to Satanic attack. There is one who wants to see every believer fail (1 Peter 5:8- *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*) (Evil one- v. 13,14; 3:12; 5:18-19)

These young men are farther along than the children and not as far along as the fathers.

4. Addressee: little children- Because you have known the Father(13c). A different Greek word for *children* is used here than was used in verse 12. *Paidia* refers to children who need to be trained. They are ignorant, unknowing.

13a and 14a are identical: to the fathers. John doesn't seem to be apologetic about repetition.

5. Addressee: young men- Because you are strong, and the word abides in you and you have overcome the wicked one (cf. 13b)

Clearly, in John’s thinking, one size does not fit all. The fathers have different needs than do the young men or the little children. Ministry guidance must be customized if it is to be maximally effective. We may have to shape our words in different ways for different groups. This is not a matter of content but of presentation. The letter to the dear children is for all, but the receptors will receive it differently because their needs are different.

John is not giving new information here. We know that from the tenses of the six verbs at the end of each clause:

1. “Are forgiven...”
2. “Have known Him...”
3. “Have overcome the wicked one...”
4. “Have known the Father...”
5. “Have known Him...”
6. “Are strong...the word abides...have overcome”

This is a reminder to believers rather than a presentation of new information.

**Summary**

Q: Why does John bother to write to these people?

A: He writes because of what God *has* done and *is* doing, in them. John writes to affirm these believers in their varied stages of spiritual formation. Wherever you are in your growth, be encouraged. God is *for* you. We who know Him are victors, rather than victims(14c). We are winners rather than losers(14c). We are **over**comers rather than **under**dogs(13b). We are strong rather than weak(14b). We are motivated by and have, residing in us, the word of God (v. 14). As I close, let me take you to John’s own answer to the question of *why* he writes what he writes. John writes to celebrate what God is doing presently AND to claim a godly future.

1 John 5:13:

*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life* (present)*, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God* (future).

Amen