



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: 1 John 2:7, 10-14

1 John 2:7, 10-14

7 Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard. ... 10 Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven on account of his name. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young people, because you have conquered the evil one. 14 I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young people, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (NRSV)

I. John gives assurance and encouragement to the believers

A. Could be that after the previous section, they might have had some uncertainty about their salvation

- “The statements that “I am writing to you...that your sins have been forgiven ... that you know God ... that his word remains in you” would be John’s recognition and affirmation that his original readers have been living their Christian lives well in light of all that he has just said in 1:5-2:11. This affirmation contributes to John’s stated purpose of assuring his readers that they do have eternal life (5:13).”

Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2, & 3 John, p. 106

- “John’s purpose in writing the letter was to assure his Christian readers of their right standing before God in light of the dramatic split that they had just experienced in their community. His letter isn’t intended to test his readers’ faith; it is intended to assure them that they have already passed the

test of continuing in Christ, even whilst others turned aside. (1 Jn. 2:12-14).” [Matthew N. Payne, “1 John is for Assurance, not Testing,” StretchTheology.com, 23 September, 2021]

- “John’s purpose in writing his letter is not to test but to assure his little children of their salvation by decisively locating them on the side of Jesus the Messiah, in contrast to the secessionists (i.e., former ...church members [who’ve left the Johannine community]) who had recently rejected the...Eye-witness proclamation of the gospel (see 1: 1-14; 5:13). As far as John was concerned, his little children had already passed the test by remaining in their confession (see 2:12-14), in contrast to those who departed from them & proven themselves to be inauthentic.” [Matthew N. Payne, “Post-Crisis Assurance & the ‘Tests of Life’ Reading of 1 John,” Reformed Theological Review, Vol. 80, #2 (2021) p.]

B. No thought of examining themselves or testing themselves

- “John is not writing to doubting believers that they might have a ‘test’ for the genuineness of [their] faith, but rather that he might warn Christians against the early Gnostic [or docetic] heresy. Look for example, at 2 Jn. 2:17-11, John tells his readers of the necessity of love in the Christian life. After he does this, he does not tell his readers, ‘See if you measure up’ [i.e., ‘test yourselves’], but something very different. He writes, ‘I’m writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name’ (2:12). He does not say, ‘so that you may know if your sins are forgiven,’ but ‘because your sins are forgiven.’ He then mentions that he is writing to those who ‘know him’ & ‘have overcome the evil one.’ This is the use of the indicative & imperative.” [Jordan Cooper, Great Divide, p. 85]

C. Addressing all the believers as children

- “John ties things together in the way he speaks to these Christians to get the theological ‘balance’ right... John repeatedly highlights their identity as Christians, & particularly as God’s children. The repeated address ‘children’ keeps these Christians’ assured status in the background of all else he says (e.g. 1 John 2:1, 12, 14, etc.). “‘Children’ is used throughout the letter as a term of address for all the readers. By addressing them as those who know the Father, the author is, in effect, affirming that they are people who walk in the light, who keep God’s commands, and who practice love of fellow believers, for elsewhere in the letter he says that these are the marks of those who truly know God (1:5-7; 2:3-4; 4:7)” Colin G. Kruse, The Letters of John, p. 99

- “Some have taken these references [3 different terms] ... to refer to different groups of people by age. It’s been suggested that the first refers to...new converts to the faith, the second to those who are spiritually mature, & the last...to those who were making progress to maturity. It is the reversed order [(‘little/young’) children, fathers, young people] which... argues against this interpretation, because there is no progression (either ascending, from youngest to oldest, or descending, from oldest to youngest) in the order of the titles used to address the groups.” [W. Hall Harris, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 93]

- “However, it appears that these...texts... actually support [the] view that there are two groups of people in view in 1 John 2:12-14, addressed first as a whole...& then as individual groups (‘fathers’ & ‘young people’) ... Thus, we conclude that the first clause in each group of three... addresses the entire audience, while two subgroups are distinguished by actual age or spiritual maturity...” [W. Hall Harris, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 93]

- “J. L. Houlden’s view that the two subgroups refer to leaders in the church addressed (i.e. ‘fathers’ = elders & ‘young men’ = deacons) is unlikely & is not indicated by usage of these terms elsewhere in the Johannine literature.” [W. Hall Harris, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 94 #178]

- “At various places the author calls his audience ‘my children,’ which would be quite natural for an

old man & authority figure who converted various members of the audience. This is less likely for a mere church elder... [It's] ...probable... especially since 1 Jn. 2:12-14 [has] family terminology used in general of church members, that this term means 'old man' – the patriarch of these house-church members. They are his family of faith. Whereas our author calls himself 'the old man,' his congregation apparently referred to him as the 'Beloved Disciple' ...judg[ing] from the 4th Gospel." [Ben Witherington, Letters & Homilies..., p. 399]

- “There is considerable debate about how to interpret the family language in 1 Jn. 2:12-14. By far the simplest solution is to assume that 'children' continues to be a term for all Christians, as it is in 1 Jn. 2:1. The fact that a different [Gk.] word for 'children' is used here (teknia) than was used there (paidia) is simply another example of ...amplification by stylistic variation, saying the very same thing in two different ways.” [Ben Witherington, Letters & Homilies for Hellenized Christians, Vol. 1, p. 475]

1. Including women even though they are not mentioned

- “1 John 2:12-14 has been the [focus] of considerable scholarly argument because it is difficult to know who the ['little/] children,' 'young people,' and 'parents' ['fathers'] are. Our translation obscures the issue by introducing gender-inclusive nouns, but this is, of course, John's point. His [terms (taken as a whole)] always refer to the entire family of God. [Females/women are not omitted, excluded.] ... All hearers are (or are potentially) 'children' ...What is novel here is [John's] use of 'fathers,' or 'parents' & 'young men' or 'young adults ['people'].” [Thomas A. Bennett, 1-3 John, p.]

2. Affirming that their sins have been forgiven

a. Implies they confessed, were forgiven, have fellowship and hence are walking in the light

3. They know the one who is from the beginning – Jesus Christ

- “In 2:13a....the author addresses himself to people of more advanced years who (also) know Jesus Christ.” Colin G. Kruse, The Letters of John, p. 97

4. They have conquered the evil one

- “We can say that the author understands believers' victory over the evil one to be achieved because God himself abides in them (he is greater than the evil one) and his Son, Jesus Christ, protects them: as a result, they are able to overcome the evil one through their faith in God.” Colin G. Kruse, The Letters of John, p. 98

5. They know the Father – implies fellowship with the Father

6. They are strong

7. They have the word of God remaining/abiding with them

- “[1 John 2:14c] does expand on what is found in 2:13b by adding that the author writes to the young men, affirming that “you are strong, and the word of God lives in you,” and “you have overcome the evil one.” In fact, the reason they have overcome the evil one is that they are strong, and they are strong because the word of God lives in them.” Colin G. Kruse, The Letters of John, p. 100

8. We need words of affirmation

- “First John 2:12-14 reminds us that Christians grow into maturity, not by repeated verbal spankings or by being driven up a new wall every week, but through tender nurturance, with due praise, openhearted encouragement, and generous reminders of what they already know (see also 2:7). The church, after all, is God's family. Its identity and security are assured by God's action; it lives by the strength of God's love. The church is the community of those who adhere to the proclamation of

eternal life (1:2), and by that adherence are no longer victimized or captivated by evil (2:13-14).” Clifton Black, *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary*, vol X. P. 823

II. Various Metaphors Describe the Church is Scripture

A. Church as an assembly (gathering)

B. Church as a community

C. Church as a family

- “There is a succession of metaphors in ecclesiology, each more intense than the other. We are first an assembly ([Gk.] ekklesia), then a community, & finally a family. Each level involves deeper intimacy, more sharing, & greater caring – indeed more time spent together. This should be a major strategy of every local church or Christian group... In...1 John 2:12-14 family imagery is used to challenge the various groups in the church.” [Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, p. 495]

III. Comparing Pauline and Johannine Church Models

- It is a “mistake... to assume that there was only one model of church governance in the early church rather than a multiplicity of models. ... [Christ’s Lordship in churches] functions through a variety of means rather than a singular one– the hierarchical one– & this is a point made with emphasis in John’s presentation of Peter & the Beloved Disciple.” [Paul Anderson, “Petrine Ministry & Christo-crazy,” *George Fox Univ.* (2005) p. 37 #7]

- “...Both models [Petrine & Johannine] reflect biblical views of how Christ might lead the Church, & therefore, Petrine & Johannine ministries must serve the larger ecclesial concern: dynamic & effective means of furthering Christocracy in the Church & in the world beyond it.” [Paul Anderson, “Petrine Ministry & Christo-crazy,” *George Fox Univ.* (2005) p. 7]

A. Contrast between 1 John & 1 Tim. regarding leaders, authorized teachers,

B. Paul in 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus

1. Hierarchical structures

- Husbands as overseers in the family and the church
- Men with teaching roles
- Role of older women and widows
- Role of younger men

2. Appointment of positions – elders and deacons

- “In both cases [1-3 John; 1-2 Tim.] problems of right conduct are in view... In the Pauline Pastorals we encounter a much greater degree of specificity in the identification of distinct groups of people & church offices. In particular, detailed directions are given for the conduct of women, slaves, bishops [elders], deacons, the wealthy, & so on... people who make up the churches, as well as their organization.” [D. Moody Smith, *First, Second, & Third John*, p. 67]

- “These [Pastoral] Letters [1-2 Tim., Titus] attest to the existence of a kind of creedal consensus... Orthodoxy, right teaching, is establishing itself. To enforce such teaching in the church... the ordained ministry has emerged (1 Tim. 4:14). Thus, we read of bishops, elders, & deacons in these letters; for the first time... historic levels of ordination are attested together. What is more, it is clear that these ordained men, particularly bishops – women are now restricted to subordinate roles –are charged with responsibility for preserving the purity of church doctrine (Tit. 1:9) In other ways bishops, along with elders & deacons, preside over the administration of the church (1 Tim. 3:1-7).” [D. Moody Smith, *First, Second, & Third John*, p. 68]

- “There are significant differences between the Pastoral Epistles [1-2 Tim.] & the Johannine Letters [1-3 Jn.] & the locus of authority. In the Pastorals [1-2 Tim.] we have the development of appointed leadership positions, & the beginning of institutionalization. The locus of authority is in the Pauline

tradition, but this is mediated by recognized & authorized teachers.” [Paul Trebilco, “Christians in the Lycus Valley,” in AH. Cadwallader (ed.) Colossae in Space & Time, p. 194]

3. Setting up for the future

- ‘In what is commonly called... church order [governance], there seems to be an obvious difference between the Paulines [1-2 Tim., Titus] & the Johannines [1-3 Jn.]. There is in the Johannine Letters little to suggest the establishment of an ordained, much less hierarchical ministry. The authorities that John can appeal to are ‘what was from the beginning’... Quite likely the Spirit also functions as an authority in the Johannine community... Unlike the Pastorals, the Johannine letters contain no nascent doctrine of apostolic succession. Yet the modes of authority...in the Pastorals... provide the structure for the emerging, catholic church... In the dominant catholic tradition, the Pauline Pastorals represent the wave of the future [the ‘Great (Catholic) Church’].” [D. Moody Smith, First, Second, & Third John, pp. 68-69]

C. Johannine writings

1. No social structures or roles

- “By contrast [from Paul], the author of 1 John can write a letter without mentioning any leaders & indeed stress that the community does not need a teacher. In 1 Jn. 2:27 we read: ‘As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, & you don’t need anyone to teach you. Instead, his anointing teaches you about all things & is true & is not a lie; just as it has taught you, remain in him’.” [Paul Trebilco, “Christians in the Lycus Valley,” in AH. Cadwallader (ed.) Colossae in Space & Time, p. 194]

- “There is a remarkable lack of hierarchical structures in the Johannine Letters. It is rather the horizontal, family relationships that are highlighted; the author repeatedly addresses the group of believers as a whole as ‘the children,’ ‘beloved,’ or ‘the brothers [& sisters]’ (e.g. 2:1, 7, 12, 14 [etc.]).” [Mikael Tellbe, Christ-Believers in Ephesus, p. 201]

2. No appointment to positions; no positions

3. Women and slaves not mentioned – doesn’t mean they are excluded

- a. Women are given more prominence in the Fourth Gospel
- b. Father’s and young men – metaphors, not a gender thing

4. Organic – shepherd (John 10), vine (John 15)

5. In John 21 Peter is not given a position but told to shepherd and feed

6. Believing community is like a family

a. John is to be the “son” to Mary

- “The entrust[ing] of the ‘keys of the Kingdom of the Heavens’ to Peter [Matt. 16:18ff] is the archetype of an institutional model of church government, while the entrust[ing] of the mother of Jesus to the Beloved Disciple [Jn. 19:26-27] is the archetype of a familial model. In other words, the ‘[kingdom] currency’ of the institutional model is power within hierarchy, while within the familial model it is love within an egalitarian community.” [Paul N. Anderson, Christology of the 4th Gospel, p. 239]

- Note...that [in 4th Gospel] Jesus indeed entrusts something to a leading disciple [‘Beloved Disciple’ –John] as a measure of ecclesial [church] authority, but rather than entrust instrumental keys to Peter, Jesus entrusts his very mother to the Beloved Disciple at the cross (Jn. 19:25-27). If this is indeed a coin of ecclesial [church] authority, as is the Matthean presentation of Keys to the Kingdom, the emphasis is upon relationality & familial care rather than structuralism & institutional hierarchy.”

[Paul Anderson, "Petrine Ministry & Christo-crazy," George Fox Univ. (2005) p. 6]

- b. Believers are called "children"
- c. Different ages are mentioned (fathers, young men)

7. Egalitarian

8. Is John reacting to hierarchical structures?

- "We find differences between 1-2 Timothy & the Johannine Letters...in terms of general social structures. The author of 1-2 Tim. articulates... hierarchical structures & orders in all areas; from the task of the husband as the [overseer] of both the family & the church, & of women [vis-a-viz] ... teaching roles, to the role of widows, the older & younger men & women & slaves. Such social structures are almost totally absent in the Johannine Letters, women & slaves are not mentioned at all &.... The older & younger members of the community ... are addressed by ...ambiguous terms. Once again, [John] does not argue in terms of certain community structures & orders. His vision of the community... seems much more egalitarian... We may suspect that the [Elder] not only presents another way of validating the true tradition, but that [the Elder] does so in deliberate response, or as a reaction, to the routinization of the offices in the hierarchical structures... in the Pauline tradition that belongs to Ephesus." [Mikael Tellbe, Christ-Believers in Ephesus, p. 210]

- Tensions with rising institutionalism within the Johannine situation apparently called forth a corrective response in the name a more egalitarian and spirit-based approach to church governance... Johannine Christianity might not have been on the periphery of the Great Church, and that is why it faced an additional set of tensions in the proto-Ignatian era... C.K. Barrett ...believed that the primary partner in dialogue within the Johannine situation was Diotrephes and his kin. In Harnack's view, Diotrephes might not have been the first mono-episcopal leader in the early church, but he was the first one we know by name.[33] Thus, Barrett saw the Johannine leadership as not only struggling to maintain unity within the community of faith, but also harmony among the churches, as they moved toward rising institutionalism in the late first century situation. In my view, that would explain John's egalitarian emphasis on women in relation to Jesus and its emphasis on spirit-based and informal ecclesiology. The Johannine witness found itself pushing back against patriarchy & hierarchy in the name of an alternative apostolic memory; thus, "his" & "our" testimony being "true" had a distinctively ideological ring to it. [In John,] the church of Christ is to be more organic & relational—like the flock is to the shepherd and the branch is to the vine—over and against more petrified alternatives. Luther derived his theology of the priesthood of all believers from John 20:21-23, & this was a part of the Johannine primitivistic thrust even as the 4th among the canonical gospels." [Paul Anderson, "On Biblical Forgeries & Imagined Communities," Bible & Interpretation (Apr. 2020) p.]

D. Conclusion: There are two main models of the church – institutional and familial

- "The entrust[ing] of the 'keys of the Kingdom of the Heavens' to Peter [Matt. 16:18ff] is the archetype of an institutional model of church government, while the entrust[ing] of the mother of Jesus to the Beloved Disciple [Jn. 19:26-27] is the archetype of a familial model. In other words, the '[kingdom] currency' of the institutional model is power within hierarchy, while within the familial model it is love within an egalitarian community." [Paul N. Anderson, Christology of the 4th Gospel, p. 239]

IV. The church in 1 John is like a family showing love to one another

A. "Children" refers to all the believers

1. Everyone has their sins forgiven – v. 12a
2. They all know the Father -v. 14a

- "Elsewhere in the letter the author repeatedly addresses all his readers as "children" (using teknia in 2:1, 28; 3:18; 4:4; 5:21 and paidia in 2:14, 18; 3:7), and therefore it seems unlikely that here in

2:12-13 the designation “children” would denote only mere infants in the knowledge of God. Moreover, in 2:14 the “children” are described as those “who know the Father,” in a way not unlike the description of the “fathers” in 2:13. It is more likely, then, that when the author uses the term “children,” he is addressing all his readers, and that they fall into two, not three, groups: those who may be described as “father” and those who may be described as “young men,” and that these two terms relate not to different levels of spiritual maturity but differ age groups.” Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, p. 95.

B. Fathers refers to those older in age

C. Young men refer to those younger in age

- “The presumption of the brief section (1 Jn. 2:12-14) would seem to be the existence of at least two, & perhaps three, Christian generations, we are reminded of the Pauline Pastorals... There are similarities or analogies with the Pauline Pastorals, so much so that we may with good reason speak of the Johannine Epistles as pastoral letters...” [D. Moody Smith, *First, Second, & Third John*, pp. 67-70]
- “Having addressed the older men, the author now addresses the younger men: “I am writing to you, young men.” The word for “young men” (*neaniskoi*) is found only here [2:13] and in the next verse (2:14c) in 1 John. It is not found at all in the other Johannine Letters or the Fourth Gospel. It does occur nine times in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, where it consistently refers to people of lesser years. This suggests that the expression “young men” in this verse should be taken in the same way. It does not mean people of greater maturity in their discipleship than the “children” and of lesser maturity than the “fathers.” Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, p. 97-8.

D. No thought of stages of growth

1. If “children” refers to all the believers, then there are only two categories (fathers and young men)
 2. No thought of advancement
 3. We need all ages in the church
- “In the Johannine community youth and age were not considered virtuous in themselves... much less institutionally beneficial. Both the young and the old occupied places of real importance in the Johannine church, because its youth were perceived to be vitally interrelated with their elders – both groups having known “him who is from the beginning” (2:13-14), for the sake of whose name their sins had been forgiven (2:12). Can Christian communities in our day move beyond both idolization of youth and repentance from ageism to the profundity of this very different kind of claim? In an age scarred by widespread rupture within natural families, can the church recover its blessedly integral experience as Christian children, youth, mothers, and fathers? With 1 John’s help, are we willing to reclaim our common birthright as forgiven children in the family of God?” Clifton Black, *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary*, vol X. P. 823

E. Living in fellowship with one another and God, and loving each other – a sign of walking in the light

- “The Johannine school [community]... built upon the mutual love of Christians. But it apparently did not reflect upon institutional means of ensuring the future existence of the church or of guarding against the subversion of the church’s fundamental tradition... A church that must survive the passing of time & preserve its identity over the generations can hardly orient itself to the Johannine writings alone [!] ... It is not only the question of concrete & enduring church order that is neglected in the Johannine writings. The concrete problems of apostolic [leadership] as treated in the letters of Paul, 1 Peter, [etc.] also recede totally into the background in the Johannine writings. Only the presence or absence of mutual brotherly & sisterly Christian ‘love’ – agape – is considered in any detail, & with it the problem of sin in the Christian church.” [Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblical Theology of the NT*, p.]

F. Using the rhetorical device of repetition

- “Reduplication’ is a rhetorical phenomenon of conveying a particular idea or series of ideas by saying the same thing in a variety of ways, using slight variations... we definitely see this phenomenon... in 1 Jn. 2:12-14 ...One of the functions of ‘epideictic rhetoric’ is to build up the audience & encourage them by mentioning things they have done well. We certainly see this here in the commendations ... If we take seriously the ‘because’ in these statements, our author is telling us that he is writing to commend the audience for overcoming in various ways the recent split. The function of such rhetoric is to remind the audience of its core values, what it stands for, & to strengthen them in those core beliefs & behaviors. This describes what is going on in 1 John extremely well. ...The use of ‘I am writing’ & ‘I have written’ ...is simply ...[a] technique to avoid ... redundancy while saying the same thing with slight variations.” [Ben Witherington, Letters & Homilies for Hellenized Christians, Vol. 1, p. 474]

- “Here the author is revealing something of his purpose in writing this [Letter] ...Roughly speaking, one can call 1 John 2:12-14 theological remarks about the audience, meant to reassure them of their Christian condition... In 2:12-14 we have two parallel stanzas saying the same thing twice with minimal alteration or variation... following the [Greek] rules about amplification & repetition.” [Ben Witherington, Letters & Homilies for Hellenized Christians, Vol. 1, p. 475]