



Have you ever noticed how encouraging a handwritten letter can be to someone? When I was a young boy I remember my grandma getting letters in the mail from her sister in Germany. It was my job to get the mail at the post office. My grandma would pull up outside at the curb and I would get out of her 1977 VW Bug. She would sit there, with the car still running, while I darted up the stairs into the post office. In the doors I'd head to the left and make a right down the first row where at the end, near the bottom was P.O. Box 1299.

Usually I would get the combo right the first time, but if I tried to clear it too quickly I would have to start all over. After getting the small metal door open I would pull out the letters and see who each one was addressed to. Making sure I had each piece of mail held tightly in my hands I would close the door to the P.O. Box and race back out to my grandma. She would glance over the mail and usually expressionless acknowledge the bills we had to pay. There were the rare times when the white envelope with the red and blue horizontal lines would appear in my hand; these were the days she smiled on the drive home.

My grandma would park her car in the driveway, not the garage, and we would walk inside our house where she would immediately sit down at the kitchen table to read the letter from Germany. I couldn't read German, although I wish I was taught the language, but I could read the expression on my grandma's face. I could see the encouragement the letters brought the woman who had left her home, lost her oldest daughter to a drunk driver, and was widowed and caring for her grandkids.

Those letters assured my grandma her family frequently thought about her, missed her and loved her dearly. In the same way, John wants his readers to be assured in their relationship with God. He's declared that God is light and he's told them what it looks like to walk in the light. But he also wants them to be encouraged to keep walking in the light. Encouragement can take two forms. You can encourage someone by comforting them, but you can also encourage someone by exhorting them to do something, almost like a warning. John offers both kinds of encouragement in this passage. Turn in your Bible to 1 John 2:12.

### Encouragement to Believers

Let's start with the encouragement John gives to these believers who are struggling. Before we read 1 John we have to remember the early church was battling doubt from the lies of the gnostic

teachers; the gnostics claimed to have special revelation about Jesus that no one else had making this encouragement all the more important.

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

**I am writing to you, fathers,  
because you know him who is from the beginning.**

**I am writing to you, young men,  
because you have overcome the evil one.**

**I write to you, dear 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 men,  
because you are strong,  
and the word of God lives in you,  
and you have overcome the evil one  
(1 John 2:12–14)**

The fact the NIV prints this section in what we consider to be a poetic form illustrates John is looking back on what he has already written in the letter.

You might have caught the six times John tells us he either has, already written or is writing. At first glance we have three different groups John is addressing in this letter: dear children, fathers and young men. Each group appears to receive two unique encouragements specifically written to their situation. Looking deeper into John's use of language in this letter we find a better understanding of who these different groups represent. Since John's favorite way to address his readers is by calling them "dear children" it's preferable to think of this encouragement applying to everyone who would read the letter. "Dear children" isn't a specific group but would refer to all the believers reading the letter.

If "dear children" applies to all believers then we need to find out who the other two titles refer to. We think "fathers" is a reference to believers who are spiritually mature; believers who have been following Christ for a long period of time. Knowing this it seems the title of "young men" would lead us to believe John is referring to those who are young believers. John isn't using

these titles as gender inclusive, only writing to males, completely leaving out females in this encouragement.

### Dear Children

"Dear children" refers to all believers and all believers are encouraged in two ways: to know their sins have been forgiven on account on his name and that they know the father. John already told us in 1 John 1:9 our sins are forgiven. You may find yourself struggling with how are your sins forgiven. John tells us your sins are forgiven on account of His name. What is "his name?" His name is Jesus Christ, the son of God.

John was an eye-witness when Christ was crucified and after Christ ascended into heaven the disciples continued preaching His name. John was eventually arrested for preaching the name of Jesus and taken before the Sanhedrin. While giving defense to his accusers, Peter boldly claimed: *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). Peter is clearly speaking about Jesus Christ who by His shed blood on the cross atoned for our sins. Through their relationship with Christ they have a personal relationship with God and no one claiming a special, false, teaching can take this relationship away from them.

### Mature Believers

The mature believers would have felt the pressure from the gnostics to abandon their faith. Both times John addresses the mature believers he uses the exact same words: you know him who is from the beginning. This description of Christ points us back to the beginning of the letter and reminds us of Christ's pre-existence and eternal deity. When these mature believers are told Jesus is the human son of Joseph, that the Spirit of Christ came upon him at his baptism and left him before His crucifixion, the fathers are equipped to refute the false teaching. Not only did they refute the teaching but they taught truth to the young believers!

This is the model the Church has used for 2,000 years—mature believers, with right teaching, teaching younger believers. This is going on right now in CCKids, our elementary-aged ministry. Our Element ministry knows the value of young believers being poured into by older believers. Our leaders come early, pray for their groups and get ready to spend an hour and fifteen minutes investing into these kids. Our kids are taught a lesson in a large group setting and then break into age specific small groups to talk more about this lesson with their small group leader. Right now kindergarten to fourth graders are meeting with a small group leader to talk about the Bible; mature believers are investing into younger believers!

David Jackman writes: "How important it is then that 'fathers' in the church should teach the 'young men' in the Word of God.

Nothing matters more for the future health and strength of Christ's body." Our Element Ministry isn't the only place this is going on at CPC; we have mature believers teaching young believers at all three of our campuses right now. If you're a more mature believer and looking for a way to invest in young believers, I'd like to talk with you and give you a few ideas of where you can serve here at CPC.

### Young Believers

The final encouragement given is to those who are younger in their faith—the young believers who are trying to discern right teaching. I don't want to elevate any of these encouragements above the other but have you noticed how far a little encouragement goes with a young person? John's encouragement is exactly what a young believer needs to hear; you are strong, the word of God lives in you and you have overcome the evil one! Who do you think the evil one is? The evil one is none other than the devil himself, the one the Bible describes as roaming throughout the earth looking for someone to devour (Job 1:7), a thief and a liar.

Young believers are in a constant battle against the evil one. You may have seen this in your own life as a young Christ follower: life is going just fine but once you accept Christ as your personal Savior things change. The evil one didn't mess with you much because he had you just where he wanted you, not focused on God. Once you became interested in Christ he started doing everything he could to get you back. The young believers are not only enjoying the forgiveness of sin and fellowship with other believers but are still actively fighting against the evil one.

I vividly remember when I first surrendered my life to Christ. I was living in beautiful San Diego. I was living in the heart of a college town, just blocks away from San Diego State University. The party life was active all around me and I was constantly plagued with the temptation to leave my new found faith. The desires of the world were at the tips of my fingers and I needed to figure out a solid plan to stay sober and pure. One night, at church, the pastor was preaching and in his message he referred to Psalm 119:9. He posed the Scripture in the form of a question I've never forgotten: How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. One way a young believer can continue to battle the temptation of the evil one is to memorize Scripture; to hide God's word in their heart.

We don't just need encouragement, we need warning. We don't just need a pat on the back telling us everything is going to be ok; there are times we also need a kick in the pants! John goes on and warns the believers about the emptiness of loving the world.

**Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the**

**flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever (verses 15–17).**

### **Warning About Loving the World**

We see John display the heart of a pastor with such encouragement given and in the next line his transition to warning the believers about emptiness of loving the world. This isn't a new message from John. John's letters have been described as being like a spiral staircase; you see the same things as you ascend but you see them from a new angle. The message of not loving the world is the same message the Christian community has already heard but presented in a new way to appeal to the reader.

You probably noticed John doesn't encourage us to "not love the world" but commands believers to not love the world! Of the six times he mentions "world" they all refer to the same thing, but let's look at the meaning. John uses the Greek word: κόσμος which when translated to English means "world." Is John referring to the physical world—the earth—or it could be the world meaning the human race? The fact is κόσμος has different shades of meaning in Scripture and if we don't figure this out it we might miss the message. When Jesus was speaking with Nicodemus He said: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). Here, in John's Gospel, we find the same word used for "world" as we find in this letter. Both times refer to the world not as physical matter but as an organized system of human activity which is opposed to God and alienated from Him. This is exactly why verse 15 is such a direct command to not love the world.

Unfortunately, at times, we all think we can love the world just a little bit. We think we are strong enough to not succumb to the temptations of the world. We think we are stronger than the forces of evil we're encouraged to overcome but the reality is none of us are strong enough.

For eight years I served at a church in Las Vegas, Nevada leading a growing high school ministry. Part of my role was to lead missions for the church. One day I received a call from our denomination asking me if I could meet with the National Missions Director. I was a bit alarmed but I figured hey, it's a free lunch so why not! After lunch I volunteered to take David to the airport. Unfortunately I missed my turn and ended up taking David down the first block of the Las Vegas Strip. I was so embarrassed as I drove this older man down the most sinful road in town. As we drove down the strip I pointed out the billboard advertising for people who wanted to star in a porno; all you had to do was call the number listed. The next billboard featured six topless women who would be performing tonight. When I thought the embarrassment was almost over there was one more as we

turned on the street leading to the airport. I pointed out to David the mobile advertising truck with an almost naked lady on the side boasting "hot girls direct to you."

I turned up the air conditioner to cool my embarrassment and I realized this was just what David needed to see; he needed to see Las Vegas as a mission field. As we approached the airport I invited him to pray for our church and pray for Las Vegas. I asked him the next time he heard the newly released Christian song, *God of this City* if he would pray for me. For months I received 7-letter text messages simply saying "praying." The Las Vegas Strip is a prime example of a place so filled with the love of the world that there is no room for the love of God. When we attempt to love the world just a little bit we actively develop real estate in our heart where God is unwelcome. Have you ever thought about it like that?

John was keenly aware of the effects loving the world has on a believer, so much so in verse 16 he takes the time to list out three major distractions Christ-followers will have to be aware of—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. None of these come from a loving God but from a world radically opposed to God. Did you notice how John doesn't list specific things but instead he addresses our personal attitude toward the things of the world. The list isn't a new list; it's something we've seen for thousands of years. The list can actually be seen as a summary of what happened with Adam and Eve in the garden when they first sinned in Genesis 3. Sadly Adam and Eve listened to the lies of the evil one and broke their perfect relationship with God.

This same list of temptations was presented to Christ in the wilderness but thankfully this time Christ rose as the victor over the evil one! Let's look at how these struggles are lived out in our lives starting with the lust of the flesh—the things that indulge our appetites. Let's start with a simple example we can all relate to—eating a meal. Of course eating a meal isn't a sin but we can probably think of a time when the food tasted so good we ate to a point where we lost control and it turned to gluttony. It doesn't stop with a meal. For many of us it's not enough to just have one drink; we need to have four. We could take it one step further. Think about the drug addict who started with just trying pot. The problem here is our fallen, sinful desires often demand a level of satisfaction which lead to breaking God's commands.

Secondly John mentions the lust of the eyes. Our eyes are the connection between our flesh and the outside world. This is one we can easily identify with the increased availability of pornography. Clearly in our consumer society this is no way for a person to live, constantly longing to view more porn. The lust of the eyes is seen in more than just a sexual way. This is also the realm where advertisement has the niche; it's their job to get you to want what you see. Just last year Samsung spent over \$4 billion

dollars on advertising. Marketers know the mindset of coveting: "I see it, I want it, I'm going to do anything I have to so I can have it." John experienced these same struggles and knew how important it was to warn believers about this mindset. Someone once said: "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay. "

Finally John speaks of the pride of life—the boasting of mankind. The pride of life can be the most difficult to bring examples to because they are multi-layered. All of these examples deal with heart issues but this one can be easy to mask with lines like, "I'm just trying to provide for my family" or "I need to work harder so I can get this position at the company." Other ways we see this expressed is from that person who always one-ups the stories of their friends. The conversations look something like this: "You got a new Honda? Great, I got a new Lexus." or "You're the VP at your company? I'm the president at mine." We could preach a whole sermon on each of these topics!

The culmination of John's exhortation comes in verse 17 where we find a simple yet profound statement: ***"The desires of this life will pass away but the person who does the will of God will live forever."*** Let me say this bluntly: Love of the world displaces love for God. Let me say this in a different way because I think it's important: Knowing the world and its desires are going to pass away ultimately exposes the hopelessness of living for worldly desires and exemplifies the blessing of having a personal relationship with Christ. John actually shares with us a law of physics that applies to our soul. No two objects can occupy the same

space at the same time; one thing must displace the other. Ian Morgan Cron wrote, "If your heart's crammed tight with material things and a thirst for wealth there's no space left for God."

If we're going to keep walking in the light, we need to know who we belong to and we need to know what we're up against. What do you need more of today? Maybe you need assurance in your walk with Christ. What you are doing is important. The prayers you pray are heard and God will answer them in His time. Stop stressing; your sins are forgiven. The time you're spending studying Scripture is changing your heart; just relax and notice it. You made the right choice by following Christ; don't question that. I know it's not easy to follow Christ but you know deep in your heart it's worth it! Stay strong, leave encouraged this morning at your choice to follow the Lord.

Maybe you need warning in your life this morning. You need to stop looking at the things you've been looking at when you think no one is watching. You need to stop overindulging; it's hurting you. Deep in your heart you know you've become complacent in your walk with Christ; your love for God has grown cold and passionless. You need to stop trying to find satisfaction in the things of this world; it's never going to measure up to the joy of following Christ. You need to stop coveting the things of this world and spend more energy cultivating your relationship with the Lord.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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