

A Test of Christian Fellowship: Separation from the World

1 John 2:12-17

1 John 2:12-17 - *"I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³ I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. ¹⁴ 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 abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked 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 all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."*

Background Notes

The apostle John addressed his readers as "little children" in verse 12, as he did in verse 1. In fact, John used this term of address seven times in the epistle. The Greek word that's translated "little children" here literally means "born ones," and it conveys the idea of being born into God's family. So "little children" refers to all believers. John used this term for all the members of God's family. "My little children" is not only the idea that the spiritual father, the apostle John, was writing to his spiritual children, but it's the idea that he was writing to all who are born into the family of God.

In verses 13-14 John divided the Christian family into three different maturity groupings: fathers, young men, and children (babies). These maturity groups included both men and women in the Christian family.

The term "fathers" represents the more mature believers, who would mostly be older in years as well. Paul began his ministry in Ephesus almost forty years before this time, so a number of believers there would have been well along in the faith and in years. The "fathers" had come to know the Lord well, and they would be known for their mature relationship with the Father. *"I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning" (v13)*. And again, *"I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning" (v14)*. This is true of mature believers today. They know the Lord in a deeper way.

"Young men" is the second category of believers. The young men category is characterized by vigor, strength and combat against Satan. *"I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one" (v13)*. And, *"I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one" (v14)*. It is vital to make room for both "father" and "young men" categories in the local church, because each generation of believers needs the other.

The third category of believers is the “children,” or the “babies in Christ.” The end of verse 13 says, *“I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father.”* Even babies know “Daddy”! The word “children” here is a different Greek word than the word that John used for children in verse 12. Verse 12 refers to everyone born into the family. Verse 13 refers to new believers in Christ who have come to know God as their Father. The babies in Christ need the “fathers” and the “young men” to help them grow in faith.

Verses 15-17 are especially addressed to the young men category, as you can see in the context. It’s a command to young men and women to live lives that are “separate” from the world. This world system is especially appealing and attractive to the “young men” category of believers. Thus separation from this world system becomes a test of Christian fellowship.

Doctrinal Point

Separation from the world is a test of Christian fellowship.

Verse 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.”*

Separation from the world is a test of Christian fellowship. The New Testament uses the word “world” in three different ways:

- ***It is used for the material world that God has created.*** Acts 17:24: *“God made the world and everything in it.”*

- ***It is used for the world of people.*** John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world...”*

- ***It is used for the satanic world system of values and attitudes that’s opposed to God.*** *“Do not love the world or the things of the world” (v15).*

The Satan-controlled world system of values and attitudes is the “world” to which John referred in this epistle. Satan is the god of this world system. Its values and attitudes are opposed to God, and we are to separate ourselves from the values of this world. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 says, *“But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.”* In the Gospel of John, the Lord Jesus referred to Satan three times as “the ruler of this world.” So Satan is the god of this world system.

In verse 15 believers are **commanded** not to love the world: *“Do not love the world or the things of the world.”* It’s not an option - it’s a **command!** And it’s a test of Christian fellowship: *“If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (v15).*

The essence of Christian fellowship is not Christians drinking coffee together or playing golf together. No! True Christian fellowship is communion with the Father and the Son (1:3), and fellowship with believers who love the Lord and are walking in the light.

Our doctrinal point is “Separation from the world is a test of Christian fellowship.” We have two sub-points under this doctrinal point.

a. The standard operating procedure of this world system.

Verse 16: *“For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.”*

The “*lust of the flesh*” is the strong and sinful desire to fulfill **any** bodily appetite (it’s not limited to sex). The “*lust of the eyes*” is the strong and sinful desire for money and possessions: “I just have to have that!” And the “*pride of life*” is egotism – and the desire to be popular and admired. “Look at me!” “I’m so intelligent” - or “I’m so good looking” - or “I’m socially superior” – or even “I’m more gifted as a preacher or a Christian musician.”

All three of these strong areas of desire are vulnerable to the temptations of the satanic world system. Satan knows that we are vulnerable in these areas because of our fallen and sinful human nature, and he designed this world system to appeal to our fallen natures in these three particular areas.

That’s the approach Satan used in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6). Eve saw that the fruit of the forbidden tree would taste good (lust of the flesh); it looked attractive, so she wanted it (lust of the eyes); and it was “desirable to make one wise” (pride of life). Eve yielded to the temptation - then Adam yielded - and we know the rest of the story.

When our Lord was tempted in the wilderness, Satan approached Him in the same way. “Command these stones to become bread” (lust of the flesh); “bow down to me and I will give you all the riches of the kingdoms of this world and their glory” (lust of the eyes); and “throw yourself off the pinnacle of the Temple and survive by your miraculous power” (pride of life). The Lord did not yield to these temptations in any way.

Satan approaches us in the same way, tempting us in these same areas. It’s his standard operating procedure.

b. The future of this world system.

Verse 17: *“And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”*

I love this verse! There's coming a day when there will be no more world system. In fact, the day is coming when believers will no longer have sinful natures that are vulnerable to such a world system. In our resurrection bodies, we won't have to worry about the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life! Our sin natures will be gone forever, and the world system will be gone. What a great day that will be!

"He who does the will of God abides forever" (v17). That verse was one of my father-in-law's favorite verses. He had a framed copy of that verse on the desk in his office; it was always before him. It is now engraved on his headstone as a testimony to his godly life and lifestyle.

This world is passing away – so why are you investing so much of your time and money in this world? 100 years from now, will all your worldly gain and pleasure matter? What is really going to count then - for you, and for your children, and for your grandchildren?

Separation from the lusts and desires of this world system is a test of Christian fellowship.

Practical Application

Use "the Word" to separate from the world.

When Satan came to our Lord in the wilderness, how did the Lord deal with Satan's standard operating system? The Lord quoted Scripture to Satan - in all three of the temptations. "It is written"... "It is written"... "It is written." All three verses the Lord quoted were from the book of Deuteronomy! Can you quote three Scriptures from the book of Deuteronomy? Kind of a challenge, isn't it, to know the Word that well?

Look at verse 14: *"I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one."* Notice – there's a connection between knowing God's Word and strength for victory over Satan's attacks.

Do you want to overcome the wicked one? Do you want to "pass the test" of separation from this world system? If so, the Word of God must become part of you. To have the Word of God "abiding" in you means more than just reading a brief "devotion for the day." We must get to **know** the Word. It must become part of us.

If the Word is abiding in us, then the Holy Spirit can bring it to our minds. It's available when Satan uses his world system to appeal to our fallen sinful nature. In the Garden of Eden, Eve did not know what God had *really* said (Genesis 3). Because she didn't know the Word, she misquoted God. No wonder there was failure. What a lesson for us!

What about us? We must know the Word and we must use the Word to separate from the world.