

Overcoming the Darkness

1 John 2:12 – 17

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August 14, 2014

Main Idea: We overcome the darkness through God's help and our obedience.

Introduction

our world is full of dangers and supernatural spiritual darkness. From the TV shows and movies that entertain our nation to the willingness to be spiritual with alternate sources for spiritual knowledge, we are surrounded by dark influences. As a Christian will in this dark world, how are we to overcome these sources of wickedness? The answer comes from John in his first letter when he explains how we are to live in this world by the power of the Holy Spirit against the darkness all around us. We must have the strength and the focus to fight these battles around us. John teaches us to strengthen our character and stand under the mighty power of Jesus.

Text – 1 John 2:12 – 17

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. **13** 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, children, because you know the Father. **14** 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 abides 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 all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. **17** And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

I. God gives us the victory (vv. 12 – 14).

A Little children grow in knowing God.

- 1 As John begins this section of poetic address, he opens by talking to his own congregation the way he has been, using the term of endearment, "my little children."
- 2 The term for little children is not referring to the youngsters in the church but rather the whole church, anyone who is walking as Jesus walked and learning how to be like Jesus.
- 3 This term can be combined not only as endearment for all of those who follow Jesus but also from an elder, John himself, who is older than most in the church and also a spiritual leader as an elder.

- 4 John can be addressing both the church in general as believers and also everyone who is younger than him chronologically. The address might simply be to the younger people in the church.
- 5 John will address three groups twice. He does this in a poetic form, almost like the same kind of poetry you find in the Old Testament book of Psalms.
- 6 Unusually, John changes the address for the children. The first time he addresses the children, he uses the term of endearment he has been using throughout his letter. But the second address to children is for different age group.
- 7 Teknia is the term of endearment that refers to children that we would consider toddlers. However the second time he uses a term for children he uses the term padia, referring to children before the teenage years.
- 8 The second part of these lines of address to children changes as well. The first time that John speaks to children, his reason for writing is that their sins have been forgiven by Jesus. This is material that was discussed in the end of chapter 1 and beginning of chapter 2 already.
- 9 Dimensions Jesus' name sort of cryptically. Instead of saying the name Jesus, he just says the name. It is most likely he is referring to Jesus' character that is demonstrated in his children. This would make sense since he has just been talking about their conduct with sin and will also talk about their character in refusing to their ability to resist the desires of this world.
- 10 The second time that John refers to the children, the reason for writing changes. They had made a transition from God forgiven their sins to knowing the father. Their relationship has developed from asking God's forgiveness to knowing God's character and demonstrating it through the power of the Holy Spirit.

B Fathers provide wisdom of God.

- 1 Next, John addresses fathers. The question that must be raised here is whether the fathers refer to physical fathers or spiritual fathers. If it is spiritual fathers he is referring to the other elders. If it refers to physical fathers, then it is a second group based on age in the three groups.
- 2 Unlike with the children's address, the address to the fathers does not change one bit. His reason for writing to the fathers is that they know him who was in the beginning.
- 3 The person John is referring to here could be the heavenly father or it could be Jesus himself. Both of these members of the Trinity are referred to as he who is from the beginning.

- 4 It could refer to the father because he ordained the creation of the world before it began. As such, he shares the characteristic of a father with the physical fathers and spiritual fathers in John's congregation.
- 5 However, if we limit our perspective to John's writings, it is most likely referring to Jesus himself. Jesus is the word of life who was in the beginning. Jesus is the Logos in John's Gospel who was in the beginning.
- 6 Jesus is most likely the one referred to as he who was in the beginning. First John started speaking about Jesus as the word of life who was in the beginning. Jesus is the one who gave the apostles his message in the beginning.
- 7 John also do something different between the two addresses for all three groups. In the first section of addresses, John uses the present tense for I in writing.
- 8 In the second line of addresses, John changes the verbal tense from present to aorist. This changes the action from a current writing of these addresses to a writing that happened in the past.
- 9 John may be referring to previous teaching or even to his gospel. It is most likely however that he is simply changing the writing style to grab their attention. In my opinion the verbal tense change shows the change in the children's relationship with God and the advances made by the young men.
- 10 No matter which term father is used to work, John is addressing the children and the fathers and the young men in a personal way. You really get the sense that he notes these groups and loves them tremendously. He writes for their benefits.
- 11 The reason he writes to fathers is because they know the one who is from the beginning. Like the fathers, who are men that are pillars in the church and in the family, foundations for their followers and families, the one who is the beginning is also the foundation for faith.

C Young men fight the battle of faith.

- 1 The final group addressed in the poetic section is the young man. It is most likely this refers to an age group in the church. John's address bears a striking resemblance to the prophet Joel who pointed out that the Holy Spirit would come upon different socioeconomic groups.
- 2 Unlike the address to the children, the young men do not change in their age bracket. This is most likely referring to the ones who love adventure and a challenge and are gaining responsibility in the church.

- 3 In the first addressed, John simply mentions that they have conquered the evil one. They are overcomers but we are told nothing more than that. We're not given the message of overcoming.
- 4 Based on the information in the rest of the book, overcoming refers specifically to being obedient to Christ, trusting in Christ for victory, and defeating all of the wiles of the devil.
- 5 The evil one referred to here is most certainly the devil himself. The young men have been brave in their spiritual battles and warfare. They have stood texts in trials and temptations that the devil has thrown against them.
- 6 In the second section that addresses the young men, the same purpose is repeated except that it is added to buy two more lines of text. Before John gives the same reason of overcoming the evil one, he gives two qualifiers.
- 7 These qualifiers help us to understand how the young men have overcome the devil. The first qualifier explains that the young men are strong. The strength most likely does not refer to physical strength. It refers to endurance on the battlefield.
- 8 Such strength is a spiritual strength, much like the kind of strength Joshua needed on the battlefield in the promised land. This is a strength that goes beyond the challenges around you. It is a power that can be relied upon in the trials of life.
- 9 The second reason they are able to overcome the devil is that the word of God abides in them. These two terms, "word of God" and "abides in you" are used a lot in John's writings.
- 10 The word of God can refer both to Jesus, the living word, and to the Bible or the Commandments that they have been taught by Jesus. These young men use their strength and the word of God as their weapons in spiritual combat.
- 11 Much like Jesus led by example in the wilderness when the devil tempted him, these young men have become experts on the field of battle with the devil. These things abide in them, meaning that they remain as powerful forces used by the young men. Abiding speaks of their connection to Jesus through obedience, which brings their victory into play.

II. We gain the victory through rejecting the world (vv. 15 – 17).

A We give up the desires of the flesh.

- 1 Connected with the idea of conquering her overcoming the devil is the idea of overcoming the world's pleasures and desires. Every part of the church is succeeding in overcoming the world.

- 2 The connection that ties verses 12 – 14 to 15 – 17 is the idea of overcoming the dark forces, which ties this section to the previous section of chapter 2, verses 1 – 11.
- 3 John introduces three challenges to every believer that must be dealt with in their lives. The very first one is the lust of the flesh or the desire of the flesh.
- 4 Like many of the New Testament writers, John begins with a warning to not love the world. This warning is meant to keep us from not becoming over comers. We cannot win the tests of our desires if we loved the world. Love of the world and love of God are complete opposites. There is still riding the fence.
- 5 John shows us that the connection to love in the world comes through these three desires that plague everybody. Nobody is immune to these desires and the pleasure they bring momentarily.
- 6 The first desire mentioned by John is the desire of the flesh or the lust of the flesh. This is a deep desire to enjoy luxurious things, as well as the desire for human flesh itself, in the form of lusting over the opposite sex.
- 7 Just about everyone deals with the issue of lust. Jesus preached about it in his sermon on the Mount. The desire for the opposite sex is okay if it is for one's spouse. But lusting after one who is not your spouse is a danger to your walk with God.
- 8 This desire of the flesh could also refer to fulfilling the needs of our body improperly. For instance, gluttony and drunkenness might be a greater desire for some. Luxury and wealth might be another desire to bring pleasure to the flesh.
- 9 Throughout the Bible, the word for flesh is not usually positive in its connotation and usage. Flesh often is used in a negative way to speak of the physical things that hold us back from our relationship with God.
- 10 We must be careful to avoid these dangers in our lives. As Christians, we are taught to be content with what God is given. We are not to be greedy, jealous, covetous, or selfish. We have everything we need and it is supplied by God. We overcome the evil one and the world when we dedicate ourselves to God's work rather than to our own kingdom.

B We give up the desires of the eyes.

- 1 The second desire that can become a trap to the Christian who once to be an overcomer over the devil in the world is the lust of the eyes or desire of the eyes.

- 2 This passion has to do with the places that are eyes travel. We see things that we want. We focus on these things rather than on Jesus and his kingdom work.
- 3 These things in our purview become more important than serving Jesus. At the very least, they become a distraction to our souls. It is not bad to have things or to look at things, but it will not help us to overcome when the world distracts us with eye candy.
- 4 The devil would like nothing more than to have the Saints distracted with the luxuries of the world. In fact, his strategy is to have a so distracted that we don't even realize our spiritual condition.
- 5 When I was a kid, we used the sin this song and one of the lines says, "be careful little eyes what you see." This is the danger of our eyes. While we're supposed to have spiritual eyes to see what God is doing, we sacrifice that great power on the spiritual battlefield for temporal things that don't matter.
- 6 What are we looking at, what is griping our attention in this world? The world is full of things that distract our sight. We must avoid these distractions such as gold, the opposite sex, mansions and wealth, coveting other people's possessions.
- 7 The problem with the lust of the eyes is that we focus on the here and now rather than the more important eternity of ourselves and those around us. We focus on the temporary rather than the eternal.
- 8 This distraction makes us innocuous to the enemy as he carries out his mission without our defense. The devil gets what the devil wants and we are not ready for battle with him. He has bought a soft with the pretty things in the world.
- 9 We succumb to his plans because we do not have our guard up and we are not ready for battle. He makes us completely ineffective. By taking this out of the battle he leaves us vulnerable. If we cannot protect ourselves, how were we going to advanced against the enemy's devices?

C We give up the pride of life.

- 1 Finally, John mentions the pride of life as the third obstacle that we are tested with by the world and the devil. If we are to be victorious, we must resist the pride of life.
- 2 So what is the pride of life? This test presents us with the desire to preserve ourselves against all dangers in this world. This distraction holds the physical world in front of us and lies to us about our mortality.

- 3 When we focus on our own lives, worrying about how we are perceived, our legacy, our wealth, our jobs, and every other physical thing that ties us to this world, we make ourselves ineffective for eternity.
- 4 The pride of life focuses on our desire to be something more here than in heaven. We are too focused on our physical life, fearing and doing everything we can to avoid death.
- 5 We need not be afraid of death because we know where we are going. Focusing on the physical and forgetting the eternal makes us ineffective on the spiritual battlefield right now.
- 6 Carry more about this world and this life in our place in it divides our affections. It also divides our loyalties. We are more concerned with our physical life, food, clothing, friendships, money, politics and the like.
- 7 These three trials and passions are flaming arrows and schemes of the devil to distract us from our mission for God's kingdom. They are meant to knock us out of the fight so that we are no trouble for the enemy.
- 8 The world system that Satan has set up to distract us is very effective. Most Christians don't even realize the battle for the souls of humanity that happens all around them. They do not recognize that their angels and demons fighting them at every turn when they are fighting for Jesus.
- 9 We have two options when it comes to the spiritual battle that happens all around us at every moment. Either we can focus on the world and take ourselves out of the battle or we can focus on the war before us and make ourselves a target for Satan's wrath because we are effective.
- 10 Either we can do the will of God and work for his kingdom or we can basically become neutral in the war with devil. If we choose to be neutral, we are actually fighting for the devil. This is not a battle where we can be neutral. We must either fight for God or fight for the devil. Choosing to be neutral means that we side with the devil. Do not allow him to distract you with worldly pleasures. Keep a firm grasp of your attachment to this world because it is passing away but we are eternal. Let us not waste the time while we have it here.

Conclusion

we have the opportunity to leave the spiritual legacy in this world for other believers. If we want to be conquerors of our desires, the world system that is set up against us, and the devil who seeks to make us neutral or destroy us, we must have the strength to deny ourselves passions that this world offers. Becoming a Victor requires that we live in obedience to Jesus' commands only through keeping our eyes focused on Jesus can we be victors over this world and its entrapments. This does not mean we can't enjoy God's creation or become a blessing. This is about avoiding the wiles of the enemy, the temptations that take us out before we become

soldiers for Jesus in his battle. Let us focus on Jesus and that will lead us to victory that pleases him.