

COMFORTING COMMENDATION AND CAUTIOUS WARNING

IJno.2:12-17

Ed Dye

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Though it is not difficult to determine the general meaning of the terms used and the statements made in vv.12-14, when he says he writes to three different classes of the Lord's servants; it is universally agreed among scholars that it is difficult to see the specific force and purpose and detailed application of these statements at this particular place in the Epistle.
2. At first sight it may seem as if they were merely some general statements introduced at this point without any specific reference to what precedes or follows and without any particular bearing on either what has preceded or what is to follow.
3. However, a closer look at the verses and a consideration of the general contents and character of the whole Epistle will show this idea to be in error. For instance:
 - a. In 1:4 John says that he writes that their joy may be made full. (This joy is the joy of fellowship with God in Christ.)
 - b. In 2:1 he says he writes unto them that they sin not.
 - c. In 2:7 he refers to what he writes to them as an old, yet new commandment of brotherly love.
 - d. In 2:21 he says he has not written to them as those who do not know the truth, but as those who know it.
 - e. In 2:26 he speaks of having written "these things" to them "concerning them that seduce you" or who would lead you astray
 - f. Finally, in 5:13 he says he has written these things unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God in order that you may know that you have eternal life.
 - g. A comparison of the character and purpose of what is written in these other verses with what is stated in 2:12-14 of our text will prove the general character and purpose to be the same. The same qualities are in all of them:
 - (1) A knowledge of God and fellowship with him in Christ, 1:4; 2:7,8,21,26.
 - (2) And victory over sin and Satan unto eternal life, 2:1; 2:12-14; 3:6-9; 5:4,5,13.
4. We have in these verses piety (the quality of being pious, or reverence for, and duty toward God) described as it appears in faithful professing

believers at different periods of life in the service of the Lord – its character in each class, followed by cautious warning against the common danger of all, that of a love of the world and the things in the world.

5. I have found no satisfying explanation given by commentators for the duplication of the threefold comforting commendation of vv.12-14.
6. But I am convinced the threefold grouping relates to spiritual maturity, not to years reckoned by the calendar. It is spiritual experience and spiritual growth and accomplishments that are emphasized and commended, from babes in Christ to seasoned servants.
7. John has previously pointed out that the obedience of faith is the evidence that the professed believer knows the Lord, is in the Lord, is in fellowship with God, and that he is walking in the light.
8. He has emphasized the importance and the nature of the old, yet new commandment that is to be obeyed in order to be in the light -- that of brotherly love.
9. He now passes on to some specific encouraging, comforting, commendations and cautious warnings to believers concerning their relation to the world, the danger of loving the world and the things that are in the world, neither of which is of the Father.

II. DISCUSSION

A. PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS PRECEDING THE ANALYSIS OR EXEGESIS OF THE ENCOURAGING, COMFORTING COMMENDATION WRITTEN TO THE THREE DIFFERENT CLASSES OF BELIEVERS IN VV.12-14.

1. The designations “children,” “fathers,” and “young men” appear to be a detailed analysis of all his readers, or all the brethren addressed, all true believers.
2. There was, it seems, evident definite design on the part of the writer to particularize those addressed.
3. It seems that it was John’s purpose, by his use of these three separate, individual terms, to assign a specific, and therefore, a limited meaning, to the three terms used; and that they are used to describe three different classes of believers from the standpoint of their spiritual maturity. In which case:
 - a. The *children* where the most recent converts to Christ, or new converts.

- b. The young men, those who had reached such a degree of maturity that they were possessed of great spiritual strength in the Lord.
 - c. The fathers where those who had been in Christ the longest, and had therefore attained to the greatest maturity and spiritual growth.
4. But two different Greek terms are used to designate the children (teknia, v.12 and paidia, v.13). Why?
- a. Obviously, from the context, both terms describe the same individuals.
 - b. That being true, then it must be that the two terms are used to emphasize the different characteristics of the same group.
 - (1) Teknia is plural of teknon, and designates the fact of childhood.
 - (2) Paidia, indicates the infancy of those designated.
 - (3) The words, in their literal sense, denote those of tender age; and, as here figuratively used, denote those who are babes in Christ.
 - (4) The first reveals that those thus designated were children; the second, that they were infant children.
 - (5) Not literal babies, of course, but those lately born again, or new-born, into the family of God, Jno.3:3-5;1Pet.2:2; Ac.2:36-38.
5. And, of course, the words “fathers” and “young men” must also be understood as being used, not in the literal but, in the figurative sense.
- a. If used in the literal sense, then:
 - (1) No elderly men who were not fathers were being addressed
 - (2) And no female believers whatsoever were included.
 - (3) All believers are not being addressed, either by way of encouraging commendation or caution, which, of course, the Epistle as a whole denies.

B. THE SPECIFIC COMFORTING COMMENDATION WRITTEN TO THE THREE SEPARATE CLASSES OF BELIEVERS, Vv.12-14.

- 1. “Unto you, my little children,” Vv.12a,13c.
 - a. The occasion for addressing them: “Because your sins are forgiven you,” V.12a; and “because you know the Father,” V.13c

- (1) This is forgiveness for past sins, is an accomplished fact, and is realized by them as a present blessing. Cf. Mk.16:15,16; Ac.2:36-38; 22:16.
- (2) How great a blessing this is! For the one so blessed has been set free from the guilt of past sins, delivered from their condemnation, exempted from their just punishment.
- (3) And there is imparted to him or her a blessed consciousness of the favor of God.
- (4) Here is one of the basic things in Christianity – the forgiveness of sins – something that all men need (Rom.3:23; Gal.3:22), but something only Christians have; and it is in Christ that they have it (Eph.1:3; Ac.4:12; 2Tim.2:10), which is something those of the Gnostic persuasion did not accept.
- (5) The forgiveness of sins is the thing that makes one a Christian, and that one has confessed his faith in both the deity and the humanity of Jesus Christ (Mt.16:16-18; Ac.8:36,37); again, it is something those of the Gnostic conviction were denying, which is one of the reasons 1Jno. was written.
- (6) The words “are forgiven” are translated from a Greek perfect (apheontai), a tense pointing to past action with existing results: “you have been, and consequently stand forgiven of your past, or alien, sins.”
- (7) To “know” the Father:
 - (a) Is to have more than an acquaintance with his nature.
 - (b) It is to enter into the most intimate relationship with him as his child in a spiritual sense by a spiritual birth, and by having been adopted into his spiritual family, the church, Jno.3:3-5; Gal.3:26,27; Ac.2:36-38,47; Gal.4:4-7; 1Tim.3:14,15.
 - (c) It is much more than a mere profession of knowing him. Cf. Tit.1:16.
 - (d) It is both to believe and obey him; to conform to his will.
 - (e) It is to know him in his saving power through Christ and the gospel of Christ believed and obeyed. See Jno.17:3; 2Th.1:6-8.

- (8) The verb “know”, in “you have known the Father,” is in the perfect tense , which signifies that they have come to know the Father and continue to know him. Cf. 1Jno.5:1: “is born of God,” i.e., “stands born of God”.
- (9) It is not that they have come to know God, but have come to know the Father.
 - (a) They have come to know God in his character as Father in the experience of the forgiveness of sins, as his children in the spiritual sense, as his children in the spiritual family of the Father, the church of the Living God, the church belonging to Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God.
- (10) The ideas of having been forgiven and knowing the Father are correlative and dependent. For instance:
 - (a) Only those who are forgiven know the Father in the sense here referred to.
 - (b) And only those who know the Father in this sense have been forgiven.
- (11) This means John is commending them:
 - (a) For their having obeyed the gospel, in being converted to Christ, and for their continuing to walk in the light as he is in the light so that they are continuing to enjoy their saved relationship with the Father and the Son.
 - (b) For being among those who “have come to know the Father, and now retain their knowledge of him.”
- b. The reason assigned for their forgiveness, or the medium through which the blessing has been obtained: “for his name’s sake,” v.12b.
 - (1) “On account of his name.”
 - (2) On the basis of his name, i.e., God, the Father, forgives on account of Christ’s name and because of his advocacy of our cause. Cf. 1Jno.2:1,2; Rom.3:19-26.
 - (3) It is through his name that we are privileged to approach the Father, Jno.14:6; 6:44,45; Ac.4:12.
 - (4) Belief in, obedience of, and dependence on Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin is the thing that establishes this spiritual relationship, contrary to the thinking of those of the Gnostic persuasion. Cf. Ac.2:21,30-38,41; 22:16; Mt.28:18,19.

- (5) Until one has a sense of sin and guilt because of sin committed, which those of the Gnostic persuasion did not have, and even some today (1Jno.1:8,10), that one will have no sense of need for a Savior.
 - (6) Nor will that one look to or depend on the name of Christ for forgiveness and acceptance before God; nor will that one confess dependence on the Savior to mediate his or her relationship to God.
 - (7) Such an one is or feels self-sufficient in the spiritual realm. Therefore, no one could write to such or speak to such as one whose sins are forgiven for “his name’s sake.”
2. “Unto you, Fathers,” Vv.13a,14a.
 - a. The occasion for addressing them: “because ye have known him that is from the beginning.”
 - b. The word “know,” the same as with reference to the “little children,” means more than casual acquaintance with.
 - (1) The verb, as before, is in the perfect tense (egnokate), “you came to know, and now know,” and describes the rich and full experience these fathers have had with and continue to have with the Lord.
 - (2) This is due, of course, to their long, faithful service to the Lord and their consequent spiritual growth and maturity in him.
 - (3) For this they are being commended and thereby comforted and encouraged to continue in that faithful service to him.
 - c. “Him that is from the beginning” is the Word, the 2nd Person of the Godhead, the Word made flesh, 1Jno.1:1-3; Jno.1:1,14.
 - (1) They had learned to know Christ as the Eternal One in the same way the “little children” had come to know God as Father.
 - (2) No one can come to see and full understand what is involved in Christ’s work of salvation and then think of him as merely a temporal being, or a mere man (a man, yes, but not a mere man), or deny that Jesus is the Christ, or that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, or Jesus is the Son of God, as the Gnostics did. For the eternity of his being is involved in his saving work!
 - d. Again, for this the fathers are being commended, comforted and encouraged.
 3. “Unto you, young men,” Vv.13b,14b.

- a. The twofold occasion for addressing them:
- (1) “Because ye have overcome the wicked one,” or the Evil One, V.13b.
 - (a) “The wicked one,” or the Evil One,” is Satan, who is thus described five times in 1Jno.2:13,14; 3:12; 5:18,19.
 - (b) He is the wicked one because he is:
 - (1) The first in wickedness, Jno.8:44; 1Jno.5:3.
 - (2) The most industriously wicked.
 - (3) The most obstinate and persevering in wickedness,
 - (4) Totally depraved with no hope of change or of redeeming value.
 - (c) They have therefore gotten the better of the wicked one in whose power the whole world lies (1Jno.5:18,19; Jno.12:31; 14:30; 15:11; Heb.2:14,15). Not that the warfare is over for them, but that it is henceforth a warfare with a defeated enemy.
 - (d) This reminds us that Satan is not merely or solely an influence, but a definite and distinct agent or spiritual being who must be, and can be, resisted, repelled, and overcome by the saints, Jas.4:7; 1Pet.5:8,9.
 - (e) We know he can be overcome for two reasons:
 - (1) These “young men” had been successful in doing it, and are commended for having done so, V.13b.
 - (2) We are told to do it with assurance that it can be done, as well as being told how to do it, Jas.4:7; 1Pet.5:8,9; Jas.1:12; 1Jno.5:4,5; Eph. 6:10-18; 1Cor.10:13; See 1Jno.3:3-10.
 - (f) Overcoming is a prominent theme in John’s writings, especially in 1Jno. and in Revelation: 6 times in 1Jno.; 17 times in Revelation.
 - (g) The perfect tense indicates the abiding results of their past victories.
 - (1) There is of course no suggestion there are no further conflicts in story for them.

- (2) In fact, just the opposite is true as suggested by vv.15-17 which follow immediately.
 - (2) And “because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one,” V.14b.
 - (a) Note the three specified characteristics of the “young men” addressed and for which they are commended.
 - (1) They were strong (spiritually strong).
 - (2) The word of God abideth in you.
 - (3) They had overcome the wicked (evil) one.
 - (b) Their strength finds expression in patient endurance, earnest labor, and resultant resistance to wrong doing in battling the right; strong in moral and spiritual conflict.
 - (c) The means of their victory over the wicked one is their strength, and the reason for their strength is the power of the word of God abiding in them.
 - (1) In no other way may one achieve victory over Satan..
 - (2) Only as the word dwells in us richly do we grow spiritually and become strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, and are we protected from yielding to temptation and Satan, and from sinning against God, Col.3:16; Heb.5:12-14; 1Pet.2:2; Eph.6:10-18; Psa.119:11; 17:4; Cf. Mt.4:1-10.
 - (d) This is true because his powerful word dwells within
 - (1) As an illuminating force, Psa.19:7; 119:105, 130; Prov.6:23.
 - (2) As a regulative force, Psa.37:31; 119:11,101.
 - (3) As a saving power, Psa.19:7; Rom.1:16,17; Jas.1:18,21; 1Pet.1:21-25.
- 4. All of these, the three specified, have shown themselves worthy of commendation for having thus far proved faithful and not yielding to the corrupting influences of the Evil One.
- 5. Victory in the past results in encouraging, blessed effects, but is not in itself sufficient to ensure victory in the future; hence, the following cautious, watchful warning of vv.15-17.

C. CAUTIOUS, WATCHFUL WARNING AGAINST THE COMMON DANGER OF ALL CLASSES OF BELIEVERS – LOVE OF THE WORLD, 1Jno.2:15-17.

Note preceding our discussion of vv.15-17:

All of those in each category previously addressed are commended for their spiritual strength, spiritual progress, and spiritual triumph; and even though obviously not of the world, were yet in the world, were yet subject to the world's allurements and temptations, and yet within reach of the Evil One. Therefore, there was an obvious need for the cautious, watchful warning of vv.15-17.

True, they have fought and won the battle in overcoming the wicked one in their lives up to this point; but the war is not over. Many battles lie ahead for which they must be prepared in mind and service. To that he now turns his attention.

That John passes at once to a warning against love of the world after mentioning the wicked one is suggestive of his power in and over the world. Cf. 1Jno.5:19; Rev.12:9; 1Pet.5:8,9; Eph.2:1-3.

1. First, the apostolic prohibition: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," V.15a.
 - a. The word "world" (kosmos) is one of John's favorites. He uses it frequently in both the Gospel and in this Epistle, wherein he uses it in three different ways. He uses it:
 - (1) With reference to the created order, the world as created by God through Jesus Christ, Jno.1:1-3,10; Cf. Rom.1:20; Col. 1:16,17; Heb.1:1,2.
 - (2) With reference to mankind in danger of perishing, in need of salvation, a world capable of being saved and the object of God's love, Jno.3:16,17; 1Jno.4:9.
 - (3) With reference to an evil order or sphere, the moral or anti-spiritual world of evil; an order which is opposed to God, and to whose pursuit those who abandon the Lord have dedicated themselves, 1Jno.2:16; Jno.3:19,20; 14:20; 15:18,19; 17:14-16; 1Jno.5:19.
 - b. It's the 3rd sense in which it is used here in 1Jno.2:15.
 - (1) To love the world as God does, in the sense of having rational, benevolent, sacrificial good will toward men lost in sin, is a duty and is of the very nature of Christianity; this is a love that lifts one up.

- (2) But to love the world as here prohibited, or in the sense of setting one's affections on its evil, its pride, its vanity, is quite a different thing; this is the love that drags one down to darkness and destruction, presently and eternally.
- c. For emphasis we note that the word "world" is used in both a good and a bad sense, with the context determining which one.
 - (1) In a good sense:
 - (a) The world was made by God through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, Jno.1:1-3,10; Col.1:16; Heb.1:1,2.
 - (b) The world was loved by God, Jno.3:16.
 - (c) The world is the object of God saving purpose, Jno.3:17.
 - (d) Jesus Christ is the Light of the world, Jno.1:9; 8:12; 9:5.
 - (e) He is the Savior of the world, Jno.4:12; 1Jno.4:1-4; Lk.19:10.
 - (f) He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, 1Jno.2:1,2.
 - (g) He is the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," Jno.1:29.
 - (2) In a bad sense:
 - (a) The whole world lieth in wickedness, 1Jn.5:19.
 - (b) The world knew him not who is the Word and Light of men and of the world, Jno.1:4,,8-10; 1Jno.3:1.
 - (c) Similarly, the world does not love his disciples; in fact, it hates them as it hated him, Jno.7:7; 15:18,19; 17:14; 23:25; 1Jno.3:1.
- d. John's prohibition is extended to "the things of the world"
 - (1) The prohibition is exceedingly emphatic: "Love not the world, neither (mede) no not either the things of the world"
 - (2) What is the difference between "the word" and "the things of the world"?
 - (a) The meaning is, Do not love the world, no, nor anything that may be in it.
 - (b) There is, therefore, a distinction drawn between the world and the things in it: a distinction between the general and the specific, the whole and the particular
 - (c) We are forbidden to love even a specific or particular part of the world.

- (d) There are those who may have repudiated the world, but for one particular, as for example, the rich young ruler of Mt.19:16-22, who but for his love of riches would have surrendered his life wholly to the Lord. He lacked only one thing!
 - (e) The “one thing” we “lack” – be it the love of pleasure, business, job, desire for fame, praise of men, prominence, prestige, worldly honor, riches, home, family, spouse, is the particular or specific thing, though we may have repudiated the world as such, which will eventually close the door of heaven in our face and send us to hell.
 - e. To love the world and the things of the world which lie in the wicked one, and yet to overcome the wicked one himself, is impossible, which gives emphasis to the prohibition of V.15, and further reason for its immediate reference following vv.12-14.
- 2. Second, the threefold reason for this apostolic prohibition, Vv.15b-17.
 - a. 1st because the love of the world excludes the love of God: “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him,” V.15b.
 - (1) John declares the mutual incompatibility and exclusiveness of love of the Father and love of the world.
 - (a) It’s the Christian’s love of the Father, not the Father’s love of the Christian.
 - (b) Just like it’s the individual’s love of the world, not the world’s love for the individual.
 - (2) We cannot love the holy Father and the un-Christian, anti-God, world at the same time.
 - (a) These two affections cannot coexist in one heart.
 - (b) Either of them, but its very nature, excludes the other.
 - (c) Mt.6:24; Rom.8:5-8; Jas.4:4; 2Cor.6:14-7:1.
 - (3) The negative in the Greek is put first in the sentence, making it emphatic.
 - (4) “Love” in both instances in V.15 is in the present tense, denoting a settled and fixed characteristic.
 - b. 2nd because “all that is in the world...is not of the Father, but is of the world,” V.16.
 - (1) V.16 confirms the preceding statement of V.15 by specifying the things that are in the world.

- (2) The three elements here referred to make up the “ALL” – are looked upon as the whole; and help us understand the character of worldliness and its hostility to God.
- (3) Therefore, by “things that are in the world,” material objects per se are not meant, though they may be the means of allurements through the three elements here specified.
- (4) “The lusts of the flesh”
 - (a) Are those evil, inordinate desires and excesses which find their origin in the flesh, and through the flesh find expression. Cf. Rom.8:5.
 - (b) Inordinate desire for sensual indulgences; the longing for the gratification of sensual, carnal appetites that are allowed to control one’s thinking and actions.
 - (c) It is a lust after the flesh; but it is more; for the flesh is thus designated as the seat in which the evil desire dwells. And such lusts exhibit themselves in the works of the flesh, with a battle constantly raging between the flesh and the spirit. See Gal.5:16-21; Eph.2:1-3; 2Pet.2:18; Rom.8:1-8.
- (5) “The lust of the eyes”
 - (a) Interpreted by the aid of other scriptures, it seems to mean the eager desire of possessions directed toward temporal and material goods, or covetousness.
 - (b) May even denote unholy desires and excesses that belong to the more socially refined or higher side of man’s being, and possibly with his mental life. Cf. Gen.3; Mt.4.
 - (c) It is not the desire to look upon pleasing, or beautiful or sublime things, that is here condemned as being “of the world” and “not of the Father,” but the sinful look of avarice or lust. See Prov.23:1-6; 27:20; Eccl. 4:8; 5:10; Cf. Lk.15:15-21; Mt.5:28.
- (6) “And the pride of life”, or “the vainglory of life”, or “the pretentiousness of life”.
 - (a) Refers to a braggadocio spirit; the spirit of vanity, vaunting and boasting.

- (b) It is well expressed by the term “braggadocio of life”; “wanton ostentation in gratifying the desires of sense and sight.”
 - (c) The word “vainglory” is used elsewhere in the N.T. only in Jas.4:16, and there in the plural, “vauntings,” or “boastings” in the KJV, “arrogance” in the English Standard Version of 2001.
 - (d) It signifies either empty display, or haughty reliance on one’s own resources.
 - (e) It is equated with “pride in one’s possessions,” and is so translated in the ESV of 2001.
 - (f) The essence of it is self-superiority. The Pharisee of Lk.18:9-12 is a case in point.
 - (g) All living up to a supposed superior social position or personal prestige, instead of as the responsible steward of undeserved bounties, is hereby condemned.
 - (h) It is the supposed justified pride of superior peculiarities that mark our lives off from and superior to the lives of others.
 - (1) It may be the false pride of superior intellect, or superior education, or superior acquirements, or superior birth, or superior station, or superior tastes, or superior race, or some other “status symbol” – whatever it is I take such pride in.
 - (i) Any differences that may happen to exist between us and others are no moral temptations to us if we regard them as a Divine trust committed to us as an agency for service to others. Cf. 1Cor.4:7; 8:1-3; 12:4-7; Rom.12:3-10; Phil.2:3-8.
- (7) “For all that is in the world...is not of the Father, but is of the world.”
- (a) Such things do not spring from or proceed from, nor originate with the Father, nor have they any connection with him.
 - (b) They are utterly opposed to the Father’s character and will; therefore, love for them can’t dwell in the heart that loves him.

- (c) they find their source in the world, and its spiritual ruler, Satan himself. Cf. Jno.8:44.
- c. The third of the threefold reason for this apostolic prohibition of V.15a: Because of the transitoriness of the world as an object of desire and of love compared with the eternal value of doing the will of God, V.17.
 - (1) The transitoriness of the one – the world – is compared with the permanence – age lastingness – of the other – the one doing the will of God – i.e., the one who keep on doing the will of God.
 - (2) God himself is eternal; and those who abide in – keep on abiding in – his will also share in his eternal glory. Cf. 1Jno.5:13; Tit.1:2; 2Tim.4:6-8; Rom.8:16-18; 8:24,25; Heb.5:8,9; Mt.6:19-21; 1Tim.6:17-19.
 - (3) The will of God is here set in contrast to all that is in the world; for the world lies in the Evil one. Again, doing the will of God is set in contrast to the love of the world; there is double antithesis.
 - (4) Which life do you think is worth living for?
 - (5) What folly to love the one – the world – and hate the other!

III. CONCLUSION

1. With all this before us, hopefully we will take courage from those of Vv.12-14 who are commended for their accomplishments and seek to imitate their example in overcoming the wicked one through faith in Jesus Christ by means of the word abiding in us as it did in them.
2. Then may we heed the cautious warning of Vv.15-17 and be found loving the Lord and doing his will to the saving of our soul, instead of loving the world and the things of the world to the lose of our soul!