

1 John 2:12-14 Spiritual Maturity

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you on account of His name.

John's just spent time giving them evidence that they're saved saying that if they follow God's commands out of love for Him, then it is evidence that they are saved. If you're a true believer you're going to obey the Word of God and have love for and serve their brethren, and so both of these are evidence that someone is truly saved. But he knows that none of them will be perfect at doing either of these things. And this imperfection, falling short, and missing the mark in these two things would tend to make even genuine believers doubt their salvation. So, verse 12 is here to pause, and give true believers reassurance that they are saved not through these works, but on the basis of what Jesus has done.

13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning.

We are all equally redeemed. But now John wants to recognize the fact that not all believers are at the same place in their spiritual walk with Christ, their submission to the will of the Holy Spirit. John asks the question: Where are you at in your spiritual maturity? John is speaking in terms of family, where there are people who are at different maturity levels.

I am writing to you, fathers

John begins at the top level, and then will work his way down. When John says "I am writing to you, fathers", he's describing those men who were spiritually mature—the spiritual fathers amongst the congregation. These are believers who's life is characterized by a deep, close, intimate relationship with Jesus as the most important relationship in our lives.

because you know Him who has been from the beginning.

These have grown in the grace and knowledge of Christ over many years. These are people who have spent many hours in the Word of God, studying, meditating on it, taking it to heart, and letting the Holy Spirit deal with their heart, and mold them into people who are more conformed to the image of Christ. They have learned Truth from God's Word, and applied it to their daily lives. These are people who have followed Paul's admonition in Romans 12:2 **And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.** It takes time, to be "fully convinced". Romans 4:20-21 **yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.**

From the Beginning

These "fathers" have known God from the beginning of their relationship with Jesus, and continue to know Him and grow in Him. Their lives are characterized by obedience and submission to God over a long period of time, in fellowship with God.

I am writing to You, Young Men

John now addresses the "young men" among his readers. They have a personal relationship with Jesus, and have walked with Him, but not for as long. This is a level below the Fathers. This Greek word, for young men, Neaniskos (Nay-an-is'-kos) describes a man from 20-40 years old or so. This is a person who as matured into young adulthood. This could be described as the worker stage. You're no longer a spiritual spectator, but are getting about the business that God has for you. Ephesians 2:10 **For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.** Those good works are part of what the life in Christ is about. Those who are workers, are laboring for Christ not to earn salvation, it is a free gift, but out of Love for Him. They're getting to know Him enough to know that He wants their entire life, and they're surrendering it to Him, piece by piece. When we surrender our hearts to Him, we begin to prioritize what He wants for our life more, and when that happens, we'll surrender our time and efforts more and more to Him. So, in terms of where you're at in your spiritual journey with Christ, think about how you prioritize Him in your life In

terms of time and resources. How important is Jesus to you compared to everything and everyone else in your life, as evidenced by your calendar, your desires, your passions, and your priorities. This will tell you where you're at in terms of maturity.

because you have overcome the evil one.

John points to another great evidence of gaining some spiritual maturity—VICTORY! Overcoming. John states that a mark of having maturity to this level is overcoming the evil one when we are tempted.

John writes this group precisely because he wants to encourage them as victorious Christians. His use of the perfect active indicative form of the word *Nikao* describes their spiritual status as a victory over evil or “the evil one,” won in the past and enjoyed in the present. “The past remains effective”. You can point to things in your life that you used to struggle with, that are no longer an ongoing problem for you, and haven't been for a long time. You have victory in areas of your life, you are an overcomer, not struggling to win against evil.

I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.

And the last group that John writes to are the Babes in Christ. Do the babes in Christ not know the Lord Jesus? Yes, they do, but they do not know Him in His full character. They know Him as a child knows their parent. They know that He loves them and takes care of them and shelters them, but they don't know all about their Father's Business. They know Him as having forgiven their sins, and that is a lot, but it is not all to know about God. Like babies, they are to feed on the pure milk of the Word. How do they do this? By cooperating with the Lord in allowing Him to wash them with the Water of the Word 1 Peter 2 2-3 **2 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 2 and like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, 3 if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.** So, baby Christians will still have a lot to work on—but God can help them grow, just as He did us.

God holds us responsible for spiritual growth. The author of Hebrews lets his audience know that he is not pleased with their spiritual growth in Heb 4:12-14 **12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the actual words of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unacquainted with the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil.** It is walking with God that matures us, and it is understanding the Word of God in our hearts that lets us know Jesus more and more, an understanding of who God is by fellowshiping with Him. And this means that we don't need, so much, others to teach us about God, because we learn about Him directly from Him. And because we have been in fellowship with God, we're not led around by strange doctrines, but discern what is the truth of God's Word ourselves, and are able to distinguish between the good and evil, the truth and falseness.

14 I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning.

John uses the past tense here to emphasize our personal relationship with God through Jesus. He's addressing fathers again to underline that what distinguishes them is their long-term personal, abiding, fellowshiping intimate relationship with Jesus. This has given them wisdom and spiritual maturity needed in their own lives, but also to help those around them grow.

I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God remains in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

John emphasizes to the young men that their advantage is their energy and strength. And this is because God's word is “in” them in the sense that they know it and apply it. It is “enduringly and effectively present” in them. God's Word, it is influencing them, guiding them through life. And this victory over Satan comes as we live according to God's Word. They were living out their lives on the basis of an orthodox biblical worldview. And this is why they “**have overcome the evil one.**”

As the forgiven children of God who are imitating Jesus' walk, our goal should be to daily overcome Satan and grow to the stable faith of the "fathers" more and more in every aspect of our life. None of us can become strong or mature any other way. There are no short-cuts! Spiritual maturity is not automatic. It results from daily decisions to walk with God, to do what is right, to practice justice and mercy, to come alongside others, and especially to get to know Him more and more, and to spend time with Him, and grow in deeper and deeper relationship with Him.