

September 27/28, 2025

Loving the Father Together

Face to Face Series

1 John 2:12-17

Pastor Bryan Clark

Like most families, our family has had our share of stuff we've gone through. And on several occasions, I have said to them, "We're going to get through this together." It's not easy to walk in the light. It's hard in a very dark and confused culture, but we can do this. But John is going to tell us this morning, "We need to do it together." That's what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 John, Chapter 2, as we continue our study through the book of 1 John.

John has been talking to us about the idea of the darkness and the light and what it looks like to walk in the light. Now picking it up in chapter 2, verse 12, he's going to tell us that in order to do this, we need to do this together, like a family. So he's going to use an imagery of a family. He's going to talk about *fathers*. He's going to talk about *young men*. He's going to talk about *children*. Now the masculine, with fathers and young men, just reflects a first century culture. The point is they're mature believers...growing believers...and new believers. So let's see what he has to say. Verse 12:

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. (*NASB, 1 John 2:12)

So, new believers, this is where we all start. This doesn't have anything to do with chronological age. It has to do with spiritual maturity. You can be 70 years old and be a new believer. You can be very spiritually mature in your 30's. It's not an age thing. It is a spiritual maturity thing. But where the journey starts for all of us is the recognition that our sins have been forgiven. That's like the foundation upon which everything else is built. So notice that its past tense, **have been forgiven**. The grammar is actually referring to something that happened in the past, in a moment in time, but has ongoing effect. So there's no question it's referring to our moment of conversion. The moment we trust Jesus as Savior our sins have been forgiven past, present and future.

It's very important to understand what John is saying, because we have to understand this and get it resolved, or we just remain spiritual children. So to resolve this is to understand that when we trust Jesus as Savior, my sins are forgiven. This goes back to chapter 1, and the reminder that we have what we refer to as a sin problem or sin principle. It's the idea that whether I've committed one sin or thousands of sins, I'm a sinner, and that sin separates me from God. It's a sin principle. Therefore, when Jesus became the propitiation for our sins, He paid the debt, and all my sins have been covered: past, present and future. He doesn't have to keep re-dying for my sins. They're all covered. So the reality of that is, as of the moment I trusted Jesus as Savior, there will never again, ever be a moment where I'm under the condemnation of God. I will never again be subject to the wrath of God for the rest of eternity. Those sins have been paid; I stand righteous before God.

It does get confusing in the fact that John also said in chapter 1, verse 9, that we are to **confess our sins, and He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins**. Some people say, "Well, because your sins have been forgiven—past, present, and future—you don't need to confess your sins," like

they're already forgiven. But John clearly said, "Yes, we're supposed to." So, what's the deal with that? We're talking about two different things. In terms of my sin, it's all been paid for, and that will be true for the rest of eternity. I wish as of the moment I trusted Christ as Savior, that I would never sin again. But of course, I do sin. We all mess up. What happens is that sin then becomes a roadblock to the relationship my soul wants to have with God. The word confession literally means to agree with God. So when I step into the light and the light exposes my rats, rather than slithering back into the darkness, I agree. I see the rat too, and I don't want it there, so I agree with God, which implies I'm going to stop. I'm going to do something about it. God removes that roadblock, which again opens me up to a deeper, more soul satisfying relationship with Him.

So think of it like this. I have three girls. They will always be my girls, no matter what. Nothing can ever change that, but if I'm in conflict with one of my girls, then there's a roadblock to the relationship that we both want to have with one another. So, until we face that and we deal with it and that roadblock is removed, there's going to be tension in that relationship. When we deal with it, it's removed, and we restore the relationship that we both want. So that's the idea. Yes, my sins are forgiven, but I also need to face those sins that are creating the roadblock in order to continue to grow as a Christian. This is like the foundation upon which everything else is built.

He says **...for His name's sake**. Basically, what he's saying is the very reputation of God Himself is at stake with this promise. "I promise you have been forgiven through Christ." Think about all these wonderful names for Jesus that we've seen already in John's letter. We learned that He is the Word of Life...that He is the Righteous One...that He is Jesus Christ, the Son of God...Jesus, meaning He is our salvation...Christ, meaning the Anointed One, the long-awaited Messiah, the very eternal Son of God who took on human flesh. We've learned He is the Faithful One. We've learned He is the Advocate. We've learned He is the Propitiation. All these names for God come to bear on the fact that God promises that your sins have been forgiven. That's where the journey starts. Verse 13:

I am writing to you, fathers, (mature believers) because you know Him who has been from the beginning. (Vs. 13a)

So what defines a mature believer? We've talked about the fact that this word **know** is an important word for John, because the false teachers were claiming some sort of a mystical way to know God. And John is saying that isn't the way you know God. You know God through understanding the truth. That's what the whole journey is about. Notice that he says, "Know God **who has been from the beginning.**" We've seen this phrase several times in John's letter, and it captures a couple of things. It captures the idea that this is the life that has defined God forever. This is what the Bible refers to as eternal life. It's not just a duration of life; it's a quality of life. It's the life that we were created to experience. But we're also told that at a point in time, the God of the universe took on human flesh in order to unveil that life to us, so that we might better understand it. So the idea of a mature believer is someone who understands that this isn't just about having my sins forgiven. It isn't merely about possessing a ticket to heaven. It isn't just about God bailing me out in a crisis. It's a love story. What my soul wants is a loving, intimate, soul-satisfying relationship with God. Ultimately, that's what it's about. It's understanding marriage isn't just about possessing a marriage license. It's about entering into the relationship. So, a mature believer reaches the point where they

understand that's what this is about. That's what my soul wants; that's what my soul longs for. This is what the whole story has been about **from the beginning**.

A couple of weeks ago, we ended the service with an imagery: making the room dark with one circle of light on the stage. I've heard from a lot of you telling me just how meaningful that imagery was. Imagery just helps us think about it and process things more clearly. One sweet lady said it was everything she could do to stay in her seat and not run up to the stage into the light, and dance with Jesus. That's what a mature believer understands. This isn't about following rules. It isn't about any of that stuff. It's about a love story and finding that deep satisfaction in this relationship with God. He goes on:

I am writing to you, young men, (This is like growing Christians) because you have overcome the evil one. (Vs. 13b)

Notice again, this is past tense. This happened the moment you trusted Jesus as Savior. At that moment the evil one lost; Jesus wins, and that will never change for eternity. You have become a new creation in Christ. Something radical happened to you. You have been born again. We talked about this last week. You have become a new creation. New creation started with the resurrection of Jesus. You have entered into that by becoming a new creation in Christ, which will ultimately culminate in the ushering in of the new heaven and the new earth to come. So, the idea is a growing Christian understands this is about more than just the forgiveness of my sin. This is about more than a ticket to heaven. This is about recognizing that at the moment I trusted Christ, the evil one lost, and Jesus wins forever. Therefore, He has started something in me that will be utterly magnificent by the time He is done.

The promise is made to the Philippians in chapter one of Paul's letter that ***He who started this, is going to be faithful to finish it***, and by the time He is done, you will be an utterly magnificent trophy of His grace. I didn't say that might happen. I didn't say it could happen. I didn't say, if you buckle down and really try harder, it's going to happen. I said the realization of the promise that Satan lost and Jesus wins, is that He's going to finish what He started, and one day you will be absolutely magnificent not based on your performance, but based on the goodness and the grace of God. We need to remember that not just on our best days, but also on our worst days, He is doing something, and He's going to finish it in us.

So let's imagine that for some crazy reason, I lost my mind and signed up to run a marathon, (*laughter*) and somehow, supernaturally, I got to see the end of the race, and of all things, I end up winning the race. Think how that would change everything along the way that I experienced: all the aches and pains, all the struggles, all the stumbles, all the injuries, all the headaches, all the times I wanted to quit, but I realize somehow, some way, I end up getting to the finish line as the winner. It would change my thinking and perspective every step of the way. That's essentially what John is saying. Yes, the enemy loses. Jesus wins. Here's the promise. You are going to get to the finish line. He's going to finish what He started, which is the energy, it's the fuel that motivates our continual growth on our best days and our worst days to stay at it, because God is doing something, and He is going to finish what He started.

Then halfway through verse 13, for some strange reason, he switches into past tense. So he's been saying, **"I am writing to you...I am writing."** Now He says, **"I have written to you, children."** So there's lots of conversation about, "Why?" I think the most likely explanation is, again to understand that first-century readers actually weren't readers at all. They were listeners. Everybody didn't have a copy of the letter; it was read to them. So all of the techniques that we would think about in literature—boldface, highlighting, underlining, italics—all that had to be done orally to make sense. So, repetition was a very common technique. I think it's as simple as John saying, **"I'm writing to you."** And then he's telling them, "I'm going to repeat what I just said, in case you slept through it." So he's saying, "I know I have written this; I'm writing it to you again." I think that's what he means. So he says:

I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. (Vs. 13c)

So, again, this is new believers. They now understand their sins have been forgiven, and they're beginning this journey forward, but they also have this understanding that this is about knowing God. This is about a lifelong journey, a love story, to experience the life my soul longs for. Notice he doesn't say, "Know Him who has been from the beginning." They're not at that point. They don't know all that. They're just beginning their journey of understanding this. So he says, **"I have written to you, children, because you know the Father."** Verse 14:

I have written to you, fathers, (the spiritually mature) because you know Him who has been from the beginning. (Vs. 14a)

It's kind of curious. This is the only one of the three where he repeats exactly word for word what he said before. Here's what I think he's saying. The first time he said it, he's just defining what a mature believer is. It's someone who understands that, ultimately, this is about knowing God. This is about what the story will be forever. But now, when he's talking about little children—new believers that are just starting their story to know God—there are those who have been walking this journey for a long time, and they know God, and they love God. Therefore, they have a responsibility to help those that are just beginning their journey, and help them understand what this looks like, what this means to encourage them, to guide them, to be part of the story.

It's kind of like the first year you're married. You know each other but the difference is you really don't know each other all that well. After 25 years, you really know each other. After 50 years, you really, really know each other. But part of the responsibility is, "Can we help those who are at the beginning of their journey understand better what this looks like?"

So this is the basic idea. What a sad thing it would be if people poured into us and helped us reach this point where we have matured as a believer, and then we check out, forgetting how many people poured into us to help us get to this point. Why wouldn't we feel a responsibility to turn around and help others in their journey? That's what families do. There were so many wonderful people that poured themselves into me and my journey as a Christian. Some of them are still part of the congregation here this morning. I understand, then, I have a responsibility to do the same for others what those did for me. We can't check out; we're family. We need to guide; we need to help; we need to encourage. We need to be part of the story that God is writing. I think that's what he's saying there. And then lastly:

I have written to you, young men, (growing Christians) because you are strong, and (Why are you strong?) the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (Vs. 14b)

So he's talking about growing Christians. I would say in any healthy church, this represents the majority. I would say in most healthy churches—this is certainly true here—that these are the people that make the church work. These are the people that make the church run. These are the people that are serving. These are the people that are involved. These are the people that are excited. These are the people that are energetic. These are people that are on board for whatever is next, because they're on this journey. They're resilient. They have this strength, this excitement that defines them as growing Christians. So the idea is that it's the word of God; it's the truth that they're understanding. It helps them understand they've been forgiven. It helps them understand they've overcome the evil one, but also it helps them understand this is what it means to know God. So what John is saying is, “Hey, we're a family; we're in this together. Wherever you're at in your journey, we can do this, but we need to do it together.” He emphasizes that because he has a concern, and it's a pretty big concern, which he picks up in verse 15:

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

That seems really serious. If you love the world, then you don't love the Father. You're walking in the darkness; you're not walking in the light. James, in his letter, writes, “*If you become friends with the world, then you've declared yourself to be an enemy of God.*” That's pretty strong language! So what does John mean? The New Testament uses the word **world**—it's the same Greek word—three different ways. One is the world, like the world God created. The second is the world of people, like when John writes, *For God so loved the world.* But often it's used to describe the world system. That's what John means. That's what James means. The world system is a system organized to operate, devoid of the presence of God. That's why the two systems can never be compatible. One is in the light with God as the center. One is in the darkness, completely devoid of God, at least in any practical sense.

I think the best way to understand this is to simply go back to the beginning of the story: the first two chapters of Genesis. We were created as people in the image of God, to find our significance and value in a loving relationship with God. And all of life flows out of that. But once Adam and Eve sinned, they were cut off from a relationship with God, and they were ushered out of the garden. This, then, leaves us with the question, “Now cut off from God, where are they going to find significance and value?” And the only possible answer on the table is “in themselves”. They're going to have to now function as God Himself. They are going to have to make themselves significant. They're going to have to make themselves valuable. So this creates what I call a performance-based value system. It's not to say there's something wrong with performance. There's not. We should always seek to do our best. But when our performance becomes the basis of our significance and value, we have now set ourselves up as God, to do it ourselves. That's the problem. I think John defines the world system as simply as any place in the New Testament, with three simple phrases. Verse 16:

For all that is in the world, (In other words, he's going to define as the first one...) **the lust of the flesh...** (Vs. 16a)

The term **flesh** is another one of those terms used in a couple different ways in the New Testament. Sometimes it's just like flesh and blood. Most of the time it carries more the idea of that which I can do myself...in other words, that which I can do without God. It doesn't have to be bad stuff, doesn't have to be evil stuff. It's just simply what I can pull off by myself. All religion is a work of the flesh. It's just things I'm trying to do to merit favor with God. Paul, in writing to the Philippians in chapter three, goes through the list of all his religious accomplishments, and he refers to them as *works of the flesh*. The idea of **lust** is not plural; it's not lusts. The one big lust for any person made in the image of God is, "I want to be God myself." I want to do this; I want to run my own life. I'll make myself significant. I'll give myself value, and I'll do this through my performance, which essentially creates a "compete and compare system". Performance has no value unless it's measured against other people. So I'm competing with everybody. I'm comparing to everybody. This is now what defines my life, trying to prove to the world I matter. Second phrase:

...the lust of the eyes (Vs. 16b)

Eyes, typically, is a reference to covetousness. "I see it; I want it." "I see it; I have to have it." You go back to verse 15, **Do not love the world, nor the things**—there it is—in **the world**. Those things in the world that help me show the world that I have significance...that I have value...that I'm important...that I matter. That's the idea there. Think of it like a game. "How do I put points on the scoreboard to demonstrate that I'm winning?" And the answer is through the things of the world. So, we compete and compare. This could be about anything you can imagine. It's about how I look. It's about how smart I am. It's about how popular I am. It's about how much money I have. It's about what I do for a career. It's about my title. It's about my education and degrees. It's about the house I buy. It's about the car I drive. These are all the ways I'm trying to send a message to the people around me, that, "Hey, of course I matter. Look at my car." "Of course I matter. Look at my house." "Of course I have value. Check out my bank account." This is how the culture functions. There's no question about it. This is how it works. He goes on with the third phrase:

...and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (Vs. 16c)

The boastful pride of life is basically self-glory. What you end up with by playing God and trying to make yourself significant, is ultimately, "Look at me. Of course, I matter. I have a big house. I have lots of money. Look at what I do for a living." The whole system makes us selfish. We're just focused on ourselves because we're *competing and comparing* all day long. In other words, we walk in darkness. I'm going to spend my entire life trying to impress people that, at the end of the story, just don't care. It's just a good way to waste your life. So he says in verse 17:

The world is passing away, and also its lusts; (Vs. 17a)

At the end of the story, there's no winners in that system. There can't be. There never will be. You get your five minutes of fame. You get some money in the bank account. There's always somebody better, always somebody richer, always somebody more popular, always somebody better looking.

You're just never going to win. It's never going to be enough. It's just a relentless system that ultimately destroys you. It's a miserable way to live. That's what John is saying.

...but the one who does the will of God (walks in the light...everything we've been talking about) **lives forever.** (Vs. 17b)

God gives us a beautiful alternative to a different way to live. The reality is that the overwhelming majority of people that draw breath on planet Earth, will live according to the world system. Oftentimes you hear people saying things like, “This person is worldly.” “This Christian is worldly.” And often what we think about is: maybe they're involved in some sort of a sexual relationship or drunk all the time or whatever. But that's not really how the Bible defines it. Worldliness means I've bought into this way of thinking, that ultimately I'm in charge of my own significance and value, based on my own performance, functioning as my own god. That's what it means to be worldly.

Let me just give you a simple example. A lot of people struggle with their self-esteem. They just don't like themselves very much. If they are to be honest, they look in the mirror and they're just not happy with it. I don't really like myself. You have to understand, if that's you, it's because your thinking is worldly. You've bought into this system. What you're saying is you compete and compare all day long, and you're not measuring up. That's why you don't like yourself. That's what the system has done to you. Rather, God offers you an alternative: I promise you, if you walk in the light and you see yourself through the lens of who God says you are, you'll never view yourself the same way again. It is the way out of that oppression, the system that can never deliver.

The last several years I've been doing a podcast. Several weeks ago we were recording the podcast, and we had a guest who's a comedian by the name of Reno. He's a fairly well-known comedian, and we were discussing some of these things, and in the course of the discussion, he said, “There's nothing more terrifying than accomplishing everything you thought you wanted. I had the money, had the fame, made it to the top of the mountain, and I had never been more miserable in my life.” He said it was absolutely terrifying which thankfully led him to a change of direction: to find Jesus, who is completely changing the direction of his life.

At the end of the day, the system can't deliver, but God offers an alternative: to walk in the light. Is that easy? No, it's not easy. It's not easy in a dark and confused world. But we can do it...but we need to do it together!

Our Father, we're thankful this morning that You offer a different way to live a life that satisfies our souls, that brings the peace, the fullness, the significance, the value that we long to experience. Lord, may we do this together as Your family. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Introduction

In our passage this week, John describes two value systems – the way of the world and the will of God. The one we choose to adhere to makes all the difference in our lives now and in the age to come.

Study Questions *(to complete on your own)*

- 1) Read 1 John 2:12-17 in a couple different translations of Scripture. Make note of words or phrases that are repeated. **What is the purpose of the repetition in each case it is used?**

- 2) Look back over 1 John 1:1 – 2:11 and write down all the names John uses to describe Jesus. **What is the significance of each one?**

- 3) Compare 1 John 2:15 to James 4:4 and Matthew 6:24. **What is the sobering message of these verses?**

- 4) Summarize the main point of this passage in your own words.

Discussion Questions *(with your group)*

1) In 1 John 2:12-14 John uses language for a spiritual family that also can be used to describe a physical family. **How can a family of origin be similar to a spiritual family and how might they be different?**

2) In the Bible, forgiveness is described on two levels. **How did Pastor Clark describe them (verse 12)?**

What has your experience with each of the levels of forgiveness been?

What questions are stirred up for you personally when it comes to issues of forgiveness?

3) Verses 15-17 are significant verses in the New Testament that help us understand the world's system and how God calls us to live in it while pursuing an intimate relationship with Him. **How did Pastor Clark explain each of these descriptive phrases?**

Lust of the flesh-

Lust of the eyes-

Boastful pride of life-

What kinds of behaviors or attitudes would be obvious in a person who loves the world?

4) What makes it difficult for you to break free from the system of the world?

Think for a minute about how God might be seeking to help you Grow and Multiply this year.

As you think about growing spiritually, what practical steps can you begin today to embrace God's way of living? (hint: take a look at the Personal Spiritual Exercises below)

What difference can you make in the lives of others by helping them grow as well?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so that we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you to strengthen your souls with exercises that challenge and stretch you in new ways. Choose one and commit to repeating it until you gain strength in that area.

- 1) **Scripture Reading: to listen and soak in the Word as an experience of the words washing over you.** Read or listen to the entire letter of 1 John at least twice/week. As you take it in, resist the impulse to study and parse the details. The point is not to gain “head knowledge” but a stirring in the heart as the Holy Spirit brings the Word to life in you.
- 2) **Memorization: to internalize God's Word.** A key passage for this series is **1 John 4:7-14**. Commit to memorize it yourself and encourage others in your group to do it with you.
- 3) **Walk & Pray: to actively engage with the scripture passage.** Write out the passage of the sermon each week on a note card and take it with you on a daily walk.
- 4) **Journal Reflection: to practice remembering what God has done.** Make time in your schedule to put down in writing the feelings and thoughts that are stirring as you interact with the Word of God.
- 5) **Self-control Exercise: to help you come to stillness from a busy or hurried pace of life.** Set a timer for 10 minutes. Sit upright but comfortably in a chair with your palms open and upward on your lap. Focus on a word or short phrase about the character of God the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. When your thoughts wander to the things on your to-do list or other people's needs, redirect them back to the character of God. When the 10 minutes is up, close in a short prayer of gratitude.

Prayer

Praying together in a group is different than praying alone with God. It's a conversation that can help you grow closer to each other as you are in God's presence. One way to pray follows this often-used pattern in scripture – acknowledge who God is, recognize the need we have for Him, and ask to partner with Him on behalf of others. When possible, use the passage of scripture from this week's sermon as your starting point, then form a prayer that follows this pattern:

God, our Father, this week we learned that you are _____ and _____ .

As I looked into your Word, I understood how I need you to _____. Help me to be faithful to _____ in the week ahead.

Other people are on my heart, and I trust that you have put them there for a reason. I ask for your will to be accomplished in their life as they _____. Help me to know how to respond well to the needs of _____, even as my first step is in praying for them right now.

Each group engages in prayer differently. Some groups go around and allow anyone to pray that desires to do so. Other groups have several people pray or maybe 1 person closes the group in prayer. Still other groups split into smaller groups of 2-3 people and those people pray for each other. How you choose to engage in prayer is dependent on your group and your choice to ENGAGE! **We learn to pray by praying and by listening and praying with others!**