**The Path to Spiritual Victory**

Acts 4:23-31; 1 John 2:12-17; John 15:9-17; Psalm 98 May 6, 2018

**Summary: John had experienced adversity in life and great spiritual challenges. He realized that a close relationship with Christ and continued growth were vital for victorious living. Many lack growth due to spiritual immaturity. Growth is key for victory.**

 The love and concern John has for the church is evident as we continue to read this epistle. He began by exalting Christ, reminding the believer of whom they have believed. He offered a challenge regarding our fellowship with the Lord and shared the comfort of knowing we have an Advocate when we sin and come short. Our last study dealt with the believer’s love for the Scripture and others. Each thought is practical in application, but also essential in our lives.

 John continues to exhort and guide the church in our text today. We find guidance and instruction concerning a victorious spiritual life. He speaks to a broad audience, but the approach is essentially the same. Many in John’s day faced adversity and suffered defeat. The same is true for us as well. Life is difficult at best. We all face seasons of difficulty, times when our faith is tried and we feel discouraged or defeated. Many struggle with spiritual victory.

Let’s move into our text verses and examine the directions John offers as we consider: **The Path to Spiritual Victory**.

**I. The Importance of a Relationship.** (12-13) – Here John addresses all believers directly. As he speaks to three specific groups, he covers each phase of our spiritual journey. All believers fit into one of the categories mentioned. Although they differ in many ways, they all share a personal relationship with Christ. The first relationship mentioned is that of:

**A. The Children**. (12-14a) – ***I am writing to you, dear children [teknia=infants], because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. [14a] I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father.***

 This speaks of those who are babes in Christ, who have yet to reach spiritual maturity. We know they are born again by the reference to their sins being forgiven and knowing the Father. They have not yet reached maturity, but they belong to Christ. There is much to learn, and a great need for growth, but the potential is there. They have reached the first step toward maturity in Christ and spiritual victory.

**B. The Father.** (14b) – ***I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.*** John also addresses the wise and spiritually mature. This level of maturity is reached at different times, depending on many variables, but it is safe to say these are not new converts. These have known Christ in salvation for some time. They have spent time with Him, reading His Word, serving in ministry, praying, all in continued fellowship with the Lord.

**C. The Young Men.** (13b) – ***I write to you, young men, because you are strong and have overcome the evil one.*** Now John speaks to those who are midway through the spiritual journey. He describes them as young men. This refers to those who have been saved for a while and are growing significantly in the Lord. They may not have reached absolute maturity, but they have endured some battles along the way and have come through them victorious. They possess a hunger and zeal for the Lord. They are strong, ambitious, eager, and committed. The Church needs lots of young men today, victors over evil!

**II. The Importance of our Remembrance.** (14) – ***I wrote to you, dear children[paidia=children], because you know the Father. I wrote to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I wrote to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.***

 Our relationship with Christ is essential and foundational, but to experience spiritual victory there has to be more than a mere relationship. Being part of the family of God also bears responsibilities. John challenges us to remember our relationship and the obligations associated with it. Notice a couple of things here:

**A. The Emphasis.** (14) – As we read the text did it appear to you that John had repeated himself here? A quick reading of the NIV text would miss an important aspect he intended to convey. Verses 12-13 were given in present tense. This verse is in past tense; “I wrote…” The NIV is wrong here when it translates a past tense verb as a present tense indicative. In fact, the tense here is something unique to Greek, it is the aorist tense, which is a one time action in the past. It’s like John is saying, “Hey guys I wrote to you about this already!”

 This is not the first time John has shared these thoughts with the mature and those who are rapidly growing in Christ. John is emphasizing continued spiritual growth. They are not to be just babes in Christ any longer. Every newborn believer is expected to grow spiritually. There is no place for complacency in our spiritual lives. Regardless of where we are with the Lord, there is always room for improvement!

**B. The Exhortation**. (14) – John is basically reminding them of the same exhortation he gave in the past. Things have not changed. The struggles of life will continue. The need for a closer walk with the Lord and advanced wisdom will remain. The enemy will not leave them alone simply because they have reached a certain level in their spiritual lives. They must continue to hunger after the Lord and study His Word.

 What a challenge that presents to us as well. It is easy to get complacent as we walk with the Lord. Most of us have been in Sunday school. We have heard the Bible stories. We know the doctrines of Scripture. We are familiar with the tactics of the enemy and the struggles of life. We have been through storms and came through them safely. We are maturing in Christ, but we must not be satisfied with where we are. There is much more to accomplish, greater heights to reach, and victories to win. Stay true to the Lord and continue to grow in Him! This huge emphasis on spiritual growth is missed in some of the English translations.

**III. The Importance of our Resolve.** (15-17) – In our closing verses John deals with the resolve every believer ought to possess. We must desire the Lord above all else. We cannot allow the desires or hindrances of life to keep us from following the Lord. We will never achieve spiritual victory apart from a consistent, continual walk with the Lord. Consider:

**A. The Caution.** (15a) – ***Do not love the world or anything in the world.***

 John well understood the continual struggle we face while living in a body of flesh. The world and all it offers appeals to the flesh. As believers we must rise above those desires, seeking the ways of God instead of the things of the world. **Colossians3:2** – ***Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.***

**B. The Confirmation.** (15b) – ***If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.***

John speaks boldly, but his words are necessary. Many today will not embrace such thinking, but it is true nonetheless. We cannot love the world, continually seeking to please the flesh without any remorse or sensing the need to repent, and have the love of God within us. **Matt.6:24** – ***No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.* James 4:4** – ***You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.***

 We have discussed the fact that trees bear fruit after their kind. We are known by the fruit we bear. What we possess on the inside will eventually be revealed in the life we live. This mark serves as a good indicator of salvation. If a man’s heart is continually on the world and all it offers, never considering the holiness of God or the sin he commits, the love of the Father is not in him. A Christian cannot live in sin and be comfortable. It may appeal to flesh, but within his heart he will be miserable. If one can love the world without thought or conviction, he needs salvation.

**C. The Corruption.** (16) – ***For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.***

 Here we discover the utter corruption of the world. (John speaks of the world in reference to the world system, what it offers, its ideas and philosophies, not just the planet.) The world is full of sin and wickedness. If we love the world, that is what we love. We desire the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life but not the Father. Such desires are not of God, but of the world and the prince of darkness. Cohabitation with the world will leave your garment spotted.

 There is much in this one verse concerning sin. In essence every sin we commit against God can be placed in one of these three categories. These are the areas Satan tempted Jesus with in the wilderness. We must understand however, sin always defiles and corrupts. Any and all sin originates with the devil; they never come from God. A lost man will definitely be characterized by these attributes, but believers must guard against them as well. If Satan tempted Jesus with them, you can rest assured he will tempt us with them also. We must be close to the Lord if we are to overcome!

**D. The Culmination.** (17) – ***The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.***

 John offers a stirring challenge in this last directive concerning our spiritual victory. Those who seek to please the flesh are concerned with the here and now. They give little thought to the life to come. Their main desire is to please the flesh as much as they possibly can while in this life.

 We discover the danger and futility of such thinking. The world and all it offers will one day pass away; it will be destroyed with a consuming fire. The things men pursued and placed such emphasis on will not last.

 The believer has hope though. We are not dependent upon this world or anything it offers. Our hope and assurance is in Christ. Those who belong to Him will live forever with the Lord.

 We need to understand this powerful truth. Our lives will culminate in one of two places. All who ever lived will be judged of the Lord, just as He will judge the world, or be accepted of Him because of a relationship with Christ, with the guarantee of eternal life. We cannot have it both ways. Everyone falls into one of two categories, saved or lost. Each category has eternal implications with vastly different surroundings.

**Conclusion:** John has covered quite a bit of ground in our text today. We must have a relationship with Christ if we are to enjoy spiritual victory over sin and possess eternal life. Every believer ought to continually grow and mature in the Lord. I fear that many in our modern culture never progress from the childhood stage. I pray that we will strive for maturity, seeking to know more of Christ, and desiring a closer walk with Him.

 We cannot look at this passage and escape the reminder of the end times. The Lord is coming again for the redeemed and the lost will stand before Him in judgment. I pray you know the Lord as your personal Savior. If not, I urge you to respond as He leads. This ought to challenge the hearts of believers to share our faith with the world. Those who die apart from Christ will face eternal condemnation and judgment in hell.

**Let us pray:**  Lord God, Holy, Mighty and Merciful, fill us with a passion to live for You and serve You, not the things of this world that soon will pass away. May we always stand strongly on your Word and in the might of the Spirit against the evil one. In the name of Jesus. Amen.