

Studies in 1 John 04 Growth of His Children

by John W. Bramhall

John W. Bramhall's sermon explores the spiritual growth of God's children, emphasizing the importance of forgiveness, knowledge of Christ, and the dangers posed by the world.

Duration: 51:32

Scripture: John 2:12

Topics: "Biblical Authority", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of the Word of God as the ultimate authority for truth. He warns against relying on human reasoning and encourages the listeners to stay faithful to the teachings of the Bible. The preacher also highlights the world's hostility towards God and the crucifixion of Jesus as evidence of this enmity. He urges believers to be faithful and let the Word of God rule in their hearts and lives. Additionally, he emphasizes the need for continual growth and dependence on the Holy Spirit as a teacher.

Transcript

Shall we turn again in the family letter of John, reading this evening in chapter two, and commencing at verse twelve, reading down through verse twenty-eight. John writing by the Spirit and saying, I write unto you children, which is the proper translation, omit the word little. I write unto you children because your sins are forgiven you for his namesake.

I write unto you fathers because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you young men because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you little children because ye have known the father.

I have written unto you fathers because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you young men because ye are strong and the word of God abideth in you and ye have overcome the wicked one. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.

If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the father but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.

Little children, it is the last time, and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us but they were not of us, for if they had been of us they would no doubt have continued with us. But they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

But ye have an option from the holy one and ye know all things. I've not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist that denieth the father and the son.

Whosoever denieth the son, the same hath not the father. Let that therefore abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the son and in the father.

And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you.

But as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. And now children, oh my dear children addressing the whole family, abide in him, that when he shall appear we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming. May God bless the reading and hearing of this section of his precious and of his holy word.

We come to the closing section of the first division of this epistle of John, where we have noted in chapters one and two, the father with his family and the family with their father. We have noted some precious truths, but in the section before us this evening, we have a most important and valuable exhortation from the lips of our beloved Lord by the spirit through which we serve in John. And it is in relation to this particular subject, the spiritual development or the spiritual growth of the family of God.

Please may I repeat it. The whole context has to do with the spiritual growth and the spiritual development of each member in the family of God. We would emphasize as we commence the study of this section with this truth.

We do and must confess and maintain the unity of the family. For the family is one, and the basis of that oneness is that we all, each one of us, have life in the Lord Jesus Christ. But in our scripture that we have read, we have divisions given in relation to the family of God.

The oneness of the family we maintain. For that oneness, the Lord Jesus prayed, as we well know in John 17, that oneness was manifested greatly in the days of the early church, as we may read in the book of the Acts. That oneness unfortunately has waned away, and the unity of the family has undoubtedly lost the expression of its outward conformity.

But nevertheless we maintain the family is one. But God alone is divided into grades, and grades that indicate the spiritual development of the members of his family, and is divided them into three classifications. Those classifications are, as we have read, fathers, young men, little children.

These are divine grades that God sees and recognizes and acknowledges within the family. And there are no other divisions that could ever be scriptural. But note in the opening of the section in the twelfth verse, there is one truth that is common with everyone in the family.

Whether they be fathers, whether they be young men, whether they be little children. And that in verse twelve is declared. And again we omit the word little, which is found a different Greek word than the other.

I write unto you children, my dear children of the family, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. This is one characteristic that belongs to each member of the family. Their sins have been forgiven.

And may I remark with earnestness, my beloved friend, if you're with us without a savior, if you are not in the family of God, your sins have not been forgiven. For the indication of being in the family is definitely proved when God through Christ has forgiven you your sins. Every member in the family of God, their sins have been forgiven.

This is a common basis of relationship not only with God, but also with one another. But let us go directly to what we find in relation to the grades that God refers to in the family development. Looking first of all, and quickly, at what we find in verse thirteen.

I write unto you fathers, because ye have known him, that is from the beginning. It is repeated in verse fourteen. I have written unto you fathers, because ye have known him, that is from the beginning.

This is the first classification. And in relation to the spiritual growth and the spiritual maturity of God's children, there are those whom he classifies as fathers. And they are called such, not necessarily because of their years, though that may often be the case, but because of their spiritual maturity.

And they have thus come along the way to be acknowledged in spiritual maturity to be the fathers within the family of God. Note their special characteristics. All that he says to them and about them is this, ye have known him, that is from the beginning.

The verb know is in the perfect tense, which indicates not only a past nor a present, but a continuous action. They have not only come to know him, but they have continued him. And in continuity they have developed in their knowledge of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

Can I insert the words of dear Peter? Second Peter chapter three and verse eighteen. But growing great and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May I reemphasize that knowledge was obtained by being absorbed and taken up with the person of the Son of God.

Him! The one of whom we learned in chapter one. Of whom John said, we heard him, we have seen him, we have contemplated him, our hands have handled him. And as the beloved apostles, thus in their experience with the blessed Lord Jesus upon the earth, came to know him and saw the manifestation of his beloved blessed person and work.

So the mature believers classified as fathers have faithfully gone on to know him and develop in the knowledge of him. And you have the expression repeated again, which we have seen before, who is from the beginning. The one who was manifested, God manifested in the flesh.

They went on to know him. May you and I have that desire. And in the prayer of dear Paul, may we indeed say ourselves that we may know him in the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering.

And John has nothing more to say to them. They have matured spiritually and in that attainment they have found all their delights. Please note carefully, not that they know about him, they know him personally.

And it's in the very person of Christ himself they have found their complete delight. For C. H. Macintosh that wrote in one of his writings of the Pentateuch, the work of Christ is the perfect resting place for the conscience. The word of Christ is the perfect guide for the path.

But the person of Christ is the perfect object for the heart. My beloved fellow believer, may I say this, as John has no exhortation, as he has no admonition for the fathers, it is because they have gone on to maturity in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. And in so doing, he has been the constant object of their heart's delight.

Did we not mention, as we looked at the beginning of this epistle, the fellowship of the father with the delight in his son? The fellowship of the son with the delight in his father? That mutual delight? And if you and I could examine the father's heart, all you would find within that blessed heart is what came out of it. In the person and manifestation of his son, this is my beloved son in whom is all my delight. And likewise, as John commends the fathers, he commends them very briefly, but completely.

The blessed one who was from the beginning manifested was their heart's delight, and they had gone along in spiritual growth. May I quote one scripture before going further? Paul wrote it in 2 Corinthians 3.18. Beholding us in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, the Lord of glory, we are changed, we are transformed, we are transfigured into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. That was the secret of their growth, their knowledge of him.

The one they knew was one who is. They not only knew where he had been, they not only knew what he was when he was upon the earth, they also knew what he is in glory. And it was the manifested Christ upon the earth, whom now they knew was glorified in heaven, was the perfect object of delight for their heart.

And thus, because of that degree, John has no further word of exhortation, of correction, or warning of admonition of any kind, but thus their knowledge--please may we say, that knowledge of him also increased their knowledge of the Father. You cannot know the Father without knowing the Son. You cannot know the Son without knowing the Father.

And when we increase in the knowledge of God's Son, we are also continually increasing in the knowledge of the Father. And what a commendation was theirs, for the Fathers are they that not only know him, the blessed Son, but they know the Father too. Well did the Lord Jesus say to Philip, he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.

Now look at the next classification as you have it, beginning, if I may, in verse 14. In the very center of the verse, you have the beloved apostle writing to the young men. Now you will note something very carefully as we proceed.

John has little to say to the Fathers. He has more to say to the young men. But he has much more to say to the little children.

Now get the picture. The family in its grades of development is revealed in this section. The Fathers in their maturity, the young men in their strength, the little children in their infancy, their spiritual infancy.

And so John is addressing words that are suitable and to be applied to each classification. To the young men, let us read what he says in verse 14, right in the center of the verse. I have written unto you young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

There are three special characteristics that John expresses in regard to the young men. One is this, their spiritual strength. They possess spiritual strength, and we are well aware in the physical realm that the pride of young men in their youth is their strength.

And here in the family of God, there are those that are classified as young men in the possession of spiritual strength. Then a second characteristic follows. And it is this, the word of God abode in their hearts.

That word of God was abiding in their hearts, for that was the source of their strength. By the word of God, which abideth in you. And the characteristic of the word of God abiding in them was the source of their strength.

And in the third characteristic, it brought victory over Satan. Ye have overcome the wicked one, and that was the result of their strength. Beloved, we can take to our own consciences and hearts the suitable words of the psalmist in Psalm 119 verse 11.

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. One cannot emphasize too greatly the abiding of the word of God within the heart. That is the secret of strength, and of thus victory, the word of God being within us.

For the word of God, when it dwells within the heart, will produce obedience to the truth. The word of God, when it dwells within the heart, will produce the mind of Christ in the life. The word of God will produce the suitable thoughts, as well as the suitable desires to mold the believer in his and her life, and form that life to be a life of blessing and testimony for the Lord.

May I read with you the words of John chapter 15 and verse 7? They fell from the lips of the Lord Jesus, and they indicate that the abiding of the word of God within the heart can produce divine manifestation of blessing and power and answers to prayer, which only can be produced in that manner. Said the Lord Jesus in John 15 7, If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Can I repeat it? I need it.

May I say, one of the great conditions for answered prayer is for the heart to be controlled by the word of God. For the heart to be persuaded what God's will is through the precious word, and that word of God will develop and mold and form the right thoughts, the right motives, the proper desires, and in conformity with the will and the word of God, the believer can ask whatever he will. And when he and she knows it is according to the mind of God, the Savior assures in his promise it shall be done unto you.

We perhaps will touch upon the same principle when we get into chapter 5 and the will of the Lord. But oh, may I say, the great responsibility of permitting the abiding of the word of God, not in the head, but in the heart, to have its proper effective result for the testimony of God's dear children. Now as John continues to write to the young men, he adds words of warning that he never could and never would utter to the fathers.

The danger that he mentions to the young men was not a danger to the mature Christians. But to the young believers, the young men, he presents a twofold danger. Look with me quickly at verse 15.

He goes on to say, love not the world, neither the things which are in the world. Now please note there's a twofold danger. The world itself, and then second, the things that are in it.

Now they're both different in their distinction. The world, John is implying that world system over which Satan rules and through man manifests and sways his power. Remember the Lord Jesus calls Satan in John 12, John 14, the prince of this world.

Paul in 2nd Corinthians 4 verse 4 called him the God of this age. John in his epistle, chapter 5, verse 19, says the whole world lieth in the wicked one. And the world was a danger, a danger to the young men.

For it is the place where men seek happiness without God. Now please may I be careful? May I be clear? It is unfortunately too possible, too often probable, that believers can set their heart on the world, and then second, the things in the world. And that covers of course what the apostle goes on to enumerate, as you find it in verse 16.

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, is not of the part of it of the world, and the world passes away and the lust thereof and so on. What are the things that are in the world? Beloved, they can be consummated in very few words. They consist of lust, lusting for what we have not, and then pride, when we get what we want.

But here are three dangerous avenues to the heart of a believer. Three dangerous avenues to the soul of a believer. The lust of the flesh, to appeal.

The pride of life, to appeal. And one can certainly realize, these are dangers that could come in. And may I point out, John had commended the young men for overcoming the wicked one.

That John warned them that wicked one was anxious to get in. And the dangers of the world system under Satan, was an avenue of danger to their soul. And we must confess, what John is suggesting, it is far better and easier to keep the enemy out, than to get him out after he's gone in.

And I'm sure that many Christians, perhaps many of us here, ourselves included, may be apt to think, how true we have found it. If we permitted the enemy to come in, we found it much more difficult to get out. But John is warning, don't let him in.

See the dangers, and then please note, what loss is sustained by letting the world and the things of the world come in, and the affections to be upon the world and the things within it. Go back to verse fifteen with me. Let me read the latter part of that verse, which we omitted.

If any man loved the world, now please note, it is a question of the believer's affections. It is a question where the believer's heart is centred. If any man loved the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

He does not say that the Father does not love him. We know that would be contrary to many Christians. But he does say, there could be no enjoyment of the Father's love, when the world, when the things of the world have taken that place of affection within the child of God's heart.

Please may I say it, for your blessing as well as for mine. God is jealous of our love, and the Father has a right to be. Even to Israel he said, the Lord thy God is a jealous God, and it is a righteous jealousy.

The Father demands, the Father expects, the Father deserves the first love of his children. O beloved, look to God that we might enjoy in conscious obedience to the Father, here below, the blessedness of his love. Do you ever notice the words in 2 Corinthians chapter six written at the end of that portion, where we are told to come out and be ye separate and so on? And then the Lord says the promise at the end of the

We begin to know the Father. We begin to realize he's my Father. Never will I forget at the close of a street meeting in the north when I was a young man.

A young fellow with his little daughter was standing listening very carefully and when the service was finished he came to me. He said I'm interested in what you've been preaching. I'd like to talk with you.

So I made an appointment in his home. And I went to his home, sat with him. He says I'm an agnostic.

Well he said I'm a socialist. Today he would have said I'm a communist because this goes back in 1920. And he said I'm a socialist.

And I sat at his table opening the scriptures, seeking to present to him the reality of God. But I never will forget what the reaction of that young fellow was when I made this statement to him across his kitchen table where we were seated. I know God is my Father.

And he reeled back in his chair horrified, astonished at such a statement. Well the world doesn't know him. But beloved the youngest child has been given the spirit of his son into his and her heart whereby we cry Abba Father.

But now what was the difficulty that faced the young children that John writes so much about? Their preeminent danger was this. Now I want you to note it quickly. The danger of Antichrist.

Look at verse 18. Little children it is the last time as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come even now are there many Antichrists whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us but they were not others for if they had been others they would no doubt have continued with us but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

Basically and very simply the danger for the little children was false teaching. Go down in the chapters of verse 26 if you please. John specifically declares why he writes such words.

These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. In other words there were men even had been in the Christian testimony. They had left the Christian testimony.

They had become antagonistic to the Christian testimony. They were propagating doctrine and error that would beguile, seduce, lead astray little children. May I say it can be a great mistake when the young believer seeks to understand the erroneous teachings of the various cults.

It can lead them astray. For false teaching, well John calls them very plainly, they are Antichrist as well as false teachers and their whole purpose is to lead astray the young children of God. Please may I say a word of warning, not only warning but sadness.

Much of it is evident today in the testimony of young believers. The neglect of knowing and developing and growing in the truth of the word of God. For listening to that which is untrue to the Holy Scripture.

What a danger. But may I point out quickly the sources of safety that John points out for the little children. Go to verse 20 with me.

Ye have an option from the Holy One and ye know all things. Read verse 27 in connection with the same truth. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you and ye need not that any man teach you.

But as the same anointing teaches you of all things and is true and is no lie and even as it has taught you, ye shall abide in him. Now what is John referring to? John refers to nothing else but the fact every child of God, even the little children, they possess the blessed person of the Holy Spirit. The anointing is the possession of the Holy Spirit who alone is the divine teacher and the revealer of the truth of God.

And it is one of the sources of safety for the youngest child in the family of God. May I remind you just briefly of this portion of Scripture that's worth studying? First Corinthians chapter 2 from verse 9 going down through verse 16. First Corinthians 2 from verse 9 to the end of the chapter.

And there you have the unfolding of the Holy Spirit as the teacher, the revealer, the one who knows all things. And please may I say, as John writes concerning the little children, you know all things. He's not telling them they know all the Bible.

What he is suggesting, they have resource, they have access to a teacher who knows everything. That teacher is the Holy Spirit. And in chapter 2 of First Corinthians in verse 12, the Apostle Paul wrote, Now God hath given unto us not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know all things that are freely given to us of God.

My beloved, listen. Young believer, you have a divine teacher who knows all things. And he's been given to you that you might know all.

Matthew Henry has a very searching commentary on that one verse I quoted from First Corinthians 2.12. That we might know all things that are freely given to us of God. And these are the words in substance, as I well remember them. At the judgment seat of Christ, we shall be called to give an account, not only of what we knew and what we did with the knowledge, but what we could have known, but did not.

When those words were brought before my heart and mind and eyes, they searched my soul. We shall not only be called to give an account of what we knew and what we did with that knowledge, but also what we might have known and did not. My beloved, will you tell me where we can matriculate and graduate from the school of God? Will you tell me when and where we'll be able on this sea to have a complete, full, perfect knowledge of the whole truth of God? Beloved, we must keep going on.

But here's one of the safety, safety resources for a little child of the Lord. The dependence upon the Holy Spirit to be his and her teacher. I remember our dear old brother, Alfred, many years ago when I was first married, going back to 1921, I can't recall.

As he sat with me on the porch of our home, we chatted together and I was telling him my hopes, my desires in relation to the Lord, His work and His truth. And as I mentioned the study of the Word of God, he put his hand on my knee and he said, boy, you'll never have a better teacher than the Holy Spirit. I never forgot that.

Whether you go to school or seminary or not, you've got to be taught by the Holy Spirit. He's the unction. Oh, my beloved.

Granted, you and I may realize, look, this is God's family. He says, I want you to grow up. I want you to grow up.

Grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. But let me name further another source of their safety in verse 21. Verse 21, I've not written unto you because you know not the truth, but because you know it,

and that no lie is of the truth.

They already possess some knowledge of the truth, and that knowledge of the truth that they possess, they should cling to. They should not deviate and seek to thus examine erroneous teaching, but enjoy what they knew to be the truth. And maintain that truth which they knew, and stay in the Word of God.

And stay away from all lies. Verse 24, if you please, quickly. In verse 24, the apostle says, let that therefore abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning.

If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son and in the Father. Please note the opening of that verse. Abide in the truth that you've heard.

Abide in the truth which you've heard. Don't give up the truth that you know. Can I say faithfully, we're living in days when many things are being done at the sacrifice of truth.

It's wrong. Paul writing to Timothy said, in 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 19, the foundation of God standeth sure, firm, and the truth of God never moves. But in Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 1, Paul had to write, we should give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, less than any time.

Not they, but we should drift away. My beloved, the truth is never going to change. What changes is the believer.

When the believer drifts away from the truth. And the safety of little children, if they maintain the truth they know by the truth, shall it not. There's a bitter for it, and that bitter is the devil.

And we must realize this. And may I quote Paul's word before we close to Timothy, in 2 Timothy 3, 14, and 17. How precious is exaltation to its son in the faith.

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, having learned them from many witnesses, that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, truly furnished unto all or every good way. Beloved, continue, continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, the things which we have heard.

And my beloved, what a joy it is to realize that when the child of God keeps in the word, and faithfully follows in obedience the word of God, that is revealed to him and to her, that child of God will grow, and that child of God will be delivered from the snares that would take them away from the truth of God. May I also add, there is one realm in society, in the society of life today, that perhaps is one of the greatest methods of taking the truth away from our young believers. And it is what I would call the intellectual realm.

The intellectual realm. Read sometime 1 Timothy 6, 19-21 to the end of the chapter. And Paul warns even Timothy and the saints of his day to beware of pseudosciences, the rational reasoning of the minds of men that are contrary to the word of God.

Now with no disparaging thought regarding the value of human science. But when human science is placed ahead of the revelation of God's truth, that's wrong. The word of God is the final authority for whatever revelation of truth God declares.

And no human reasoning can take its place except without disaster. It's one of the ways, Paul said, Little children, don't let anyone seduce you. Now to correlate it together quickly.

Here's the family. Now you just ask the Lord in yourself where you are. The fathers, the young men, the little children.

But with the responsibility, the father said, I want you to grow up. My, I remember when my kids were young and probably your own had done the same. The kitchen door post was marked continually as they grew up.

They'd stand against there sometimes nearly every day. You'd think they were going to grow every day. And put a mark across the door post.

And beloved, may I ask, I say it earnestly, and I ask my own soul, John, how much have you grown? How much are you growing? My beloved, will you not ask it of yourself? Am I growing in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? One word in closing, verse 28, is John's closing word in this section, and he addresses it to all the family. For may I repeat, the word children, properly in the original, takes in the whole family. Little children, the youngsters, the little ones in the family.

But in verse 28, know, and be ashamed before him at his coming. Now I don't know whether you'll agree with this comment as I close, but I am persuaded that what John is meaning here, when the Lord comes, children, we who have been your teachers, we who have been your leaders, we who have been your guides, we who have been your instructors, when the Lord comes, we don't want to feel ashamed of you. Now look, you may put yourself in that way, but I believe frankly, John's referring to the apostles and the servants of God.

Little children, please don't make us feel ashamed when we come before the Lord. My beloved, what a responsibility to grow spiritually. This lady said to me many years ago, she said, Mr. Bramwell, what school did you go to? I said, listen sister, I'm still in school.

Never get out of it. One thing I'm grateful for, I don't have to live as long as Methuselah did, but nevertheless, if I had to, I'd still be in school. My fellow believer, please may I exhort, may God help each one of us to say, Lord, help me to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of him who is from the beginning.

That I may spiritually mature to his honor and glory, and to the joy and to the happiness of the Father. Shall we pray? Blessed Father, we sometimes wonder what you think of your children. We could each one say, Lord, what do you think of me? As we close this section of the study of thy word tonight, may every one of us say in the words of the psalmist, search me, O God, and know my heart.

Try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way, way of pain or grief in me. And lead me in the way of a lasting. Blessed Father, we want to grow to thy satisfaction and to our Lord's glory.

And this is the deep and earnest plea of our hearts as we close the study. Lord, make us matured Christians. It's up to us, Father.

And all the enabling grace is provided by the Spirit, through the word, that we may grow. For we ask you, giving thanks, we're in the family. We're in the Beth family.

And Lord, we pray, help us to show to the world we belong to the Beth family. In Jesus' name, for his glory, amen.

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