

Devout Young Men

Introduction. It's important to understand 1 John as a response to the rise of an early form of Gnosticism. This was a religious mysticism that took Christian ideals and propagated an understanding of salvation based on esoteric "knowledge". According to this view, redemption is through direct knowledge of the supreme, hidden divinity, attained via mystical or esoteric insight, not through repentance of sin and faith in Christ's death to bring about spiritual rebirth.

In 1 John 2:12-14, John addresses the people whom he is writing. In vv. 13-14, he mentions "young" men. The Greek term indicated anyone who was what we would consider younger today. You can tell that John had great confidence in these individuals because he mentions three traits that we can learn immensely from today.

I. Their Character

- A. John described them as "strong" which means "robust, mighty" (cp. "mightier" in Matthew 3:11; "boisterous" in Matthew 14:30; "vehement" in Hebrews 5:7). Every English version that I could find uses "strong."
- B. They were qualified for active and useful service in the cause of the Redeemer. All of us have to be "strong in the Lord" (Ephesians 6:10).
- C. Two qualities that will help younger ones to be "strong":
 1. Remember your Creator (Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:1).
 2. Let no one despise your youth (1 Timothy 4:12).

II. Their Source

- A. While they were strong, the author reminds them that their strength ultimately depends on one fact alone — the Word of God abiding in them.
- B. "Abide" means to stand fast in God's Word, to dwell in God's Word, to persist in God's Word.
 1. In a nutshell, abiding in Christ means allowing His Word to fill our minds, direct our wills, and transform our affections.
 2. Words the Bible uses besides "abide" include:
 - a) "Meditate" (Psalm 1:2; Joshua 1:8).
 - b) "Consider" (2 Timothy 2:7).
 - c) "Look into" (James 1:25).
 - d) "Dwell" (Colossians 3:16).
 - e) "See" (Jeremiah 2:31).
 - f) "Bind" (Deuteronomy 6:7).
 - g) "Receive" and "search" (Acts 17:11).
 - h) "Hide" (Psalm 119:9-16).
 - i) "Hold fast" (1 Corinthians 15:2).
 - j) "Piercing" (Hebrews 4:12).
 - k) "Eat" (Jeremiah 15:16).
 3. The first term used above is "meditate" (Psalm 1:2; Joshua 1:8).

- a) Eugene Peterson, in *Eat This Book*, tells us that the Hebrew word for “meditate” is the same word used in Isaiah 31:4, which speaks of a hungry lion growling (hagah) over his prey.
 - b) One way we’re to approach the Bible is to meditate or “growl” over it. Picture a hungry lion, in all its power, focused, serious, and concentrated on every part of its meal, growling out of pleasure and intensity as it eats. We need to come to the Bible with purpose and intensity, wishing to catch every word God has for us that will nourish our hungry souls. Do we too often come to the Bible casually, not really hungry, not really expecting to gain anything we might need?
- C. So how can we abide in the Word?
- 1. We should acquire truth and gain wisdom, discipline, and understanding—this sort of life pleases God and brings joy to parents. Getting truth means acquiring training in the truth, and gaining understanding means developing the perception and practical knowledge of the truth (Proverbs 23:23-25).
 - 2. “Rightly dividing” in 2 Timothy 2:14-15 suggests a plowman making a straight furrow in the soil.
 - a) As Timothy teaches the Scriptures, he’s to guide the Word of truth along a straight path and not turn aside into the devious paths of deceiving interpretations.
 - (1) A “straight” path would be the truths in vv. 11-13.
 - (2) A “crooked” path would be the error in vv. 16-18.
 - b) “Reading into” the text what clearly isn’t there is of help to nobody but is shockingly common.

III. Their Proof

- A. They had overcome the evil one.
 - 1. The NKJV uses the term “wicked one,” which occurs multiple times in the New Testament (Matthew 13:19, 38; Ephesians 6:16; 1 John 2:13-14; 3:12; 5:18-19).
 - 2. “Evil one” was used alternatively several times in the New Testament (Matthew 5:37; 6:13; Luke 11:4; John 17:15; 2 Thessalonians 3:3).
- B. How to overcome (1 Peter 5:9).
 - 1. Temptation is something we all have in common. Scripture admonishes young people to “flee youthful lusts ...” (2 Timothy 2:22), but young and old alike need to consider the temptations they face. How we respond to it is extremely important to our welfare and happiness in life, but also eternally (1 Timothy 4:7-8).
 - 2. The account of Joseph relates how a young man resisted temptations and maintained his faithfulness to God.
 - a) Joseph had been sold by his brothers into slavery. He was taken to a foreign land and became a servant of Potiphar, an Egyptian. Regardless of his “bad deal” in life, Joseph didn’t blame God, but continued to trust and serve Him.
 - b) When Potiphar’s wife “cast longing eyes” on Joseph and wanted to seduce him to engage in sexual immorality, he consistently refused.

There's a strength observed in Joseph that many don't understand and don't want to possess. Many would mock at Joseph's moral strength and consider his behavior bizarre (cp. 1 Peter 4:4).

- c) In Joseph's account (Genesis 39:7-18), there are four factors which contributed to his strength in time of temptation.
 - (1) He remembered that others trusted him.
 - (a) "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand" (Genesis 39:8). There's something powerful in the presence of temptation when we remember others have placed confidence in us.
 - (b) Perhaps it's the memory of loving, concerned parents who have taught you the importance of behaving responsibly (Ephesians 6:4). Or, recalling how much your husband or wife love you, and the vows of faithfulness you pledged to each other (Ephesians 5:22-33). Maybe it's a close friend, an esteemed teacher, or a respected employer who genuinely cares for you.
 - (c) Potiphar had entrusted so much to the responsibility of Joseph. How could Joseph now betray that confidence? When tempted, consider how many others will be affected by your actions.
 - (2) He wanted to please God.
 - (a) "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). Something is counted as wickedness and sin because it's a transgression of God's Word (1 John 3:4).
 - (b) God has spoken clearly about the sin of sexual immorality and the virtue of moral purity (Genesis 26:10; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; 7:2-5; Hebrews 13:4). A knowledge of the Bible is of paramount value when enticed to sin.
 - (c) However, there's a difference between knowledge and faith. Faith means "trust" — a trust that's based on what we learn in God's word (Romans 10:17). There are many people who may "know" a particular action is wrong, but they may not have "faith" to dedicate themselves in service to God. Joseph's faith was the reason he resisted temptation (1 John 5:4).
 - (3) He was careful of his environment.
 - (a) "So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her" (Genesis 39:10). The fact that Joseph was cautious to not put himself in the situation of being alone with her is significant. Her repeated efforts to seduce Joseph to sin were met by Joseph's good judgment to avoid placing himself in a compromising situation where sin could occur.
 - (b) A key element in self control and purity is demonstrated here. Doing right isn't only a matter of the strength of my will to refuse evil, but having the good judgment to avoid the situation altogether when possible.
 - (c) If Joseph had allowed himself the opportunity, he might very well have taken it. Many like to place themselves in situations, as if to

say, “I want to see how close I can come to evil without crossing the line.” This sadly dooms many good Christians to failure (Romans 13:14).

- (4) He ran scared from sin.
 - (a) Joseph “fled and ran outside,” leaving his outer garment in her wicked grasp (Genesis 39:12). The nature of this temptation, because of the power of the sexual appetite, left Joseph with only one recourse — to run!
 - (b) To have hesitated could have proven disastrous. The godly will find themselves in situations that’ll be frightening because of the temptations and the knowledge of one’s own weaknesses.
 - i) In Proverbs 23:1-3, Solomon warns that someone must exercise caution in the presence of a ruler, for he may entertain with ulterior motives.
 - ii) The food aims not to feed him but to either test the guest’s character or entrap the guest to do the host’s bidding. If the first, the ruler will detest the guest as a glutton and wreck his career. If the second, the guest will feel obliged to do the ruler’s bidding. His hospitality is deceptive.
 - (c) As with Joseph, we have to listen to God’s warning to “flee fornication” (1 Corinthians 6:18), as well as fleeing a lot of other temptations: “love of money” (2 Timothy 6:9-11), “youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22), etc.

Conclusion. Develop your character. Concentrate on the Word. Overcome your worldly desires. You’ll be an exceptional assistance to your family, your church, and your community.

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