

1A father's charge to young men

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1 John 2:14: *"I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him from has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one."*

The fathers are to take what they know of the Father and impart it to the young men.

The strength of the fathers is in their knowledge of God. Knowledge to us simply means intellectual comprehension. But in the Bible, to know means to know a person, not a thing. Knowledge is about intimate personal relationship and experience. To know God is not to know things about God, even correct things, it is to walk with God, to know His heart. When a couple has been married for a few years, they get to know each other so well the one knows what the other is thinking even a word passing between them. After years of walking with God, we should come to know Him intimately, but this kind of knowledge is only gained through years of relationship.

The strength of the young men is in the Word of God and in their ability to overcome the enemy. This is an interesting statement. We tend to think that it would take as many years to come to know God's Word and to have spiritual power to overcome the enemy as it would to gain the type of knowledge of God possessed only by the fathers. Yet such is not the case. It is true that some levels of understanding God's Word take years to reach. But the problem lies in our over-emphasis on intellectual knowledge. While it make take years or advanced training to understand certain aspects of Scripture, or to be able to get up and teach the church about it, most of the Bible is pretty simple. Anyone can gain a sufficient grasp of it quickly enough to use it. A brand-new convert with only a small understanding of the Word can use it against the enemy to devastating effect. By the same token, an unbelieving or liberal-minded professor of theology may have accumulated a lifetime of facts about the Bible - some of them erroneous - but in truth understands it less than the new convert on fire for God. There is something isn the spirit of a young man which takes the Bible as a sword and jumps at the chance of using it in battle. That's what he's talking about here.

The same thing is true for the second part of the statement. Young men are destined by God to overcome the enemy. You don't have to have known God for years to enter into battle and triumph. After all, the armed forces usually recruit men under 25, not over 50! There is a raw strength of faith in young men which can be harnessed to achieve great things.

Satan's strategy, therefore, is to neutralize the strength of the young men. The young men are the future fathers and leaders, and if he destroys them now, he destroys the future of the church. That's why the fathers (who know God and equally know the enemy and his ways), are charged with safeguarding the young men and helping them to achieve their destiny. The generals, through their years of experience, know their enemy, know his tactics, and know the way to win. But it is the soldiers who will fight the battle. The job of the generals (like the fathers in the

church) is to release the young men in such a way that their strength is employed most effectively.

But what are the enemy's tactics? Fortunately John, as a father, tells us. Immediately after he refers to overcoming the enemy, he reveals the enemy's weapons: *"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. For all that is of the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but from the world"* (verses 15-16).

Here he lists three things:

The lust of the flesh. We interpret the flesh very narrowly to refer to sexual sins, but actually in the Bible it refers to our sinful human nature in rebellion against God. The mind set on the flesh is hostile to the Law of God, Paul tells us (Rom. 8:7). He tells the Corinthians they are fleshly, and then illustrates it not by sexual sins (though they had some of those) but by sins of jealousy and strife. The flesh represents sheer rebellion against God. The flesh places myself at the centre of the universe. The flesh wants nothing to do with the cross. Satan will lead you down some of these roads: Do what you want. Don't let anyone judge you. No society in history has been devoted to the pleasure and fulfilment of its inhabitants as much as ours. God wants warriors totally consumed by His call on their lives. He calls you to declare war on the flesh. If you don't it, will consume you.

The lust of the eyes. I interpret this to include sexual sins, but also the sheer pursuit of materialism. I want what I see. This is the wealthiest society in history, but also the most addicted. People want what they see and will do anything to get it. Any form of addiction, including sexual, starts with giving in to temptation. But no moral temptation is successful unless there is a pre-existing defect in character. The biggest cause of marital unfaithfulness is not sexual lust but the desire on the part of men to hold power and control. I want what I see, and I will do anything to get it. The cure is found in 2 Cor.. 4:18: *"We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*

The boastful pride of life. Men are driven to succeed. It is part of the leadership genes God has placed within them. But, as with other gifts of God, it can be twisted by the enemy. When we have not found our entire worth and significance in who we are in Christ, we have to find it somewhere else. We pursue a career, a reputation, position and wealth. We are prepared to sacrifice everything else, including family, to attain it. Our success becomes our god. As young men, God wants this issue settled now. Whatever God has planned for you, whether it involves fame or complete obscurity, wealth or relative poverty, is immaterial. Fix your eyes on the goal. Paul was a man who had found his significance in his religious position, but realized when he came to Christ he had to set it all aside. After that, he had a different viewpoint: *"I press on, in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus... forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:12-14).