

## **Selected Sermons #17**

The Festival Half of the Church Year by E. Schaller

### **I John 2:12-17 Reminiscere**

I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from, the world. The world and its desire pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

#### **Dearly beloved of God, fellow Christians –**

A gathering of Christians such as we have here today is indeed a very select audience. Of such people one can expect that they will understand and put to use the powerful message of our text. Otherwise it would be a quite hopeless effort to preach it. Often, when we read the

words of John, *“Do not love the world,”* we do get such a hopeless feeling. We think of the many, many people who are slaves to love of the world. Some of them are observing Lent. They think they are, saying, *“During Lent we shall give up some of our sinful pleasure. We won’t dance; we won’t drink; we won’t go to night clubs.”* Such people are just on furlough; the world is giving them a little vacation. They do not have the slightest understanding of what the apostle is saying in our text. We think also of ourselves and fear it is entirely possible that there are some here today (among the true Christians) to whom John is not speaking. His message is addressed to carefully chosen people whom he names, and he goes to considerable trouble to explain why he is writing to them. It is, then, a very personal message suited to a few fortunate and blessed individuals. God grant that you may be numbered among those who can receive . . .

**John’s confidential warning against love of the world.**

We will wish to consider both

- I. That it is surely addressed to us**
- II. Why it ought to be heeded by us**

**I. *I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.***

This is a most blessed company which the apostle calls his *little children*. He learned this expression from the Savior, with whom it was a fond name for his true, dear

disciples. Most of them were grown men and women, yet he embraced them in his word, “Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer.” (John 13:33)

And what a fitting name it was for them, **young or old**, for from the word of the gospel preached to them they first learned about their true Father. Jesus had brought them to this knowledge by revealing himself as the Savior who had come to reconcile them to God, to bring back peace between them and God by taking away the handwriting of their sins which was against them, nailing it to his cross. To belong to the world and to be guilty before God is one and the same thing, for the whole world is guilty. The *little children* have been rescued from this guilt, for **their names**, though written in human records of birth (and will be written on their gravestones) **are also written in heaven**, in the book of God’s family. This is because they bear the name of Jesus in their hearts. That name means that their *sins are forgiven*.

How fortunate are the children of the Triune God! Are they not free from the tragedy, the doom that is hanging over this earth? No one can lay anything to their charge; no one can condemn them. They belong to Jesus Christ, in whom they trust, and whom they serve in faith. These children enjoy certain peculiar advantages also according to their station in life. Though all are children of God, there are two distinct groups of them – the old and the young.

The apostle addresses them separately. **The older children** have lived in this world a longer time and

therefore look back on years of struggle in the night of this world-age, for the life of a child of God is lived against the powers of darkness that rule in this world. It is warfare, constantly, against those who would get back power over his soul and bind him again in the service of sin. The older Christian has a great advantage, for he has much of this battle behind him. As he advances in years, he seems to be climbing ever higher out of the dark valley – and as he nears the crest of life’s hill, he begins to see the first light of dawn.

Not that the later years are easy, but there is greater security, for the **fathers** have come to *know* so well, in good and evil days, *the Lord of Creation who was from the beginning*. They have formed a close and wonderful friendship with the eternal Savior and have begun to taste a little of the meaning of eternity. This closeness to Jesus came from years of associating with him in his holy Word.

Though life has been filled with serious shortcomings and with many failures, Jesus has never failed them. He has always been ready with forgiveness; in joy and sorrow their companion, in temptations their guardian, in sickness their physician, in bereavement their comfort. It is fine to be so rich in experience and to know that most of the fighting is over. It is wonderful to have grown through the years near to Jesus’ heart. For such children of God, the command “*Do not love the world*” will come with a special force.

How, then, is it with the other group – **the younger**? We may feel that it is the youth who find it hardest to appreciate the warning not to love the world, that it is the young who are most helpless against the dangers of the world. They seem like easy prey to the glamour of the world, its inviting sins and easy ways – but hear with what confidence the apostle singles them out and speaks to them.

Are they **Christian young people**? Then they have every advantage; *they are strong* and have already tasted the victory. What is their strength? Certainly it is not of the flesh, which is strong in them, and the enemy is fierce against them. They are strong in the Lord because *the Word of God abides in them*. Unless they throw it away, their victory is certain. Is it not true that, though Satan goes about as a roaring lion and scowls fiercely, though he breathes out threatening and slaughter, “he is judged, the deed is done, one little word can fell him”? To such people, young and old, one can speak as John does. Surely we belong to that select audience.

**II.** Let us then hear **how it ought to be heeded by us**. *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.*

We are not now speaking of *the world* as God created it or even of the natural world operating by the laws of God in divine orderliness. The *world* of our text is that disarranged, corrupted realm in which the devil is the ruling spirit. He is its “*prince,*” as the Lord called him; the “*god of this world,*” as the Apostle Paul names him. According to St. Paul, writing to the Galatians, “Christ gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.” (Galatians 1:4) Though it would be natural to think, then, that having escaped from this world, God’s children would look upon it with horror and would on no account want any part of it again, we know that we cannot expect this. If we could, there would be no need of this Word of God. As it is, we are here dealing with the very heart of Satan’s hellish campaign to destroy God’s children. His bait for the trap is *this world*, for here the deadly poison is offered.

The world’s advantages for living – its riches, its wisdom, its righteousness, and its honors – are put before us by Satan not to use but to accept in exchange for our souls. We are tempted to put them into the service of sin. Here is the opportunity for lust. Every sinful desire finds a fulfillment in the things of this world. Everything (though God created it) can be used to feed the eyes and the flesh and the pride of sumptuous, rich living. In short, the world has been converted into a luxurious place wherein one can live far from God, close to hell. Now, why does this attract

children of God? - Because the child of God has this flesh yet living within himself or herself. The attraction exists and as if by a magnet gives consent to give one's life to be used in the enjoyment of *the "pride of life"*. This *"pride of life"* would have us become a prisoner again and destroy utterly the whole glory of the *"new man"*, in whom God's love lives.

And to what end? *The world is passing away, and the lust of it.* Does it not remind us of an old-time circus parade? We hear the blaring of trumpets as the procession approaches with shouting and acclaim of the people. At last the parade passes before us with its tinsel and gaudy trappings, and we think, *"How glamorous, how utterly delightful is a circus!"* But already it is passing by, soon vanishes in the distance, and all is again quiet except the stirring of the dust. The street is empty, littered with cast-off paper, and the sun is burning down with a real heat. So does the *world pass away*. It is like a handful of sand – the tighter we clutch it, the faster it dribbles through our fingers, and we are left with soiled hands but nothing else. Indeed, *Fleeting is the worldling's pleasure,/ All its vaunted pomp and show;/ Solid joys and lasting treasure only Zion's children know.*

What is this over against having our names written in heaven? Let the old and the young among us note it will! The **fathers** must not take pride in their past experience, saying, *"Oh, there is no danger to us any more. We are too old to be snared by the music of the world."* Think of David

who was an elderly man when his eyes deceived him, and he fell. Think of Peter. Think of the miser who died so suddenly in his riches.

Nor let **the young** become secure in the grace that is theirs and think that they, more than others, will escape the allurements of the world. Instead of over-confidence, let us develop a passion for the love of God, the sweetness of values that are eternal. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6) Let us claim these blessings rather than forfeit them. *He who does the will of God abides forever.* This is our Lord's confidential assurance for you and me in these last days of sore distress. Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and treasure it! Amen!

The Savior calls; let every ear #281

My Jesus, as thou wilt #420

How can I thank thee, Lord #417