

I JOHN: DISCERNING TRUE FROM FALSE SPIRITUALITY

Part VI: Practical Maturation Levels In True Spirituality, 1 John 2:12-27

A. The Little Children Maturity Level

(1 John 2:13c, 18-27)

I. Introduction

- A. One may be in spiritual fellowship with the Lord, but his spiritual maturity level is an entirely different matter: fellowship relates to one's spiritual health while maturity relates to his growth level in that healthy state.
- B. 1 John 2:12-27 addresses the three practical maturation levels in true spirituality, and we start with the introductory level experienced by all new believers, that of the Little Children level in 1 John 2:13c, 18-27:

II. The Little Children Maturity Level, 1 John 2:13c, 18-27.

- A. We know that John addressed practical maturation levels in true spirituality in 1 John 2:12-27 as follows:
 - 1. In 1 John 2:12 and 2:28, the KJV terms "little children" render the Greek term, *teknion*, the diminutive of *teknon* that refers to a child in general, a "born one" in a family, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 815-816; John G. Mitchell, Fellowship: Three Letters From John, 1974, p. 63.
 - 2. However, between those verses, in 1 John 2:13-27, the KJV term "little children" translates the Greek noun *paidion*, "very young child" (Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 609) or "little baby" (Ibid., Mitchell, p. 70).
 - 3. Thus, John addresses all believers by use of the word *teknon*, but he shifts to discuss their maturity levels in 1 John 2:13-27, addressing spiritually immature babes in 1 John 2:13c and 2:18-27, spiritual young men in 1 John 2:13b and 2:14b-17 and spiritual fathers in 1 John 2:13a, 14a. (Ibid., Mitchell, p. 63-75)
- B. John's message to immature spiritual babes in 1 John 2:13c, 18-27 reveals their characteristics and needs:
 - 1. Spiritual babies have come to know the Father in a permanent way (*egnokate*, the perfect tense of *ginosko*, "to know," Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 815; Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 159-161; The Analy. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 114, 1 John 2:13c. Thus, they are positionally saved, having eternal security.
 - 2. However, spiritual babes tend to rely on others around them for spiritual nurture so that they become vulnerable to heeding false teachers and apostates who arise in the organized Church, 1 John 2:18.
 - 3. John thus informed spiritual babies that false teachers arise and leave the true Church because they are not part of God's actual flock, but are imposters who have crept in among God's true people, 1 John 2:19.
 - 4. This leads to a concern by the spiritual baby on how he can discern false teachers to avoid being misled, and John refers to two key possessions even spiritual babies have to discern false teachers, 1 John 2:20-27:
 - a. First, even spiritual babes have Almighty God the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4) indwelling them (Romans 8:9b), and through Him they know all things [in discerning truth from error in the context], 1 John 2:20. The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence acts as a spiritual Parent to keep the new believer from being an "orphan" (*orphanos*, Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 586-587), John 14:18 NIV. Accordingly, the Comforter the Holy Spirit teaches the believers all things (John 14:26) and guides him into all truth (John 16:13).
 - b. Second, John noted that the objective Word of God defines true from false teachers, noting that anyone who denies that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God is a false teacher, 1 John 2:21-23. For this reason even new believers as "newborn babes" are directed to desire the sincere milk of God's Word that they might grow through its application, 1 Peter 2:2; Ibid., Mitchell, p. 72. Indeed, the written Word of God is the believer's ultimate authority for faith and practice, 2 Timothy 3:15-17.
 - 5. As the spiritual baby then relies on the Holy Spirit and uses Scripture for discernment, he remains in fellowship with the Lord and avoids being misled and spiritually harmed by false teachers, 1 John 2:24-27.

Lesson: *The first or "entry" level of maturity for all believers is that of "spiritual babe," and such believers realize they are truly saved, and in that salvation they are eternally secure. However, believers at this level tend to rely on people around them in the Church for their stability and can be susceptible to harm by false teachers, those who are not truly part of God's family, which teachers eventually leave the Church in their waywardness. Thus, spiritual babies need to rely on the indwelling Holy Spirit to discern true from false teachers, and they must grow in their use and understanding of Scripture as their ultimate authority for faith and practice.*

Application: *(1) If we realize that we are a "spiritual babe," may we overcome disillusionment at seeing people in the Church turn from the truth and leave by ceasing to depend on people around us for spiritual stability and instead rely on the Holy Spirit and God's written Word for discernment. (2) If we have matured beyond the "spiritual baby" level, may we direct immature believers to heed the Holy Spirit and Word of God for stability.*