

# **I JOHN: A STUDY IN SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT**

## **V. Discerning Immature Believers And Their Needs**

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

### **I. Introduction**

- A. John wrote 1 John to counter heretical views (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 881), so the epistle provides discernment, and is thus “filled with contrasts – light and darkness (1:6-7; 2:8-11); love of world and love of God (2:15-17); children of God and children of the devil (3:4-10); the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist (4:7-12, 16-21).” (Ryrie Study Bible KJV, 1978, “Introduction to the First Letter of John: Contents,” p. 1770)
- B. We view the epistle for much needed spiritual discernment in our era, and study John’s teaching on discerning immature believers and their needs in 1 John 2:13c, 18-27 for our insight, application and edification:

### **II. Discerning Immature Believers And Their Needs, 1 John 2:13c, 18-27.**

- A. John’s discussion on the various maturity levels is somewhat puzzling and needs to be explained (as follows):
1. In 1 John 2:12-27, John addressed believers in their different levels of spiritual maturity, referring to spiritual babes as “little children,” to believers in the intermediate level of maturity as “young men,” and to mature believers as “fathers.” (John G. Mitchell, Fellowship: Three Letters from John, 1974, p. 63)
  2. 1 John 2:12 KJV addresses “little children,” but the Greek term for that expression is *teknia*, anyone who has been born into God’s family regardless of his maturity level. (Ibid.) Thus, every true believer of any maturity level appreciates the fact that his sins have been forgiven him for the sake of Christ’s name.
  3. After addressing all believers in 1 John 2:12, in verse 13, John initially addressed the three maturity levels.
  4. John repeated this triad starting in 1 John 2:14 but moved with comments on each group up to 1 John 2:27, and we re-arrange John’s material to start with “little children,” move next to “young men” and end with “fathers” so as to understand the steps we need to take to progress from one level of maturity to the next.
- B. John’s address to “little children,” spiritual babes, is then given in 1 John 2:13c, 18-27 KJV (as follows):
1. The Greek term for “little children” in 1 John 2:13b and 18 (that starts John’s 1 John 2:18-27 section on “little children”) is *paidia*, the word for “little babies” who are spiritually immature. (Ibid., p. 70-75)
  2. “Little children,” spiritual babies, have experientially come to know (*egnokate*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 815) God the Father (1 John 2:13c). They have seen the Father work in their lives since their salvation.
  3. However, the big threat to spiritual babies is the false teacher (Ibid., Mitchell, p. 71), so writing to the *paidia* “little children” in 1 John 2:18-27 (Ibid.), John instructed them on handling false teachers:
    - a. Since even spiritual babies have heard of the coming antichrist of the future Tribulation, John added that even now there are many antichrists, many false teachers like him, for we live in the last days, 1 John 2:18.
    - b. Spiritual babies are stunned to witness what they once thought were godly teachers leave the church exposed as false teachers, but John wrote that such teachers were never true believers, and they leave the Church that it might be manifested that they really did not belong to God’s spiritual family, 1 John 2:19.
    - c. Such awareness can leave the spiritual baby feeling insecure about being able to discern true from false teachers, so John stated that the Holy Spirit Who has spiritually anointed them at salvation equips even little babies in Christ to discern between truth and error, 1 John 2:20. (Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to 1 John 2:20)
    - d. Since even spiritual babies in Christ know the truth by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit, John added that false teachers, antichrists and apostates, deny that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, and in doing so, they also deny both Christ and God the Father Whom spiritual babies have come to know, v. 21-23.
    - e. John then directed little babies to remain committed to God’s Word (in 1 Corinthians 12:3 and 1 John 4:1-3) that clarifies Jesus’ identity as the Messiah and Son of God, 1 John 2:24; Ibid., Mitchell, p. 74.
    - f. Since spiritual babies themselves confess Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, John assured them that God has promised them unconditional salvation security, 1 John 2:25.
    - g. John summarized his teaching to spiritual babies by noting that he was telling them about false teachers, and that the Holy Spirit in them via His discernment was the solution to false teachers, 1 John 2:26-27.

***Lesson:*** *Spiritual babies have experientially come to know God the Father, but they are vulnerable to being misled by false teachers who pose as godly teachers but are not even true Christians. Thus, spiritual babies must (1) rely on the indwelling Holy Spirit’s discernment to handle false teachers, and (2) examine (a) all teachers and (b) their own unconditional salvation security status by the test of the confession of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God.*

***Application:*** *If we realize that we are spiritual babies, may we heed John’s teaching on overcoming false teachers.*