

GOD'S BABUSHKAS:
The Three Stages of the Christian Life, Nesting One in Another
(1 John 2:12-14)

I. WELCOME

- Pastoral Prayer
- Today's Text: (Slide)

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. ¹³I am writing to you, fathers, because you have come to know him *who has been* from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have triumphed over the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you have come to know the Father. ¹⁴I have written to you, fathers, because you have come to know him *who has been* from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have triumphed over the evil one. – 1 Jn. 2:12f

- Prayer for the ministry of the Word

II. INTRODUCTION

A. Occasion and Purpose of 1 John

1. Infiltration, deception, *loss of assurance*
2. Response, instruction, *restoration of assurance*
3. Something to note: In ministering to the Asian believers, John addresses three different categories of Christians: Little children, young men, fathers

B. Today's Two Big Ideas:

#1. In today's text we find an inspired revelation of *the three basic stages of the Christian life*.

#2. As Christians grow and pass into the next stage of the Christian life, they never outgrow and leave behind the previous one; rather, they understand and appreciate the previous one at deeper and deeper levels. Thus, Christian fathers (and mothers) continue to be little children and strong young men and women, retaining all the advantages of the previous stages, but leaving behind the pitfalls.

3. Illustration of what Christian growth is NOT: Metamorphosis (Slide)

4. Illustration of what Christian growth IS: Babushka's (Slide)

III. STAGE #1: LITTLE CHILDREN

A. Text: I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake . . . I have written to you, children, because you have come to know the Father.

B. Comments:

1. Your sins are forgiven (Rom. 4:7-8, Psalm 32; Luke 7)
2. For his Name's sake (and not my works) (Acts 2:21, 4:12, Rom. 10:13)
3. You have come to know the Father (Mt. 11:27, Gal. 4:6, 1 Thess. 1:9)

C. Application: Not to lose the joy, not to lose the wonder!

D. Pitfalls:

1. Rich in experience, weak in understanding
2. Vulnerable to various kinds of enemy activity (Eph. 4)
3. Illustration: Dean vs. the bad soil (Mt. 13)
4. Moral: Dean needed to reach Stage #2!

IV. STAGE #2: YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN

A. Text:

I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have triumphed over the evil one.

B. Comments:

1. You are strong (It IS possible! Rooted, grounded, built up, Eph. 3, Col. 2)
2. The Word of God abides in you (this is HOW it's possible; Luke 24, Mt. 7:24)
3. You have triumphed over the evil one (This too is possible! Victory over the evil one (Eph. 6)
 - a. The evil one has many strategies: temptation (enticement), condemnation, impersonation, deception, confusion, doubt, fear, infiltration into churches, persecution, etc.)

b. There is ONE three-fold solution to them all: *Truth Illumined*, enabling *Discernment* of what is true and false, good and evil, beautiful and ugly (Heb. 5:12-13), enabling the *Wielding of the Shield of Faith* (to receive or resist) (Eph. 6)

¹³ For everyone who *only* partakes of milk is unskilled in the message about righteousness, for he is *still* a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, whose senses have been trained by constant practice to discern both good and evil.

Taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one.

C. Illustration: Milton Vincent (Reading: Romans 5 became Milton's shield; or Dean, deliverance, John 12)

D. Pitfalls: (Rev. 2:1f) Pride, ungodly ambition, forgetfulness of one's first love. Note Well: The Lord takes us to stage #3 through chastening/setbacks/lapses/etc. to teach us absolute dependency upon him, and all the blessings that godly dependence brings (E.g. Peter, Driscoll, Tully, etc.)

V. STAGE #3: FATHERS AND MOTHERS

A. Text: ¹⁴ I have written to you, fathers, because you have come to know him *who has been* from the beginning.

B. Comments:

1. You have come to know Him . . . (i.e., not merely introduced to, but now in a ripe, abiding, comfortable relationship with) (e.g., rather one's mate)

2. Who has been from the beginning (Rev. 1:4)

MP: It is Spirit-filled meditation upon God's loving, eternal purpose for His elect children that brings His spiritual child to mature adulthood.

¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear; for fear involves punishment, and he who fears has not been perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. – 1 John 4:18f

C. Pitfalls: Sleep!

VI. CAVEAT: LET'S BE CLEAR ABOUT SPIRITUAL MATURITY (Rom. 7, 8, 2 Cor. 12:10, Phil. 3:12f)

A. What it is not: Sinless perfection (that awaits us in heaven) (Rom. 7, Phil. 3:12f, 1 John 1:8-10)

B. 2. What it is: Growing dependency upon Christ and God for all things (Rom. 8, Gal. 5:16, 2 Cor. 12:10)

Quote: Newton shows us from Scripture that true sanctification is all about growing in humility, dependence, and gratitude. Joy blossoms in our hearts not as we try harder and harder to grow, but as we see more clearly the depths of our sin, and understand more fully our utter helplessness. Only then will we take our eyes off ourselves and look to Christ for all we need in life and in death. Only then will we truly cherish our Savior and believe that we need him every minute of every day, and that without him we can do nothing. – Gloria Duguid

VI. CONCLUSION

A. Question: How shall we become mature Christians?

B. Answers: By becoming one of God's Babushka's (Slide)

1. Be aware of the three stages of Christian life, and of the fact that mature Christians retain the strengths of all three. (Slide)

2. Never lose your childlike joy over the forgiveness of your sins, or your childlike wonder over having come to know the one true God.

3. Constantly strive to become stronger in Christ by asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate the life-giving truths of his Word, and to help you put them in practice

4. Cultivate through prayer and Bible meditation an awareness of God's *eternal* love, purpose, and plan for you in Christ.

5. Remember that Christian maturity is *not* sinless perfection, which must wait for the next life, but steady, humble, grateful, and joyful dependence upon God and Christ for all things.

C. Closing Quote from one of God's choice Babushkas, a true father in the Lord:

How good it would be if we could learn that God is easy to live with. Fellowship with Him is delightful beyond all telling. He communes with His redeemed in an easy, uninhibited fellowship that is restful and healing to the soul. He is not sensitive or selfish or temperamental. What He is today we shall find Him to be tomorrow and the next day and the next year. He is not hard to please (though He may prove hard to satisfy). He expects of us only what He has Himself first supplied. He is quick to mark every simple effort to please Him, and just as quick to overlook imperfections when He knows we meant to do His will. He may sometimes chasten us, it is true, but even then He does so with a smile, the proud, tender smile of a Father who is bursting with pleasure over an imperfect but promising son or daughter who is coming to look more and more like the One whose child he is every day. He loves us for ourselves and values our love more than galaxies of newly created worlds. Some of us are religiously jumpy and self-conscious

because we know that God sees our every thought and is acquainted with all our ways. We need not be. [Towards His children in Christ] God is the sum of all patience and the essence of kindly good will. We please Him most, not by frantically trying to make ourselves good, but by throwing ourselves with all our imperfections into His arms, believing that He understands everything and loves us still. – A. W. Tozer