

Doctrinal Summary of Spiritual Development & Maturity-The Spiritual Infant

In 1 John 2:12, John identifies that he is writing to some believers who are spiritual infants.

“I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake.”

The words “little children” are translated from the Koine Greek word τεκνία (“tek-ni-ah”) which more literally means, “infant children, being tools or instruments used to accomplish something.” It refers to the earliest stage of a human’s physical life beginning at his first breath. However, John uses the term in reference to believer’s spiritual development, describing spiritual infants whose main identifying feature is that their sins have been forgiven.

The words “have been forgiven” are translated from the Koine Greek word ἀφέωνται (“ah-phe-ohn-tai”) which more literally means, “they really have been acted upon in a completed action in the past with results that continue on to be sent away resulting in release of liability or responsibility.” The things which have been sent away are the sins of believers. This occurs in the moment of faith in Christ (cf. Jn. 3:18) and is the same moment in which the believer has eternal life (cf. Jn. 3:15). Because his sins are sent away from him, the believer is no longer liable or responsible for them. They are removed and are no longer his concern.

The spiritual infant has this reality as the basis for his maturity. He is at the most basic stage of spiritual development for there is nothing else to describe his maturity other than that he has been released from the liability of his sins because they have been sent away from him. He does not yet have any experiential knowledge of who God is because, until his sins were forgiven, he did not have any relationship with God and could not walk with Him. But now that he is a child of God, he can learn who his Heavenly Father is, experiencing His character by walking in a relationship with Him.

There are seven characteristics of God (cf. Rev. 5:6) which comprise His holiness. God is:

1. Love-Unconditionally pursuing what is best at His own sacrifice (1 John 4:8)
2. Omnipresent-Completely present in the universe (Psalm 139:8)
3. Omniscient-Completely knowing what is actual and potential (Colossians 2:3)
4. Eternal-Having no beginning and no end (Psalm 90:2)
5. Righteous-Relating properly to all things in accordance with their design (Psalm 145:17)
6. Omnipotent-Completely powerful to accomplish whatever He wills (Revelation 19:6)
7. Sovereign-The Supreme Authority Who reigns over all things (Hebrews 6:13)

As the spiritual infant interacts with his Heavenly Father, these attributes are encountered and he begins to learn that he can trust who God is. As he learns that he can trust his Heavenly Father, he learns that he can trust in the promises made by his Father concerning him. The more the spiritual infant walks with his Heavenly Father, the more he develops an experiential understanding with His character. This develops a readiness to trust His Father who will teach him to live righteously as a member of God’s royal family.

Learning who God is and that He will do what He says provides the spiritual infant with the necessary foundation to learn that the Father’s ways can be trusted for the next phase of his spiritual development. The more the believer understands who God is, the more He will trust and obey His ways.