

1 John 2:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

Analysis

I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. John begins a threefold address (verses 12-14) to different groups, though interpretation varies on whether these are chronological stages (new converts, mature believers, very mature) or comprehensive address to all believers from different perspectives. "I write unto you" (graphō hymin) uses present tense, emphasizing the current letter. "Little children" (teknia) is John's tender term for all believers (used in 2:1, 28), emphasizing their spiritual youth and need for pastoral care.

"Because your sins are forgiven you" (hoti aphēōntai hymin hai hamartiai)—the perfect tense "are forgiven" (aphēōntai) indicates completed action with continuing effect. Forgiveness is an accomplished reality, not uncertain hope. This isn't conditional ("will be forgiven if...") but declarative ("have been and remain forgiven"). This provides assurance—believers can know with certainty that their sins are forgiven.

"For his name's sake" (dia to onoma autou)—forgiveness isn't based on our merit, repentance quality, or spiritual maturity but on Christ's name—His person, work, and authority. "His name" represents all that Christ is and has done. Forgiveness rests on Christ's substitutionary atonement and righteous advocacy (2:1-2), not on human achievement. This eliminates boasting and provides security—forgiveness depends on Christ's finished work, not our fluctuating performance.

Historical Context

Assurance of forgiveness was revolutionary in the ancient world. Pagan religion offered no certainty—worshipers hoped sacrifices appeased gods but had no guarantee. Mystery religions promised purification but required ongoing rituals. Even Judaism's sacrificial system required repeated offerings with no final assurance. Christianity proclaimed definitive forgiveness through Christ's once-for-all sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10-14).

The phrase "for his name's sake" echoes Old Testament language where God acted "for His name's sake"—for His glory, reputation, and covenant faithfulness (Psalm 23:3, 106:8, Isaiah 48:9, Ezekiel 36:22). God forgives not because we deserve it but because Christ's work upholds God's glory and satisfies His justice. This God-centered foundation for forgiveness provides unshakeable assurance.

Medieval Catholicism struggled with assurance. The sacramental system emphasized ongoing penance, confession, and uncertain purgatorial cleansing. Reformers recovered biblical assurance—forgiveness is complete in Christ, known through faith, producing joy and security. Luther's breakthrough came in realizing righteousness is gift, not achievement—received through faith in Christ's name. John's declaration "your sins are forgiven" became central to Protestant assurance.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does knowing forgiveness is "for his name's sake" (Christ's work, not yours) provide security when you feel unworthy or sinful?
2. What difference does it make that forgiveness is perfect tense (completed and continuing) rather than future or conditional?

3. How should certain forgiveness affect your daily Christian life, relationships, and service?

Interlinear Text

Γράφω	ὑμῖν	τεκνία	ὅτι	ἀφέωνται	ὑμῖν	αἱ
I write	unto you	little children	because	are forgiven	unto you	G3588
G1125	G5213	G5040	G3754	G863	G5213	
ἀμαρτίαι	διὰ	τὸ	ὄνομα	αὐτοῦ		
your sins	for	G3588	name's	his		
G266	G1223		G3686	G846		

Additional Cross-References

Acts 10:43 (Sin): To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Acts 13:38 (Sin): Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:

Ephesians 1:7 (Sin): In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Acts 4:12 (Parallel theme): Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Psalms 106:8 (Parallel theme): Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.

Colossians 1:14 (Sin): In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

Psalms 25:11 (Sin): For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.

1 John 1:7 (Sin): But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

1 John 1:4 (Parallel theme): And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

Luke 24:47 (Sin): And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

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