

Structure of First John 2:12 to 2:14

Set 1	Set 2
2:12 I am writing to you, little children , to affirm that your sins are forgiven you on account of "Jesus'" name.	2:13c Indeed, I wrote to you, children , to affirm that you know the Father.
2:13a I am writing to you, fathers , to affirm that you know the One who is from the beginning.	2:14a Indeed, I wrote to you, fathers , to affirm that you know the One who is from the beginning.
2:13b I am writing to you, young men , to affirm that you have overcome the Evil One.	2:14b Indeed, I wrote to you, young men , to affirm that you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the Evil One.

First John 2:12-14 is also a highly structured grammatical unit. It is structured around two sets of three statements introduced by two tenses of the verb "**I write**": "I am writing" (γράφω / *graphō*) in the first set and "I wrote" (ἔγραψα / *egrapsa*) in the second set. The second set of statements duplicates some of the material in the first set. Each set addresses groups referred to as "**children**", "**fathers**", and "**young men**". This structure is visually illustrated above.

Unfortunately, the verse divisions in our English Bibles, which are not part of the original Greek text, do not align with this structure - one statement is in verse 2:12, three statements are in verse 2:13, and two statements are in verse 2:14.

The syntax of all six statements is identical: a form of the verb "to write", followed by an expression of direct address (children, fathers, young men), followed by an affirmation statement.

In Greek this syntax is: the Present or Aorist Tense form of γράφω / *graphō*, a vocative of address, and a ὅτι / *hoti* clause.

The statements sum up some of the teaching from the beginning of the letter, look forward to teaching that is ahead, and provide encouragement through affirmation statements that stress things that are true about the people John writes to.

Verse 2:12 looks back to verses 1:8-2:2 that focus on sin and confession.

Verse 2:13c looks back to verses 2:4-2:8 that focus on knowing God and keeping His commandments.

Verses 2:13a and 2:14a anticipate or look ahead to the section that God is Righteous (2:29-4:6).

Verses 2:13b and 2:14b anticipate or look ahead to the section that God is love (4:7-5:4).

The three main points made in the statements are:

- Their sins are forgiven.
- They know the Father.
- They have overcome the evil one.

Biblical scholars are unsure of the purpose for the tense change of the verb "I write". Suggestions include:

- There is no significance to the change in tense.
- The change in tense is merely a stylistic variation to avoid repetition.
- The change to the Aorist Tense indicates that John is now referring to the preceding part of the letter, an earlier letter such as Second or Third John, or the Gospel of John.
- The change is used for emphasis to underscore that what John writes is true, similar to saying, "Indeed!" or "This is important".

Overall, it appears that the change in tense is stylistic and added for some kind of emphasis or to heighten the rhetorical effect. Since we are not ancient Greek speakers, we cannot fully appreciate the subtle rhetorical feel of the language.