

## Five Truths God Wants Every Child of God to Know

### 1 John 5:13-21

**Introduction:** 1) In a letter to a man named George Ticknor (dated Nov. 25, 1817), Thomas Jefferson was critical of state legislatures for not “perceiv[ing] the important truths that knowledge is power, that knowledge is safety, and that knowledge is happiness.” One might challenge particulars of Jefferson’s statement, but there is certainly a ring of truth in it to be sure.

2) The apostle John certainly thought knowledge was important. In fact he was vitally concerned that his “little children” (5:21) know a number of things because they had come to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. In fact a quick survey of this 5 chapter letter reveals at least the following things we can know:

- 1) We can know that we know God (2:3, 13, 14; 4:7).
- 2) We can know that we are in God (2:5).
- 3) We can know that it is the last hour (2:18).
- 4) We can know the truth (2:21; 3:19).
- 5) We can know that Jesus is righteous (2:29).
- 6) We can know that we will be like Jesus (3:2).
- 7) We can know Jesus appeared to take away sins (3:5).
- 8) We can know that Jesus is sinless (3:5).

- 9) We can know that we have passed out of death into life (3:14).
- 10) We can know no murderer has eternal life (3:15).
- 11) We can know love (3:16; 4:16).
- 12) We can know that God abides in us (3:24; 4:13).
- 13) We can know the Spirit of God (4:2).
- 14) We can know the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of error (4:6).
- 15) We can know that we love God's children (5:2).
- 16) We can know that we have eternal life (5:13).
- 17) We can know that God answers prayer (5:15).
- 18) We can know that we will not practice sin (5:18).
- 19) We can know that we belong to God (5:19).
- 20) We can know that the Son of God has come (5:20).
- 21) We can know that the Son of God has given us understanding (5:20).
- 22) We can know Him who is true (5:20).

3) In this final section of 1 John (5:13-21), things we can know dominate the conversation. Seven times the word know appears. Christianity is not an "I hope so" or "I think so" faith. It is an "I know so" faith because what has been revealed in the Bible was given to us by God, a God who speaks and a God who speaks only truth. As he brings his letter to close, what is it, in particular, that John wants, that God wants, every child of His to know?

## **I. We can know we have eternal life      5:13**

1) In a real sense the entire letter of 1 John has been pointing to this verse. On five prior occasions, John has given his reasons for writing. I like the way John Piper lists and summarizes all six occurrences:

“1) 1 John 1:4: “We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.” John is an unashamed Christian Hedonist. The joy of their assurance will be his joy. And he wants it. It is good to want that kind of joy.

2) 1 John 2:1: “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteousness.” He hopes his book will give them fresh power to overcome sin. And part of his method in helping them overcome sin is to assure them that failures do not have to prove fatal to your eternal life.

3) 1 John 2:12-13: “I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name’s sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.” In other words, he is filled with hope that the ones he is writing to are truly

believers. They are forgiven. They do know God. They have triumphed over the evil one.

4) 1 John 2:21: “I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.”

Same thing: My letter is not to get you started in the Christian life, but to confirm you in it.

5) 1 John 2:26: “I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.” He is concerned with false teaching. This letter is meant to protect them from those who would lead them astray. In other words, the fact that we are born again does not mean we no longer need warnings.

6) 1 John 5:13: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.” This is the one that dominates in this letter. Most of what is here is designed to provide tests of life: “I write these things...that you may know that you have eternal life.” That is, that you may know you are born again from death to life.

Summing up all these reasons for writing 1 John goes like this: *I am writing because you are true believers, but there are deceivers in your midst, and I want you to be rock-solid confident in your present possession of eternal life*

*as regenerate children of God, so that you are not drawn away after sin.*

*And if this letter has that effect my joy will be complete.* So at the heart of his reason for writing is the desire to help them know they are born again—that they now have new spiritual life. Eternal Life.” (“Everyone Who Has Been Born of God Overcomes The World”, 2-24-08).

2) John tells us it is possible to have eternal life, the very life of God, and yet have doubts. And, he does not want us to have doubts. He wants us to have assurance. Therefore he provides multiple tests throughout the book (“These things” in verse 13 refers specifically to 5:1-12, but in general they refer to the entire book) revolving around the three themes of belief, obedience and love. Those who believe Jesus is the Son of God, pursue obedience, and love others can be assured they have eternal life right now. Today! Forever! Don’t doubt because of an ignorance of God’s Word and His promises. Don’t doubt because of a faulty theology (eternal life is something I can lose or forfeit). Don’t doubt because of disobedience. Don’t doubt because of hate. Flee to Jesus. He is the Word of Life (1:1). He is eternal life (1:2).

3) And remember: Feelings come and go and feelings can be deceiving. My confidence is in the Son of God, none else is worth believing. Jesus said in John 10:28-29, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me,

is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." I will take Jesus at His word. I can know I have eternal life.

## **II. We can know that God answers prayer      5:14-17**

1) With the assurance of eternal life comes another confidence: answered prayer. John addressed prayer in 1 John 3:22. There he informed us that God answers our prayers when we are 1) keeping his commandments and 2) doing those things that please Him. John now adds a 3<sup>rd</sup> requirement: "according to his will" (v.14). R. A. Torrey said, "Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God's infinite grace and power. All that God is and all that God has is at the disposal of prayer. But we must use the key. Prayer can do anything that God can do and since God can do anything, prayer is omnipotent." With these 3 keys in place, John says we can be confident toward God as we pray (v. 14). Indeed we can know he hears us (v.14-15) as we ask and we can "know that we have the request that we have asked of him" (v. 15).

2) George Mueller lived from 1805-1898. He was a great man of prayer who refused a regular salary and financial support for himself or the ministries he led. A leader of the Christian Brethren movement, Mueller said, "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is laying hold of His willingness."

Verse 14 again contains the crucial phrase: “according to His will.”

Nothing we ask for lies beyond the power of God except that which lies beyond His will, His purpose, His plan.

Question: Why would you want something contrary to God’s will? It is right to pray according to God’s will, and it is wise to pray according to God’s will. He knows what is best and He wants what is best: for His glory and our good. God wants to give you what you would want God to give you if you were wise enough to want it.

Now, God’s will may be different than what you want, but I believe this: it will always be better than what you want. Romans 12:2 tells us God’s will is good, acceptable and perfect. I want what God wants for me. I want God’s will.

3) In verses 16 & 17 John gets specific when it comes to prayer. Verses 14-15 were about petitions. Verses 16-17 are about intercession. The issue is seeing someone in sin. In the original text some form of the word “sin” appears 7 times in verses 16-18. Let me say before we go on that verse 16 is one of the most difficult verses to interpret in all of Scripture. A humble interpretation is right and wise.

First, John addresses a brother “sinning a sin” not leading to death. Then he addresses someone whose sin “leads to death.” The crucial question is this:

is John speaking of physical death or spiritual death? Further does he have a Christian in view in both instances or is the second situation that of an unbeliever? Again dogmatism is unwarranted in interpreting this verse, but my best attempt is this. John has spiritual death in mind and two different persons in view. Thus his argument is something like this: Brothers and sisters in Christ can fall into sin but their salvation and spiritual death is not at stake because they have Christ as their atonement and advocate and they believe in Him for eternal life. If you see them in sin, don't talk first to others about them (gossip?!). Talk first to God about them. Praying for their restoration is always God's will so pray to the Lord and God will give life, restore the joy and vitality of their salvation since their sins do not and cannot lead to spiritual death. They may be spiritually disciplined as Hebrews 12:5-13 teaches, but they cannot spiritually die.

4) Then John addresses a sin that he says leads to death. Interestingly, he does not say the one committing this sin is a brother. Of this sin John says "I do not say that one should pray for that." Note, he does not command us not to pray, but it is clear he is doubtful that it will do any good. Now the question which confronts us is this, "what is the sin that leads to death?"

Three main views have been put forward:

1. **A specific, deadly sin.** High handed sin, sin that is willful and deliberate; sin that is of a serious nature. Some, like F. F. Bruce, see the death as physical (ex. Ananias and Sapphira; Acts 5:1-11; Incestuous man at Corinth; 1 Cor. 5:5; Corinthians abusing the Lord's supper; 1 Cor. 11: 30).

2 **Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.** (Matt. 12:32; Mark 3:29). A deliberate, knowledgeable, willful, verbal and continual rejection of the truth that the Spirit bears witness to. It is a hardening of the heart to a point that prayer will not help.

3 **Total rejection of the gospel and Christ.** The sin of the false teachers who willfully and habitually oppose the witness of God to the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ (cf.2:19). This one is not called a brother. He is an apostate. D. Edmond Hiebert is helpful here: "These false teachers manifested the spirit of Antichrist, separated themselves from the true church, and perverted or rejected the apostolic message of redemption in Christ. In deliberately rejecting the incarnate Son of God, in whom eternal life is available, they committed themselves to a spiritual attitude and course of action that could only be characterized as "sin unto death" (*BibSac*, 1990. p. 320).

If this is correct, and I think this is the best option, John is saying reject the biblical teaching about Jesus and death, spiritual death, is your destiny. To pray for such a one is futile and useless. It will do no good.

5) Verse 17 affirms that all wrongdoing, all unrighteousness is sin, and yet he again states, “there is sin that does not lead to death.” Such sin can be confronted and even conquered thru the faithful intercession of one believer for another. Spurgeon said it so well in an address to his Pastors’ College regarding the power of prayer...

“Might not we win more victories if we used this weapon of all-prayer? All hell is vanquished when the believer bows his knee in importunate supplication. Beloved brethren, let us pray. We cannot all argue, but we can all pray; we cannot all be leaders, but we can all be pleaders; we cannot all be mighty in rhetoric, but we can all be prevalent in prayer. I would sooner see you eloquent with God than with men. Prayer links us with the Eternal, the Omnipotent, the Infinite, and hence it is our chief resort. Resolve to serve the Lord, and to be faithful to Him for succour. Be sure that you are with God, and then you may be sure that God is with you” (*An All Round Ministry*, 313-314).

### III. We can know victory over sin

5:18

1) For the final time in this letter John addresses the “new birth,” being “born of God.” The apostle wants us to be sure that we have been “born again” and he catalogs no less than 13 evidences of the new birth in this letter.

- 1) Those who are born of God keep His commandments (2:3-4; 3:24).
- 2) Those who are born of God walk in the same way Christ walked (2:5-6).
- 3) Those who are born of God are lovers not haters (2:9; 3:14; 4:7-8, 20).
- 4) Those who are born of God love the Father not the world (2:15).
- 5) Those who are born of God confess the Son and have Him (2:23; 4:15; 5:12).
- 6) Those who are born of God practice righteousness (2:29).
- 7) Those who are born of God do not continually practice sin (3:6, 9-10; 5:18).
- 8) Those who are born of God have the Holy Spirit (3:24; 4:13).
- 9) Those who are born of God listen to the Word (4:6).
- 10) Those who are born of God believe Jesus is the Christ (5:1).
- 11) Those who are born of God overcome the world (5:4).
- 12) Those who are born of God believe Jesus is the Son of God (5:4-5).
- 13) Those who are born of God know Jesus protects them from the evil one (5:18).

2) Here in verse 18, John makes 3 powerful affirmations that assure us once again of our victory over sin. First, we know that the person born of God does not keep on sinning. Sin is no longer the pattern of his or her life. John is affirming the purity of our lives not its perfection, something he addressed in 3:2-3. Future glorification (perfection) impacts present sanctification (practice). Second, the One who is born of God keeps or protects him. I like the fact that the *HCSB* capitalizes “One” because I believe the reference is clearly to Jesus and not us. We do not keep ourselves. Jesus keeps us. This is a theme repeated several times in the New Testament.

- John 17:12- “While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me, I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”
- 1 Peter 1:5- “Who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”
- Jude 24 – “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy...”

Jesus, by His work on the cross, obtained my salvation. Now, by His work in heaven, maintains my salvation (see Heb. 7:25). Jesus Christ, the

eternally begotten of God protects me, keeps me safe. Therefore, and this is our third promise, “the evil one does not touch me.” The word “touch” has the idea of grabbing hold of something with the intent to harm. Alexander Ramsay says, “He is well kept whom Christ keeps; the enemy of souls cannot lay hold of him: he assaults but cannot seize” (Quoted from Curtis Vaught, 134).

3) Satan may grab at us and tempt us through doubt, friends who fall away, idols, fleshly enticements and worldly allurements, but because of the power of Christ he cannot get us. There again is a beautiful logic to this verse. The devil does not touch the Christian and harm him in any ultimate sense because he is protected by the Son. And, because the Son keeps the believer safe, he cannot persist in or continually practice sin. It is contrary to his nature. It is contrary to his Protector.

Now we know why we have victory over sin and why we have victory over Satan. “The Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8) and He did a perfect job!

#### **IV. We can know we belong to God      5:19**

1) In stark contrast to the safety of the believer in Christ, the whole world lies, rests, in the power of the evil one. We are safe but the world is a slave.

2) Believers in Jesus have a certain and settled knowledge that they are from God, literally “we know that of God we are.” The *NIV* says, “We know that we are children of God.” Eugene Peterson in *The Message* says, “We know that we are held firm by God.” Here is confidence, an inner assurance, that spiritual death has no claim on me. Here is a certainty of the soul that sin cannot dominate me (5:18) and the evil one cannot harm me (v. 18).

“Now I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me;

Not for the years of time alone, but for eternity.”

(“Now I Belong to Jesus”, *Baptist Hymnal*)

3) Tragically, on the other hand, those caught up in the lies and futility of this world-system are controlled and captivated by the power and authority of Satan himself, “the evil one.” Satan who blinds the minds of unbelievers (2 Cor. 4:3-4), snatches the Word of God from human hearts (Matt 13:4, 9), deceives by miraculous signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9), and entices through fleshly desires and pride (1 John 2:15-17) has the entire world in his pocket. This is instructive for those of us who follow Christ.

4) We are in a global conflict with an enemy that influences and in many instances controls cultures, societies, finances and even governments. This “evil empire” under “the sway of the evil one” opposes with vehemence the advance of the gospel, ministries of mercy, and care for the weak and

helpless. He hates who we are and what we are trying to accomplish. This requires, on our part, a wartime mentality and commitment. Sacrifices must be made, and strategies bathed in spiritual wisdom must be created and implemented. But know this, as we move forward we are children of God, a God who is in us and who is greater than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4). We are His and He will protect us (5:18).

**V. We can know what is true      5:20-21**

1) Not surprisingly, John ends the letter like he began it, talking about Jesus! He affirms again the reality of the incarnation (“we know the Son has come”). He also affirms that it is Jesus who gives us understanding so that we may know him who is true, that is God Himself, in and thru Jesus Christ. These words echo Luke 10:22 where Jesus said, “no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

2) Because of our union with Christ, we understand the truth of the gospel, we are safe from the claws of the evil one, we know the Father and we abide “in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ.” Of Christ it can be said, “He is the True God and eternal life.” Here is truth. Here is life. Here is knowledge and understanding. All of this is ours by virtue of our union with Christ, because “we are in him who is true.”

3) However, if there is a true God there are also false gods. Therefore John provides a simple but perfect complement to verse 20 and a perfect conclusion to the letter in verse 21.

4) “Little children,” he says “keep yourselves (imperative of command) from idols.” Be on guard, John says, from god-substitutes. Paul gave us similar warnings: Ephesians 5:5, “For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” And in Colossians 3:5, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you; sexually immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

John, letting his letter be our guide, would say, “those who claim to be Christians but do not believe the truth concerning Jesus, do not live a righteous life in obeying God’s commands, and do not love others are in danger of idol worship. This is an idol because they have created a religion that is false. This is a religion that man has created and not that of the apostolic faith. This is nothing short of idolatry. To embrace a form of Christianity that allows one to deny the truth about Jesus, not live a godly life, or not love others, is to create an idol—and that is something all Christians must constantly guard against” (Ben Merkle, *BibSac*, July-Sept 2012, p. 340).

5) John Calvin said, “The human heart is an idol factory.” (*Institutes* 1.11).

Mark Driscoll says idolatry is the opposite of the gospel (*Death by Love*, 92). Amazingly, an idol can be a good thing. However, when we turn a good thing into a god thing it becomes a bad thing, an idol.

Tim Keller helps us see how idolatry is sin when he says, “the ultimate reason for any sin is that something besides Christ is functioning as an alternative “righteousness” or source of confidence—and is thus an “idol,” a pseudo-savior, which creates inordinate desires.”

Luther, Preference to the Galatians: “This rock...the doctrine of justification...was shaken by Satan in paradise, when he persuaded our first parents that they might by their own wisdom and power become like God...Thereafter the whole world acted like a madman against this faith, inventing innumerable idols and religions with which everyone went his own way, hoping to placate a god or goddess, by his own works; that is, hoping without the aid of Christ and by his own works to redeem himself from evils and sins. All this is sufficiently seen in the practices and records of every culture and nation...” (Section 1a). Also, Luther A Treatise Concerning Good Works: “Those who do not... trust in His favor, grace and goodwill, but see His favor in other things or in themselves, do not keep this [First] Commandment [to have no other gods before Him], and practice

real idolatry, even if they do the works of all the other Commandments...”

(Part X). Any effort to earn our own salvation creates “idols” of necessity. For if we make our career or our morality or our marriage our fundamental “confidence” in life—our “wisdom” and “power”—then those things become idols which we look to instead of Christ for our “salvation.” Thus, those “keeping” the other 9 commandments as a way to earn their own salvation are really breaking the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment by and in their morality! Therefore, their good works are all done in service to an idol as a way of avoiding Christ as Savior. (Source Unknown)

6) In sum, idolatry is anything you love, enjoy and pursue more than God, more than Christ, who “is the true God and eternal life.”

- Idols say we are true when God says only Christ is true.
- Idols say we will give life when God says only Christ provides life, eternal life.
- Idols promise but can never deliver but God says Christ both provides and delivers.

So guard yourself from idols of power, control, comfort, approval, position, applause, and pleasure. Your heart will never be satisfied and at rest with any of these little false gods. Only Christ truly and eternally satisfies. Jesus said it perfectly, “whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never

be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

**Conclusion:** Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the true God, and the only God who gives you an eternal life you can be certain you have. All you have to do is believe in his name. He and he alone is the “true God.” All other gods and deceiving counterfeits are false substitutes. What they promise they can never provide. Jesus “is the true God and eternal life.” On this truth one can stand and stake their eternal destiny. This is how John ends his epistle. This is where we should take our stand today and forever.