

## Let Jesus Be Your Teacher

1 John 5:18-21

### Introduction

1. Christian doctrine is not a popular or appreciated subject in our day. In fact, to make a statement like that found in 1 John 5:20, “we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life,” is considered narrow and intolerant, completely out of step and out of touch in a day when all faiths are created equal.
2. A recent Zogby poll says that 75 percent of American college seniors report that their professors teach there is no such thing as right and wrong in the literal sense. The poll taken for the National Association of Scholars reveals that teachers address the issues of good and evil in terms of “individual values and cultural diversity.” (© 2002 WorldNetDaily.com. Posted: July 11, 2002).
3. In an article entitled “Faith is about questions, not answers,” (Oct. 16, 2002, *RNS*) by Tom Ehrlich, an Episcopal priest, Christian doctrine receives a scathing critique from his poison pen.

Freedom is anathema to many believers. From its earliest days, the Christian community has devoted enormous energy to defining a single correct way to believe. ... Religion asserts relentlessly, despite all evidence to the contrary, that theologians can read the mind of God, and that any conclusions other than theirs would violate the Almighty and must be quashed.

History hasn't been kind to most religious doctrines. Some were revealed as self-serving and political, more about allocating power than standing before God. Some doctrines were exposed by discoveries of better manuscripts and evidence of tampering by early transcribers. Some were exposed by science, that dread enemy of theological certainty. Some were grounded in controversies of the moment. Some doctrines stopped making sense. And some proved too heinous, like doctrines affirming slavery, apartheid and Nazism, to be tolerated.

The quest for certainty remains fervent, however, even desperate. In troubled and confusing times, as these surely are, many demand absolutes, and, with increasing shrillness, they demand silence from those who believe differently. The fearful demand answers, not more questions, and machinelike images of reality, where systems can be fixed, master-strokes can succeed, and logic can trounce ambiguity. They are offended by those who embrace uncertainty.

With Scripture citations flashing like sabers, many believers go for the “palpable hit” to reveal dogmatic error and to “prove” their simple answers to complex questions.

Doctrine, you see, is our attempt to escape the world, not to address it. Doctrine isn't a perfection of faith, but avoidance of faith. Rather than seek the mind of a living God who toils and troubles in the world as it is, we scour ancient texts for safe conclusions about matters that God left behind long ago or never cared about in the first place.

4. How should we respond to such an avalanche of criticism? First, doctrine does not try to escape the world. Doctrine helps to explain the world. Further, the ancient text of the Bible does not attempt to provide us with safe conclusions, it gives us a divine perspective, God's perspective, whether we like it or not, whether it is safe or dangerous. I am not convinced that God has left behind long ago matters that He revealed in His Word to us. I believe the Word He gave then is the Word He has preserved for today, and it is the wise person who comes to God to hear what He has to say. It is the humble person, who, like Mary in Luke 10:39, "sat at Jesus' feet and heard His Word."
5. 1 John 5:20 says, "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true." Listening to Jesus means listening to the greatest teacher who ever lived. Though these closing words in 1 John came directly from John, ultimately they come from our Savior "who is the true God and eternal life." Letting Jesus be our teacher by His Word, what is it that He teaches us?

### I. Jesus teaches you how to live. 5:18

- × "Knowledge is power" it is often said. The Bible would certainly say "knowledge is important." 4 times in these final verses of 1 John the word "know" (*oidamen*) appears. Previously we were told we could be confident and have assurance in our possession of eternal life and that God answers prayer. Now we are told we can be certain in our knowledge of (1) what the new birth does to sin, (2) the world and (3) the Son of God.
- × Interestingly verses 18, 19, and 20 all begin with "We know." First, we can know how to live.

#### 1. Do not continue in sin.

- × Know (pre. ten. meaning) ... born (W.A.R.) of God does not (cont) sin.
- × Born (10x in 1 John) speaks of the new birth, being born again, from above (John 3). Godwardly it is called regeneration. The human complement we call conversion.
- × Does not (cont) in sin – recalls 1 John 3:6, 9. John is affirming the purity of our life now not the perfection of our glorification in the future. John has told us a number of things we can know for sure.

1 John 2:3	We can know that we know God.
1 John 2:5	We can know that we are in Him.
1 John 3:14	We can know that we have passed from death to life.
1 John 4:18	We can know the love that God has for us.
1 John 5:3	We can know that we love God's children.
1 John 5:13	We can know that we have eternal life.
1 John 5:15	We can know that God answers prayer.
1 John 5:18	We can know that Christians do not live in sin.

- × A Christian may stumble into sin but he will not stay in sin. A Christian will not live in sin because he will hate sin. It is contrary to his nature, the divine nature, for sin to be his habit of life.
- × Plummer: "A child of God may sin; but his normal condition is one of resistance to sin" (Plummer, 169).

## 2. Be confident in the Savior.

- × We now see another reason why we cannot continue in sin and why Satan cannot harm us; get his evil, clutching claws into us.
- × The one born of God (aor. tense) keeps (cont) him safe (NIV). The one born of God is either (1) the believer himself or (2) Christ. That it is Christ is the better view. Nowhere does Scripture teach that we keep ourselves, but repeatedly it teaches we are kept by Jesus.  
**John 17:12**, “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”  
**1 Peter 1:5**, “who are kept by the power of God through faith for 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 faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.”
- × Christ, by His work on earth obtained my salvation, by His work now He maintains my salvation.
- × Christ, the eternally begotten Son of God keeps us. He guards us as our own special, spiritual guard.
- × The wicked one – emp. his evil, malicious character.
- × Does not touch (harm) him. Satan cannot put his hands on us because we rest safely in Christ’s hands. He may attack us but he cannot grab us because we are kept by Jesus. Our security is not in us. It is in Jesus. Be confident in the Savior.

## II. Jesus teaches you where you are. 5:19

- × Where you stand spiritually is important. It is also inescapable. Everyone stands somewhere and God’s Word informs us there are only two options available. You need to know where you are. You need to know whose you are.
1. Some are children of God.
    - × Lit. “We know that of God we are.” We know it; not hope it or think it. We have been born of God. We do not love or live in sin. We are kept by Jesus out of the reach of the wicked one... we know we are of God. We are confident; we have an inner assurance in our soul that we belong to God. Knowing Jesus equals knowing God and knowing God equals peace in my soul and certainty of my future (5:13).
  2. Some are controlled by Satan.
    - × The stark and striking contrast of group 2 with group 1 could not be more pronounced.
    - × Whole world (*cosmos holos*) in the evil one lies. The world is society, culture, government, earthly life. The evil one does not “get his arms around” the believer, but the world is helplessly in his grasp. He controls them as a master controls a slave. Jesus came to break the power of this usurper.  
**John 12:31**, “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.”

**John 14:30**, “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.”

**John 16:11**, “...the ruler of this world is judged.”

- × “Man is free to choose his master, but he is not free to be without a master” (Hiebert). Know where you stand.

### III. Jesus teaches you whom to believe. 5:20-21

- × We do not live in a world that believes nothing. We live in a world that believes everything.
- × **Would you believe?** The survey question was: “Which if any of the following do you believe in at least to some degree?” The responses were:

	1976	1996
Spiritualism	12%	52%
Faith healing	10%	45%
Astrology	17%	37%
UFOs	24%	30%
Reincarnation	9%	25%
Fortune-telling	4%	14%

--*Skeptical Inquirer*,  
Sep/Oct 1998 (page 9)

- × “Jesus Himself is not the proper object of faith. This proposition, I realize, is a radical departure from traditional views. Jesus called on His followers to trust the Father, to believe in God’s domain or reign...Jesus Himself should not be, must not be, the object of faith...That would be to repeat the idolatry of the first believers.”

Jesus Seminar founder Robert Funk, in his book *Honest to Jesus*. (quoted in *Apologia Report*, Sep. 29, 1997)

- × What and whom you believe in is crucially important. Like our spiritual standing in verse 19, ultimately, there are only 2 Gods in which to believe as verses 20-21 make clear. Again you must choose one or the other.

#### 1. Affirm the true God. 5:20

- × Son of God has come. Here is the sole ground of truth and life, knowledge and understanding about God. False teachers then and now always subtract or add to Jesus. The Bible says in Christ are the truths of God made known, “in Christ” as Paul said in 2 Cor. 1:20, “All the promises of God in Him are Yes, in Him Amen, to the glory of God in us.”
- × In Christ you can know Him who is true (3x), in fact in Christ we are in Him who is true...His Son, Jesus Christ. Stay with Jesus and you are safe from error. Stay with Jesus and you are safe from deception. Stay with Jesus and you are safe from sin. Stay with Jesus and you are safe from Satan.
- × This is the true God and eternal life speaks of (1) the Father, (2) Jesus, or (3) the Godhead. I believe it is Jesus. He is the nearest antecedent to the pronoun. It is

- fitting that as John began and ended his gospel with a declaration of Christ's deity (John 1:1; 20:28), he would do the same in his letter (1 John 1:1-3; 5:20).
- × Jesus is the true God and eternal life. However, if there is a true God, there are also false gods.

### **Transition**

We must affirm the true God, but we must ...

### **2. Avoid the false idols. 5:21**

- × Simple and startling, this verse is a perfect complement to verse 20, as well as a stern warning.
- × Dear children (*teknia* – 2:12, 28; 3:7, 18:4:4)
- × Keep (aor. imp.) guard, reject is the idea. We are kept by Christ in verse 18, but we must still be on guard in verse 21.
- × Idols – (1) Pagan idols of Rome, (2) False gods of the heretics, or (3) Anything that takes the place due to God and God alone.

**Eph. 5:5**, “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

**Col. 3:5**, “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

“Be on guard against the God-substitutes.”

- × The idols of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are no really no different than those of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Church. The names may have changed but the idols are still the same:
  - 1) The worship of Narcissus – the god who fell in love with himself. That is the supreme god of our age!
  - 2) The worship of Bacchus – The god of wine and pleasure – most folks are looking for happiness rather than holiness, sensual pleasure rather than spiritual purity.
  - 3) The worship of Venus – The goddess of love.
  - 4) The worship of Apollo – The god of physical beauty.
  - 5) The worship of Minerva – The goddess of science.
- × What is ultimate in your life is your God. It can be you, family, money, beauty, sex, pleasure, job, position, popularity. These are false gods. Jesus is the true God. He is the only God.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the true God, the only God who provides eternal life to anyone who comes to Him in faith. He is the true revelation of God. Anything else is a counterfeit and a false substitute. On this truth one can be certain. On this truth one can, they should, stake their eternal destiny. This is where John ends. This is where we should stand.