

# 1 John 5 - Results of Fellowship; Assurances of Fellowship; Concluding Exhortation

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### 1 John 5

## XI. Results of fellowship (1 John 5:1-12)

- (1) Faith, love of God and the brethren, obedience (5:1-3)

**1 Everyone** who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been **born of God**, and everyone who loves the Father **loves the child born of Him**.

**1** Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him.

**1** Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah<sup>1</sup> has been born from God, and everyone who loves the parent also loves the child.

**1** Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

- "Everyone" - all-inclusive; no room here for this to mean only a specific sub-group of people (the "elect")

— Calvinism has a very difficult time, in light of their doctrine of Unconditional Election, explaining the "whosoever wills" passages (Cf. John 3:16; Acts 17:30; Rom 10:13; 1 John 5:1; Rev 22:17)

— Contrary to their view, *nowhere* in Scripture do we see the idea that most people, are unable to be saved because they aren't one of the elect

- This is one of the clearest statements in Scripture of what is necessary for a person to be saved. It is one of more than 150 passages in the NT where belief in Jesus is the sole condition for salvation.

— What defines a Christian is their belief in Christ, by faith, not their lifestyle, good works, or obedience to God

- "...born of God" - a phrase used three other times in this epistle (2:29; 3:9; 4:7); here, John defines how a person is "born of God"

— John has been hammering a believer's love for the brethren throughout this epistle, but he also wanted his readers to understand that a person cannot love their way to salvation.

— The love of God (*agapē*) comes from our relationship with Christ, through the Holy Spirit, after we believe and are indwelt by Him. We may be able to do loving things before we come to Christ, but that love does not come from the Holy Spirit.

- It is assumed that there are two effects from our belief that Jesus is the Christ:

1. It is assumed that every believer loves the Father

2. It is also assumed that we will love (*agapē*) others who are also "born of Him"

— To love the family of God means that you do not limit your love to your own denomination or group, to your own social or financial status, to your own race, to your own political perspective, or to your own exact theological persuasion. If any of these things mean more to us than our common salvation, something is very wrong.

- "...loves the *child* born of Him" - how do we love another Christian when we do not like the person?

— The key is the meaning of love. Loving our brethren means doing what is best for them. It does not mean feeling affection for them, though feelings of affection frequently follow a commitment to do what is best for another person.

— God does not require us to feel equally affectionate toward all of our brethren, but He does require us to do what is best for them—with the proper attitude

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and follow His commandments.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.

2 This is how we know that we love God's children: we love God and keep his commandments.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

- Those who love God will obey His commandments, and one of His commandments is to love the children of God

— Just as much as our love for the people of God reflects our love for God (as expressed in 3:10,17), our love and obedience to God is a demonstration of love to the body of Christ

— We love other believers best when we obey God

- A Christian who does not love God or keep His commandments (especially to love their fellow believer) is of little effective use to God or within the body of Christ

— This is true even if the person may be involved in a ministry or hold a position of authority within a church

— When our love and obedience grow cold, we not only harm ourselves, but we harm the body of Christ as well. Our lack of love has the effect of hindering the spiritual progress of God's people.

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and **His commandments are not burdensome.**

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

3 For this demonstrates our love for God: We keep his commandments, and his commandments are not difficult,

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

- A carbon copy of what Jesus said in John 14:15: **If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.**

— The fundamental proof that we love God and people is obedience to the Word of God

— Here, Jesus lays out what it means to love God, very clearly and succinctly: to love God is to obey Him. If you don't obey Him, you don't love Him. If you love Him, you will obey Him. Obedience is the barometer of our love for God.

— If my life is inconsistent with His commandments, my emotional feelings and responses are irrelevant. The test of my love for God is whether or not, or the extent to which, I am walking with God in obedience. The test is not how well you know the Bible, how good your

theology is, or not how many books you've read or mission trips you've been on. It's how well your daily life is conformed to His truth.

- "...His commandments are not burdensome" - everything that God calls a Church Age believer to do is not burdensome because, unlike the Mosaic Law, God gives us His Law (Law of Christ, Rom 8:2; Gal 6:2) and He also gives us the power to keep it.
- OT believers did not have the power to obey the Law as NT believers in Christ do. The OT Law was ruthless. It was great at showing you your faults, but it was terrible at giving you the power to obey it and live a godly life.
- To unbelievers, and to many believers, God's commands seem burdensome. But when we see how wise and good His commandments are, that His response is not "No" but "Better," we begin to recognize that His Law is actually a gift from Him to help us live the best and most fulfilling life possible.
- God's commands are like an "owner's manual" for life. He tells us what to do and not do because He created us and knows everything about us. God's commands are never given to bind us or cause pain for us, they are solely given to bless us.
- When you compare God's commands for us to the religious rules men make up, God's commands are much less burdensome. Jesus consistently contrasted the religious requirements of the Pharisees to the simplicity of obeying God (Matt 11:30; 23:4).
- God's commands can be summed up with: Love God and love others.
- Another way that God's commands are not burdensome is that when we come to Christ, our new nature *wants* to obey Him. When you love someone, it seems little trouble to go to a lot of difficulty to help or please that person.
- The seven years that Jacob served Laban in order to have permission to marry Rachel "seemed to him like *only* a few days because of his love for her" (Gen 29:20).

## (2) The believer's overcoming faith in Christ (5:4-5)

4 For **whoever** has been born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith.

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

4 because everyone who is born from God has overcome the world. Our faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

- Every Christian instantly "overcomes the world" by our initial faith in Christ

- To continue to "overcome the world" (along with the flesh and the devil), all we need to do is to continue to exercise faith in Him (Cf. Rom 8:37; 1 Cor 15:57)

- The idea that a believer, born of God, could be defeated by this world was a foreign concept to John
- "...whoever" - *to gegennenmenon*, better translated "whatever" [see NASB95]
- This suggests that there is something inherently "world conquering" in our experience of being born of God
- We are immediately told what that is: our faith

**5** Who is the one who overcomes the world, but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

**5** Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

**5** Who overcomes the world? Is it not the person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

**5** Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

- Continuing to overcome the world is not automatic for a believer; not all Christians continue to overcome the world (Cf. 2 Tim 4:10). Only those Christians who continue to live by faith do.

(3) The continuing object of faith must be the true Christ (5:6-9)

(A) Witness of the water and blood (5:6-7)

**6** This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

**6** This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

**6** This man, Jesus the Messiah, is the one who came by water and blood—not with water only, but with water and with blood. The Spirit is the one who verifies this, because the Spirit is the truth.

**6** This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

- John now precisely identifies who Jesus is, since He's the one on whom a person must believe in order to become a child of God

- There are numerous views as to what the "water" and "blood" in this verse refer to. Probably the best explanation is the oldest recorded Christian understanding of this passage, first recorded by Tertullian:

- "...water" - refers to Jesus' baptism; apparently the heretics who John is countering in this epistle attached a certain importance to Jesus' baptism

- John also may be correcting Cerinthus, a false teacher at the time, who claimed that the Spirit came upon Jesus at His baptism but left Him before His death
- "...blood" - His death on the cross
- The Holy Spirit also bears witness to the true person of Jesus, as Jesus promised He would (Cf. John 15:26; 16:14)

7 For there are three that testify:

7 For there are three that testify:

7 For there are three witnesses in heaven—the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one.

7 For there are three that bear record **in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.**

- "...in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" [KJV] - see note: **The Johannine Comma** below.

(B) Witness of the Spirit (5:8)

8 **the Spirit** and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

8 the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

8 And there are three witnesses on earth—the Spirit, the water, and the blood—and these three are one.

8 **And there are three that bear witness in earth**, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

- "And there are three that bear witness in earth" [KJV] - see note: **The Johannine Comma** below

- There are three witnesses telling us who Jesus is: the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and all are in agreement

- "the Spirit" - at Jesus' baptism, and subsequently through the apostles and prophets

- "...the water" - of Jesus' baptism, which witnessed His true humanity and His identification with mankind

- "...the blood" - of His crucifixion, which witnessed His complete obedience to the Father

— The testimony of eyewitnesses and prophets, as well as that of the historical events, affirmed the divine and human character of Jesus Christ

### **The Johannine Comma**

A few late manuscripts of 1 John insert other witnesses between the words "testify" (v7) and "the Spirit" (v8). Erasmus included these witnesses in his edition of the Greek NT, and the translators of the AV followed his example.

The addition (in italics to highlight) reads: "...testify *in heaven—the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit—and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth:* the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

While this addition is a nice and clear testament to the Trinity, there is not a single manuscript that contains this addition before the 14th century. There is one manuscript in the 11th century and one in the 12th century in which the additional text was added to the margin by another author.

In addition, In the first 450 years of Christianity, there were many theological debates regarding the exact nature and understanding of the Trinity. In all of those debates, *no one ever once* quoted these words in question from 1 John 5:7-8. If they were originally written by John, it seems *very strange* that no early Christian would have quoted them. In fact, though none of the ancient Christians quote from this verse, although several of them do quote from both 1 John 5:6 and 5:8.

This passage is not included in any of the ancient translations – Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopian, Coptic, Sahidic, Armenian, Slavonian, and so forth. Only in the Latin Vulgate does it appear. It is probably best to regard these words as the work of an over-zealous copyist who thought that the NT needed a little help with the doctrine of the Trinity, and he figured this was a good place to do it. Or perhaps the words just started as notes written in the margin of a manuscript, but the next person who copied the manuscript thought they must belong in the text itself.

While there is no explicit statement of the Trinity in John's original statement, that doctrine is clearly woven into the fabric of the NT. We find the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together as equal, yet distinct Persons in Matt 3:16-17; 28:19; Luke 1:35; John 1:33-34; 14:16,26; 16:13-15; 20:21-22; Acts 2:33-38; Rom 15:16; 2 Cor 1:21-22; 13:14; Gal 4:6; Eph 3:14-16; 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2.

So how did these words ever get included if they are not in any ancient Greek manuscripts? The words were included in ancient Latin versions of the Bible, and in 1520 a scholar named Erasmus produced a new, accurate edition of the Bible in ancient Greek. When people studied Erasmus' Bible, and compared it to the Latin version, they noticed he left out this passage and criticized him for it. Erasmus said, "If you find me one Greek manuscript with these words in them, I'll include it in my next printing." Someone "discovered" a manuscript with the words in them, but it wasn't an ancient manuscript. Erasmus knew this, but had already promised to add the words if someone found a manuscript with the words, so he reluctantly added them to his 1522 edition. He also added a footnote saying he thought the new Greek manuscript had been written on purpose, just to embarrass him. That manuscript (*Codex Montfortii*) is on display in the library of Trinity College, Dublin.

Since the Greek text of the NT that Erasmus printed became one of the Greek texts used to make the King James Bible, these added words became part of the King James Bible. Most Christians may not know much about these passages, but many religious people who don't believe in the Trinity (such as a Jehovah's Witness) know the textual issues around this passage. Therefore, if you bring up this verse to support your position, they will show you how this passage doesn't belong in the Bible. It may get some thinking, "Well, maybe the Trinity isn't true. Maybe Jesus isn't God. Maybe it's just the invention of people who would try to change the Bible." This can do some real damage.

A passage like this also warns us that when it comes to such matters, God doesn't need our help. The NT is fine just like God inspired it. It doesn't need our improvements. Though the teaching of these added words is true, they shouldn't be here, because we should not add our words to the Bible and claim they are God's words.

#### (C) Witness of God (5:9)

9 If we receive **the testimony of people, the testimony of God** is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son.

9 If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son.

9 If we accept human testimony, God's testimony is greater, because it is the testimony of God and because he has testified about his Son.

9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

- "...the testimony of people" - everyone everyday receives the witness of men about various things
- If we receive the testimony of men and receive (believe) it, how much more should we believe the testimony of God about His Son?
- "...the testimony of God" - God gave His testimony about His Son at Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:17), at His crucifixion (Matt 27:51-53), and through His apostles (John 19:35-37)
- God never asks us to believe with "blind faith." Instead, our faith is to be based on reliable testimony, and we have the most reliable testimony possible: the witness of God.

#### (4) He who believes in this testimony has life (5:10-12)

10 The one who believes in the Son of God has **the testimony in himself**; the one who does not believe God **has made Him a liar**, because he has not believed in **the testimony that God has given concerning His Son**.

10 The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son.

10 The person who believes in the Son of God believes this testimony personally. The person who does not believe God has made him a liar by not believing the testimony that he has given about his Son.

10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

- "...the testimony in himself" - when we believe in Christ, receive the Holy Spirit as an internal confirmation with our spirit of our right standing before God (Cf. Rom 8:16)

- "...has made Him a liar" - when we refuse to believe in Jesus, we reject the testimony that God has given us about His Son. Thus, our unbelief is effectively calling God a liar.

— Most people who do not believe likely do not intend to call God a liar, but they do it nonetheless

— The unbelief of an unbeliever is their fault, not their misfortune

— It was a foreign concept to John that a person would profess belief in God, yet reject God's testimony of His own Son. Such rejection cannot be excused due to ignorance.

- "...the testimony that God has given concerning His Son" - this testimony from God is given to us in v11...

11 And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

11 And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

11 This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is found in his Son.

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

- The testimony of God concerning His Son is that the eternal life that God has given us is "in His Son"

— This isn't an offer of eternal life, but a confirmation of what God had already done for John's readers

— Eternal life is a gift from God, received in Jesus Christ

12 The one who has the Son has the life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

12 The person who has the Son has this life. The person who does not have the Son of God does not have this life.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

- A further explanation of v11... if you have believed in the Son, you have received eternal life; and if you have not believed in the Son, you have not received eternal life.

(1) Exhortation to be assured of life (5:13)

**13 These things I have written to you** who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may **know** that you **have** eternal life.

**13** These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

13 I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

— "These things" - refers to what John had just written about God's witness (v6-12), and more directly what is said in v11-12, rather than to the whole epistle

— "These things" in this verse (referring to v6-12) simply means that John is insisting on the believability of the witness (testimony) of God. John asserts that this "testimony" can be either accepted or rejected. If we accept it, we have internalized that testimony so that the believer has the testimony "in himself" (v10a). To reject this testimony is to make God out to be a liar (v10b).

— So the issue John is referring to is the truth or falsity of what God declares, which is that eternal life is God's gift to us in Christ (v11a). And since this kind of life is *in* God's Son, there is no other qualification for possessing it than to possess God's Son (v11b-12). The believer in the Son may therefore *know* that he has eternal life (v13a).

— The assumption that underlies John's thought here is that to believe in God's Son as the Appointed Giver of eternal life (v 11) is to possess the Son and the life He gives (v12-13). Thus the one who believes God's testimony about His Son possesses within themselves the testimony, the Son, and eternal life all at once!

— This is all very simple: John makes absolutely no effort to add additional "checks" or "tests" for the believer's salvation. The believer's assurance that he possesses eternal life is directed totally and unambiguously toward the truth of what God says about His Son, and in that truth the believer is invited to rest.

- Calvinism teaches that this verse is the purpose statement for the entire epistle of 1 John, rather than just the context in which the verse falls (5:6-12). They come to this conclusion because of the similarities between 5:13 and John 20:30-31:

- Both give a purpose for writing something
- Both use a neuter plural "these"
- Both appear at the end of a book written by John

— But John includes four such "I have written these things" statements in this epistle:

- "these things" in 1:4 refers to what he had previously written in 1:1-3
  - 1:4: **These things we write**, so that our joy may be made complete.
- "these things" in 2:1, refers to what immediately precedes in 1:5-10

- 2:1: My little children, ***I am writing these things to you*** so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;
- "these things" in 2:26 refers to what immediately precedes in 2:18-24
  - 2:26: ***These things I have written to you*** concerning those who are trying to deceive you.
- "these things" in 5:13 refers to what immediately precedes in 5:6-12
  - 5:13: ***These things I have written to you*** who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

— Did John write every part of the whole book to fulfill joy, every part to prevent sin, every part to warn of deceivers, and every part to assure them? No. The natural referent of each purpose statement is the paragraph immediately preceding it.

— To interpret 1 John 5:13 as the purpose statement for John writing this epistle, one must make two incorrect assumptions:

1. That 1 John was written to both believers and unbelievers
2. That John 20:30-31 is the purpose statement for the entire Gospel of John, when in fact it is only the purpose of the two "sign sections" of that Gospel (John 1-12; 18-20). It is clear that John 10:10 is the purpose statement for the two "non-sign" sections (John 13-17; 21)
  - Another point discounting (2) above is that "These things" in John 20:31 does not refer to the entire Gospel, but only its 'neuter-plural' antecedent "signs." The "signs" are what John pointed to for people to see, then believe.

— The purpose statement for this entire epistle is given to us in 1:1-4 (see notes there)

— "...I have written to you" - notice that it is God's Word, the "things I have written to you," that is the foundation and the basis for believers to "know" that they have eternal life. John gives this assurance to us as an *objective* verification that we have eternal life (assurance of salvation).

— If I'm looking at myself, my works, how I feel on a particular day, etc., I may or may not believe I have eternal life. My assurance of salvation would be *subjective*, rather than objective. Our objective assurance of eternal life comes from the promises God has made to us in His Word.

— "...know" - *eidō*, to see or perceive; we can be sure ("know") that we have eternal life if we have believed on Jesus Christ (John 5:24)

— The Apostle John expected his readers to know that they had eternal life; he also knew that the assurance of that salvation was possible. God does just want us to have eternal security, He wants us to know without a doubt that we possess it. That is the difference between eternal security and assurance of salvation.

— Our assurance of salvation is based on the testimony of God in His Word. Christians get confused when we begin (or are taught) to test our faith by our works. By doing this we actually begin to alter the very nature of our faith. Once we become preoccupied with what we imagine ought to be the effects of faith, we have destroyed the true focus of faith, from the unchanging testimony of God in His Word and instead on the shifting testimony of our own hearts and lives.

— Once our Christian experience is made the grounds for our assurance of salvation, as some believe 1 John does, John's statement in this verse about "knowing" becomes a complete impossibility and this verse is a highly misleading statement!

— According to Calvinism, even if I am living obediently right now, the possibility exists that I may cease to do so in the future. But if I did cease to do so, according to their belief system, that would prove that I am not a Christian despite my previous obedient lifestyle. Thus my present obedience does not prove my Christianity and thus I cannot know at any time before the end of my earthly career whether or not I possess eternal life. So if John had meant we must test our Christianity by our current or ongoing obedience, he could not have honestly said that we can *know* we have eternal life.

— The following quotes demonstrate this dangerous and heretical doctrine, taught by prominent five-point Calvinists today:

*"No Christian can be sure that he is a true believer. Hence, there is an ongoing need to be dedicated to the Lord and to deny ourselves so that we might make it."* [John Piper]

*"What causes me to be anxious is the possibility that I may not be a Christian—that I might be fake...that everything I've ever done might be a farce—those are horrible, horrible thoughts, right?"* [John Piper]

*"A while back I had one of those moments...and suddenly the question hit me: 'R.C. what if you are not one of the redeemed? What if your destiny is not heaven after all, but hell?' Let me tell you that I was flooded in my body with the chill that went from my head to the bottom of my spine. I was terrified.*

*I tried to grab hold of myself. I thought, 'Well, it's a good sign that I'm worried about this. Only true Christians really care about salvation.' But then I began to take stock of my life, and I looked at my performance. My sins came pouring into my mind and the more I looked at myself the worst I felt. I thought, 'maybe it's really true. Maybe I'm not saved after all.'"*

*I went to my room and began to read the Bible. On my knees I said, "Well, here I am. I can't point to my obedience. There's nothing I can offer.... I knew that some people only flee to the Cross to escape hell.... I could not be sure about my own heart and motivation. Then I remembered John 6:68. Jesus had been giving out hard teaching, and many of His former followers had left Him. When He asked Peter if he was also*

*going to leave, Peter said, 'where else can we go? Only You have the words of eternal life.' In other words, Peter was also uncomfortable, but he realized that being uncomfortable with Jesus was better than any other option." [R.C. Sproul]*

If a Christian seeks assurance of their salvation through examining their good works, one of two things will result:

1. They will minimize the depth of their own sinfulness and the extent to which, even as a Christian, they fall short of the glory of God (self-righteousness)
2. They will see their deep sinfulness as hopelessly contrary to any conviction that they are saved (live a life of frustration and despair, even depression)

— It is logically and theologically absurd to claim that a salvation that is apart from works is not recognizable except by works

— Many commentators incorrectly believe the words "these things I have written to you" as a statement about the purpose of the entire epistle. Then they take ideas like "abiding in Him" (2:6,24) and "keeping His commandments" (2:3,7-10) as intended to be "tests" to determine whether we are saved or not.

— Calvinism cannot offer anyone assurance of salvation...it can only offer anxiety. In Calvinism you can believe the gospel, repent, follow Christ with tears in your eyes and loyalty in your heart...and a Calvinist still can't tell you that you're saved. Why? Because you could just be temporarily enlightened, self-deceived, or maybe God never loved you. Maybe He decreed that you'd fake it for awhile. Calvinism asks you to commit your life to a god who might not be committed to you. To follow a savior who never died for you. To love a god who may have created you for destruction. Calvinism asks people to play spiritual roulette with your eternal destiny. That's not the good news of the gospel...that's unnecessary, cruel, and gaslighting.

— See We Believe In...Assurance of Salvation for more information.

— "...have" - present tense indicating that eternal life for a believer is a current possession (Cf. John 5:24)

— If we indeed have eternal life, it only makes logical sense that we should *know* we have eternal life

[John 5:24; 6:47; Rom 4:4-5; 11:6]

In 1 John, all believers, whether immature or mature, walking in the light or in darkness, are repeatedly addressed by such terms as those who are "born" of God (2:29; 3:9 [2x]; 4:7; v1,18 [2x]), or as "little children" (*teknia*, a term used of all believers in 2:1,12,28; 3:7,18; 4:4; v21-22) or as "beloved" (*agapētoi*, a term used of all believers who are especially loved by God in 2:7; 3:2,21; 4:1,7,11).

The biblical evidence overwhelmingly supports this conclusion: The Holy Spirit directed the writers of Scripture, and in particular the apostle John, to utilize the concepts of the never-

to-be-repeated new birth that can never be lost or forfeited versus daily, repeated fellowship with God that can be lost or forfeited so as to keep clear these important scriptural truths.

### **John Calvin's View of Assurance**

*In short, no man is truly a believer unless he be firmly persuaded that God is a propitious and benevolent Father to him...unless he depend on the promises of the Divine benevolence to him and feel an undoubted expectation of salvation. [Institutes, 111.11.16]*

(2) Assurance of life gained through answered prayer in the will of God (5:14-17)

(A) General assurance of answered prayer (5:14-15)

**14** This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, **He hears us.**

**14** This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

**14** And this is the confidence that we have in him: if we ask for anything according to his will, he listens to us.

**14** And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

- For those who "know" they have eternal life (v13), John now relates the idea of "confidence" in Him through prayer

— The preceding context (v3-13) is obedience to the will of God. Now in this verse, he says that whenever we need help, but particularly help in obeying God, we can confidently ask for His help through prayer

— He conditioned the promise "whatever" (v15) with "according to His will (v14)

- Three aspects to the purpose of prayer:

1. "...ask" - much prayer fails because it never asks anything (Matt 7:7)

2. "...anything" - God wants us to ask Him for anything; no limits on what can or can't be asked for

- This doesn't imply that everything we ask for will be granted, but "anything" in the sense that we should pray for "everything" (Phil 4:6)

3. "...according to His will" - God wants us to see and discern His will through His Word, then pray His will into action (John 15:7)

- In John 15:7, Jesus said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."

- When we abide in Christ, our will becomes more and more aligned with His will, and when we "ask for what you desire" it is more and more like asking according to His will.

- "...He hears us" - God hears all prayers, but He hears our prayers favorably because we are His children, asking for help to do His will. God will always grant that kind of request.

15 And if **we know** that He hears us *inwhatever* we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

15 And if we know that He hears us *in whatever* we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

15 And if we know that he listens to our requests, we can be sure that we have what we ask him for.

15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

- "...we know" - *eidō*, we know the most important aspects of God's will through Scripture

— Prayer should be rooted in understanding God's will and promises, and praying those two things in to action

— For every prayer request, should should ask ourselves: "What possible reason do I have to think that God will answer this prayer?" We should be able to answer this question from His Word.

— The most powerful prayers in the Bible are always prayers that understand the will of God, and ask Him to perform it

— It is not necessarily wrong to ask God for something He has not promised, but we should realize that if we are not coming to God on the basis of a specific promise, we don't have the confidence that He will answer us favorably.

- "...whatever" - the "whatever" we ask for is conditioned by "according to His will" in v14

If prayer should be made according to God's will, why should we pray at all? Surely his will is going to be accomplished, whether or not we pray for it to be done?

To speak in such terms is to assume that God's will must be understood in as static or immutable, as if God has made a detailed plan beforehand of all that is going to happen—including the fact that we are going to pray in a particular way and at a particular time. But while the Bible does speak of God's plan and purpose for the world, to speak in such deterministic terms is inconsistent with the freedom which the Bible itself assigns to God's children, and it wreaks havoc upon the biblical idea of the personal relationship which exists between God and his children.

(B) Examples of effective intercessory prayer (5:16-17)

- (a) Prayer for a brother involved in a sin that does not lead to death (5:16a)
- (b) Prayer for a brother involved in a sin that does lead to death (5:16b-17)

**16 If anyone sees his brother or sister committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will, for him, give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death; I am not saying that he should ask about that.**

16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is a sin *leading* to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.

16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray that God would give him life. This applies to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not telling you to pray about that.

16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

- Does this verse indicate that a believer can commit a sin that leads to spiritual or eternal death and therefore a loss of salvation?

— To make interpretation of v16-17 smoother, insert "premature physical" before each instance of "death" in these verses

— "If" - third class condition, indicating that what John is about to say is a *possibility*, not a foregone conclusion

— "...committing" - *hamartanō*, present tense, present active participle, indicating that this sinning is deliberate and it appears externally as overt sin, not just a suspicion

— When John refers to "a sin" that a believer observes another believer sinning, the nature or description of that particular sin is not given; nor is there the definite article before the word "sin." This indicates that John is not singling out a specific sin but probably the quality of a state of rebellion (Cf. 3:4).

— "...a sin" - clearly indicates that believers still sin, sometimes with no regard to whether they are seen or not by others (reflecting hard-hearted carnality) and that some of their sins are clearly observed by other believers (and unbelievers)

- What are the results of a believer "sinning a sin"? Two consequences are noted:

1. It could be that the sin "does NOT lead to death" (physical death)

2. It could be that the sin is "leading to death"

- "...death" - *thanatos*, physical death; the death of our physical body. This verse is talking about premature physical death of a person.

- "...he shall ask" - how should a believer respond when he sees another believer sinning a sin that *does not* lead to physical death?

— According to this verse, he should specifically intercede for him in prayer and ask for his brother's spiritual restoration to fellowship with God

— "...life" - means life in contrast to temporal death; the restoration of fellowship from his temporal death and access to an abundant life (Cf. Luke 1:24)

- How can God answer his prayer and give the sinning believer "life" unless he is dead in some sense (temporally, not physically). This verse is not saying that a believer who sins a sin not leading to physical death will die, then we are to pray for him and God will resurrect him from the dead.
- If the believer will pray for the sinning believer in this way, this is a promise that God will "give him life" (an answer to his prayer for other believers, who commit a sin not leading to death)
- The point of this verse is the need for intercessory prayer by one believer for another believer who has overtly committed a sin that does not lead to death. This is further evidenced by the preceding verses (v14-15), which describe the confidence that believer's should have when they pray according to God's will. Verse 16 is an example of how to pray according to God's will.
- In 1:9 John made it abundantly clear that when we as believers sin, we need to "confess our sins" and appropriate God's "family" forgiveness. In 2:1-2 he says that while God does not desire for His children to sin, they will do so, and Jesus Christ ever lives to make intercession for them as their righteous Advocate.
- Verse 16 simply instructs the believer to make intercession for another believer who sins, in the same way Jesus makes intercession for us when we sin
- "...to those" - anticipates other sinning believers are prayed for as well
- *All sin is serious but not all is hopeless and beyond the reach of Christian intercession; this leaves a standing challenge to brotherly intercession.* [D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1991), 263]
- "...There is sin *leading* to death; I am not saying that he should ask about that" - after explaining the right loving response when observing a believer sinning a sin in rebellion toward God, John now explains what the believer's response should NOT be toward his fellow believer
- When we observe a fellow believer sinning a sin, we are NOT to pray that God would divinely discipline them with physical death (although we may be tempted to do so)

17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not *leading* to death.

17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not *leading* to death.

17 Every kind of wrongdoing is sin, yet there are sins that do not lead to death.

17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

- John now anticipates the reactions of his readers to his previous comments (v16), and seeks to clarify any misconceptions or misinterpretations of what he taught

— Some people may consider sin that does not lead to death as inconsequential, so he states that "all unrighteousness is sin" in God's eyes

- This is also a counter to the gnostic false teaching, which downplayed the significance of sin in the believer's life
- John then underscores that there is sin that does not lead to (premature physical) death, though it still results in a death-like existence of broken fellowship with God unless the believer confesses it as sin to God and his fellowship with God is restored (Cf. 1:9)

(3) The believer's three certainties (5:18-20)

John now summarizes the major thoughts he has presented in this epistle, to reinforce and review them for his readers.

(A) Sin is a threat to the believer's fellowship and should be abstained from (5:18)

**18 We know that no one who has been born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.**

**18** We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.

**18** We know that the person who has been born from God does not go on sinning. Rather, the Son of God protects them, and the evil one cannot harm them.

**18** We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

- "We know" - John probably meant that "we" apostles know, and now you (readers) know, what he has written in this epistle

- "...no one who has been born of God sins" - as in 3:9, John affirms the basic nature of a believer who has God for a spiritual Parent is not to sin

- "born of God" - always refers to a believer in this epistle (Cf. 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4)

- "sins" - not that in this verse, the translators do not add "continually" in italics, even though this usage of "sins" (present tense of *hamartanō*) is the same form and tense used in 3:6, where "continually" was added (see notes there)

- "...He who was born of God" - Jesus Christ

- "...him" - an abiding believer

- "...the evil one does not touch him" - does not mean that Satan or his demons cannot attack or physically hurt an abiding believer (Cf. Job). It means that he cannot destroy the abiding believer in his faith and testimony.

— John likely restated this fundamental truth because people normally behave in harmony with what they believe themselves to be. If an abiding believer believes that he is protected by Jesus from the evil one, his attitude and actions (and confidence) will bear that out.

— "touch" - *haptō*, to fasten or adhere to (Cf. John 20:17)

— Because believers are "born of God," Satan cannot "attach" himself to us or "cling" to us in the same way he can to those who are not "born of God"

(B) Believers stand against the Satanic world system (5:19)

19 We know that **we are of God**, and that the whole world lies in *the power of the evil one*.

19 We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of the evil one*.

19 We know that we are from God and that the whole world lies under the control of the evil one.

19 And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

- "...we are of God" - knowing this means abiding believers can be free to be what they are in Jesus Christ and separate themselves from the world system in rebellion against Him

(C) True knowledge of the incarnation allows the believer to experience communion with God (5:20)

20 And **we know** that the Son of God has come, and has **given us understanding** so that **we may know** Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. **This is the true God and eternal life.**

20 And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

20 We also know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know the true God. We are in union with the one who is true, his Son Jesus the Messiah, who is the true God and eternal life.

20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

- "...we know" - *eidō*, to see, perceive; general knowledge

- "...given us understanding" - if God did not reveal Himself to us, we would never search for Him. We know Him because He has revealed Himself to us.

— More than any other way, God has revealed Himself to us by "Him who is true": "His Son Jesus Christ"

- "...we may know" - *ginōskō*, to know intimately, by experience

- "...This is the true God and eternal life" - this is who Jesus is

— This may be the most unequivocal statement on the deity of Jesus Christ in the NT

XIII. Concluding exhortation to abstain from idolatry (5:21)

21 Little children, **guard yourselves from idols.**

21 Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

21 Little children, keep yourselves away from idols.

21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

- "...guard yourselves from idols" - this may seem like a strange way to end his epistle, but it fits with John's overall theme of fellowship with God
  - Idolatry is the enemy of fellowship. Idolatry is either embracing a false god, or having a false idea about God.
  - John closes with this warning after spending most of this epistle warning us against the dangers of the false Jesus that many were teaching in his day (Cf. 3:18-23; 4:1-3; 5:6-9)