

6,25,26 1 Jn. 5:13-21, The Importance of Knowing Who We Are

(vs. 13) These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

As self-explanatory as this seems to us, since we know that John's readers were being shaken by false teachers in regard to both the identity of the Son of God as well as to the sufficiency of faith to secure salvation, John was not taking them back to Sunday School, he was reaffirming their eternal security through faith in the true Christ.

And when John added, "that you may continue to believe . . ." he was reminding them that the ongoing experience of the Life they now possessed, and the formation of Christ within them, required continuing in the same mindset of faith that brought about their possession of that Life in the first place; the childlike, unconditional faith that initiated a relationship of trust and dependency meant to last forever. Col. 2:26, "In the same manner you received Christ, so walk in Him."

Here's an interesting approach to this passage by Ironside;

Do you have faith in the Son of God? Do you trust in Him? If you do, then I have a message for you, and I wish I could drive it home to every heart with power. Suppose a letter came addressed, "To you who believe on the name of the Son of God." The courier announces, "I have a letter, and if the person to whom it is addressed is here, please come and claim it. It is addressed to 'You who believe.'" What would you say? Do you believe on the name of the Son of God? Is this letter for you? Very well, then, open it and see what it says. "That you may know that you have eternal life". It is a message from Heaven to every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you been doubting the assurance of your salvation? Are you "sometimes up and sometimes down," yet hoping all the while that you are Heaven-bound, but not fully sure of it? Get it settled today. Put away your doubts and fears, and look by faith at the risen Christ. Take it from God Himself that "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life" (John 3:36).

The reason I like that is not because its theologically deep and revealing, but because it's personal and deals with the genuine struggles believers then (and now) sometimes have with the assurance of their salvation.

We could take that same approach to a myriad of other battles of the mind we sometimes face. Faith is shown throughout the Bible to be the most effective way of victory over all doubts and uncertainties. So even if 'assurance of salvation' is not a problem for you personally, assurance of acceptance as a disciple might be, or confidence of what John calls "the coming judgment" of believers – and more attacks of "the accuser of the brethren" trying to replace childlike faith in our Father with doubt and fear.

John wants his readers (and us) to know that it is faith that pleases God; our striving to work for our salvation or to work to become better Christians, more acceptable to God, is not what God is asking of us. It's always been faith, as shown everywhere from Zechariah to Hebrews;

(Zech. 4:6) 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty—you will succeed because of my Spirit . . .'

And *all* of Hebrews chapter 11, with example after example, of how everything in human history that was victorious and pleasing to God was based on faith in the hearts of His people.

So, again, John felt that this would be a good reminder for his readers; and it's always a good reminder to us also. Sometimes when the pressure is on, going back to initial faith and first love is our best move.

Right after vs. 13, John uses that foundation to apply faith's confidence to our prayer life;

(vs's 14-15) Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

I'm aware that there are many Christians who wonder what the practical value is of telling us that the only time our prayers have any possibility of being answered is if they are specifically "God's will".

We're told to cast all our burdens on Him because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). In Prov. 3:5-6 and 16:3 we read; "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths . . . Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established."

There is something underneath all of these, and countless more like them, that has to exist before a verse like we have in 1 Jn. 5 will be an encouragement rather than a mystery.

The person praying must be a disciple of Christ, not just saved. God doesn't answer the petitions of the flesh, which may characterize a large number of believers, especially in their younger years as Christians. But more mature Christians have learned, through experience, three vital lessons that undergird all their prayers to God.

The first one is that nothing in this life will ultimately work out if we don't pick up our cross each morning to follow Him – in other words, self is out and Christ is Lord.

The second one is the realization we make over time that God's wisdom is infinitely greater than ours and that it would be insane to lean unto our own understanding of what God should do.

Finally, effective prayers are those that rise from people who know that God's will is always going to be motivated by love (as well as omniscience) and they *personally* desire to see the Lord in action through their prayers accomplishing His purpose for us. They see prayer as an incredible privilege of co-laboring with the Lord in the fulfillment of His purpose in this Age.

As I read a few weeks ago in an article Lori sent, these kinds of people see even suffering as "love-tokens" of God.

Bottom-line, a man or woman who knows these things about their Father in Heaven, would not only *not* want anything but His will to happen, they longingly look forward to both the discovery and outcome of “Not my will, but Thy will be done”.

And it’s not just an attitude of devotion and self-sacrifice, it’s a mature understanding of, and love for, the God they serve.

They want what He wants more than anything else; they realize that it’s in their best interest, as well as for His glory, to have His will done on earth as it is in heaven.

So, John is offering people like that confidence that the Lord is aware of their prayers and of what is driving them; and because of that, they can be assured that their prayers will be answered. That whole mysterious, relational process through prayer in union with the mind of Christ for the accomplishment of God’s will in our time is something some believers are very excited to be a part of.

Others are just ticked off that God isn’t doing what they asked Him to do and they wonder what possible good there could be in these verses in 1 Jn. 5. They’re thinking, “Well, if the only thing God is going to do is what *He* wants to do; then what’s the point?”

It’s in things like that, that we can see one of the differences between a carnal Christian and a growing disciple of Christ.

Now, vs’s 16 & 17 are going to move us back into a very controversial segment of this letter, and I will do my best to explain my take on this. It’s definitely an area of the Bible that I would guess you probably haven’t heard a lot of pastors expound on because depending on how one approaches this, there are some definite risks of offending someone.

So, with that intro. let’s read the verses;

If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death.

There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.

The first thing we need clear up is that, as we've seen throughout his letter, John is writing to, and about, Christians, not unbelievers. This person is a "brother" and whatever he's doing could potentially result in his death (like Ananias and Saphira or the Christians Paul wrote about in 1 Cor. 11).

And unlike Jas. 5:14-15, this "brother's" sin can't be resolved through prayer. Here's the James passage;

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

Also, in case it's crossed anyone's mind, this is not the "unpardonable sin" of Matt. 12:31-32;

I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

We won't tangent off on that now, except to say that the sin Jesus is talking about has to do with the ministry of the Holy Spirit (as shown in John 16:8) and the context is the Lord's warning to Pharisees, not to believers.

(John 16:8) "When He (the Spirit of Truth) has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of *sin*, because they do not believe in Me."

The person in 1 Jn. 5 has already (quote) "believed in Christ" or he wouldn't be called a "brother". At some point in his life, he made a decision that was the opposite of the "unpardonable sin" of Matt. 16. He received, rather than rejected, the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

He appears to be in a “grieving” or “quenching” the Spirit mode now, and that’s something directed at believers, not unbelievers. For the unbeliever the only issue is what they will do with the offer of Christ, which is why “sin” in John 16 is in the singular.

The phrase “unpardonable sin” is directed to unbelievers and is related to Heaven and Hell; the “sin unto death” is directed to believers is related to God’s discipline of His own children.

So, the question now is – what is it that a Christian can do that results in them leaving earth prematurely?

First, since we see this historically in Acts 5 and in 1 Cor. 11, we know that it’s not one specific type of sin that causes this. In Acts, Ananias and Saphira lied; in 1 Cor. 11, an historical take on this suggested that some of the Corinthian believers died because they were using the time of the Lord’s Supper to get drunk on the wine. Whatever it was that they were doing, it was ‘unworthy’ of the seriousness of what the Lord’s supper represents.

So, our passage in 1 Jn. 5:16-17 is similar to 1 Cor. 11 in that neither author cites a specific sin that is resulting in physical death. To be able to see this through the Lord’s eyes means we’d have to look, not at a listing of potentially horrible sins, but at the context of each time you see someone in the Bible who dies prematurely due to sin; and when we do that, we see that it’s not so much the sin mentioned that resulted in death (because other believers committed similar sins and remained alive). It was more an issue of the heart of the person who committed this “final straw” type of sin.

In 2 Cor. 4:18, Paul reminded us that that which is seen is temporal; that which is unseen, is eternal. If we can’t see the invisible world, we’re missing out on the ability to interface with the spiritual world that we are at war with. In the case of 1 Jn. 5, spiritual discernment is needed to identify the condition of a person who is in danger of this happening.

We also know from 1 Cor. 11 that the Lord normally takes the offending believer through a series of warnings before removing someone from this life ('some are weak, some are sick, (then) some have fallen asleep').

At each stage, the believer is reminded by increasingly difficult circumstances that confession is needed, and he's warned that refusing to confess what he's doing could result in death.

Something that we have to be very careful about is allowing the enemy to convince us that any difficulties we are having, especially if they are *extremely* difficult, are happening because God is warning us. If Satan can convince us of that, then not only do we miss out on the education that can be gained from suffering, we can also become obsessed and fearful that everything happening to us is coming from God's displeasure with us for some reason.

We can get paranoid about it and wonder if our suffering is designed to increase our growth and character, or if we're being warned about things like we see in 1 Jn. 5.

First, people who are afraid they are being disciplined unto death, people who are concerned about this, are the ones least likely to be in that situation. Their 'concern' is coming from a sensitive conscience; they are what our Lord would call, "the poor in spirit". God knows that these people are willing, even *desperately* willing, to confess anything He shows them.

But those who really are in danger, tend to excuse or ignore all they are doing- or they blame others or God for their problems.

The Lord is faithful; He will let us know if there is something this important that should be on our radar. So, unless you have been shown some sin that you've overlooked that needs to be forgiven for restoration to fellowship, you should assume that the suffering you're experiencing is for your growth, not for discipline.

The Holy Spirit gently discloses any sins needing to be confessed to the transparent believer – the enemy, on the other hand, shouts accusations and personal condemnation in order to shatter our trust in the Lord and to entrap us in guilt and

shame. And Satan does not reveal the way out – he makes sure there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

Eventually, as we grow, we become better able to recognize the difference between our Father’s guidance and the enemy’s accusations. The personalities and approaches of the invisible forces interfacing with our lives become clearer and because of that, we become more successful at recognizing the source of the thoughts flooding our minds.

I’ll share one illustration that I thought would be a good example of approaching the communion service in an ‘unworthy’ manner.

You may wonder what Paul meant by “Failing to discern the Lord’s body?” Let me illustrate in this way. How frequently we have gone to a funeral service and have seen before us the casket containing all that was mortal of some loved one. What a solemn time it was. What would you think of some light, flippant person coming into such a service and perhaps hardly taking his seat before he leans over to the person next to him and says, “By the way, I heard a hilarious story; let me tell it to you while we wait for the pastor to begin.” Every respectable person would look upon him with indignation and say, “What is the matter with this man? Does he fail to discern the body of our dear one lying there?” The bread and wine upon the Table of the Lord set forth the precious body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and any one coming into such a scene carelessly, failing to discern the Lord’s body, does not recognize that this is a memorial of death, this is a remembrance of the One who died for us.

I used that illustration because it shows that the *heart* of the offending Christian is real issue. His heart was determining not only his actions, but was also revealing his spiritual condition. God never has to look at the outward appearance or actions of someone to know where they’re at spiritually because He can look at the heart. And as we’ve seen numerous times in other studies, Christians with spiritual discernment can also see past actions to the heart of any given situation or individual. 1 Cor. 2:15, “He that is spiritual judges all things . . . ”

That's how (in Acts 16) Paul knew the real thoughts and purpose of the slave girl in Philippi, and how Peter knew that Annanias' and Saphira's lie was the result of a much deeper problem than simply exaggerating their giving.

Several authors I've read over the last few years have said very dogmatically that *spiritual discernment* is the single most important, and the universally most lacking skill that is needed in the Church of the final generation.

The deception of imitation Christianity in our time is too perfect and too subtle to avoid being taken in by, if all we use are our observation skills to show us what's happening.

Finally, in 1st Jn. 5:17, the phrase "there is a sin not leading to death" just means that the sins committed by believers whose hearts are in the right place need to be confessed, but they aren't in danger of dying because of them. They just need to be made aware of something they're missing. Once they know, they are transparent and honest enough before the Lord to confess whatever the sin is and move on.

The last part of 1 Jn. 5 is vs's 18-21;

We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, 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. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

We saw in a previous study in 1 Jn. 3:9 what it meant when John wrote phrases like "whoever is born of God does not sin." I'll briefly share what we looked at the first time John said this so we can have it in mind as we look at 1 Jn. 5;

To say that a true believer won't continue in sin after salvation is to contradict 1 Jn. 1:8 & 10 which says,

If we say that we have no sin (present tense), we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

So, what do we do with 1 Jn. 3:9 says, “Whoever is born of God does not sin”? 1 Jn. 1:8 & 10 made it clear that *all* who are “born of God” sin, and if anyone says they don’t, they make God a liar and His word is not in him.

Several translations decided to add the phrase “practices sin or practices righteousness”, alleging that the verb supports ongoing action. But the actual word used is “poieo”, which simply means “to do”. As one lexicon stated it;

It was needless for the NKJV to change the KJV’s “doeth righteousness” to “practices righteousness”, since the Greek verb is the common one for “to do” and carries no special overtones like “makes a habit of” or something similar.

The bottom line is this: That which was placed in us at our new birth, the human spirit born of the Holy Spirit, is incapable of sinning. The sins we have in our lives never come from what the Bible calls “the inner man”; the spirit within us that is created in the image of Christ.

It’s not just spiritual discernment that has its source in who we are as new creations in Christ, our new nature in Christ is also the source or ground of our true righteousness. The flesh produces both sin and imitation righteousness and religion; but once we’ve grown to full maturity as Christians, and our flesh has been progressively subdued in our thinking and actions, that which defines us is our behavior that springs from our new nature. Out of our heart shall flow rivers of living water – the Holy Spirit conforming us to Christ and Christ’s life being manifest outward from us to those around us.

I realize that it’s very difficult for us to see ourselves as having two natures that we are carrying around in this body, but the sooner we begin to see how each one works (one working *for* us, and one working *against* us), the sooner we’ll be able to successfully battle the flesh and live in the spirit.

Paul wrote Romans around 57-58 A.D.; so, he had been a believer for quite awhile before these things we're talking about began to make sense to him. And they would never have made sense if he hadn't had the intense inner struggle he shared with us in Rom. 7. So, I'm going to read a portion of that, and it's familiar, but try to get a feel of what Paul is going through when he wrote this because both Paul and the Holy Spirit Who made sure it was in the Bible, want us to understand the reality of the inner battle we all face if we try to grow into who we are in Christ.

(Rom. 7:15-25) What I am doing, I do not understand. For what I want to do, I'm not doing; but what I hate, that is what I'm doing. If, then, I do what I don't want to do . . . it is no longer I who do it, but sin (the old nature, the flesh) that dwells in me. For I know that in my flesh nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I can't find. For the good that I want to do, I don't do; but the evil I don't want to do, I do consistently. Now if I do what I don't want to do, it is not me who is doing it, but sin (the old nature, the flesh) that dwells in me. I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Paul uses phrases like “inward, or inner man” and “the flesh” or “sin” singular (referring to the sin nature) and ultimately, he realizes he has both vying for control of his mind and actions – battling each other to rule over him.

We have one body housing two natures at war with each other. The word “sanctification” refers to what happens as we grow spiritually and the flesh, the sin nature, decreases in terms of influence. The new man who we are as new creations in Christ, increases. And our recognition of each becomes more accurate so we can know what to trust and what to do.

The Holy Spirit brings Truth and the Life of Christ to our inner man and from there the knowledge and strength we need for discernment and obedience is transferred

to our soul (our mind). The world, the devil, and the flesh all try to grieve and quench the working together of Holy Spirit and human spirit, to keep us either living in sin, or doing our best to imitate Christ and Christianity.

Either way, if the enemy is successful, the Christ-life is suppressed and either immorality or Christian Religion characterize our lives. We keep learning but we are never able to come to an empirical knowledge of the Truth.

I think it would be a safe assumption to say that most, if not all of us, have experienced some degree of Romans 7. When Paul went through that and understood how this works, he wrote Romans 8. And without going into all that's in that chapter, the guiding principle of this is stated simply in Rom. 8:14-16;

As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are mature sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Which is saying that we are to depend on the Spirit of God to both understand and live what life can be for the children of God. The battle continues, we learn along the way, through experience, all that we'll need to know to convince us that we *are* the children of God and have no desire to allow the old self, the world or the devil to tell us that we belong to any of them.

Well, my intention is not to go back over what we studied in Romans 7 & 8, I just wanted to make sure we have some idea of what John is doing in the closing of his first letter.

So, let's go back there and clear up a few verses that might be a little confusing. First, vs. 18 says that "He that is born of God keeps himself and the evil one does not touch him."

Since the new man does not sin because he is created in the image of God, the Christian's new nature is a refuge and Satan cannot induce the new creation humanity to sin. As a result, Satan never tries to tempt our new nature, Satan's appeal is always to our flesh hoping that we will be as ignorant as Eve was and consider Satan's offer.

That's why in 1 Jn. 5:18 John wrote, "Whoever is born of God does not sin; . . . and the wicked one does not touch him." The regenerate nature we receive from God at our re-birth does not sin – and Satan can't change that.

But if we allow the flesh (the thoughts and ways of the natural man), to govern our decisions, it's only a matter of time until Satan will become our guide for either immorality or for imitation Christianity. At that point, fellowship is broken, and no matter how much we learn from like-minded Christians and pastors, we will never know the Truth as it is in Christ.

Like we read in Rom. 8:16, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." That's the spiritual world we are meant to interface with and live in 24/7. The Holy Spirit communicating light and Life through our human spirit to our soul (our mind). Then our thoughts and actions become an expression of that process, that relationship. As we grow, we spend less time listening to the suggestions of the flesh and more time having an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying to us. When Christ returns and we are fully transformed, and the flesh is removed, and Satan is imprisoned for 1000 years, the voice of the Lord will be the only voice we hear and the only one we will want to hear.

The next vs. in 1 Jn. 5, vs. 19, is one of the most all-encompassing verses in the Bible, here's the verse; "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one."

There are a couple ways to approach this. John is making a clear distinction between what is of God and what is of "the wicked one". As he closes his letter, he's re-emphasizing the "not of this world" nature of every born-again child of God. And the way he phrases it would be like saying, "We know with absolute certainty that we are a new creative act of God; one that has never happened before, a new humanity". And, of course, John is hoping that by now, his readers have a better idea of what it means to be a type of humanity that is not naturalized to this world in any way. By nature, we are as different from all of the earth-dwellers (religious or otherwise) as Jesus was from those He interacted with in the days of His flesh – which is one reason everyone, even His own disciples, were consistently confused by the things He said and did.

Then John becomes equally dogmatic that everything outside of that which is of Christ alone belongs to the “god of this world”, which is why the world is in the condition it’s in. Listen to Spark’s explanation of this;

There is one comprehensive and all-embodying truth which, if it really gained the complete mastery of our hearts and dominated our whole consciousness, capturing our will, our hearts, and our minds, would revolutionize everything, just as the new covenant represents a revolution from the old covenant. The great truth which embodies everything is this: that God has determined that nothing which is not Christ shall remain, and He is working toward that end, on the one hand to rid this universe of everything that is not Christ; on the other hand, to fill this universe with that which is Christ. That means that God does not accept or recognize anything whatever that is not Christ. Then again, it means that God puts His seal upon what *is* of Christ, and it is all a matter of the measure of Christ. It is a tremendous thing when that really does come to our hearts with the force and the power which it represents. It explains everything of God's dealings with us. It gives us the key to our problems. It sets us at once upon the highway of God's own purpose.

Those are some of the implications of being strangers in a strange land. We have to explore for ourselves whatever personal implications may need to be understood and either embraced or discarded.

John’s point is simple – “We are of God”, and whatever is of the world is not compatible with who we are becoming in Christ. Discerning the specifics is obviously an issue of spiritual growth, but I think for most of us, worldly things are fairly obvious; our real battle is identifying whether the things presented to us as being a part of Christianity are genuinely out from Christ or whether they are imitations of Christianity, which are much more difficult to identify than worldliness.

As we’ve seen throughout 1 Jn., his purpose in what he wrote is to warn about this, to identify the religious and spiritual deceptions his readers were facing in his generation, and to establish some rock-solid guidelines that every generation of

believers can use to be clear in their own minds about what it means to be “of God” versus being “under the sway of the wicked one”. Those are obviously extremely serious exhortations and any child of God that truly desires to honor His Lord will press into prayer and study as much as possible to possess a mature and effectual spiritual discernment so they can be as safe as possible in this final age of deception.

Finally, its probably clear by now why John ends with these verses (20 & 21)

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, 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. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

John gives one final appeal to clear up any misconceptions about who the true Christ is, who we are as those joined to Him, and the much-needed realization that possessing and experiencing genuine spiritual life is only possible through the Son of God. Everything else are idols that must be avoided at all costs.

John has been very consistent throughout his letter in making the meaning and explanation of the true Christian life as clear as possible, and at the same time, he’s been exposing all of the 1st. century movements and doctrines that had the potential of sabotaging our experience of the Life we’ve entered in Christ.

So, now it’s up to us. Can we see what we need to see to be safe? Do we know enough about abiding in Christ to make that our number one priority in this journey we’re on? If those things are true of us; John would be thrilled – like he said in 3rd John 4, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the Truth.”