

**1 John 5:13-21**  
**(Isaiah 43:1-3a; John 17:1-5)**  
**“That You May Know”**

## **Introduction**

As we come to the end of our study of John’s letter, he states clearly what his purpose was in writing: “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” (5:13). In the 1920s, a young cadet at Augusta Military Academy in Virginia began to realize that his own good works, his own attempt to live a moral, honorable life, could not make him right with God. He began to realize that under the moral façade of a southern gentleman was all of the corruption of desire and selfishness that marks every one of us, even the best of us, by nature, and he began to long to be forgiven and reconciled to God.

When he shared his struggles with his older sisters, they pointed him to this letter that we have been studying, and as he read it, he began to understand the biblical grounds of assurance. When he reached this thirteenth verse of chapter five, he knew that his sins were forgiven, that he was at peace with God, that God had redeemed him and made him his child. That young man was my father, and he claimed 1 John 5:13 as his life verse, and spent the rest of his life telling others that they, too, could know that they were reconciled to God and given the gift of eternal life within God’s kingdom.

But you may be wondering what these three truths that we have been studying look like in practice. To think biblically about who Jesus is, to love one another and to live in glad obedience to God’s commands, is a life transforming program, all-encompassing and thus completely overwhelming. Where does one begin? In concluding his letter, John applies the tests in a most practical way.

## **Body**

### **1. An application of the relational test: Effective prayer (5:14-17).**

Everyone prays, even those who don’t believe in the existence of God or in the efficacy of prayer. When in danger, when a crisis arises, when someone we love faces trouble, we cry out for help in hope that someone somewhere will hear and come to our rescue. But John describes a life of confident prayer: “And this is the confidence we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us” (5:14).

This is an incredible statement: that those who are in Christ may pray with the confidence that God hears our prayers and will answer. However, there

are two crucial caveats, one stated in this verse, the other illustrated in the verses that immediately follow. The first caveat is that we learn to pray as Jesus prayed, submitting all things to the Father's will. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36). This is what it means to pray in Jesus' name: to pray according to his will. If you act in someone's name, you are acting on their behalf, to do what they want done. To say, "In Jesus' name, Amen," is not a mantra that gets us what we want, but rather an act of submission to what the Lord wants. So the first caveat is that effective prayer assumes that we are living in such communion with Christ, so steeped in this Word, so filled with his Spirit, that we are seeking, asking, desiring his will to be done and our will to be conformed to his. Only thus do we pray as members of Christ's body.

The second caveat is found in the illustration that follows, namely, in how we are to pray for one another. The great point of prayer is for it to be an expression of our love for God and for one another. Prayer is not my personal way of bending God to do my will, but is God's invitation to me to get my will lined up with his and to join him in his work. Prayers made in this context are powerful and effective because they are pleasing to God and flow from a relationship of love with him and with one another.

There is a difficult matter here, concerning what exactly John meant by "sin that leads to death" (5:16). John and his readers obviously knew what he was talking about, but we simply do not. Some believe that it refers to certain sins that bring physical death, but most agree that it refers to a sin that leads to spiritual death. My best guess is that John is referring to what Jesus called "an eternal sin" that "never has forgiveness." The context of that statement was that Jesus' enemies accused him of working miracles by the power of Satan. In response, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3:28-30).

So, here John says that there may be some cases where prayer itself is powerless because the one we are praying for has so utterly rejected God's Spirit that the Spirit has withdrawn his saving influence from that person's life. But don't miss the two keys: Effective prayer is according to the Father's will, and prayer is given to us, not as personal talisman to get what we desire, but as a redemptive means of joining the Lord as he seeks and saves the lost.

## **2. An application of the ethical test: Freedom from bondage (5:18-19).**

The second application is that those who have been born of God are no longer under bondage to what John calls, "the power of the evil one." John depicts the world, meaning this world in rebellion against God, as lying under

the power of Satan, but he insists that we who have been born of God, who thus have God's Spirit within us and are joined to Christ, are protected by God and are no longer in bondage to sin and death. Thus, he writes, "We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him" (5:18).

The context for this assertion is the beginning of the letter in which John explains what he claims here. In brief, everyone sins, even God's children. When we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, who has given himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sin. Yet, even though we still sin, we are no longer living in a pattern of perpetual sin. The whole trajectory of life has been changed from one who once pursued sin to one who now pursues righteousness. Sin was once our delight and righteousness was drudging duty and obligation. Even when we saw sin's destructive effects, we were powerless against it. Now, we have the mind of Christ and the power of the Spirit, and are no longer in bondage. When we sin, it is because we have gotten our minds off of the Spirit and onto the flesh. Such behavior is no longer the pattern, but increasingly the exception, as Christ conforms us to himself. John explains all of this in the second half of chapter one and the first half of chapter two of this letter (See 1:5-2:6).

The key here is that we may live in the confidence that we are no longer in bondage to sin and death. We have been set free and may now pursue the life that was once impossible for us to grasp.

### **3. An application of the doctrinal test: Knowledge of God (5:20-21).**

John's final application concerns, both *what* we know and *whom* we know. "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 that we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life" (5:20-21).

We know certain things that God has done: he has sent his Son to give us understanding of who he is and of his ways. But he has given us so very much more than mere knowledge about him and his work: he has given us personal knowledge of him. We do not just know *about* him. We "know him who is true." "Him who is true" clearly refers, not to Jesus, but to God the Father, for John then writes, "and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ."

Here we come to the heart of the meaning of our salvation. The only all-encompassing biblical expression for our salvation is "union with Christ." All the benefits of salvation flow from this great truth: When we are born of God, we receive the Spirit of Christ and are joined to the body of Christ. He is in us and we are in him. Because he is in the Father and the Father is in him, we

are also in the Father and the Father in us. Thus, we have been joined to the triune God. This was Jesus' prayer for us the night before his crucifixion:

I do not ask for these only [meaning, those with him in the upper room], but also for those who will believe in me through their word [meaning, people like you and me], that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may be perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me (John 17:20-23).

The next sentence of our text is, again, a source of some interpretive confusion: "He is the true God and eternal life." If this refers to Jesus, it is a powerful statement of his divinity. However, it probably refers to the Father, since John is talking about him here and calling the Father, "him who is true." In either case, John points us to the miracle of God's grace, that we have been born of God, and thus are no longer under the dominion of the powers of this present age but are living, even now, joined to the living God, in the reality of the age to come, and even now may know as friend the One who created the cosmos and who invites us to call him, Abba, Father.

## **Conclusion**

John's final word is an admonition: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (5:21). This letter has been a call to know the truth, to walk in the truth, and to live by the truth in love. Idols are lies, substitutes for God. They may be good things, even gifts from God, but if we put them in the place of God, if we trust them – whether shiny things or beautiful people – to give us the meaning, significance, security and value, that only God can give, then we will shipwreck our lives.

It is good to ask ourselves from time-to-time, "What am I trusting to give my life meaning? What could I not imagine being without? Whom do I desire more than I desire intimacy with the Lord?" Don't turn God's good gifts into stumbling blocks that keep you from knowing him. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

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