

March 20, 2016 by Steve Brandon



## Things We Know

### 1 John 5:18-21

We know that ...

1. We Have Eternal Life (verse 13).
2. God Answers Prayer (verses 14-17).
3. God Protects Us (verse 18).
4. We are from God (verse 19).
5. We have Understanding (verse 20).
6. Idols are Prohibited (verse 21).

I invite you to open your Bibles to 1 John, chapter 5. I want for you to think about the knowledge in the world. With more and more people, with more and more discoveries, with more and more technology, our knowledge of the world is ever increasing. And today, it is increasing at a faster rate than ever before, because we have a mechanism to record all of the knowledge with tools called computers. We have a mechanism to share all of the knowledge which is called the internet.

But, like the surface area of an expanding balloon, the awareness of what we don't know is becoming greater and greater. Because, with greater knowledge comes greater questions. This is how it always works. The more you know about something, the more questions that you will have about it, because you will know more about what to ask.

It's how it works in science. It's how it works with literature. It's how it works with history. It's how it works with theology.

The more you know, the more questions you have. And the more questions that you have, the more you realize you don't know. This world is filled with unanswered questions, the number of which grows every day.

Well, in a world of questions, there are some things that we know for sure. This morning we come to the end of our exposition of 1 John. He is telling us of what we know to be true about our salvation. John is giving assurances to his readers, to those who "believe in the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:13). He's pouring it out strong.

This ought not to be so surprising to us, as that's the whole reason why he wrote. He wrote to give assurance (5:13). And it's only appropriate that he finishes his epistle with these assurances. In the last section of this little letter, we find five statements of things that we know. I'm going to begin reading in verse 13, because, it's where the thought begins. And as I read, I want for you to listen for how often John says that "you know" or "we know."

1 John 5:13-21

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.

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.

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.

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

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. He is the true God and eternal life.

Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

This passage contains 5 things that we know. First of all, from a few weeks ago, we know that ...

#### 1. We Have Eternal Life (verse 13).

This comes in verse 13, ...

1 John 5:13

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

Such a knowledge comes to those who believe in Jesus. Such a knowledge comes to those who pass the tests of 1 John. It comes to those who are walking in obedience to the Lord. It comes to those who are walking in love. It comes to those who are believing in the true, historical Jesus.

If you have any questions about that, listen to the message from a few weeks ago. I trust that the Lord will use the message in all of our hearts.

Second is a point that we looked at two weeks ago. We know that ...

## **2. God Answers Prayer (verses 14-17).**

1 John 5:14-15

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

The promise of verse 15 is vast! "We know that he hears us!" "We know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." I exhorted you to pray big! And, to accept the results, as God answers prayers according to His will.

Thirdly, and here we will slow down and take some time as we consider these last four verses, we know that ...

## **3. God Protects Us (verse 18).**

Look at verse 18, ...

1 John 5:18

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.

John's assurance here goes back to the entire message of the epistle. It goes back to how you can tell a genuine believer from a false professor. You can tell by the life they live.

Jesus said it this way, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:20). He reasoned, "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit" (Matthew 7:17-18, NASB).

This is exactly what John is saying. The one who genuinely believes in Jesus Christ, the one who has been born of God, will produce good fruit. He will walk in righteousness. Or, to use John's terminology, he will not keep on sinning.

1 John 5:18

... Everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning

Now, of course, this doesn't mean perfection. It doesn't mean that a believer will never sin. Such an idea contradicts what John wrote in this letter. Back in chapter 1 and verse 8, John writes, ...

1 John 1:8

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Two verses later, John writes, ...

1 John 1:10

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

John never claimed that a Christian would be free from sin. So, verse 18 doesn't mean perfection. But it does mean something. It means that a believer in Jesus Christ will not live in a pattern of sin. The pattern of a believer's life will be one of obedience to God. The pattern of a believer's life will be one of love for others.

This is almost exactly what John said in chapter 3 and verse 9.

1 John 3:9

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

But, there is a subtle difference in emphasis between 3:9 and 5:18. And this is where the Bible is so rich, because it gives us another perspective of the reality of our salvation. The emphasis in chapter 3 and verse 9 is that God so changes us deep within that our heart's desire is toward righteousness. That is, that we act according to our nature.

A dog will bark at squirrels. A cat will chase the mouse. And one who has been born of God won't keep on sinning ...

1 John 3:9

"... because he has been born of God."

And the treasure of our text today is that emphasis isn't upon our willing, but upon God's working. Look again at verse 18.

1 John 5:18

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.

There it is, ...

### **3. God Protects Us (verse 18).**

If you are in Christ this morning, if you know and love Jesus, if you have been born of God, then you can be assured that God is protecting you. He is keeping you from the evil one. This is exactly what Jesus said.

John 10:28-29

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

The picture here is that God takes his children into his own hands, and he protects them and keeps them and holds them tight, so that when another comes along and tries to take a precious child away from him, it's impossible. It simply cannot be done.

Parents, you know what this is about. When your child is about two or three years old, and you play a little game with them. You hold a little toy in your hand that they want. Like a little glow-in-the-dark Tyrannosaurus Rex. And so, they take your hand, and try to open it one finger at a time. You give them a little resistance, and you pretend to struggle. And when they manage to open up one of your fingers, you keep it open for them. After a bit of struggle, all of your fingers lay open, and you let go of the toy.

Now, if you really wanted to, there is no way that your child is going to be able to get the toy out of your hand. And so it is with God. He holds believers in his hands, and protects them. And the evil one cannot pry them away no matter how hard he tries. In fact, as John says in verse 18, "the evil one" cannot even "touch him." This is a fact that we know of our salvation. The one who has been born of God is safe and secure in the hands of God.

I remember meeting up with a long-lost Christian friend. I hadn't seen him in years. I asked him how he was doing, and the first sentence out of his mouth was this, "The Lord has kept me." What a great illustration of this verse. "The Lord has kept me."

As Richard Sibbes has well said, "When the child falleth not, it is from the mother's holding the child, and not from the child's holding the mother. So it is God's holding of us, knowing of us, embracing of us, and justifying of us that maketh the state firm, and not ours." [\[1\]](#)

This is one of those Christian assurances that we know. We know that God Protects Us (verse 18).

And as we move on to verse 19, we see a similar thought.

1 John 5:19

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

This is my fourth point. We know that ...

### **4. We are from God (verse 19).**

That is, we belong to him. That is, we are his children. That's why the NIV translates this verse, "We know that we are children of God."

Now as children of God, we are different than the world. We live in a different domain. We live unto a different king. We live under a different power. And that's the emphasis of verse 19, ...

1 John 5:19

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

One of the constant points of emphasis that John makes in his little letter is that there are two types of people in this world. There are the

children of God and there are the children of the devil. Look over at chapter 3 and verse 10, ...

1 John 3:10

By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

In other words, the children of the devil follow the ways of the devil. And the children of God follow the ways of God. The ways of God are righteousness and love. Whereas ways of the devil are wickedness and hate.

And beware, the ways of the devil can come cloaked in religion. Do you remember when Jesus was battling with the Pharisees (those who prided themselves in religion)? Jesus said to them, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). And so, these righteous Pharisees followed in his ways of wickedness and hate. And they murdered Jesus, thereby demonstrating whose children they were.

But such is not the case of the children of God. The children of God walk in the ways of righteousness and love. Nowhere in John's epistle is the contrast between the children of God and the children of the world clearer than in chapter 2, verses 15-17.

1 John 2:15-17

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

The ways of the world are the desires of the flesh. The ways of the world are the desires of the eyes. The ways of the world are in the boastful pride of achievements and accomplishments and possessions and wealth.

But, such are not the ways of the children of God. John couldn't have been more clear. He said, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." So, you either love the world and are controlled by its power. Or, you love the Father and are controlled by his love. And for those of you who are controlled by the love of the Father, John's assurance here in verse 19 for you.

1 John 5:19

... we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

So, embrace the promise. You don't have to go the ways of the world. You can follow after the ways of God. And following after the ways of God, you can have assurance that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

Let's move on to the fifth assurance. It comes in verse 20. We know that We Have Eternal Life (verse 13), God Answers Prayer (verses 14-17), God Protects Us (verse 18), We are from God (verse 19). And, fifth, we know that ..

## **5. We have Understanding (verse 20).**

1 John 5:20

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. He is the true God and eternal life.

Verse 20 sums up everything that John has been saying throughout his entire epistle. Jesus, the Son of God, has left heaven, and has come to earth to live and dwell among us. We have seen him. We have touched him and heard him. And the reason why Jesus came was to make the Father known to us. To make known his ways. To make known his salvation. To make known his truth.

And he, "has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true." And as we come to know him who is true, we abide in him. We abide in Jesus. We abide in his teaching. We abide in his love.

And this brings us to eternal life, which is in the true God. And we know these things. And we can stand firm in these things. That's exactly what verse 20 says, ...

1 John 5:20

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. He is the true God and eternal life.

John says this against the backdrop of false teachers who deny Jesus Christ (2:22). They deny that he came in the flesh (4:2). They deny that he is the Christ (2:22). To these things, John says, ...

1 John 2:22

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

John writes chapter 5 and verse 20 against the backdrop of false professors who claim to know Jesus, but are living lives contrary to the truth. They don't love the brethren. They don't obey the commands of God. To these things, John says, ...

1 John 1:6

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

1 John 2:4

Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1 John 2:15

... If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

John writes chapter 5 and verse 20 against the backdrop of those who have left the fellowship of God's people who were claiming that they knew better and who sought to persuade others to come away with them. To these things, John says, ...

1 John 2:19

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

Throughout the entire epistle, John is trying to bring us back to the solid truth that we might truly know the genuine realities of God and of Jesus. That we might stand firm in these things. And the reality is this: what was true in John's day is equally true in our day. There is much confusion in the world today.

There are many who say that you can't really know about things eternal. There are many who cast doubt upon the truthfulness of the Bible. There are many who live for the world and believe that they won't ever pay for their sins.

On the religious side, there are many who claim to know Jesus who actually know little about him. There are many who claim to believe in Jesus who don't even know the truth about Jesus. There are many who claim to follow Jesus who actually don't follow him much at all.

And to all of these errors and all of these false ways, John writes, ...

1 John 5:20

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. He is the true God and eternal life.

So, church family, know these things for certain. Jesus came. Jesus has given us understanding to know the true God. And only the true God will lead us to eternal life. People can give you all sorts of counsel and advice, but no better advice can be given than this. "Jesus is the way the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Trust in him.

Finally, comes verse 21.

## **6. Idols are Prohibited (verse 21).**

1 John 5:21

Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

What is interesting about verse 21 is that it seems to come from nowhere. John hasn't mentioned idols anywhere in this epistle. And now, last of all, he mentions idols.

It's almost as if John was about to send off his letter, only to remember one last thing which he barely scribbled at the end of his letter before sending it off on its way. "Keep yourselves from idols." It seems almost not to fit. From verses 13 to 20, John has been pounding the things that we know.

1 John 5:13

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

1 John 5:15

... We know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

1 John 5:18

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning. ...

1 John 5:19

We know that we are from God. ...

1 John 5:20

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding. ...

And then, ...

1 John 5:21

Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

It seems that it would have fit in better if John had written. "*We know* that idols are wrong, so keep away from them." But he doesn't do that. He simply writes, ...

1 John 5:21

Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

I believe that the connection between verses 20 and 21 goes like this. Verse 20 is a call to follow the true God. Verse 21 is a call away from the false gods.

Why John wrote these things here is the object of much discussion. I have read of at least ten different suggestions.

1. The term is a Platonic designation for "unreal" objects in contrast with the "real" world of ideas.
2. The term is taken literally to refer to the idols of wood and stone which were common in John's time and locality.
3. The term is an abbreviated description of food sacrificed to idols.
4. The term is a general designation for a compromise with paganism.
5. The term stands for the mystery religions and their practices.
6. The term designates gnostic ideologies or philosophies.
7. The term points to Jewish worship in the Jerusalem temple.
8. The term speaks of sins of various kinds.
9. The term is taken symbolically of any and all untrue representations and teachings concerning the one true God.
10. The term is a way of designating the secession from the community that has been so prominent in this epistle.

However, the application is clear: idolatry is prohibited.

Idolatry and God-worship was the battle of the Old Testament era. Abraham came from a family of idol makers to live in a land of idol makers. Moses brought the Hebrews out of Egypt, a land filled with idols. When Moses delayed upon the mountain, Israel even engaged in idol-making themselves (Exodus 32). The history of the judges and the kings is a history of Israel's flirtation with idols.

Although the form may be different, idolatry is still an issue for the church today. We live in a nation where one of the most popular television shows is entitled, "American Idol." Now, I don't think that there is anything wrong with placing singings on a stage and voting the best ones to go on. However, it does represent an idol of ours in America: fame and prestige.

Furthermore, there are many other idols we have that we don't even realize. It may be comfort or ease or pleasures of the world. Colossians 3:5 warns us against covetousness, "which is idolatry." If there is anything our society is known for, it is covetousness, the wanting of more and more things. John says, "keep yourselves from idols" (verse 21).

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 20, 2016 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] Richard Sibbes, Complete Works, Volume 6, p. 439