

1 JOHN

5:1-21

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Taught at our Sunday evening service, 31st July 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: 1 John 5:1-21

Good evening. Let's pray.

Introduction

Tonight we're studying chapter 5 of 1st John, concluding our study of this short but meaty book. As I've shared at the start of each of our studies, there are 5 reasons John notes as to why he wrote this letter:

1. That you may have fellowship with other believers (1 John 1:3)
2. That your joy may be full (1 John 1:4)
3. That you may not sin (1 John 2:1)
4. That you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13)
5. That you may *continue* to believe in the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13)

Overview of 1 John

And as a summary of each chapter:

- Chapter 1 - A real Jesus and restored relationship with God who is light
- Chapter 2 - We know that we know Him, but should walk our talk, and avoid deceptions

- Chapter 3 - We are children of God, and should abide in Him, and love others that do
- Chapter 4 - Be careful what you listen to, and love one another for God is love
- Chapter 5 - Obedience to Christ should follow the certainty of what has been done for us

Another way of summarising this book is that in the first part of this letter we see that God is light. In the extensive middle part, we saw that God is love. And the subject of this final chapter is God is life.

Overview of chapter five

Tonight, looking at chapter five, we can divide it up into four sections to help us better understand or memorise that which it says:

- v1-5: Overcoming this world
- v6-13: Certainty of eternal life
- v14-17: Confidence and compassion in prayer
- v18-21: Obedience in the midst of this world

Chapter five

So let's take a look at this final chapter. Verse 1 says:

1 John 5:1

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

Our faith is simple. If we place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we are saved. We don't have to earn it. In fact we can't - it's by God's grace, and nothing to do with ceremony, ritual or denomination. However, it's not automatic, we must come to Him in repentance and faith. When we do, we are born of God. We're born again. It really is that simple. And it changes everything, including how we feel about Christians. We don't loathe them, we love them. But how do we know we love them? John writes:

1 John 5:2

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

That means His commandments are not only for *our* good, but for the good of *others*. And that the best way we can love others, is to love God - for if we love Him, we'll keep His commandments.

Consider the 10 commandments - the last 6 are to do with how we treat our fellow man. Then take the hundreds of commands we read in the new testament. If we keep those things, we'll not be gossiping, backbiting, arguing, or showing malice, deceit or envy. How can we love others if we don't hold fast to what God has commanded us to do?

Remember what John wrote previously:

1 John 3:11

For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,

And also what he recorded Jesus say:

John 13:35

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

We have no excuse not to love, because we have seen how much God loves us. John continues:

1 John 5:3

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

His commandments are not burdensome. Does that mean that it's easy to keep them? No, we all know it can be hard, right? We live in a world that encourages us to sin, and sometimes we listen to that encouragement. So rather, what John is saying is that God's commandments don't impose a burden when they are kept. Sure, sinning is easy - but oh, the consequences are no so easy to deal with. If we're honest, we can see that in our lives right? Times we've been unkind, unloving, unfaithful, unfriendly. There are consequences to those things. Yes, Christ has forgiven us, but we are still left with the earthly consequences of our sin for the rest of our lives.

But keeping Christ's commandments doesn't do that. Who ever came to you and said "I'm really struggling with how much I showed love to someone all those years ago"? Who ever said "I feel weighed down by how honest I've been" or "I deeply regret not gossiping more". His commandments are not burdensome.

And we don't keep His commandments because we *have* to, but because we *want* to. Because we love Him. Love for God makes the difference.

1 John 5:4

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

We are no longer under sin. We are free from bondage. We no longer *have* to sin. And we overcome the temptations of this world - not through a program, but through a person. Not through self-help programs or mindfulness. But through faith in God, through His Word in us, and His Holy Spirit in us.

1 John 5:5

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

Not merely faith in *something*, but faith in *someone*. In our Saviour. What confidence we can have!

And John wants us to have this confidence in a real Saviour, who really came to this earth, had a real body, an actual crucifixion, an actual resurrection, and in indeed an actual ascension to Heaven.

We read...

1 John 5:6

This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.

Remember, throughout this letter John has been dealing with Gnostics who believed that Jesus didn't have a real body. That He wasn't fully man. But John was there, his hands had handled. And so he *knew* that this witness, this testimony of the Holy Spirit through God's Word that Jesus came in the flesh was true. He wasn't a hovering spirit. He was fully man, and fully God. And I should note - this was not for some of His life, but all of it. Jesus wasn't a man who was made Christ *only* from His Baptism until His crucifixion - that's also what John is addressing to the false teachers of the day by writing these things.

And John clarifies that we can believe the witness of the Holy Spirit with regard to Jesus humanity AND divinity, because of the absolute unity of the Trinity. We read:

1 John 5:7

For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.

Simply put, this is not unity as the Conservative party is currently talking about how their new leader will unite the party. This is perfect unity. They are one. This is the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity.

However, with that said, there are two matters to address. The first is simple. Some deny that there is a Trinity, because the word *Trinity* is not used in scripture. They same as some deny that there will be a rapture because the word *rapture* is not found in our English translations either. But in both cases, the doctrine IS found in the Bible in multiple places. So it's a poor argument. But I mention it, because there are others who argue against the doctrine of the Trinity in more covert ways.

And that brings us to the second matter which can spiral into a very deep study. We're not going to do that tonight. But what I intend to do is to lay out the key points as clearly as I can. What is this matter?! you may be asking. Well, some of you may have even spotted it if you are reading something other than the KJV or NKJV - and that is verse 7, and part of verse 8, is truncated or missing in several other versions. So let's put these two verse together...

1 John 5:7-8

For there are three that bear witness 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, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

The highlighted section is what is truncated in the NIV, NASB, and ESV among others. Why is that? It's because supposedly, as even the footnotes in the NKJV say, these words are not found in the earliest manuscripts, that is; the earliest surviving copies of the Bible. However, that is a theory that is brutally assaulted by the facts, for the most reliable manuscripts DO include this text - such as the textus receptus that the KJV and NKJV is translated from. Where the doubt comes from, is that other manuscripts such as the codex sinaiticus and codex vaticanus omit this and other passages - such as John 8, Mark 16:15 and Romans 8:1. And it's on those texts, which are influenced by the Catholic Church and - you guessed it - the Gnostics, that most modern translations are based.

John Courson clarifies this in his commentary:

Remember, we not only have copies of the original texts—we also have sermons of church fathers that are older than the oldest texts we have. And guess what. The messages of the early church preachers refer to John 8, Mark 16, Romans 8, and 1 John 5:7. So whatever texts they had in their hands contained the very passages that newer translations question. If these texts were not so pivotal, I wouldn't think so much about the controversy. But I see something more than coincidental in attacking such powerful passages.

Jon Courson

Further to what Courson notes, if the highlighted section I showed were removed, there would be a grammatical problem in the Greek text - yet further evidence that it was indeed there when John wrote this letter.

Now, indeed there are those who want to undermine Biblical doctrine. And in this specific passage, we see an undermining of the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity. That's why this is a big deal. Now, I'm not suggesting for a moment that you throw your newer translations out. They can be helpful, and as our pastor has said before you should read the Bible you're prepared to live by! But what I don't want, is for your confidence in the Word of God, the Bible, to be knocked because you see these fallible footnotes or find things are missing from your Bible. And what I DO want to do is to encourage you to carefully choose a translation, especially for deeper studying, that is accurate and faithful to reliable texts, not based on those influenced by those who would seek to undermine what the Bible says.

I hope you can see that it's important to have quickly covered that, but at the same time, let's not lose sight of what John is writing here. Let's look over these verses again:

1 John 5:6-8

This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness 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, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

v6 - speaks of water and blood - that is Jesus physical life. He was not a spirit only, and the Holy Spirit is witness to this

v7 - reinforces the position of the Holy Spirit - and the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit agree as one

Leaving us at v8 - where John says both the Holy Spirit in us, and the testimony of Jesus earthly life (which John is declaring to us) are in agreement.

And he continues...

1 John 5:9

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son.

That is, if we are willing to believe mere sinful men despite that they can so easily, and so often do, aim to deceive - we should certainly believe God who cannot lie.

1 John 5:10

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

Those who do not know Him, and in fact, deny that Jesus existed, or that God sent Him, or that He is the Son of God, are, in the end, calling God a liar. Yet for those who believe and have the witness of the Holy Spirit in their lives, not only do they have confidence that they know God, but that witness is the promise, the confidence of all that is to come. We read...

1 John 5:11

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

This is what God has said about His Son! That we have eternal life in Him, and through no-one else, through no actions or earning of our own, but given it. We do not deserve eternal life, and so to believe God is to believe in His grace, not simply in His existence.

John speaks frankly:

1 John 5:12

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

It can't be any clearer. Jesus is not merely a good man, as many believe. He is not merely a prophet, as Jews and Muslims believe. He is the Son of God. The Messiah. Our Saviour. Without Him, you're sunk.

What's the point of John writing all this? He continues:

1 John 5:13

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.

This is not written to unbelievers. But to believers. Why? So that we may KNOW that we have eternal life. That we may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

What does *continue* mean here? Continue is inserted to help clarify - that's why it's in italics to note it was put there during translation - but just occasionally it's clearer without the inserted word. For this isn't about perseverance of the saints, but that we may know that our faith is not in vain. That the Gnostics are not right. That we haven't been sold a lie. But rather, we have been given the truth about a real Jesus, who had a real body, who is a real Saviour. A Saviour that can be known, who knows us, and knows our every need. John continues...

1 John 5:14

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

Wow, we can have confidence that the God of the whole universe - our Creator - will hear us when we pray. However, there's an important part of this verse we must not miss - that He hears us if we ask anything according to His will. So the key to answered prayer, is praying according to God's will.

George Müller put it like this: "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is laying hold of His willingness." I like that. It's a good reminder that we should seek to find out what God's will is - both from His Word, and from listening to Him in prayer - not only giving our requests in prayer.

Oh how many wasted prayers we have surely each made where we have asked God to do something that was not in His will! And how grateful we should be that He didn't give us what we wanted.

My son is almost 7 months old, and he's now interested in absolutely everything. I'm certain that if I gave him a power drill, he'd have a play with it. But because I love him, I won't give him what he wants - unless it's in my will too. Yet how much purer is our Heavenly Father in His will for us! When He fails to answer our prayers, we would do better to assume it is protection, rather than punishment.

Again, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us...

1 John 5:15

And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

Therefore, ask according to His will, and He will do His will. Why doesn't He do it anyway? you may ask. Well we pray, not to change God's heart, but ours. As someone said, "The primary purpose of prayer is not to get answers but to deepen our friendship with God"

Chuck Smith put it this way:

Prayer is not an agency by which my will is to be accomplished upon the earth. The purpose of prayer is to get God's will to be accomplished upon the earth, and so many times we ask and receive not because the motive behind our asking is really that of accomplishing my will rather than God's.

Chuck Smith

So what is God's will? Well, when it comes to the specifics of our lives, we should absolutely seek the Lord in prayer, listening to what He will say, not asking Him to listen to us. But lest we make any error, we must note that God will never, ever, tell us to do anything contrary to His Word. So read the Bible – become familiar with it. And if in doubt, start by praying for those things the Bible says are His will. For example, Ephesians 6 tells us how doing the will of God means we should be good workers, serving God, not man. 1 Thessalonians 4 tells us how it is the will of God that we abstain from sexual immorality, and in the next chapter tells us that we should "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." While 1 Peter 2 tells us that the will of God is that we should be good citizens.

Those are things we can pray with confidence that God will help us with, for we know for certain that they are His will – for His Word declares so! But we should also pray with compassion:

1 John 5:16

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.

Some do believe and teach that this is talking about death spiritually – as in the unforgivable sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit – but I would agree with J Vernon McGee here, given that the Greek word for death here is speaking of a physical death.

Of course, we seldom think of sin in these stark terms, but if you persist in sin, it may cost you your life. That's what happened in the case of Annanias and Saphira in Acts chapter 5 who lied to God (and the apostles) about their giving. They didn't even make it out the door.

And then in 1 Corinthians 11 we read of those who were taking communion unworthily of whom Paul wrote "For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep." – that is they died.

Why then, should we think we can disgrace our heavenly Father and not ever have any physical consequence? Of course, we know full well this does not happen in each situation that a believer disgraces his or her Saviour. But the possibility is there, as the early church clearly knew through those examples.

Their implication for us, beyond not putting ourselves in that position of course, is to watch and care and pray for those believers around us that are stumbling and struggling in their faith. There comes a time to rebuke, exhort, correct. But we must always pray.

1 John 5:17

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

We are to call sin sin. It is not a self-esteem problem or identity problem. If we disobey God, if we are unrighteous, that is sin.

And John now writes:

1 John 5:18

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.

John began this chapter speaking about how overcoming the world – something that we cannot do in our own strength, but only with God's help. That's why we have the Holy Spirit in our lives, and His Word in our hands – and hopefully our hearts.

Yet all believers will still sin. This is the dual nature at play. This is what Paul wrestled with, and what you and I wrestle with too. It's the flesh vs the Spirit. And that's why it is so important to walk in the Spirit, and not choose to fulfil the lusts of the flesh. And it is a choice - we don't have to sin. We are not slaves to it. Yet that is not the case for the world. We read:

1 John 5:19

We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.

While we KNOW - that is, while we are fully aware and certain we are saved, the world is blissfully unaware of what influences them. John says here the world is embraced by the devil in the same way a baby soundly sleeps, being rocked in the arms of it's parent. Verse 20...

1 John 5:20

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.

Contrasted to the world around us, we are not in the dark any more. God is light, He is love, He is life. He has exposed the wicked works of darkness, He has loved us with unfathomable love, and has given us eternal life.

John now signs off this letter by writing:

1 John 5:21

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

That's an easy request, right? Not many Christians would go and buy a statue of Buddha, or Diana of the Ephesians, right? I think that's a fair assumption.

But an idol isn't only a statue. It is anything that takes God's place in our lives. We can easily idolise a boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, wife or children. We can idolise celebrities, influencers, sports stars. But we can also idolise singleness or marriage itself, or our careers, money, wealth or health. We can all too easily idolise the latest gadgets, cars, or idolise our list of home ideas on Pinterest. Even the way we spend our time can fall into this category of idolatry - whether its an addiction to social media, magazines, or the news.

But consider one more time that John was addressing the problems of Gnosticism, likely in Ephesus. And what did the Gnostics do? They had created their own idea of who Jesus was. They used the same name, they believed parts of the Bible. But they believed in a different Jesus. Today, many in the world are quick to say "this is who Jesus is to me". If we do that too, we're creating a god to suit ourselves - we're making our own idol. May we be very careful not to do that, but to stand fast on the truth of God's Word - and pursue the wonderful relationship we can have with a real Saviour, who really lived, died and rose again just as the Bible says.

Conclusion

How do we conclude such a meaty book? I think this comment from Gerard Chrispin makes sense of so much of what we've looked at these past 5 weeks:

How does a person know that he knows Christ? By obeying God, loving Christian brethren, resisting worldliness, practising righteousness, living a pure life, and not living for sin. These are tests given in the letter. The truth that, once a person is saved, he (or she) will always be saved is put in the context of testing oneself to see if the evidence of salvation is there. This gives deep assurance, without shallow presumption, to the one trusting Christ.

Gerard Chrispin

Application questions

As you go into this week, ask yourself these questions - if there's work to do in your Christian walk, and I know there is in mine, then act on your answers:

- Are we keeping God's commandments?

- Are we praying according to God's will?
- Do we know what the Bible says about each?

Let's pray.