

# That You May Know

*And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.  
(1 John 2:3 ESV)*

*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.  
(1 John 3:14 ESV)*

*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 5:13 ESV)*

## **That You May Know**

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**1 John 5:13-21**

**Rev. Paul Carter**

### **Introduction:**

Good morning everyone! I hope you brought your Bible with you and that you are able to open it now to 1 John 5:13. We are coming to the end of this epistle and as we do we are coming to the climax and conclusion of John's argument. He says:

“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 5:13 ESV)

This whole letter has been about ASSURANCE. John believes that it is possible for you to KNOW that you are a Christian. It is possible for you to KNOW that you are really and truly a child of God.

You don't have to be unsure of these things – you can be confident in your identity, your calling, your perseverance and your future. I write these things that you may KNOW.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 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. <sup>14</sup> And this is the confidence that we have toward

him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. <sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.

<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:13–21 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Bible readers have long recognized the similarities between the end of this letter and the end of John's Gospel. In John 20:30-31 John says:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but **these are written so that you may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30–31 ESV)

So John wrote his Gospel for unbelievers and he wrote his epistle for believers.

His Gospel was about evangelism, his epistle is about ASSURANCE.

This last paragraph then is John's summary, his conclusion and his closing exhortation. He says – I wrote THESE THINGS to you who believe that you may KNOW. So what are “these things”? What has John told us in terms of HOW we may develop our Christian assurances? That's the first thing we need to remember.

**How Can You Know?**

Dr. Robert Law was a Scottish missionary in the very early days of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and he wrote a whole book on this subject called “The Tests Of Life: A Study Of The First Epistle Of St. John” and in it he said this:

“With St. John **the grounds of assurance** are ethical, not emotional; objective, not subjective; plain and tangible, not microscopic and elusive. They are three, or rather, they are a trinity: Belief, Righteousness, Love. By his belief in Christ, his keeping God’s commandments, and his love to the brethren, a Christian man is recognized and recognizes himself as begotten of God.”<sup>1</sup>

That’s a pretty decent summary of everything we’ve read in this epistle thus far.

Do you want to know whether you are really a Christian?

It’s got nothing to do with whether you are BLESSED or not – in the material sense. It’s got nothing to do with your Spiritual gifts or experiences – which as John reminded us in chapter 4 – can be faked and counterfeited.

So most of what you hear in contemporary evangelicalism about the evidence of God’s presence in a person’s life is completely ignored by the Apostle John. What he says is that if you want to know whether you are a real Christian or not you look for 3 things:

- 1. Belief**
- 2. Righteousness**
- 3. Love**

Belief – do you believe in the Christ of Scripture? The Jesus anticipated by the Old Testament prophets and explicated by the New Testament Apostles? Yes or no? Do you believe in the Jesus who is TRULY GOD and TRULY MAN? Yes or no? Do you believe in all of what God said concerning his life, mission and identity? Yes or no?

Because if you are editing, shading, changing or updating – you are not a Christian. Orthodox BELIEF is the first ground of assurance in the Epistle of John.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* as cited by Colin G. Kruse in *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 200.

And righteousness is the second.

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. (1 John 3:9 ESV)

A real Christian LEAVES SIN BEHIND. He has the SEED OF GOD in him. He does commit sin from time to time – if you say that you don't you are a liar, John says, but the trajectory is onwards and upwards. No true believer is finally and ultimately overpowered by sin. Real believers change – slowly but surely, by one degree of glory to the next – into the same image as Jesus Christ, this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

And real believers LOVE – that's the third ground of assurance in the Epistle of John. Real believers LOVE the children of God. There is a force in them that is attracted to other believers. The SEED OF GOD in them reaches out for others who are born of God. Real believers love one another, because love comes from God.

That is how you know, in John's Epistle. If you are still believing what the Bible says about Jesus, if you are slowly but surely leaving sin behind and if you are beyond drawn deeper and deeper into Christian love and community – then you are a Christian. You can KNOW THAT because all of those things are either inevitable or impossible depending upon whether or not the Seed of God has been born in you.

So take an honest look at yourself and deal with what you see.

I wrote these things to you who believe that you MAY KNOW.

Alright – now what are we supposed to know? That was HOW we are supposed to know – now here at the end John tells us WHAT we are supposed to know.

### **What Can You Know?**

The first thing is the most important thing. He says:

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 5:13 ESV)

### **1. You can know that you have eternal life**

There is nothing more important than that, is there? Are you going to heaven when you die or are you not - you need to know the answer to that question.

Now to be clear John isn't saying that if you love the brethren and if you leave sin behind you will SAVE yourself by so doing – no!

John is NOT TELLING PEOPLE how to GET SAVED in his Epistle, he is telling SAVED PEOPLE how to grow in their assurance. John told people how to get saved in his Gospel – and he did a great job of it! He records Jesus as saying:

“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:40 ESV)

“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” (John 10:9 ESV)

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6 ESV)

Alright, so people ARE SAVED by trusting in Jesus. He is the DOOR. He is the WAY, the TRUTH and the LIFE. No man cometh unto the Father but by him.

That's how you get SAVED. So if you are believing in that Jesus – if you are looking to him as your Lord and Saviour, then John is saying here, you can KNOW that you have eternal life.

He who saves you has guaranteed your eternity.

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. (John 6:39 ESV)

If you are believing in Jesus then Jesus is committed to you. He will not allow you to fade and disappear – he will RAISE YOU UP and RESTORE YOU ENTIRELY on the last day. He will lose NONE of those who have been given to him. All of those people will be with him in eternity – thanks be to God.

You can rest in that, John says. I wrote this whole letter so that you could KNOW THAT YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.

The second thing you can know, if you are believing in Jesus and growing in righteousness and loving the brothers and sisters is that your prayers will be heard by God.

## **2. You can know that your prayers will be heard**

He says that in verses 14-15:

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will **he hears us**.<sup>15</sup> 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. (1 John 5:14–15 ESV)

So if we are REAL BELIEVERS – which we can KNOW, John says, then we can expect God to HEAR our prayers. After all – we are his children. Fathers LISTEN TO THEIR KIDS. So you can KNOW that your prayers will be heard.

And IF you ask according to his will, then you can KNOW that your prayers will be answered. This qualification is on top of the qualification John gave in chapter 3 verse 22. There he said:

whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. (1 John 3:22 ESV)

So putting that all together John is saying that IF you are a real child of God – which you can KNOW, then John says you can be ASSURED that God will HEAR your prayers and IF your prayers accord with his WILL and IF your behaviour accords with his WORD – THEN you can be confident that your prayers will be answered.

That's a very precise promise.

And it gives us something to aspire to. We have access to the God of the Universe. He will HEAR our prayers if we are his true children. So we need to learn to ask for the right things – things that accord with his will and purpose – and we need to be sure that our behaviour accords with his character because God will never allow himself to be identified with wickedness, lawlessness or rebellion. So there is a challenge here – but also a tremendous opportunity - because if we get this right then we will be harnessing the most powerful force in all the universe.

As James, the brother of Jesus said:

“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (James 5:16 KJV)

The third thing you can know, John says, is that you will persevere.

### **3. You can know that you will persevere**

That's the point he seems to be making in verses 16-18. Listen to those verses again, he says:

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. <sup>17</sup> All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.

<sup>18</sup> 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. (1 John 5:16–18 ESV)

So the argument here SEEMS to be that BECAUSE God's true children are POWERFUL in prayer and because God's true children have the SEED OF GOD living inside of them, no TRUE

BELIEVER will finally fall away. He or she WILL NOT SIN UNTO DEATH. There is too much working against them and in them and around them - therefore, their sin, will not lead to death.

But the people who are not truly saved – the people who have rejected the worship of the true Christ, the people whose desires and instincts are ultimately in control of their lives – the sin of those people WILL BE unto death, John says. They’ve locked into a lane and their destiny is sure.

So as we’ve seen before, according to John perseverance is either IMPOSSIBLE or INEVITABLE – that’s what he says.:

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. (1 John 5:18 ESV)

The true children of God WILL PERSEVERE – they have the SEED of God, they have the prayers of God’s people – they have the PROTECTION OF JESUS CHRIST – the one who was born of God – so they may struggle, they may stumble, but they will not finally fall.

But the people without those resources will fall. They will. There is nothing in them that is strong enough to break the devil’s hold. Their fate is sealed and unless something changes, there is no point in even praying for them, John says.

Now I know that sounds CRAZY – but that is what the Apostles tend to say in this situation. F.F. Bruce reminds us of that, he says:

“With regard to such men John may have felt much as the writer to the Hebrews did in another situation, that it was ‘impossible to renew them to repentance’; renunciation of the apostolic witness to Christ and His saving power was indeed a ‘sin unto death’.”<sup>2</sup>

So perseverance is either inevitable or impossible depending upon who you are in Christ before God. John means for that to be reassuring – and it should be – and it will be – if you KNOW that you belong to God. And you can know that – that’s the fourth thing that John is saying here.

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<sup>2</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Gospels & Epistles Of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 125.



#### 4. You can know that you belong to God

You can see that in verses 19-20:

We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. <sup>20</sup> 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. (1 John 5:19–20 ESV)

John says here that it really shouldn't be that difficult to KNOW whether or not you belong to God. The whole world is in the power of the evil one – so either you are following God and becoming more like him – or you are following the devil, and becoming more like him, so the longer this plays out, the easier it will be to tell TO WHOM everyone belongs.

And of course that is classic John.

In the Revelation of John by the end of all the various trials, tribulations and upheavals everyone on planet earth will be IDENTIFIED as belonging to one of two camps. Either the camp of the Lamb or the camp of the beast.

By the way – that's what the "Mark of the Beast" actually means. It isn't a microchip or a tattoo – and it certainly isn't a vaccine!!!

William Hendriksen says about this "mark of the beast" in Revelation 13:16:

"In order to understand the expression 'mark of the beast' we must remember that not only cattle but slaves also were branded and marked. The mark meant that the slave belonged to his master. ... So 'receiving the mark of the beast' seems to mean 'belonging to the beast and worshipping the beast'."<sup>3</sup>

As to why it goes on the forehead and the hand he says:

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<sup>3</sup> William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 150.

“The forehead symbolizes the mind, the thought-life, the philosophy of the person. The right hand indicates his deed, action, trade, industry etc. Therefore receiving the mark of the beast on the forehead or right hand indicates that the person so characterized belongs to the company of those who persecute the Church; and that – either preeminently in what he thinks, says, writes or more emphatically in what he does – this antichristian spirit becomes evident.”<sup>4</sup>

So what John is saying here is that everyone is subject to TWO VERY DIFFERENT POWERS. The SEED OF GOD is taking you down a particular road and the SEED OF THE SERPENT is taking everyone else DOWN A PARTICULAR ROAD – and these roads do not run parallel. They produce very different beliefs, very different behaviours and very different attitudes toward the church of Jesus Christ.

And therefore, it really isn't hard to KNOW TO WHOM YOU BELONG.

Look at your hands.

Look at your head.

If your HEAD is filled with false ideas about God, about his people – about his Christ - then you are not a Christian. You belong to the Beast. You are of your father the devil.

And if your hands are swift to shed blood. If they recoil from acts of love and service toward the brothers of sisters of Christ – then you are not a real believer.

Your hands and your head tell the truth.

And your hands and your head, John says to these dear believers – tell me the truth. By your beliefs and by your actions you show me that you are the people of God.

Therefore, little children, keep yourselves from idols.

### **Little Children Keep Yourselves From Idols**

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<sup>4</sup> William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 150.

That's John's concluding charge. You are real believers; you ARE the children of God and therefore you should have nothing to do with idols.

Given the context of the letter it seems almost certain that in the most immediate sense John is referring to the deceptions and distortions of the APOSTATES – those who “went out from us because they were not of us”.

John has just told them not even to pray for those people – let alone having them over to the house for further conversation.

No.

They've made their choice. They've outed themselves and now all they want to do is drag you down with them – so NO. John says, don't pray for them and don't EXPOSE yourself to their influence.

You need to let them go.

Now, this isn't John being MEANER than Jesus, this is John LEARNING FROM JESUS. When Jesus sent out JOHN and the other disciples in Matthew 10 he said to them:

“And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. <sup>15</sup> Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.” (Matthew 10:14–15 ESV)

You don't want to be associated in any way with people who have locked in to a path of rebellion. These are not parallel roads – so if they are going that way, then you need to let them go.

That's all John is saying. He is saying that we need to BE AWARE of the influence that other people and other voices can have on us.

Now, we don't need to be fearful, because we have GREAT RESOURCES. We have the SEED OF GOD in us, we have PRAYERS OF GOD'S PEOPLE FOR US – so we can be CONFIDENT – but we cannot be foolish. We need to MARK dangerous influences and avoid them.

That's how John Calvin understood the closing challenge in this passage. He said:

“Let us then remember that we ought carefully to continue in the spiritual worship of God, so as to banish far from us **everything that may turn us aside** to gross and carnal superstitions.”<sup>5</sup>

If there is anything that would turn you aside – if there is any voice confusing you or calling you to ungodly concerns, behaviours or priorities then you need to mark that voice – you need to FLAG that influence - and avoid it. That's the closing challenge in this passage; so let's take that seriously.

Let's use our final few minutes to FLAG some unhelpful voices and influences. We've probably got time for two – one from the right and one from the left side of the road. First of all then:

### **1. Let's be wary of any so-called Christian who is saying that sin doesn't matter**

If someone is preaching a Gospel that does not require people to renounce sin and to move towards the word and will of God in all things – then that is the Gospel of antichrist. Have nothing to do with it.

The real Gospel says that God accepts us AS WE ARE – but then immediately begins to change us into the image and likeness of Christ – and that includes sexual purity. As we've talked about before in this series – God's love is FOR US and AGAINST OUR SIN – so any voices out there that are saying that God is FOR US and INDIFFERENT to our sin need to be flagged and avoided.

You may need to step away from those voices for the sake of our safety and stability in your faith.

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<sup>5</sup>John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 98887.

That's what John is saying.

And the Apostle Paul said something similar, he said:

Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." (1 Corinthians 15:33 ESV)

If you've got somebody whispering in your ear that sin doesn't matter – you will eventually believe them. So FLAG that voice – and cut it off.

And secondly, from the other side of the road:

## **2. Let's be wary of any so-called Christian who is saying that politics is ultimate**

Now no one is saying that politics isn't important – it is – but we need to be careful with voices who seem to be suggesting that politics is **ULTIMATELY** important – that is not true. That is a distortion and that is what an idol is – and this idol is **EVERYWHERE** right now in evangelicalism.

I want to be careful here not to say too much and or too little. So how about I just say this: if you think that Donald Trump is the **SAVIOR** or the **DESTROYER** of the Christian church – you have lost the plot and descended into idolatry.

No human politician is that important.

The Bible warns us again and again about this distortion – because it is one of the most common forms of idolatry within the covenant community. Psalm 146:3-4 says:

"Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish." (Psalm 146:3–4 ESV)

The influence of human leaders is never so great and never so lasting as some are inclined to believe. Therefore, as Psalm 118 says:

“It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.” (Psalm 118:9 ESV)

But it isn't just our friends south of the border that struggle with this – this type of idolatry exists up here as well. Let me put it this way: if your COVID politics are the reason that you haven't been coming to church then I think it would be fair to say that you have fallen into the ditch of idolatry. John has made it CLEAR that LOVING ONE ANOTHER IS a necessary test of faith – so if your politics are pulling you out of this community – then you are listening to the Siren's Song.

Be very careful.

These are MOMENTARY concerns and they mustn't distract you from walking on this path that leads to eternal life. The grass withers and the flower fades but the WORD of our God shall STAND forever.

Therefore, little children, keep yourselves from idols. Let's pray together.