

Sermon 51, Jesus Is the Answer, 1 John 5:18-20

Proposition: The thrust of John's letter is not to proclaim how wonderful Christians are, but how wonderful Christ is!

- I. Major Premise: No One Born of God Sins, v. 18
- II. Minor Premise: We Are Born of God, v. 19
- III. Conclusion: ~~We Don't Sin~~ Jesus Has Come!, v. 20
 - A. The Gospel Is Not the Good News that We Don't Sin!
 - B. The Gospel Is Good News About Jesus
 1. What He's Done, v. 20
 - a) He's Come
 - b) He's Given Us Understanding
 - c) He's Taught Us to Know Real Truth
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 - e) He's Saving the World from the Wicked One, v. 18b
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 - a) He Is the Real God
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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come today to the penultimate and climactic verse of this letter. We have seen the summit of revelation in the declaration that God is love, but John overtops even the grandeur of that declaration in how he finishes his letter with the announcement that Jesus Christ is the real God and that He is eternal life. I want to show you this morning how John uses structure to undercut our ideas about how important we are, and instead to magnify how important and glorious Jesus is! So let's look at that together.

I. Major Premise: No One Born of God Sins, v. 18

We saw last week how the letter closes with a triple sequence of "we know." We know that we have eternal life in Christ, of course, and we know that life comes to expression through the act of prayer. But John gives us three others things that we know. The first of them is that the God-begotten don't sin. This is something that Christians and non-Christians alike are aware of. Even those who know little about our faith know that it is connected with being good, and that Christians profess that all kinds of things are sins and try their best to avoid indulging in those sins. Well, at the end of this letter that has been so adamantly opposed to sin in all its forms, John tells us that no one born of God sins.

II. Minor Premise: We Are Born of God, v. 19

And then, he tells us that we are born of God. We know that we are of God. The Christian can have confidence about his parentage. We aren't orphans. We aren't in this world alone and wondering where we came from. We know that we came from God; that much is certain. If you don't have the assurance that John speaks of here, then you need to do what he's talked about through the rest of the book: Confess and forsake. Walk by the Spirit. Love the brothers and sisters. Glory in your identity as a child of God. And when you do those things, then you will attain the certainty that you are indeed born of God. The whole book was written so that you could know you know Him. If, after fifty sermons explaining that in detail, you still don't know how to have assurance of faith, then come talk to me — and read 1 John again, marking every place where the apostle says “By this we know.” The bottom line is that you know you know Him by your Spirit-empowered works. If you're doing what only a child of God who possesses the Spirit of God can do, then you know that you know Him!

Well, obviously John has set up vv. 18 and 19 as something of a syllogism. The God-begotten don't sin, and we know that we are God-begotten. Therefore, what's the conclusion? What's the third thing we know?

III. Conclusion: ~~We Don't Sin~~ Jesus Has Come!, v. 20

Well, as you can see in the text before you, John doesn't wind up with a “Therefore, we know that Christians don't sin.” Why not?

A. The Gospel Is Not the Good News that We Don't Sin!

Because even though it is great news that you and I don't have to sin anymore once we've been born again, that is not *the* good news. The good news is better than the news that Christians don't sin. If you think the good news is that we don't sin anymore, then you're a moralist. It will come out in how you talk. It will come out in how you live. What's most important to you will not be who Jesus is and what He did, but rather who we humans beings ought to be and how we ought to live. In short, if the best news you have is the news that we don't sin, then you will be full of law, not gospel, which means that you will be full of judgment, not grace. And so John doesn't end his book on the note that Christians don't sin. That's not the good news he has to preach.

B. The Gospel Is Good News About Jesus

He has better news. He has the good news that the Son of God has come and done everything necessary to save the world.

This is the last thing we know, and the most important thing we know. Eternal life, prayer, not sinning — the reason for all of that is that Jesus came and did what He did in order to save us.

1. What He's Done, v. 20

Thus, John gives us a comprehensive summary of what the Son of God has done.

a) He's Come

The first thing the apostle notes is that Jesus has come. He did not stay in Heaven, distant from our problems. He came to earth, lived among us as one of us. He knows where you live because

He took on flesh and moved into the neighborhood. Why is Christmas the most important holiday in the world, even in many non-Christian cultures? Because everyone understands that the coming of Jesus is big news. No one sings songs about Caesar Augustus' birth. No one celebrates the birthday of Alexander the Great. But a huge fraction of the world's people, even those who don't believe in Jesus, take time to commemorate His birth. He came. He showed up. He came through. He was present. Never underestimate how powerful that is.

b) He's Given Us Understanding

But the good news doesn't stop there — not even close. More than coming to us, He has also given us understanding. Our minds were closed to the truth. We didn't know God; we walked in darkness and alienation, as Paul explains in Ephesians. Jesus opened our eyes to the truth. Jesus supernaturally takes away the veil that hides the real meaning of reality from those who are walking in darkness.

Do you know that God is real, that He created the world, and that He came in His Son to save the world? Then you know something that most of the people on earth don't know. You know it because Jesus has opened your mind to understand those truths. The problem is not that the truth was obscure; rather, the problem was that your mind refused to accept it. You couldn't wrap your mind around it without Jesus opening your eyes.

c) He's Taught Us to Know Real Truth

Why did Jesus open your mind to the truth? Because He wanted you to embrace the truth. He taught you to know. That's why John repeats over and over "This is how we know." First John is not about guessing, hypothesizing, or wondering. It's about knowing. Through Christ, we know the real truth.

d) He's United Us to the Real God

And we not only have cognitive blessings, whereby we begin to understand what the world is like; we also have relational blessings, the greatest of which is that we are united to the true God. John means true as opposed to fictional, real as opposed to fake. We not only know the truth; we know the God who is true. That is the Christian message. Being free from sin is great; being united to God Almighty is much greater. Through Christ, we have an indissoluble bond to the Father. We are in covenant with Him; we are, in fact, His children. As you all know, you can't divorce your children! God has brought us forth as His sons and daughters; that is an irreversible procedure.

Are you ready to believe this and act on it? Do you have certainty in your heart that God is really yours in Jesus Christ? If you do, then you will live the obedient lifestyle John has described in the five chapters of this letter.

e) He's Saving the World from the Wicked One, v. 18b

Finally, in addition to all that He has done for you, Jesus is saving the world from the wicked one. He does not let the wicked one touch His people — and ultimately, we know that He will not let Satan keep the world he stole. Jesus is the Savior of the world, and we will see His Kingdom come even as Satan's Kingdom is destroyed.

Jesus has done all of these things. He's enlightened you, united you to God, and intervened to protect you from Satan.

2. Who He Is, v. 20

How? How could any man do such incredible, supernatural things?

a) He Is the Real God

Well, the answer is clear. Jesus did these things because He is the true God. He is the real God, equal to and one with the Father. We are in God because we are in Christ, and Christ is God.

Brothers and sisters, from the earliest times, around the year 120, it has been reported that Christians would gather early in the morning to sing a hymn to Christ as God. Why? Because we know that the Son of God is God, just as my son is a man like me.

Jesus is the real God. What more is there to say? He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. The Gospel is good news about Him.

b) He Is Eternal Life

Not only is He the true God. He is eternal life. In other words, not only is He eternally alive. His power and dynamism is such that He is life itself, just as He is love and joy and justice and every other virtue. He is His properties; He is life. To know Him is to live; to fail to know Him is to fall down into a death from which there can be no escape.

It is not a category mistake to call Jesus life. Instead, it is a category mistake to look for life anywhere outside of Him. Don't do that. He is the true God; He is eternal life. Don't lose Him. Stay with Him, for you were made by Him for Him. He gave you natural life at the moment of your conception, and He gave you eternal life at the moment of your regeneration. Cling to Jesus. You know Him, and if you've listened to all that John says, you know that you know Him.

This letter was about bearing witness to the life that was from the beginning in the Word. Do you think John has done that? I think so. You've heard the apostle's eyewitness testimony. Believe it, and you will know life without death and glory without end. John says so; the Spirit says so too. Amen.