

*Bubba was bragging to his boss one day, "You know, I know everyone there is to know. Just name someone, anyone, and I know them."*

*Tired of his boasting, his boss called his bluff, "OK Bubba, how about Tom Hanks?"*

*"Sure, yes, Tom and I are old friends, and I can prove it." So, Bubba and his boss fly out to Hollywood and knock on Tom Hank's door, and sure enough, Tom shouts, "Bubba, great to see you! You and your friend come right in and join me for lunch!"*

*Although impressed, Bubba's boss was still skeptical, and after they left Tom's house, he told Bubba that he thinks Bubba's knowing Tom was just lucky.*

*"No, no, just name anyone else," Bubba said.*

*"The President of the United States," his boss replied.*

*"Yes," Bubba says, "I know him, let's fly out to Washington." And off they go. At the White House, the President spots Bubba on the tour and motions him and his boss over, saying, "Bubba, what a surprise, I was just on my way to a meeting, but you and your friend come on in and let's have a cup of coffee first and catch up."*

*Well, the boss was very shaken by now, but still not completely convinced. After they left the White House grounds, he expressed his doubts to Bubba, who again implored him to name anyone else.*

*"The Pope," his boss replied.*

*"Sure!" says Bubba.*

*"My folks are from his homeland, and I've known the Pope a long time."*

*So off they fly to Rome. Bubba and his boss are assembled with the masses in Vatican Square when Bubba says, "This will never work. I can't catch the Pope's eye among all these people. Tell you what, I know all the guards so let me just go upstairs and I'll come out on the balcony with the Pope."*

*And he disappears into the crowd headed toward the Vatican. Sure enough, half an hour later Bubba emerges with the Pope on the balcony. But by the time Bubba*

*returns, he finds that his boss had fainted and was surrounded by paramedics.*

*Working his way to his boss' side, Bubba asked him, "What happened?"*

*His boss looks up and said, "I was doing fine until you and the Pope came out on the balcony and then the man next to me said, "Who's that on the balcony with Bubba?"*

Throughout his letter, the Apostle John has been concerned about who and what we know. There are over 30 instances of the word "know" in his letter, and in this last portion, three times, John will lead us off with the words "**we know**".

This morning, we are going to look at the last four verses of this letter – three of which serve as a review of sort – then at the very end, John seems to throw us a curve ball.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **1 John 5** and we will pick up where we left off with **verse 18**. John says,

**We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.**

Now, as you might remember in John's day – false teachers called "Gnostics" had wiggled their way into church congregations. They claimed to be Christians, they seemed like Christians, they talked like Christians, and not only that, they said they had special knowledge from God that average Christians did not have, and once these Gnostics got their foot in the church door, they spread their deceptive and dangerous heresies which created a lot of confusion and doubt about Jesus Christ, about salvation and the hope of eternal life to those who believe, and they offered a distorted view about man and the nature sin.

The Gnostics claimed that the spirit – the inner man, was good and that all physical matter, all flesh was evil. They taught that the spirit was separate and untouched by fleshly influences – therefore, the flesh could do whatever it wanted to do, and the spirit was unaffected. In a nutshell, their false teaching was nothing more than a license to sin, and they led very immoral lives.

Well, previously in his letter, John addressed this nonsense and he made it very clear that no one who is born of God practices sin, because he has a new nature, and because he is born of God. Now, if you recall, that word "**practice**" was key to understanding John's teaching. In the Greek, the word "**practice**" is translated

“*poieó*” and it speaks of habitual action – and when referring to sin, John was saying that the lifestyle of a Christian – their normal way of life cannot be characterized by continual habitual sinfulness.

That’s what John meant when he explained that a true believer will not practice sin – **we know** this – and in the first part of **verse 18**, John is saying the same thing – not with the word “**practice**” but with the word “**sins**” – it’s present tense which implies a continuous action and in context, it speaks of habitual sinning. So, John is not saying a true believer is sinless – he already made that clear at the beginning of his letter, instead he is saying is that a true believer sins less – they don’t want to live in sin as they once did. You might recall the illustration I used to explain this back in Chapter 3 and I want to share it again.

*A pig and a sheep may fall into the same dirty mud hole, but there is a difference. The pig will love it and wallow in it, because that’s its nature. The sheep will want to get out and avoid that mud hole the next time, because it has a different nature.*

*If God abides in you – if you are a child of God, you don’t want to wallow in the mud, but if you like it in the mud and don’t want to get out of it, then you can claim to be a sheep all day – but John would say you just might be a pig.*

Yes, a child of God may fall into sin – the mud holes are inevitable, but because they have a new nature, they will not continue in it, but persevere through it. Whoever is born of God does not practice sin.

Now, let’s look at the second part of this verse. Again, John says

**We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.**

This is an awesome verse about our security as believers in Jesus Christ. First, we are told that God **keeps** those who are born of Him. That Greek word for “keep” is “*tereo*” and it means to watch over so as to guard something that is in one’s possession, and if you notice, John uses the word in its present tense – **keeps**, which speaks of God’s continual watching over us and protecting us from the evil one, who like a roaring lion wants to devour us, but here we are told the evil one does not **touch** those whom God protects, and I need to explain that.

That word “**touch**” means more than just a superficial touch. It means to “*lay hold of*” or “*to attach to,*” and it gives the picture of Satan seeking to lay hold of believers – to snatch them away so as to make them captives of sin once again.

Yes, Satan will come against us. Like “flaming arrows” or “fiery darts” Satan will hassle and persecute, accuse, and tempt the believer, and his efforts may seem fierce, but he cannot sever the believer’s connection with God. Satan cannot snatch away a believer who is being watched and guarded by God.

In **John 17:12**, Jesus speaks on this in His prayer to the Father,

*“While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.”*

Later in **1 Peter 1**, beginning with **verse 3**, the Apostle Peter tells us this,

*<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

The believer is kept by the power of God – guarded under continuous protective custody. The believer is secure because they protected by the only One who has the power to keep them, and as such, the evil one cannot snatch them away. Satan cannot take hold of a true believer, but he has taken hold of something else.

Let’s continue with **verse 19** where we are presented with the second “**we know**”. John tells us,

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

**We know** – we know in our hearts, that we are of God, and then by contrast, John provides a clear dividing line between those who live for God and those who live for this fallen world. As a reminder, listen to what John said back in **1 John 2**, beginning with **verse 15**.

*<sup>15</sup> Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. <sup>17</sup> The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

John taught that either you are a child of God and separate from the entanglements and the enticements of this world system that is opposed to God, or you are under the deceptive **power of the evil one** – given over to the self-gratifying and human-centered lusts that this world openly flaunts and its followers freely embrace.

That's the contrast, that's the dividing line, and for John there was no middle ground. We cannot love two things that are in total opposition to each other. If you love God, you will love what He loves. If you love the world and the lusts of the world, then you will perish with the world – a world that John says is passing away.

Now we come to the last “**we know**” and it's the grounds for the previous two. Let's continue with **verse 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. This is the true God and eternal life.**

If you notice in this verse, the word “**true**” is mentioned three times, and as we have learned in the past, when a word is repeated like this, it is done so for the sake of emphasis. We know the truth, we know it intuitively – God has **given** it to us – and beyond any shadow of doubt, we know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God – sent from heaven by the Father – born of flesh on the earth. We know our faith does not rest upon good guesses, on wishful thinking, on creative fables, on human philosophy, or on untried theories. It rests upon great historical realities and truth. Jesus came to us so that we may know Him who is true.

Now, I need to point something out here. That word “**know**,” in the phrase to **know Him who is true** – in the Greek, speaks of the knowledge that we gain by experience. It's more than just intellectual knowledge. God reveals Himself to us through our experiences as He works *in* us and *through* us and *around* us.

For example, we can intellectually know about God as our provider as we read stories in the Bible. If you recall on New Year's Day, I told you how the prophet Elijah was provided for by God during a drought with water from a brook and catering service from ravens. It was a great Bible story, but to make it really real and personal, we can come to know God as our Provider when we experience Him meeting our own needs in a time of want. We can read about God comforting someone in the Bible like David, but we would not personally know God as our Comforter unless we experience His comfort during a time of grief or sorrow. God

desires that we know Him at a deeper level, so we need to watch for those ways that God may reveal Himself to us through experiences with Him.

God wants us to know Him, He desires an intimate and growing relationship with us that is real, because quite frankly, everything else in the life of a believer is grounded and flows from that relationship with Him. It starts there.

Now, we come to the last verse in his letter where John seems to throw us a curve ball. Look at **verse 21**. He says,

**Little children, guard yourselves from idols.**

**Why would John end his letter like this? Why would John bring this up now?** He has not mentioned the subject of idolatry in his entire letter, and he waits to do so at the very last verse.

When we think of idolatry, I think our minds tend drift back to those biblical days – both Old and New Testament, where people worshipped false pagan gods and bowed down before man-made idols. In the Old Testament, the Israelites bowed down before a golden calf they made, while ironically, Moses was up on the mountain receiving God’s moral law we call the Ten Commandments. Later, the Israelites would enter the Promised Land and despite the warnings from God, they became intertwined with the people in the land and adopted their pagan religious beliefs and idol worship. In the New Testament, both Greek and Roman cultures were filled with idolatry – the early church was surrounded by their idols, but I don’t think this is what John had in mind.

Let’s remember why John wrote this letter in the first place. The Gnostics, with their false teaching, did not try to create a pagan idol – instead they sought to remake the Son of God. They wanted a substitute Jesus – one of their own making – one who suited them. They denied that Jesus was the Son of God, God in the flesh, and so they reimagined Him – which is in essence idolatry, and from that vantage point – it sums up this entire letter very well. So, John’s final words are a warning against the danger of taking the Jesus of the Bible and twisting Him into a version we like.

This came from the NY Times just a few of days ago:

*The Church of England is considering scrapping centuries of religious teaching to give God gender-neutral pronouns. The church, which is headed by King Charles III, confirmed that its Liturgical Commission has launched a special project to*

*examine updating future teachings. Some priests have already made such changes, trading references to “he” and “him” for simply “God” or even “they” and “them,” and rewriting the “Our Father” that starts the Lord’s Prayer to “Our Father and Mother.”*

In principle, this is no different than what the Gnostics tried to do. It’s a distortion of the truth – the truth about God and the truth found in His Word. The false teachers sought to reimagine Jesus to suit themselves, and as you can see, it still occurs today – sadly, in the church. This is just one example of the church caving into the culture around them – and although discouraging, none of this should be surprising to any of us.

In **2 Timothy 4**, beginning with **verse 3**, the Apostle Paul described for us exactly what our day and time would look like. He said,

***<sup>3</sup>For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, <sup>4</sup>and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.***

Now, before you get all high and mighty, before you start wagging your finger at “those” people, let’s make this a little more personal. **Have you reimaged a God who suits you?**

Of course, your answer is “no” – so let me get a little more specific with my questions about your God. **Does your God mind if you’re a little greedy, a little selfish, and a little materialistic? Is your God fine with that? Is your God okay with a little bit of hatred towards others – you know those who have it coming – those who don’t agree with you? Is your God satisfied with half-hearted devotion – a devotion that’s only given when it’s convenient – a devotion which does not disrupt anyone’s way of life or jeopardize their comfort? Is your God content to leave people just the way they are without any expectation of change or growth?**

If I just described your God – that is not the God of the Bible. Listen, if you are not careful, without realizing it, you can slowly and subtly drift and find yourself worshipping a God of your own imagination – of your own making – one who suits you – one who allows you to follow Him on your terms – one who ultimately lets you do what you want to do.

That’s what the Gnostics did – it’s a form of idolatry, and we cannot fall for it, and therefore, John says to “**guard yourselves from idols**” – guard yourselves from

anything, anyone, any false doctrine, and any values of this fallen world that attempts to distract your affection and devotion away from Jesus Christ.

We know the one true God, so watch out for anything that seeks to take His rightful place in your life.

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