

1 John 5:1-21

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Preacher: Chris Roberts

[0 : 00] Well, thanks very much, Ian. We're on page 1230. And it's been great, hasn't it, hasn't it, to look at this letter of 1 John over the last few weeks, if you've been around at the lunchtime talks, we've been going through it.

And I want to finish off this series this afternoon by actually looking at the whole of chapter 5. So for the sake of time, we just read from verse 13 there. But I want us to see the whole of chapter 5 in a bit of a kind of quick, quick sweep, a whistle-stop tour.

And if you've been around over the last few weeks, you'll have seen that the whole of 1 John, this letter, is a letter dealing with doubt. It is a letter dealing with doubt. Doubt about what true Christian faith is all about.

So John has been dealing with doubt. And to do that, throughout the whole letter, he has done that by distinguishing two groups. Two groups at the opposite end of the spectrum, if you like.

So if you remember, group 1 are the confident, super spiritual religious people. And they've got confidence that their relationship with God is sorted, that they have fellowship with God, and it's all wrapped up nicely for them. They're confident of it.

[1 : 30] But group 2, over here, are the doubters. People who lack assurance. People who are not feeling confident about their relationship with God. And we've seen that they are John's recipients, the people that he's writing to.

And all along, he's wanted to show them, that even though they may doubt themselves, they are true Christian believers with true Christian faith.

And the confident bunch, group number 1, well, just look at them, he's been saying, hasn't he?

They've left the church in chapter 2. They've left the apostles' teaching.

They've ignored the basic truths about Jesus that the Bible teaches us. They've left obeying him and loving his people.

They are deceivers, even though they look so confident. So it's a letter of reassurance for group number 2, isn't it?

[2 : 40] The doubting Christians. Christians who struggle with assurance. So it's a great book to read when we feel like we are in that group, group number 2.

If we are the kind of Christians, if you're a Christian, who is just struggling with assurance, struggling with doubts about the Christian faith.

Maybe we think to ourselves, I am the only person in this group here who doesn't quite get this, who doesn't believe properly. Everybody else seems to be so sure, seems to be so certain about this.

And we have our doubts. And maybe we even start to ask ourselves, well, do you know, maybe I am just like one of those false Christians at the end of it all.

Well, John finishes with giving us the task of helping each other with those sorts of doubts.

[3 : 40] How can we encourage each other when we lack assurance? So just look at verse 16 in that chapter that Ian read for us. Verse 16, if anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will give him life.

Now, there's lots of awkward things in there which we'll get on to in a second or two. But in the context of the situation, the thrust of that verse is clear, isn't it? It's about taking responsibility for your brother, for each other, brothers and sisters.

It is about taking note and seeing what is happening in each other's lives and acting accordingly, more specifically praying about it.

Helping each other with sin and with doubt. Now, we'll get on to that a bit later. But I want us to see three things in chapter 5 about true Christian faith that we can use to encourage each other when we doubt, when we lack assurance.

So for assurance, firstly, we should remember the right tests of our faith. That's in verses 1 to 5. Remember the right tests.

[5 : 04] Now, as we've been looking at this letter, that is nothing new, is it? To look at these tests of what is real Christian faith. But it's worth saying again, isn't it, that our faith is not about the test of how confident we feel before God.

That changes all the time, doesn't it? But we've seen time and time and time and again that there are more solid tests that we can use to be assured that our faith is really genuine.

So if you were here last week, you might remember that we saw the content test or the doctrine test. It's about the content of what we believe, what our faith is actually in, in Jesus.

So look at verse 1 of chapter 5. Everyone who believes Jesus is the Son of God has been born of him. So that's the first thing that we can say to each other, isn't it, when we're lacking assurance. What do you believe about Jesus? It's pretty simple, isn't it? And when we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, he is God in the flesh, that is a sure test of real Christian faith.

[6 : 21] And you see in that verse, as we do that, our family tree changes, doesn't it? Imagine your family tree with the lines drawn. Well, it's rearranged, isn't it, in that verse, verse 1 there.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. Lines redrawn on your family tree, vertically towards God.

Connecting you to God as your loving Father. You become a son as you believe in Jesus the Son. And also lines drawn horizontally to our brothers and sisters.

So that's test 2, isn't it? True Christian faith is tested by how we love other Christians. How we love the brothers. Verse 2.

We love the children of God, other Christians. Now, you might be one of those people who loves Bible doctrine. You love getting into the Bible and seeing what it says about Jesus and about different things.

[7 : 26] And that is a great thing. That is a really good thing to do. But if you're tight with that kind of thing, with doctrine, and learning what the Bible says, And yet, you are loose with loving other Christians.

Other brothers and sisters. Well, actually, John says, you are doctrinally in error. The two have to go together, don't they? Doctrine and love.

And we've seen that all through this letter. But then, there is a third test as well, isn't there? That as we become children of God, we want to do what pleases Him.

So, verse 3. This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And then if you look on at verse 4, there is an important connection here, I think.

He goes on to say, a bit part of the way through verse 4, Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. Now, I think those two verses are together there, because this overcoming of the world is often used in the Bible to speak about resisting temptation, resisting doing the things that God our Father, if we are His children, doesn't want us to do.

[8 : 47] So, overcoming the world is about doing what pleases to God, obeying Him. And a sign of Christian life, that we are born of Him, is that we swim against the tide of the world, if you like.

Dead things, things that are not alive, things that haven't been born, driftwood, that just goes along the stream, doesn't it? It just goes along the currents of the world.

So, assurance comes when we use these right tests to look at our faith. What we believe about Jesus, how we love other Christians, and how we live, according to that.

So, the right tests. But secondly, assurance for Christians come when we remember the right testimonies. The right testimonies. The right testimonies in verses 6 to 12.

I wonder what you would say if you could speak for the world, and answer the question, what is faith? What is faith? I think one theologian puts it quite well when he says that the world sees faith as a subjective, personal religious choice that is based on next to nothing.

[10 : 11] Now that sounds a bit arrogant to say that, doesn't it? But actually it's true. We believe what we want to believe. We don't have to give a reason for that.

Nobody can say any different to us. That is faith in the world's eyes. It's a subjective thing. What I choose. But when the Bible speaks about faith, it is never subjective.

It is always based on objective testimony. So when the Bible calls us to believe in Jesus, it is not blind faith that he is asking us to do.

It's always a decision based on a testimony. Now we do this all the time, actually, don't we, with human testimony. Whether it's in court or in a supermarket, we read packaging and make our decisions, we watch adverts, we hear human testimonies all the time.

And make our decisions based on them. So, verse 9, you see John's argument here. If we receive the testimony of men, which we always do all the time, Christian faith happens when we receive God's testimony, which is greater.

[11 : 35] His testimony, verse 9, about his son. So, God has three witnesses, if you like, in a courtroom that give us testimony.

And if you can bear with this, it is worth seeing. So look at verse 7 of chapter 5. There they are, these three that give testimony from God.

The Spirit, the water, and the blood. And these three agree. So it's a majority decision in the courtroom, if you like. Three testimonies from God.

Now, at this point, it's probably worth saying that there is a bit of a difference of opinion about what each of these things are. The Spirit, the blood, and the water. Some people say different things. So some people say that the water is, it's a symbol about Jesus' birth. So if you read John's Gospel, chapter 3, Jesus speaks a bit there about being born by water, and then being born by the Spirit.

[12 : 39] Others think this water is about Jesus' baptism. And then there's the blood, isn't there? Well, most people agree that that is talking about Jesus' death on the cross.

Well, either way, you look at these things, actually all of them are symbols of things that have happened to Jesus in his earthly life, aren't they?

They are objective, historical facts about Jesus. Things that actually happened. That God gives us as a testimony to say who Jesus really is.

So, if we are Christians, we can go home this afternoon and we can say to ourselves, I am a strong, confident Christian and I will stop doubting.

We can do that, can't we? And maybe we should at times. But, for assurance, for real assurance for Christians, we have to remember the right testimonies.

[13 : 44] Now, it sounds simple, but actually what that means is that when we doubt, the best thing to do is to go back to Jesus. Go back to his place in history.

If I'm doubting, as a Christian, have I forgotten the testimonies of God through the people who were actually there, the people who actually saw his birth, who actually were there when he died, and were there when he rose again.

Remember, back in chapter 1 of 1 John, John reminds us that the basis of all of this is his own personal witness, isn't it?

His own personal testimony of objective events. If you look at chapter 1 in verse 2 and verse 1. That which we have heard, which we've seen with our own eyes, which we've looked upon and touched with our hands.

You see, John wants you to receive a testimony as an objective piece of evidence. At the end of his gospel, John 20, he tells us clearly why he's writing his gospel.

[14 : 59] He says, now Jesus did many other things which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ. So it's almost like the letter of 1 John is a sequel to John's gospel, isn't it?

Getting us to go back to part 1, go back to the testimonies of the gospels whenever we doubt. The objective things outside of ourselves that have happened in history.

But you know, there's a third testifier as well here, isn't there? We've mentioned the water and the blood, but there is also the spirit. He mentions the spirit. Now, there is even more debate about what that is talking about.

But I'd want to say, actually, that he is speaking here about the Holy Spirit who comes into the life of a genuine believer when we trust in Jesus.

And that Holy Spirit, he, as Paul says, bears witness, gives testimony with our own spirit that we are children of God.

[16 : 15] Now, it's quite hard to pin this down because actually this is a subjective experience, experience, isn't it? This is something that we feel for ourselves as God's Holy Spirit gives us that assurance that we do belong to him.

It's that feeling, isn't it, that as we hear the gospel, as we hear the other testimonies that God gives us, it's that feeling that, yes, this is true and this is for me and I really do belong to Jesus.

I do belong to God. Well, you have to use the right tests, see the right testimonies but lastly, this afternoon, this afternoon, our assurance comes from togetherness in the gospel, togetherness. So, look at verse 16 again where we started. If you keep your eye on that, it is slightly tricky again, isn't it, this verse. It's a difficult afternoon, I'm sorry about that but we've got two slightly tricky bits of scripture here, haven't we?

This is probably one of those passages that a lot of people get a bit confused about. So, chapter 5, verse 16 to the end. There is some confusion here.

[17:37] He talks about some sins that lead to death, doesn't he? And then some sins that don't. He speaks about praying for some sins and not praying for others.

Slightly confusing. Well, let's think about what we do know from this letter. From the beginning of the letter it's been clear, hasn't it, that everybody sins.

There's no dispute about that. Everybody sins. So, remember in chapter 1, in verse 8 and 9. If we confess sins, then we are telling the truth.

Everybody sins. And if we don't say that, if we deny that, we're calling God a liar. The right thing to do is to confess it. Now, if you look at chapter 1, verse 9 again, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and he is just, to forgive us all unrighteousness.

Look at verse 7 of chapter 1. The blood of his son Jesus cleanses us from all sin. So, what we do know is that all of us sin and all sin is forgivable.

[19:02] So, all of us sin and all sin is forgivable. So, chapter 5, we have to say, is not about kind of grades of sin.

So, some sin needs special human intervention like murder. No, verse 17 of chapter 5 again, all wrongdoing is sin and all sin we've seen is forgivable.

Not on the basis of someone praying for us, but, from chapter 1, by confessing it to Jesus and his blood cleansing us.

So, that is not what chapter 5 is about. This isn't about having to do penance for worse sins. This is not about that. No, we've got to remember the context of the situation here, haven't we?

Remember our two groups that we started to think about at the beginning. One group, remember group 1, the confident, their big problem is that they've left the apostles' teaching.

[20:14] They've stopped believing the testimonies of God about Jesus, haven't they? They've rejected that. So, look at chapter 5, verse 12.

You see, the sin that leads to death here in these verses that John speaks about is the sin to be in group number 1, isn't it?

It is the sin of proudly rejecting God's testimonies. sin. It's a bit like in Mark's gospel where Jesus talks about the unforgivable sin, if you've heard about that.

It's the sin of refusing the only place of forgiveness. It's about refusing Jesus' death and resurrection. It's to walk out on the only source of life, the sin that leads to death.

And so do you see that John tells us to pray for each other when we sin in all the other kinds of ways, in all the ways that aren't about rejecting Jesus.

[21:34] There are lots of other sins we do, aren't there? In all the other ways to keep us from that big sin of joining group 1. All sin is forgivable.

So, the application is we ought to be in each other's lives confessing. And speaking about all of our other sins. And praying for each other.

And God will give us life, John says. The problem is that unconfessed sin, sin that is not prayed about and graciously dealt with, can combine with a lack of assurance confidence for these people in John's letter.

It can combine with a lack of confidence, with doubt, and is compelled then, isn't it? And can lead to further unbelief, to lead us back into group 1.

So, we're called to restore each other when sin comes into our lives. So that we might not reject Jesus as well.

[22:51] So, we wouldn't agree with penance and confessional boxes and all of that sort of thing, but there is something about confessing sin and seeking to help each other with sin, isn't there?

that is so important for assurance, for confidence. So, are we so private about the sins that we know are in our lives that it's impossible for people to be able to do that for us?

Restore each other when you sin and you will have it like, have life. So, do it together. That's the point.

Do it together. remember, use real tests of true faith. Remind each other of the real testimonies in the Gospels and restore each other when we sin.
All sin is forgivable. Let's pray to finish.