

1 John 5:15-20

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[0 : 00] Now please turn to 1 John chapter 5. We'll come to the end of 1 John. After 6 months on and off.

! 1 John chapter 5, you'll find it on page 1023 in the Church Bibles. While you're finding it, let me thank you for your prayers and support. Thank you for your words of encouragement. I was very encouraged and thankful to Paul for coming along and sitting on the panel.

So, 1 John chapter 5, and we'll start reading. I'll be looking from verse 16 to the end, but I'll read from verse 13 just to give us a recap of where we are.

1 John 5, starting from 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.

And this is the confidence that we have towards him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 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 : 29] If anyone sees his brother committing a sin, not leading to death, he shall ask, and he 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. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.

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.

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

[2 : 44] Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we pray that you would sanctify us by the truth.

Your word is truth. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. It may seem that some of this passage almost comes out of the blue, right at the end.

There are words used here that he hasn't used earlier on, and yet some words that he used quite a while ago. So it might be a little hard to follow. But it does flow perfectly from what we've been seeing so far, as surprising as that may sound.

Six months ago, when we started looking at 1 John, I told you four things, just about the first four verses. I told you that the good news of Jesus Christ is true.

That this good news creates a community. That this community has fellowship with God. And that the good news story isn't over yet. And all those four things are still as relevant for this passage as they were for that first passage that we looked at.

[3 : 58] Those are key things that John has been thinking about. And as we've drawn to the end of 1 John, 1 John spent quite a while, we looked at this before Christmas, where he says, this is what true Christian teaching is.

This is what it looks like. This is how to discern whether the teaching you're hearing is good and true Christian teaching or not. That's from chapter four at the beginning.

And then he spent a while, that we saw three weeks ago, thinking about what true Christian love looks like. He'd mentioned the need to love one another earlier. And so he spent time saying, this is what true Christian love looks like.

And last week we looked at the blessed implications of Christian truth for us in our lives. The implications of our belief.

It means we have great assurance of faith. And tonight we're going to think about the implications about all of this for what we do. There's implications for what we believe, but also implications for what we do.

[5 : 05] But it'll help to think a bit about where we ended last time. The implications for what we believe. We saw that because of the truth of Jesus, we can have confidence.

That's the word he used, confidence, or assurance. And I think it's helpful to think a bit. Well, assurance of what? What am I assured of? And we'll use the phrase sometimes, assurance of salvation.

Our confession has a chapter entitled, of the assurance of grace and salvation. And it's a good and helpful way of thinking of assurance. But maybe it's just me.

But I think that we can sometimes be in a danger of thinking that being saved is just about being safe. Or that receiving grace is just about being in God's good books.

Or that having eternal life just means having a good and never-ending life. And in verse 13, he said that he wants them to know that you have eternal life.

[6 : 11] But a key thing is what this eternal life leads to. Verse 14, if you have eternal life, what that leads to is prayer. An implication of eternal life is prayer, confident prayer.

And did you notice how Jesus defined eternal life earlier in the reading in John 17? Verse 3, he said, This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

When I was young in the kids' club that we used to go to, we had a great game called Word Disassociation. Yet somebody would say a word, and then the other team would have to bring up a word that has absolutely no connection to that one.

And you could just have a word association game. You could hear one word, and then think of a word related to it. And what would you do if you played that game, and you started off with the word, life?

Well, if there was a materialist in the room, they might say, and this is how they apparently teach it these days, and I learnt it all in Welsh anyway, so I had to look it up.

[7 : 23] They would say, Mrs. Gren, apparently, that's the acronym you need to know, is Mrs. Gren. Movement, respiration, sensitivity, growth, reproduction, excretion, nutrition. That's life in the materialist world.

Maybe if there was a humanist playing this game, and had to link to the word life, I'd say adventure. Creativity, art, expression, music.

That might be what they say, but if the apostle John were to play that game, and he heard life, he would say relationship with God. Communion with God. Fellowship with God.

Biblically, or at least in the way John uses this language, and I think we need to bring our minds into conformity with the way the Bible teaches it.

I'm finding this more and more, this isn't how we naturally think, but at least for John, for us as image of God, to be alive is to be in relationship with God. Eternal life is not an individualistic idea.

[8 : 35] It is deeply covenantal. It is relational, through and through. To have eternal life is to be in fellowship with God.

That's how Jesus himself defined it. This is eternal life, that they know you and the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Which is why John says, you have eternal life, so pray. In verse 14. And he tells us that insofar as our prayers are aligned with what God's will is, we can pray confidently that he will hear.

What a wonderful privilege that is. That assurance of eternal life should mean that we pray, we long to speak with the one with whom we have fellowship, and we can do so confidently.

And that brings us to our passage tonight, because then the question would be, well, what should I pray for? And of course there can be plenty of things that we could pray for.

[9 : 41] The disciples asked Jesus how to pray, and they got the Lord's Prayer, and that showed them a wealth of things they could pray for. But John wants us to focus here on one particular thing that we should be praying for as we live in this world.

And for John, the question brings him back to the topic of sin that he had mentioned earlier and at length. That John has made it very clear that it is not okay for a Christian to sin.

That you can't do that, is the way he says it. He's not saying it is literally, physically impossible for it to happen. He's just saying, you can't do that here.

You can't sin. But he has acknowledged that we do sin. He said if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ.

He says if we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins. So he acknowledges that while it is awful that we sin, it is still a reality that we do sin.

[10:48] And so he's relating this question of what do we pray for to this problem of we still sin, don't we, in this world. In this last hour is what John calls this time we live in. And he wants us to think about how do we respond to the sin of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Children, what do you do if you see your brothers and sisters, maybe at home, and they do something naughty, they sin. What's the first thing you want to do? Maybe it's to run and tell mommy and daddy about what they did.

Maybe it's to shout at them. And maybe there'll be a time to tell them what they did. And there might be the right thing to do at times.

But there are times when our desire to tell people what this person did is actually demonic. Wanting to tell people about their other people's sin. It is at least not the first thing we should want to do.

Maybe we see other people sinning. Maybe they've lost their temper. Or they do something that they don't normally do. And maybe we just look away, feeling a bit embarrassed for them. And just hope that they just sort it out between themselves and God.

[12:02] And pretend we didn't really see it. And then they can just keep their dignity. But John says our first response to seeing somebody sin is to pray for them.

If you see somebody sinning, pray for them. Pray for them to be restored to fellowship with God. If you see someone sinning, they are breaking their fellowship with God.

And your first instinct should be to pray for them to restore that fellowship. So whether you're at home with your brothers and sisters. If you're in school or the workplace or in church.

Wherever you are with your brothers and sisters in Christ. When you see them sin, our first instinct is to remember, Well, I have assurance of eternal life. I have access to the Father.

What better use of this access I have to the Father. Than to pray for this brother and sister who is sinning. And to ask the Lord to intervene.

[13:04] To break in. To bring them to repentance. There may be more that needs to be done. But that is what John wants us to do. He wants us to pray for them. And you might be looking at these verses.

And you think, yeah, but he's actually talking about very specifically, isn't he? He's talking about the sin that doesn't lead to death. And what on earth is all that about? Well, verse 17 is clear, isn't it? All sin is lawlessness. It is all bad. It all damages our relationship with God. But there is a sin that does not lead to death.

It's all bad. But not all of it completely destroys our relationship with God. And it does seem that, just from the way that John usually uses the words life and death, that he's talking about eternal death here.

And there are some who would say, well, he's talking about Christians who just physically die. You know, if you had instances like that in the church in Corinthians, people misusing Lord Sappho or Ananias and Sapphira.

[14:07] But it seems that he's talking about people being eternally condemned here for their sin. And it is people in the church sinning like this.

And it's not to say that you can lose your salvation, but this is sin that reveals people to be not truly believers. Which is what they've been through. They've seen people who had left the church because they had revealed themselves to be not truly of us.

They went from us because they weren't truly of us. And whatever this sin that reveals that is, it might be a particular pattern, but whatever it is, it reveals that this person is a fake.

Something that reveals that they're completely reprobate. But John doesn't tell us what this sin is. But I think that's partly the point.

At the end of verse 16 is actually quite tricky. And I'm loathe to say this, I don't like it, but I think the translation could be improved. This is literally, if I were to give you a really clunky translation of the end of verse 16.

[15:15] On that phrase that's translated, I do not say that one should pray for that. This is a really clunky version of it. Not about that, I am saying or speaking, that he might pray.

And this is an okay translation of that. But I'm trying to study it and looking at people who, I found one person who had looked at everywhere you see a construction a bit like that in the Bible. And so you don't really find this type of construction. And he concludes, and I think helpfully saying that, I'm not speaking about that. That is saying, I'm not speaking about the sin that leads to death. That he might pray. So he's not saying, don't pray for that. He's saying, I'm not speaking about the sin that leads to death. In order that your focus might be to pray. John's aim, having told you that you have fellowship with God, is not to tell you not to pray. It's to tell you to pray. And there will be cases when it might not be, it might no longer be appropriate to pray. [16:24] And there are times in the Bible where people are told that. So the translation issues doesn't mean you should completely transform the theology here. There's nothing particularly to worry about. And I might be wrong on that.

And if you conclude that I'm wrong, that's fair enough. But at the very least, John's focus here is to get them to pray. His focus is not to say, oh no, is that the death sin? Or is that the life that is not so bad sin? That is not for us to do. There may be times when we see this person is clearly a fake. Clearly a reprobate. And we have been praying. And we have been exhorting. And they're just clearly just opposing the church at every point. And there may be a time when it is appropriate to stop praying. But what John really wants us to do is to pray for them. So he's not going to teach us about the sin that leads to death. Because what he wants us to do is to pray for them. But I think his mention of the sin that leads to death can help to further assure us. [17:32] You can imagine, can't you, that having gone through this difficult time, this church might be thinking, well, maybe we're not as special. Maybe God doesn't listen to us as much. Because that's what they said, that they kind of had this better life.

And God will always listen to them. So when we pray for people like this, why don't they come back? Maybe we really are not as special. They're saying, well, there are times when we pray for people to be saved, to come to fellowship with God. And it doesn't happen. And it is actually their fault. I think this is a word of comfort for them. Saying, yes, sometimes you will pray for someone. But they won't come. And it's not your fault. You prayed for them. But the reason it didn't come, it's actually their fault. It's because of their sin. Their unbelief. So I think John is encouraging them not to worry that it is any failing in them and their praying that has resulted in people not actually coming back.

Some have proven themselves to be fake Christians. Fake and truly reprobate people who are actually opposing the church. But he does want them to pray. [18:50] Do pray for brothers and sisters when you see them sin. That is what he wants you to do. With the access you have to the great king of heaven, pray for your brothers and sisters not to be brought into sin.

That's what Jesus is praying in the high priesthood prayer, isn't it? Sanctify them. Keep them. He wants them to live in holy lives with God's help. That should be our instinct as well. To be praying for each other. So just as eternal life is a relational category between us and God, very importantly at the beginning of the book, it's actually the relationship is with God with his church. So we are all together having a relationship with God. Not just me and God several times. It's actually us having a relationship with God. So we want to be praying for each other in our collective relationship with God.

And that is what John wants us to do with this great privilege access we have, is to be praying for each other. And then John moves on to what we know.

[19:58] So flip the page. And from verse 18 to the end, or to verse 20, three times he uses the phrase, we know that. So clearly he wants to draw our attention to what we know.

They had come into contact with these false teachers who probably were something early in what's called the Gnostic movement. Gnostic, Gnosis, but there's knowledge. They were really proud of all they knew. And so what do the true Christians actually know? This is John's focus here. Verse 18, we know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning.

But he who was born of God, or begotten of God, I think he's talking about Jesus there, he who was begotten of God, protects him and the evil one does not touch him. So you think, yeah, we know that sin is not a mark of the Christian life.

That's one thing we know. Sin is not a key identifier of a Christian. They are protected people by the begotten one.

[21 : 04] They are protected from the evil one. That is the first thing they know. So he's building up this case now, as a sort of climactic summary. One thing we know, sin does not mark us.

It doesn't identify us. Second thing, we know that we are from God, but we also know that the story isn't over yet. We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. Everything is not okay yet. The whole world isn't hunky-dory just yet. So if people, if these false teachers want to say, well, given that everything's fine, it doesn't matter what we do, that actually as people sin, it's fine, don't worry.

No, the evil one truly still has the world in its grip. And so when we see sin abounding, that is evil. We shouldn't like that. We shouldn't think that's fine.

Don't worry. You say, no, this shouldn't be the case. But we are born of God, and so we are very different from this world, and yet we are in danger of succumbing to the temptations of sin, even though this does not mark us.

[22 : 16] And so we know that we're not marked by sin, but we do live in a world where we are born of God, living in an evil world. This story isn't over yet. We live in an evil and fading world.

Sin really does matter. But we should care about avoiding sin. So we should be praying for each other not to sin. So that's one thing we know.

And the third thing we know, and we know in verse 20, 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. But we know this is the key for living as sons of God in a world that's in the grip of the evil one.

Knowing him who is true, and to be in him. Jesus Christ is the source of truth and understanding. And just as at the beginning of the passage last week, John gave us a summary statement of what we confess about Jesus Christ, that he's the one who came through water and the blood, with the Spirit testifying to it.

[23 : 31] We have another one, Jesus Christ, and then he is, and what do we see? He is the true God and eternal life.

This is as explicit as John gets. He is true God. Jesus Christ is God. He's making it very, very clear. So that this final point, this final verse, just makes it really explicit what this whole book is all about. He's talking about what we must do. That's the third thing. We've seen what we must pray for, what we know, and what we must do. If the key battle that we as the begotten ones of God, the key battle we're facing is this war against sin and against the evil one who has his grip on the world, the key thing we need to know is who Jesus Christ is and who Jesus is is true God.

Then, of course, the church's focus and the church's priority. As the community that God has come into fellowship with, those who know God, those who know eternal life, our priority is to keep the first commandment.

That is the first, that's where to begin. If you want to know where to begin in fighting against sin and surviving in this evil world, we should focus on not worshipping idols.

[25 : 03] Keep yourselves from idols, little children. Not in order to become little children, keep yourselves from idols. You are little children, so keep yourselves from idols.

Don't worship any other gods. These people who cause so much trouble in your church, John is saying, are worshipping other gods because they are lying about God.

If they are lying about Jesus, which he has established the case very clearly, if they are lying about Jesus, they are lying about God. He's kind of ramped up the seriousness. It's not just minor theological quibbles, they've lied about who God is.

who God is matters. When you say false things about God, you're building an idol. To know who God truly is and to contemplate him, to contemplate who he is, is one of the most important things you could do.

It's not just a nice exercise for pastors to do, but to know who God truly is, it's vital. Not just because it's nice or you need to pass an exam or something, but actually if you want to survive and keep

going, well, in this world where the devil has his grip on us, well, not on us but on the world, with us being protected, and if we want to avoid falling into sin as the world keeps tempting us, the key thing you need to know is who is God, who is Jesus, who is Jesus Christ, you need to contemplate who he is, meditate on the nature of God, there are lots and lots of good books out there to help you do that, there are lots and lots of bad books out there that will hinder you from doing that, you need to know that Jesus is God, that is a key starting point to know, if you want to meet God, meet him in [27 : 07] Jesus Christ, and so we having had assurance, we have eternal life, we have fellowship with him, how do we keep on going as we pray for one another in the battle against sin, we keep ourselves from idols, let's pray.