

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## A look at 1 John: 1 John 5

We are coming to the end of this lovely letter written by the Apostle John. What concern he had for those who love the Lord Jesus as their Saviour! That concern led him to desire the best for them. He commences in 1 John 1:4, *"These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."* This is a tremendous wish for anyone. Now, in 1 John 5, into which we will be looking today, John says, *"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God"*, 1 John 5:13. Sadly, in his day there were false teachers coming in who were spreading error concerning the person of Christ and it was important that believers should maintain every confidence in their trust in God.

This confidence gives full joy. In chapter 5 we have some tests raised to show and prove the Christian position and confirm that confidence. Although the Apostle had some particular believers in mind when he wrote his first letter, the Spirit of God was behind the writing, it has been preserved and has become of great value through the years to the present day. We can, therefore, put to ourselves the same tests and this will help to cement our trust also in the Lord Jesus Christ.

### 1. The test and belief of love (1 John 5:1-5)

#### Belief

The Apostle begins 1 John 5 by challenging the belief of those to whom he first wrote. Did they question if they were truly born of God? Then the Apostle tells them that *"whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God"*, 1 John 5:1. There is no doubt. So we also can challenge ourselves on this first test.

Do we believe? Harry was advised that he had been left £1,000 in the will of his recently deceased aunt. It was his but he had to accept it. He certainly told his friends of this great gift but he took no steps to collect it. If it was ever to become his he must be persuaded that he needed to claim it for himself. So belief includes not only a "head" knowledge of some matter but a firm persuasion that the matter must be followed through.

To be born of God we need to believe and accept *"that Jesus is the Christ"* (1 John 5:1). This means that the Person we know to be Jesus, God the Saviour, is the Christ, the Messiah, God's anointed One in this world. It includes complete acceptance on our part of the work the Lord completed at Calvary. If we cannot accept this, there is no hope for our souls. The glorious Gospel we believe required that God, in all His love for man, gave His own Son as the One appointed to come into the world as Jesus, the Saviour (see John 3:16). He was not here as just another man but God's own gift from heaven to men. When we **believe** that and accept all that it means, we **are** born of God. We can be absolutely sure.

#### Love

Now this can be tested another way. As true believers, having come to an understanding that our sins are forgiven, we realise into what a relationship of love we have come. John tells us in 1 John 4:8, *"God is love"*; and again in 1 John 4:11, *"If God so loved us..."*, so we come into happy relationship with a loving God. It is because of this, John says, we love other believers, 1 John 5:1. We are all family members.

John then puts the same matter the other way round. *"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments"*, 1 John 5:2. There is a two-way love; we love God, we love the children of God. One cannot go without the other. Now love is not a theoretical process; it is very active. *"God so loved that He gave..."*, John 3:16. We also find that the activity of love is shown as the children of God rejoice together and suffer together, 1 Corinthians 12:26. How vital this is to real fellowship and love between believers.

Perhaps someone may say, "My church has a very "cold" atmosphere, there seems to be no love there at all". Let me respond by asking what love do you show? It will make all the difference and you may well find that others are more friendly and ready to show love than before when you show love towards them.

Then there is another practical matter. 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 tells us what we are like without showing love and then goes on to show what love does for us. *“Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil...beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth...”* (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a) How do we measure up to these verses? How much will the believer, who knows the love of Christ, put up with from others? We read in 1 Peter 4:8, *“Above all things have fervent love among yourselves: for love shall cover the multitude of sins.”* When my brother fails, will I be a talebearer or will I seek to help him and allow my love for him both to settle and “cover” the matter?

1 John 5:3 adds a further consideration. If our love for God is real, we will *“keep His commandments”* and they *“are not grievous.”* It is not a matter of keeping the law; that is described as a yoke which is difficult to bear, Acts 15:10. It is a matter of keeping His Word and being subject to Him in all things. Love is not seen in a person who is wayward and demands his own rights. At the same time, we cannot use love as an excuse for covering evil. The truth of God must come first. This is not a burdensome responsibility at all but is a ready response of a heart that loves God. Love and keeping His Word is, therefore, a most important guide to our true position before God.

## Overcoming

Yet another test is shown to prove that we are born of God. How does the believer fit in with the world, that is, the system operated by mankind on the earth which takes no account of God? The believer avoids those systems. He keeps clear and seeks to honour God in every way. The Apostle has already spoken, in 1 John 2:16, of those things which need to be dealt with if we are to overcome the world: *“The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”* all come into the matter. These relate to those fleshly indulgencies which many have been involved in, the pleasures and senses to which we give way and our ambitions and self-seeking praise.

How can we be overcomers then? John says, *“even our faith”*, 1 John 5:4. Our desires have now changed; we want to please our Saviour. We find the means of victory is centred on our faith. We have no other strength than this. When we had no trust in the Lord and His work of salvation, we had no power to overcome the world. The world was fully part of us. But since we are born anew by trusting in the Lord Jesus as Saviour, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God have helped us and we seek to obey the new nature. The desires for the things of the world have begun to fade and the new life within us has consequently grown. Perhaps, for some, that growth is slow. But we learn that it is not by our own power that results are achieved. We are *“kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”*, 1 Peter 1:5.

## 2. The test of the new birth (1 John 5:6-13.)

The Apostle John now speaks of three witnesses to the new life a believer has. Perhaps we need to clarify that the passage speaks of three witnesses and not six (1 John 5:8). It is generally understood that 1 John 5:7 is an insertion to an early manuscript and not in the original. These verses bring these three witnesses to us confirming, in another way, that we truly have new birth. *“There are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one”*, 1 John 5:8. So let us try to understand this.

There is God the Holy Spirit who has a fundamental role by indwelling every believer. His coming is promised in Acts 1:8, *“ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me.”* That Power through the Word of God and through each believer is a witness to every believer and unsaved person. We learn from John 16:8 that the Holy Spirit will *“reprove (convince) the world of sin.”* To the disciples the Lord says, *“when the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth”*, John 16:13. So He is a powerful witness to the work of Christ both to unbeliever and believer alike. Every part of His work will testify to Christ, *“He shall glorify Me,”* the Lord says in John 16:14. Here, then, is the first witness. When we have new life, for the first time we sense the certainty of the work that has been done in our soul because the indwelling Holy Spirit is there and *“our joy is full”*. This is the first witness.

1 John 5:6 and 1 John 5:8 tell of two other witnesses. John is the only Gospel writer to tell us of these two in his Gospel, John 19:34. At the end of the suffering and death of our Saviour, John writes, *“But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.”* We have read in 1 John 5:6 that the two witnesses are the blood and the water. Isn't it amazing that these witnesses to our new birth come from a dead Saviour! How vital is the blood! The Old Testament offerings spoke of the blood to be shed. This was required by the Judge on account of sin. *“Without the shedding of blood there is no remission”*, Hebrews 9:22. In the first talk on this letter we read that *“the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin”*, 1 John 1:7. So we have the witness of judicial cleansing, before the Judge of all the earth. The blood shed has not only covered our sin in the sight of a holy God but has removed it all together.

The third witness is that of the water (1 John 5:6, 8). This also flowed from the side of the Lord Jesus (John 19:34). Perhaps we have learned that the blood has cleansed us in the sight of God but we still need some reassurance for

ourselves, some practical certainty. Often in Scripture water speaks of practical cleansing. How does this practical cleansing come about? In Ephesians 5:25-26 we read, "... *Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify it and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word...*" The Word of God is applied to my heart and conscience and is sufficient to set me free from the habits of sin into which my past life has kept me. I am set free from the control of past habits. The blood has been effective before God to cleanse from sin and the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to take away the power of sin practically. Every believer can sense this blessing.

These are the three witnesses and they all agree together. There is eternal life or full salvation for every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not just the witness of men; that may even be wrong; it is the witness of God, 1 John 5:9. We are not dependent upon man or upon our own efforts to give confirmation but we can rely on God and His Word. If we do not accept this, we make God a liar (1 John 5:10). The great statement of 1 John 5:11 confirms it all. "*This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*" All comes from the Son of God Himself. There can be no argument or failure.

The Apostle has brought his reader through to this glorious certainty, "*that ye may know*", 1 John 5:13. There must be no further doubt; all has been settled by the Lord Himself.

### 3. The Conclusion (1 John 5:14-21)

The acceptance of all the past lessons the letter has given us now give us great confidence and particularly we have the great confidence of prayer. We are brought into the closest relationship, so much so that it gives us a confidence or boldness to bring our petitions to God and to know that He hears us. This also brings the certainty of an answer. Yet the Apostle does add one condition. "*If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us*" (1 John 5:14). We may well question how do we know what is according to His will.

Firstly, anything for which we ask must be in agreement with the Word of God. If it is not, then we cannot expect our prayer to be heard. But then, perhaps it is in agreement with His Word but perhaps we are not living in accordance with His will for us. Then we are also faced with the prospect that our prayer is not heard. John tells in his Gospel, how the Lord emphasises the necessity of living the Word of God: "*If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you*" (John 15:7). When our desires are to walk "*in newness of life*" (see Romans 6:4) with our Lord it will mean that we want to move totally according to His will for us. Then, when we ask anything, we have the assurance that He hears and answers. The answer may not be immediate but the Lord has His ways and knows when to answer. The dependent believer will only want what is the Lord's will.

The Apostle now comes to discuss a further problem: that of seeing a brother in Christ sin, 1 John 5:16-17. It would seem that sickness may sometimes come upon one who sins. It is a happy privilege to pray for one who is affected in this way. So often we may never know what the situation is but we can still pray for the sick. We pray for restoration not that he be taken. Yet there is such a thing as being "sick unto death" (1 John 5:17).

We have an illustration of this in Acts 5:1-11. Both Ananias and Sapphira decided to lie in giving a gift to the Church (Acts 5:2) and when challenged, confirmed that lie. The outcome was that both of them died (Acts 5:5,10). Peter tells Ananias that they had lied to the Holy Ghost (Acts 5:3) and this was the seriousness of the matter, as though the Holy Spirit did not know what was happening. There was no way for them to be restored to a place of confidence in the testimony to their Lord on earth.

We find another illustration in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. The Corinthians had become careless in the way they remembered the Lord in His death. "*For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep [or have died]*", 1 Corinthians 11:30. Would we be so careless of the honour to our blessed Lord that it needs Him to remove us? In the face of deliberate disobedience to the Word or mind of the Lord, He sometimes will take a believer from this world. Eternal life can never be lost but physical life comes to an end. The Lord will deal with the matter at the judgement seat of Christ (See 2 Corinthians 5:10).

This letter ends with three statements introduced by "*We know...*" This word really speaks of an inward knowledge, not just something we have heard about. We have the full assurance of it. The first concerns our general walk. "*We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not...*" 1 John 5:18. This really means we do not practise sin. Yes, we are not free from sin, but we know the Advocate who is able to put things right, 1 John 2:1, and the Accuser, "*that wicked one*" (1 John 5:18) cannot come and condemn the child of God because he is in the hands of the Lord. Any such judgement will take place between the Lord and the individual.

The second statement, 1 John 5:19, gives us the assurance that in spite of the fact that the world in which we are is entirely wicked, "*we know [with full assurance] that we are of God*". The youngest believer can be assured of this and it brings with it such peace. The blind man, who had his sight restored, see John 9:1-41, could say, "*One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see*", John 9:25. His knowledge was unshakeable.

The third statement tells us that *“we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us understanding...”*, 1 John 5:20. The Apostle could say this because he had been with Jesus and personally knew Him. We also can say this because we have His word and He has been revealed to us in it. 1 John 5:20 closes with the statement *“This is the true God, and eternal life.”* Who is the true God but Jesus Christ? This eternal life is seen personally in Him.

The letter ends with an appeal in 1 John 5:21: *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”* Anything we allow which comes between ourselves and the Lord is an idol we set up. Yet we have only just read of Jesus Christ in 1 John 5:20, as *“the true God.”* Every other object which supplants Him in our lives is an idol. From today, will we maintain in our lives our Lord Jesus Christ, *“the true God”*, in His rightful place? May the Lord help us to do this for His name’s sake.

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