

Truth for Today

The Bible explained

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 21 February 2016

No. T0925

Speaker: Mr. David Anderson

Life in the family of God: Confidence and assurance in family

Whenever I think of 1 John 4:1-5:21, I always remember from my youth, an elderly Bible teacher called Norman. For two reasons:

1. His last ever address in my church fellowship was from 1 John 4 on the constancy of the love of God we abide in;
2. For an expression of his about the confidence and assurance we have in God, based on 1 John 5:11-13. These verses state that Christians are confident they know God and have been brought into ultimate reality, called eternal life. Norman used to say, "Yes, we believers know that we know that we know! Sadly, unbelievers don't know that they don't know that they don't know!" It takes a few moments for such a message to sink into our minds, but it rings true! What do we know? We know the absolute truth about God through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We know because we have been born into the family of God. Life in His family is eternal life. John states truths in an uncompromising way. It's either white or black. It's either light or darkness. It's either truth or error.

Here's the references in 1 John 1-3 where John states what believers know about the Faith:

- 1 John 2:2-3 and 3:5: We have come to know God through believing the Gospel - that Christ was the propitiation for our sins.
- 1 John 2:13-14: All the children of God know Him as Father.
- 1 John 2:18: We know we are living in the last days of Church history.
- 1 John 2:21: All believers know the truth.
- 1 John 2:29: We know that Jesus Christ is righteous and everyone who practices righteousness has been born of God.
- 1 John 3:2: Because we are God's children, we know that when Christ appears we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.
- 1 John 3:5: Believers know there is no sin in Him.
- 1 John 3:14: We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love others in the family of God.
- 1 John 3:16: We know what love really is because Christ laid down His own life for us,
- 1 John 3:24: We know that God abides in us by the Holy Spirit.

Today, we'll discover more things we know from 1 John 4:1-5:21

Let's now look through 1 John 4:1-5:21 with the idea of "Confidence and Assurance in the Family of God" in mind. I'll divide the talk into six parts:

1. Truth from God (1 John 4:1-6);
2. God abiding in us (1 John 4:7-16);
3. Confident children (1 John 4:7-21);
4. Obedience to God (1 John 5:1-5);
5. Assurance and security (1 John 5:6-17);
6. Truths to treasure (1 John 5:18-21).

1. Truth from God (1 John 4:1-6)

To have any confidence in God, we must know the truth about Him. We must have truth from God to give us the assurance that we have eternal life, that is, the family life of God in eternity. We know Jesus said "[He is] the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). But how can we be sure of the truth twenty centuries later? Here in 1 John 4:1, the Apostle John is acutely aware of the activity of the evil one to undermine the truth and warns: "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God.*" He explains what was prevalent in his day, "*because many false prophets have gone out into the world*" (New King James Version).

In 1 John 4:2-6, John provides three tests for us to apply to any person who claims to be either speaking or writing about the truth of God. And here we come to those black and white statements, which John often uses, from today's passage of Scripture.

a. What does the speaker, or writer, say concerning the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ? (1 John 4:2-3)

The first, in 1 John 4:2-3, is the most crucial of all: what does the speaker, or writer, say concerning the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ? Is he ready to state publicly, or openly, that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh? To come in flesh means that Christ existed before He was born and became Man. That is, it's to confess that He's both God and Man - that, in reality, He's the eternal Son of God. It also means that the speaker, or writer, will personally bow in obedience to Christ as Lord. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:3, "Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit."

b. Is the speaker or writer, popular with the world? (1 John 4:5)

The second test is in 1 John 4:5: is the speaker or writer, popular with the world? Does the world of unbelievers readily listen and accept what he is saying? Sadly, any person who gives a worldly interpretation of the truth will readily accord with the culture of the day; and express its thoughts and principles to gain the world's approval, which is wrong.

c. Is what is taught in accord with the truth of Christianity found in the New Testament? (1 John 4:6)

The third and final test is: is what is taught in accord with the truth of Christianity found in the New Testament? John claims in 1 John 4:6, "*We [apostles] are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us.*"

He concludes by stating that by applying these three tests we'll be able to discern the spirit behind the speaker; and we'll be able also to distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. He also states, in 1 John 4:4, that even the youngest members of God's family have the spiritual capacity to detect, and to resist, a false or evil teacher because the Spirit of God, who indwells believers, is more powerful than the Devil who is in the world.

2. God abiding in us (1 John 4:7-16)

Love permeates the family life of God. It's primarily the love between divine Persons. "*The Father loves the Son*" (John 3:35 and John 5:20). 1 John 4:8 and 1 John 4:16 both declare, "*God is love*" - it's His nature. First of all in this section John writes of how that divine love has shown itself to, or amongst, us. It's an expansion of John 3:16 - God's love for the world caused Him to give His only Son. "*In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*" (1 John 4:9-10).

You may think by this point that John is repeating what He has already written in 1 John 2:2-3 and 1 John 3:5-6; and you're correct. John does repeat truths for emphasis and such repetitions impart confidence and assurance. It's as though he's inserting a truth-screw. Each turn brings around the same truths again and again. But each turn expands on the previous turn and goes in deeper making us feel more secure. The central core of the truth-screw is the love of God! Remember what Norman said about its permanence and our abiding in it? This is exactly what 1 John 4:12-13 states. The Holy Spirit assures us that God's love abides in us. With another turn of the truth-screw, we're reminded of the Apostles' testimony. They were eye witnesses of the Son of God and personally testified that the Father has sent the Son to be Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14). It follows then that we're assured that God dwells in everyone who confesses Jesus to be the Son of God; and that they dwell in divine love (1 John 4:15-16).

There are practical consequences to receiving these truths from God:

- a. We're enjoined to love every member of God's family (1 John 4:7 and 1 John 4:11). When love is practised, each one is confident that he or she has been born into this spiritual family and knows God in reality (1 John 4:7).
- b. God's love is perfected in us. That is, it's carried to its fullest possible extent within us and reaches its climax. It's not our love that's made perfect, it's God's love which is made complete in us. It's we who are immersed in the boundless ocean of His love!

3. Confident children (1 John 4:17-21)

1 John 4:16 reminds us that God's nature is love and so 1 John 4:17 is another turn of the truth-screw, "*love has been perfected among us.*" This gives us boldness, or confidence, because perfect love has settled the issue of our sins

once and for all. The reason for our confidence in that coming day of judgement is found in John's words "*because as He is, so are we in this world*" (1 John 4:17). The Lord Jesus is now in heaven, with judgment completely behind Him. He came into the world once and suffered the punishment for our sins. But He has finished the work of redemption and God has given us assurance of this in that He raised Jesus our Lord from the dead (see Romans 4:24-25). Not only are we forgiven, we're also justified. We can boast, "*As He is, so are we, in this world*" (1 John 4:17). This describes our position of acceptance before God in Christ. Nine monosyllables standing in a row, as He is in heaven, so are we below. We're confident children in the family of God! 1 John 4:18a gives the reason for our boldness, "*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment.*" It follows then that anyone "*who fears has not been made perfect in love*" (1 John 4:18b). God's perfect love dismisses any fear of mine.

- a. I am assured of His love, because I accept that He sent His Son to die for me;
- b. I know He loves me because He indwells me through my entire life on earth;
- c. I know there's no prospect of future judgment for me.

Our response to such overwhelming grace is an outburst of praise and worship, "*We love Him because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). The only reason we can love is because He first loved us. But there's a test of the reality of this confession. 1 John 4:20-21 insist we must show this love by loving our brothers and sisters in Christ. We haven't actually seen God for we live by faith. But we can see Him in His children as they display His love. John therefore makes one of those challenging statements: if I say "*I love God*" and don't exhibit His love for His children that proves me to be a liar. A liar is a mere professor of Christ and is not a possessor of eternal life. John turns the truth-screw again by repeating an earlier commandment from 1 John 3:23 that "*he who loves God must also love His children.*"

4. Obedience to God (1 John 5:1-5)

I've made several references to the fact that this letter of John is like a truth-screw, which constantly repeats truths as it turns. But at every turn there's also a corresponding exhortation for his readers to practise the truth. 1 John 5 opens with a repeated statement of truth concerning the spiritual vitality of God's children and the outcome of that life they possess in practical Christian living upon earth. "*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him*" (1 John 5:1). There's a saying in the world that "blood is thicker than water" and it refers to family loyalties. It's based on the fact that they naturally love each other. That love is different from whatever love they have for friends and neighbours. It's a love they derived from their family experiences of how their parents loved them.

When my children were small, they gave me a small trophy on which is inscribed "to the best Dad in the world". It was their estimate of my love for them. In God's family, we love His children because we love the Father (English Standard Version translation of the latter part of 1 John 5:1). He's the Father from whom all fatherhood is derived. All love within the family of God is based on the love that God the Father has for God the Son. His children share in that love as we know from John 17:23 and John 17:26, "*You have ... loved them as You have loved Me.... I have declared to them Your name [of Father], and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.*" Another feature of eternal life is that love obeys. This was seen perfectly in the earthly life of the Lord, the "*not My will but Yours*" (Luke 22:42) attitude. Our obedience to the commandments of God is demonstrated by our love for His children (1 John 5:2). "*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome*" (1 John 5:3). So why do we find it so difficult at times to love other Christians? It's because we're affected by the spirit of the world. But we can succeed by faith! "*For [everyone who] is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*" (1 John 5:4-5).

5. Assurance and security (1 John 5:6-17)

In 1 John 5:6-12, we have assurances based on God's own testimony. The language is a little strange but the overall impression is that it all depends on what God has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. 1 John 5:7-8 state there are three testimonies that God gives to His children, "*For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree*" (English Standard Version). What does this mean? We're familiar with the Spirit's testimony to Christ and we know that He's the Spirit of Truth (1 John 5:6b, with John 14:17, 15:26 and 16:13). Because the Spirit is God, He cannot lie (see Titus 1:2), which is a wonderful assurance for us to grasp. The whole of the Bible is truth from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21!

Now as to the witness of the water and the blood, I quote 1 John 5:6a (New King James Version), "*[The Son of God] is He who came by water and blood - Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.*" In other words, the Son of God was born a Man in order to die to make propitiation for our sins. It was a divine necessity! That's why John emphasises the water as well as the blood of the Saviour in his Gospel. "*One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may*

believe" (John 19:34-35). The water testifies that the death of Jesus the Man cleanses us from all the defilement of our old nature, the sinful flesh. The blood signifies that God justifies us (see Romans 5:9). So these three, the Spirit, the water and the blood, unite in one testimony from God to declare the total effectiveness of the Saviour's death; as well as the blessing of eternal life to each and every believer, (1 John 5:11-12).

1 John 5:10 commences by saying that every believer has that witness within his or her heart. *"And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son"* (1 John 5:11). 1 John 5:10 concludes with another of John's contrasts. *"[Anyone] who does not believe God's [testimony] has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son."* Therefore, 1 John 5:12 concludes with an absolute assurance followed by a solemn warning. *"[Anyone] who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."* An addition comment on the latter is given in John's Gospel 3:36. *"[Anyone] who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*

1 John 5:13 further assures believers of their faith. They certainly and positively know they have eternal life. Their confidence in God extends to their prayer life. They know that they can ask for anything which is in accord with His will; that they will be heard; and that they will receive what they have requested (1 John 5:14-15). However there's a time when believers should not attempt to pray for the recovery of a person who commits a sin that leads to death (1 John 5:16-17). There's no definition of that sin, but it's obviously something very serious and which betrays the fact that the person concerned is one of God's children.

6. Truths to treasure, 1 John 5:18-21

John summarises his letter concerning life in the family of God with further truths, which impart further assurance and security. These are secrets for God's children to treasure. Let me remind you again of Norman's saying. "Yes, we believers know that we know that we know! Sadly, unbelievers don't know that they don't know that they don't know!" So, finally, what do we know? We know these spiritual realities:

- a. 1 John 5:18: we know that true children in God's family, those born of God, do not practise sin. We can't claim sinless perfection, as we learn from 1 John 1:8-2:2. But sinning is not a habitual activity for believers. As also in 1 John 3:9, true believers guard or keep themselves through the energy of the divine nature, which they receive at new birth. That's how they remain unscathed by the wicked one.
- b. 1 John 5:19: we know that our origins are from God, whereas unbelievers are the Devil's children; and are led by his influence to sin. We're not of the world even as Christ is not of the world (see John 17:14-15).
- c. 1 John 5:20: we know that the Son of God has come. John opened his letter with this great truth of the Incarnation.
 - Believers fully understand that through Him came the full and complete revelation of God. *"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him"* (John 1:18).
 - We know, and are abiding in, the true God.
 - All these blessings we have in His Son, Jesus Christ. The emphatic translation of the last sentence of 1 John 5:20 is, *"He [Himself] is the true God and eternal life"* (English Standard Version).
 - He's the Person of the Godhead in whom eternal life has been perfectly expressed. *"No one comes to the Father except through [Him]"* (see John 14:6).

John ends his letter with an exhortation, *"Children keep yourselves from idols"* (1 John 5:21). An idol is a substitute or false god, which takes the place of the one and only true God. It's anything that would wheedle its way between us and God to hinder our enjoyment of life in the family of God.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.