

“Assurance”
Lesson 28: 1 John 5:1-21
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Assurance: “a positive declaration intended to give confidence.”

In studying for this lecture, I imagined sitting down with Apostle John. I asked him, “John, what is the overall reason you wrote this part of your letter?” He replied, “Well, did you READ it, Maggie?” I replied, “Yes, but...” John interrupted, “Let me tell you a story about duct tape.” I interrupted *him*, “John, you had duct tape in ancient Israel?” He replied, “Just listen.”

“Duct tape is reliable and strong and used for many applications. It’s said to be waterproof, but to depend upon it for a water-tight seal is not a good idea. There was a man in Alaska who tried to cross a channel of water in a homemade, inflatable, boat, wrapped in duct-tape. He didn’t have a life jacket but he *did* have his dog and a paddle. He trusted the duct-tape-covered boat with *his* and his dog’s life to get across the channel of water. Well, the Coast Guard had to rescue him.”

John continued: “I wrote this part of my letter to Christians, those who believe Jesus is the Son of God and call Him their Savior. They were hearing false teachers teaching false doctrines. They were like the man in the duct-taped raft, flailing in the water, struggling with confidence in the faith they had placed in Jesus for eternal life.”

I thanked John, told him I’d see him again in heaven, and returned to study Chapter 5. I believe John wanted all believers to be assured, to be confident, to *know*, that:

Jesus is the Son of God
We’re to obey and love God
We’re to love God’s children
We have eternal life
We overcome the world
There are powerful witnesses, both physical and Divine, that testify to Jesus
We can ask God anything in prayer that aligns with His will
We will not continue to live in sin as we did before we were a believer
Jesus gave us understanding about who He is
We can trust God, who is true and eternal

I organized the chapter into three sections:

1. Believers are born of God (1-5)
2. Jesus is the Son of God (6-12)

3. Believers can KNOW they have eternal life (13-21)

The first 5 verses are rich with assurances we have as believers.

“Everyone born of God believes Jesus is the Christ. Everyone who loves the Father loves His children. By this we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For everyone born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” (5:1-5)

Throughout the chapter, John wove in words and phrases essential to believers, such as:

Born of God

This is one of Apostle John’s favorite terms. Being born of God also means being “born again”. Many “claim” to be born again but are not, therefore, it’s vitally important to understand that only those who “believe that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” (1 John 5:1a) and “No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” (John 3:3)

There are five characteristics of being born of God:

1) Have faith in Jesus Christ as God’s Son and accept Him as Savior. When we believe in His Son, God does something awesome! He causes us to be born a second time *as His child*! He makes us into a new creation and gives us a new self. All our sins are wiped away because Jesus Christ took them upon Himself.

2) Love God and love others born of God. Our love for God must naturally extend to those also born of God. Love for God and loving our fellow believers demonstrates our new birth. The kind of love we’re to have for God *and* for those born of God, is *agape*—agape love is the highest form of love characterized by selfless, unconditional, and sacrificial commitment. It’s God’s kind of love.

3) Obey God’s commandments. Obeying God proves our love for Him (1 John 5:2-3), demonstrates our faithfulness to Him (1 John 2:3-6), glorifies Him in the world (1 Peter 2:12)

4) Overcoming the world. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, and as they mature in their Faith, those born again can resist the world’s influence and attraction to its values. A believers’ first birth is physical and they enter into a biological family as a sinner. Their second birth is spiritual and they enter into a spiritual family as a conqueror.

5) Not continuing to sin. We're *all* infected. By that I mean, we're all sin positive. Sin and temptation will always be a part of our lives in this world. Even born-again have to choose God over evil. Before being born anew, we followed our sinful nature, but being born again is characterized by an increasing desire to follow the nature of God. We'll never *not* be infected with sin until we stand before Jesus in heaven.

Children Of God

The moment we are born and delivered in the birthing room of God's family, we become children of our Heavenly Father and we have *lots* of siblings - spiritual brothers and sisters - because God is the Divine parent of us all! Can you imagine the family get togethers we'll have in heaven?!

About being His child, Scriptures tell us:

- "The Father has lavished His great love on us and called us children of God and when Christ appears, we'll be like Him." (1 John 3:1-3)
- "But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:12)
- "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." (Romans 8:16)

John told those born of God, to love the *Father* and love the *children* of the Father because we all belong to the same family. Here's an earthly metaphor to explain the spiritual truth of being a child of God.

When a baby is born, a new life emerges, and as they grow, many children begin to look like their birth parents. "She has her mom's eyes." "He has his dad's smile." For some, the resemblance is uncanny how much they look like their parent. And as they grow, similarities become more pronounced, such as their voice, actions, how they walk, their posture, smiles — all of which points to their family origin.

So it is for those born of God. When we're born into the family of God, we grow to be more like our Divine Father, that is, to reflect His image in our character and actions, and we grow to resemble Him in our relationship with His Son.

When I was studying this passage, I reflected on my four *earthly* siblings. When we were kids, it was so easy to love my "baby" sister, Marianne, but sometimes, I really got into it with my other siblings. Fortunately, we grew out of that behavior; thank you Jesus. John explained that love for our spiritual brothers and sisters is to be a natural outcome of loving God, the Father of our siblings.

Loving God, loving His children, and obeying His commands form inseparable links in a circular chain connecting and unifying the kingdom of God.

John wrote that following God's commands wasn't a burden. But isn't choosing God's way over the world's way difficult sometimes? The world wants us to believe that "Christianity stuff" is oppressive and offensive. There's an ever-growing society of cancel-culture, dismissal, intolerance, and ostracization against those who follow Jesus. However, choosing God's ways reflect God's character and becomes a source of joy and freedom - not a source of hardship.

And this is so simple, yet so powerful! Because we're born of God, we have the same power *living in us* that raised Jesus Christ from the dead! We have power to overcome the influences of the world, to not be ruled by the desires of our sinful flesh or by Satan's rule and lies.

And as overcomers, we will have a special place in heaven because Jesus promised: "To him who overcomes I will give him the privilege of sitting down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and have sat down with My Father on His throne." (Revelation 3:21)

Witnesses/Testimonies About Jesus

John wrote of the witnesses who testify to Jesus' divinity and humanity.

"This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement." (5:6-8)

The first witness is the water, which refers to Jesus' baptism where God affirmed Him as His Son. The second is blood, which represents Jesus' crucifixion and His sacrificial death on the cross. The third witness is the Holy Spirit, whom John called "the truth", Who, when He speaks, He speaks all things in relation to the Son. These three witnesses all agree in their testimony about Jesus affirming the truth of His identity and mission. Yet, there is another witness!

"We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which He has given about His Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made Him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about His Son." (5:9,10)

Often in courts of law, decisions are based upon the human witnesses whose testimony isn't always accurate or true or even makes sense. For example, a witness testifying in court actually accused the attorney of *creating* evidence and trying to *trick* him with the *facts*!

Compare the world's flawed testimony to the perfection of God upon Whom our faith is based. His testimony is true, and is greater than man's concerning the death, resurrection, ascension, and rule of His Son.

When the world denies Jesus is the Son of God, it's claiming God's words are not true. To deny the Son is to deny the Father. No one can *accept* God and *deny* His Son. Those who reject the testimony of the water, the blood, and the Holy Spirit, are rejecting God's testimony, in essence, calling God a liar, but Hebrews 6:18 tells us Almighty God cannot lie. John's case for Christ is settled - Jesus is the Son of God!

John told us how *vital* it is to believe God's testimony. Now he tells us *what* God's testimony is. "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." (5:11,12)

Verse 13 may be the focal point of John's entire letter: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." Believers are to *know* they are born again, that they are God's children, that they will have life with Him forever.

Those who put their faith in Christ and who know Him as Savior, are assured they will hear their name read aloud from the Book of Life. But those who do not believe, will not have eternal life.

We are to share the good news about eternal life with Jesus, however, we also need to share what happens when people don't know Jesus as Savior, whose names are not written in the Book of Life, who chose not to believe in Him. "Anyone whose name was not found written in the Book of Life [will be] thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:15) Like the man in the duct-taped-boat, it saddens me to wonder, what or who, the unsaved rely on for their eternity.

I can't get my head around living for eternity but then I remember these words from Amazing Grace: "*When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun.*" The promise of eternal life gives me comfort, especially in times of loss and grief. Sure, sometimes I have questions, even doubts, yet I personalize what Jesus said: "*Maggie, I give you eternal life, and you will never perish—ever!*" (John 10: 28)

We have Assurance/Confidence in Prayer

Have you ever been talking to someone on the phone and you're talking and talking and talking, maybe telling a hilarious story or admitting something stupid you did (well, maybe those are *my* conversations) and the person you're talking to says, "Hello? Are you there? I haven't heard a thing you've said for the last couple minutes." It's frustrating when you can't tell if you're getting through to someone, or if they even hear you.

Verses 14 and 15 are about petitioning God through prayer. "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask— we know that we have what we asked of Him." (5:14,15)

We must have confidence that when we align our requests with His will, the Creator of the universe hears our prayers.

“Nothing we ask for lies beyond the power of God except that which lies beyond His will, His purpose, His plan. He knows what is best and wants what is best for His glory and our good.” (Christ Centered Exposition) Sovereign God acts according to *His* ways, not ours. He responds to our prayers according to *His* will, not ours. Whether or not what we pray for is granted, we must trust God to decide.

“Be bold, audacious, confident. The Lord of all heaven promises us that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us! No other spiritual activity is guaranteed such results.” (Max Lucado)

Sin / Death

In verses 16 and 17, the topic is sin (wrongdoing/unrighteousness) and how a believer should pray for others. “If you see a fellow believer committing *sin that does not lead to death*, you should pray and God will give them life. There is *sin that leads to death*. I am not saying that you should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.” (5:16,17)

These verses do not address any *specific* sin. John did mention two categories of sin: sin that *does not* lead to death and sin that *does* lead to death.

Most Bible scholars and Bible commentators concur on the following interpretation of verses 16 and 17: “Sin that *does not* lead to death” refers to physical death of a believers’ earthly body. “Sin that *does* lead to death”, refers to the spiritual/eternal death of an unbeliever.

Unfortunately, we Christians still sin. When we were born again, we weren’t given a super-serum that inoculated us *against* sinning. Romans 6:6 says we no longer have to be *enslaved* to sin, but we live in the flesh, and the flesh wants what the flesh wants. Apostle Paul admitted his own battle against the flesh, yet he also wrote, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:16)

Sin will often impact a believer’s life. and they may pay a consequence for sin, such as shame, criminal punishment, health issues, etc., and the price may even be the physical death of their earthly body. However, it cannot lead to spiritual/eternal death because a believer’s salvation is not at stake. We are covered by the blood of Christ. Because of God’s grace and His Son’s obedience, eternal life is given to those who believe in Jesus - sin cannot take that promise away.

“Off and on salvation isn’t in the Bible. It contains no example of a person who was saved, then lost, then resaved, then lost again.” (Max Lucado) Those born of God cannot be unborn!

Continuing about consequences of sin that *does not* lead to physical death, if a believer falls so deeply into sin, with no repentance for their willful, continual sin, their testimony and service on earth may be so damaged that they bring dishonor to the name of Christ, and God may choose to severely discipline them by taking them home to be with Him. There are examples in the Bible about believers’ actions that

led to their sickness and/or death, as did with Ananias and Sapphira. Once again, although the believer may *physically* die, he cannot *spiritually* die because John 10:28 says not a single believer will be snatched out of God's hand.

And a believer's sin that does NOT lead to spiritual/eternal death can be opposed through intercessory prayer—praying for the life of believer's fellowship with God to be restored.

Sin that Does Lead to Death (Spiritual/Eternal Damnation)

Sin that does lead to death (spiritual/eternal damnation) is sin that is committed by unbelievers and by those who only *claim* to believe in Jesus. They were never born again, never had the Holy Spirit dwell in them, never experienced the second birth, because once someone receives the Holy Spirit, the Spirit cannot be taken from them. "Once a person is created into a new creation in Christ [he cannot] become the old creation again." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

This sin is considered "unpardonable", committed by those who willfully and persistently reject Jesus as God's Son, whose heart is so hardened they are unwilling to turn to God.

William Barclay's description of sin that leads to death is especially descriptive: "'Sin which leads to death' is persistent, obstinate, deliberate, purposeful. It is committed by one who persists in sin, who rejoices in sin, who never thinks of temptation as a sin, who has no regret for sinning, who glories and boasts and delights in his sin, who is proud of his sin, who knows how to get away with his sin. It is committed by one who has listened to sin so often, and refused to listen to God so often, that he has come to love his sin."

John wrote there was no point in praying for someone engaged in sin that leads to spiritual/eternal death, possibly because that person has no desire to repent. However, John didn't command us *not* to pray for them, for how can we know if someone has come to that? We can't. Therefore, we should pray for their salvation.

I've heard people, I assume were Christians, voice concern they may have committed the unpardonable sin. A believer cannot commit "sin that leads to spiritual/eternal death" because whoever declares Jesus is Lord and believes that God raised Him from the dead, will be saved" (Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9,10,13) and they *will* have eternal life. (John 3:15, 16)

Moving on to verses 18 and 19, I like The Message version: "We know that none of the God-born makes a practice of sin—fatal sin. The God-born are also the God-protected. The Evil One can't lay a hand on them. We know that we are held firm by God; it's only the people of the world who continue in the grip of the Evil One."

John cautioned that those born of God do not continue to live in the sinful desires they had prior to salvation. When we're born again, the Holy Spirit changes our nature away from continually desiring to sin. Believers are not *incapable* of sin, however, through the Holy Spirit, we mature to become more and more like Christ and less and less like the world.

John told believers that Jesus protects them from Satan. Satan may grab at us, tempt us through doubt, through the flesh, through things of the world, however, he cannot attach himself or cling to us to make us practice sin. The believer is under the keeping power of Jesus Christ and Satan cannot gain control of him. We are still in the battle because the world is under the power of the evil one, but *only* until Jesus Christ strips him of power.

Closing out his letter, John declared the Messiah had come and has given us understanding to *know* the only true God. "We know also 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 by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life." (5:20)

The word John used for "know" means *knowledge by experience*. Jesus wants us to know Him personally. Jeremiah 9:24 says God wants us to have understanding to know Him, to know that He is the Lord, Who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth.

Then the last verse of the chapter may seem like a strange way for John to end his letter: "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols." (5:21)

Idol worship was quite prevalent in John's time, and was a struggle for Jews and Gentiles alike, however, it also applies to us today. We must remain faithful to God alone; to not worship or overindulge or pursue anything more than we do our Father; to prioritize God above all else. Consider what strategies can be adopted to guard against *God-substitutes*, because our hearts can never be satisfied with any of them. "When we turn a good thing into a god thing, it becomes a bad thing." (Timothy Keller)

In closing, I offer these three applications from the last chapter of 1st John:

1. Be Assured of Your Savior: Let the assurance of eternal life influence your life and decisions.
2. Pray with Confidence: When you pray, seek alignment with God's will in your requests.
3. Guard Against Sin: Be vigilant and rely on the Holy Spirit for strength and guidance.

2000 years ago, I believe John was telling the recipients of his letter which also applies to us today:

Christianity is not a "I hope so" faith. It's an "*I know so*" faith.