

1 JOHN 5:18-21

INTRODUCTION

In verse 13 John tells us one of his purposes for writing; then he goes on to spell out the implications of knowing that we have eternal life. Last time we looked at one of those benefits of having eternal life the benefit of prayer of having freedom of speech before the living God. We have a new confidence and assurance in prayer because of our relationship with our Father through Jesus Christ.

If you look at the verses that we are studying now you will see a little phrase that is repeated again and again. That phrase is "we know." Having an absolute assurance of our salvation makes us certain of other things. It makes us certain that our prayers will be heard but here are some other things that we are certain about.

1. WE KNOW THAT WE WILL NOT CONTINUE TO SIN (v 18)

This is the evidence that we are born of God, we will not continue to sin. Now he does not say we will not sin, that was what the false teachers claimed for themselves (1:8-10 & 3:9). But what John says is that Christians cannot go on sinning habitually. Now John has said this before in this letter (3:6, 9). Whenever someone is born of God then that person will not go on sinning as they did before for he is no longer a slave to sin, no longer being controlled by his sinful nature no longer following after the ways of the evil one. No! he is born again and therefore a change has taken place, a new Master has come in and is in control and the evidence of this is that a Christian will not go on sinning as he or she once did.

Now the reason why a Christian does not continue to sin as before is because the one who was born of God keeps him safe. Some confusion has arisen among translators here because some see the two uses of the term 'born of God' to be identical. Such a view puts the onus on the born again Christian to keep himself. Now this is not an unbiblical idea it is found in 1 Timothy 5:22, James 1:27 and Jude 21. However I think it is unlikely that this is what John means here for he is writing to assure the Christians and to think of keeping oneself safe would lead these Christians to despair.

There would be little assurance if our victory over sin were dependant on our ability to keep ourselves safe. I think the NIV has probably got it right here when it refers to the one born of God as Jesus. It is the Son of God who keeps the Christian safe. The Christian is delivered from sin by Jesus Christ and is sustained and given strength to persevere by Christ. However as I said the other side of the truth is taught in Scripture as well. There is a sense in which we keep ourselves as we appropriate God's resources and as we co-operate with God's grace. Sanctification is a work of God's free grace, but God works in us to make us active therefore it is absolutely true that Christ keeps his people safe but we also are to maintain our walk with God.

We have to deal with sin in our lives; we have to exercise daily Christian disciplines of study and prayer. We have to deal with wrong attitudes and actions. However we

can only do that because Jesus ultimately keeps us safe and it is he who works in us so that we can work out our own salvation (Philippians 2:12-13).

The result of Jesus keeping us safe is that the evil one cannot harm us. It literally means to fasten himself upon us. He may and will attack us but he will never be able to succeed in getting us back into his fold. The world is in his grip as we will see in a minute but the Christian belongs to God is kept safe by Jesus Christ and although Satan tries to do some damage he can never defeat us or get us to follow him. He might have the occasional victory but he will never win the battle.

That has already been won by Jesus Christ when he died for us on the cross that we might be born of God. Jesus guaranteed our security and he has all authority and power to keep us safe (John 10:28-31). So as we struggle against sin in our lives we do so with real confidence for our protector is stronger than our enemy he is more watchful and more concerned for us than we could ever be. We know this is true therefore let us rejoice in this truth and let our lives clearly show its truth to the world.

2. WE KNOW THAT THE WORLD IS UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE EVIL ONE (v 19)

One of the most dreadful things about the life of the unbeliever is that he is often oblivious to the danger that he faces. The whole world is under the control of the evil one. This does not mean that God is not sovereign. The Devil is subject to God's authority just like everyone else he is not allowed to go an inch further than God's permission sanctions (Job 1-2). His ultimate doom is assured (Revelation 20:10). Nevertheless Satan does possess real power even though it is not final or ultimate power.

Most of the world however does not even realise this and as a result they have no desire to escape from his control. But unbelievers are oblivious to spiritual realities they are blind to the truth they cannot see the significance of the gospel, they do not understand why there is all this talk from Christians about salvation. When you tell them that they are under Satan's sway they laugh they think you are only joking. However we know the true state of affairs our eyes have been opened we see the world as it truly is.

We know that we belong to God and not to the world. All that we have comes from God and so we now belong to him totally. Therefore the implication of this truth is that we are separated from the world, we have different priorities and our focus is upon God and not this world. The world is dominated by the devil he is actively at work in the world in order to demonstrate his opposition to God. You only have to read the newspaper or listen to the news to know that this is true.

However God controls his children He is our ruler, our allegiance is to him and to this world. Our priorities of time, money, and service should be focused and centred on our God. We belong to him and the challenge for us all is this; could anyone tell that we belong to him by looking at our lives. Do our attitudes reflect that, does the way we use our resources reflect that and do our passions reflect that? Because we belong to God and not the world of course does not mean that we are to have nothing to do with the world and remove ourselves into communes and live

completely separately by not even functioning within the world's framework. We do have a new attitude to the world because we belong to God but that does not lead to indifference or separation but it leads to involvement and compassion after the model of our Saviour.

We are salt and light in our world, and we have the task of communicating this great gospel truth to the world. It is so easy to want to have minimum contact in this world. Some Christians do that; they go to work and do the job they are paid to do without wanting to get involved in helping their fellow workers. They come home close the door and have no contact with unbelievers until they go to work and so on. They go to church and enjoy the fellowship but they cannot handle the world.

But once we have this assurance and confidence that we belong to God then we will be able to act and react within the world on the basis of this assurance. I think 'Caring For Life' is a fine example of people who belong to God but because of this confidence they are able to interact with those in the world showing compassion and sharing the good news of Jesus which ultimately is the only hope for a world under the control of the evil one.

3. WE KNOW WHY JESUS HAS COME INTO OUR WORLD (vs. 19-20)

John says that another implication of our assurance of salvation is that we know that Jesus has come so that we may know him. The result is that we are in him. Our faith is grounded in what God has done in history; we know that Jesus has come in the flesh (4:2) and has given us understanding. The idea of 'understanding' here is not just intellectual knowledge but it also carries the idea of the capacity to receive truth. Jesus opens our minds by his Spirit so that we can understand the gospel and are able to respond to that gospel.

God's truth is addressed to the mind so that we can understand prepositional truth but that is not true understanding. It must penetrate the heart and it must activate our wills so that we will respond to prepositional truth. Jesus is Saviour is prepositional truth but knowing that will not save us. It must move from our thinking into our hearts and move our wills so that we come to understand why we need a Saviour and are willing to accept him as our personal Saviour. In doing this we come to know Him who is true and we are in him who is true.

Jesus came to bring us into a personal relationship with God for this to take place he has to give us understanding, he has to open our hearts (Lydia's Acts 16:14) illuminate our minds and move our wills so that we can be sure that we have come to know the true God and eternal life (v 20). We live at a time when no one is allowed to be sure or dogmatic about religion but the Christian can be sure and dogmatic about this; that we have come to know the true God through his Son Jesus Christ who came into our world and has given us understanding so that can know God.

So our salvation comes from God through Jesus and even the ability to understand and apply the gospel comes from Jesus by his Spirit. People of the world can hear the gospel message about Christ, the cross, resurrection, judgement, eternal life and wonder how it all fits together. How can anyone find such things of interest they say?

But then among these people of the world there are people who hear the same message and it all fits together perfectly for them.

They understand their need; they see themselves as sinners they know they are not right before God. They understand that Jesus is God the Son they understand the significance of his work on the cross and his resurrection. They are grateful that Christ's calls them to repent and believe and it all makes sense so they respond to God's gracious invitation. They are now born of God. Beforehand they had no idea what it was all about, they might have understood the message but not have seen its importance or significance for them. But now Jesus has granted them understanding, He opens their blind eyes and gives them a true and saving knowledge of himself.

Now if Christians know this then how should it affect us? I can think of two ways. One is prayer and other is witness. If only God gives understanding then we must plead with him to do so for those that we share this good news with. If salvation really depends upon God, which is what 'Reformed' people believe then our prayer life as individuals and as a church, must reflect our belief. I sometimes wonder if we only believe this in an intellectual way for so often it does not move our hearts and wills so that we are people who feel compelled to pray.

But of course we also must get this gospel out for God saves through the hearing of the word (Romans 10:17). Its as we witness and preach the gospel and it's as we pray and plead with God that he might give understanding to unbelievers that God will work and open the hearts and minds of sinners and move their will to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

But these assurances that come from our assurance of salvation does not mean that we can now just relax let go and let God do everything. No! As I have already said because God works in us does not mean to say that we have no work to do. We have to fight the temptation of idol worship. John finishes his letter (v 21) with what seems to be very abrupt words. In the context of 1 John the apostle is writing against the false teachers who had abandoned the gospel for a completely different gospel.

In doing so they were making idols in their heart. O when we think of idols we think of images made out of stone or wood that people bow down to but idols as you know is anything, which takes the place due to God. John is giving a final warning to the church not to go after the false teaching that had influenced some to leave the church. To do so would be to worship an idol because to have a false view of God is idolatry; it is to replace the true God with a god of our own imagination, which is idolatry.

So it is today any who worship a god who only loves but never judges is guilty of idolatry for they are worshipping a god that only exists in their own imagination.

So as I conclude let me summarise 1 John for you. It was written to give a way of testing true Christianity from false religion. In doing so John is seeking to assure those who pass the test of their salvation and to show them the implications of their assurance. Therefore as we leave this book let us be sure that we are believers let us know that we know that we are born of God and then let us demonstrate our

confidence in God in prayer, holiness, devotion to the Lord and in keeping ourselves from idolatry.

Amen