

WORDS OF ASSURANCE FOR THE CHRISTIAN

Please do not read these comments until you have read the Scriptures for this lesson. Begin by letting the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

The epistle of 1 John was written to warn the early Christians about the heresy of Gnosticism, to teach them the broad outlines of Christian responsibility, and to give them assurance in their Christian faith. Gnosticism taught that matter was inherently evil and only the spirit was good. This teaching led them to deny that Jesus Christ was both God and man (cf. 5:1, 5). They taught that Jesus was a real man and Christ was God, but they were not one Person. Christ only came to dwell with Jesus from the time of His baptism until sometime prior to His crucifixion. Jesus died only as a man. This doctrine denied the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and made His physical resurrection impossible. John exposed this serious error (5:6-12).

Gnosticism also taught that only a Christian's spiritual life was essential. This led some of them into asceticism which denied all physical pleasures, and led others into licentiousness which allowed every physical pleasure. It appears that John was dealing with the latter group because of his emphasis on obedience to God (5:2-3). The doctrines of the Gnostics were a form of idolatry from which John exhorted the Christians to flee (5:21).

John urged the believers to love God and to love the fellow believers by keeping God's commands (5:2-5, 16). He also gave them assurance in various areas of their faith (5:13-20) so that they might not be overcome by Gnosticism, but be victorious in their Christian life (5:4-5).

I. Credentials of the New Birth – 5:1-12

A. Love for God and the Believers – 5:1-3

5:1 – “Jesus is the Christ” – John's use of “Christ” was the same as saying “the Son of God” (compare 5:1 with 5:5). The Gnostics denied that Jesus was God, but this is what one must believe to be in God's family.

“Born of God” – This phrase is used several times in 1 John (2:19; 3:9 twice; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18).

“Loves” – He that loves God will love His children also. No one can say he loves God, but not love His children.

5:2 – “We love the children of God” – He who would show love to God's children must begin by loving God. This is the reverse of the law in 4:20; 5:1. He who would love God also must love His children.

5:3 – “Keep His commandments” – Love for God without obedience to Him is impossible.

“Grievous” – God's commandments are not “burdensome” (cf. Mt. 11:30). Love for God makes obedience to Him light and easy.

B. Victory over the World – 5:4-5

5:4 – “Whatever” – This does not specifically indicate a man or a woman; it is a neuter word to include everyone.

“Overcomes” – This verb is in the present tense to indicate continual victory in a continuing conflict.

“World” – It stands for the forces of wickedness that are organized under the leadership of Satan.

“Victory” – It is from the same root as “overcomes”; it is a play on words in Greek.

“Overcomes” – This verb is a different tense than the one that appeared earlier in the verse. This is an aorist verb, a constantive aorist, which considers the whole battle as one event that has been won. “Has overcome” is a better translation.

“Faith” – This is the noun form of “believe” in the Greek. John often used the verb, but only used the noun once in this epistle. Faith is the instrument of victory.

5:5 – Believes that Jesus is the Son of God” – This is the content of the faith that overcomes the world. There is no victory over the world without believing that Jesus, the man, is also the Son of God: He is the God-man. The Gnostics could not confess this statement; therefore, they had no power to overcome the world.

C. Witness to the Believer – 5:6-12

5:6 – “Came by water” – This is a reference to Jesus Christ’s baptism.

“Blood” – This is a reference to Jesus Christ’s crucifixion.

“Not by water only, but by the water and blood” – The Gnostics believed that Christ came to dwell with Jesus at the time of His baptism, but left Him before He went to the cross. This statement declares that Christ not only was baptized, but also was crucified. Jesus Christ was the union of God and man into one Person at the time of His conception and still remains so.

“The Spirit that bears witness” – The verb is in the present tense – a continuing witness by the Holy Spirit to the fact that Jesus is God. He witnessed to the fact that Jesus was God when He came upon Him like a dove at His baptism. He also witnessed to His deity at Pentecost and continues to do so in the hearts of sinners whenever the Gospel is preached (Jn. 16:7-11). It is also His witness in the lives of believers that illuminates their minds to understand the deity of Jesus more accurately as they read the Scriptures.

“The Spirit is truth” – The witness of the Spirit is valid because He always speaks the truth.

5:7-8 – Verse 7 ends with “record” and verse 8 begins with “the spirit.” The other words in these two verses are not found in any Greek manuscripts before the fifteenth century and only in Latin manuscripts before that time; therefore, they are not considered authentic by textual scholars.

“Bear record” – The same word is translated “bears witness” in 5:6, which is preferred. The Spirit, the water (Jesus’ baptism), and the blood (Jesus’ crucifixion) all join together in a united witness concerning the deity of Jesus. This verb is in the present tense, which shows that these three continue to witness the fact that Jesus is the Son of God.

5:10 – “Believes on the Son of God” – This is deeper than an intellectual belief. The demons have this kind of belief, but they tremble at the thought of judgment (James 2:19). Many have a belief in the Son of God for miracles, but it will not give them eternal life. Believing is the same as receiving when John uses the word (Jn. 1:12).

“Has the witness in himself” – The true believer has the witness of the Spirit within himself. He can sense it and this gives him further confidence that Jesus is God.

“Has made Him a liar” – When a person refuses to receive Jesus as his Savior, he makes God a liar because he refuses to receive the “record” (witness) that God gave concerning His Son.

5:11-12 – “This is the record” – **God’s witness** (“record” should be translated “witness”). John is about to declare the substance of the witness concerning God’s Son.

“God has given to us eternal life” – **God’s gift**. It cannot be earned or purchased because it is too precious for man to obtain by his resources. It must be received as a gift. This life is everlasting life, but it is more. It is also a special kind of life; it is a divine life (2 Pet 1:4).

“This life is in His Son” – **God’s Son**. He is life (Jn. 14:6). In Jesus Christ there is life for sinners.

“Has life” – **God’s promise**. This is eternal life and it is a present possession for those who have received God’s Son. They receive this life as soon as they receive Jesus Christ.

“Has not life” – **God’s warning**. Apart from Jesus Christ there is no life in eternity for sinners. They will exist, but they will be separated from God and suffer in the Lake of Fire forever (Rev 21:8).

II. Certainties of the Good News – 5:13-20

A. Assurance of Eternal Life – 5:13

5:13 – “These things have I written to you” – This statement indicates that John is about to tell his purpose for writing 1 John – that Christians might **know** that they have eternal life. His purpose for writing the Gospel was slightly different – that sinners might **have** eternal life (Jn. 20:31). His message in the Gospel tells sinners how to be saved, and his message in his Epistle gives Christians assurance that they are saved. Therefore, one can expect to find helps throughout the Epistle that will give Christians the assurance of their salvation. Bishop J. C. Ryle found six tests in 1 John that would help a person to know whether or not he was born again. He wrote them in a tract entitled, “Are You Born Again?” Here is a summary of those tests that he found: (1) no habitual sinning (3:9; 5:18); (2) believing in Christ (5:1); (3) practicing righteousness (2:29); (4) loving other Christians (3:14); (5) overcoming the world (5:4); and (6) keeping oneself pure (5:18). No habitual sinning should read, “No sinning.” When a believer abides in Christ (3:6), he lives by the divine nature that only born again Christians have and he cannot sin. Other tests could be added, such as: (1) keeping God’s commands (2:3); (2) perfecting the love of God in himself (2:5); and (3) realizing the Spirit’s work in his life (3:24; 5:10).

B. Assurance of Answered Prayer – 5:14-17

5:14 – “Confidence” – Same word as “boldness” in 4:17. This word is also translated “confidence” in 2:28; 3:21. Here it speaks of the trust we have in the gracious promise of our heavenly Father to hear and answer our prayers.

“If we ask” – Many things are not received from God because there has been no request for them (James 4:2).

“According to His will” – This is one stipulation that God requires for answered prayer. It is a gracious stipulation because He has the best plan for everyone. If His will be done, it will bring the greatest blessing. God’s will is revealed in the Bible through commands, examples, precepts and illustrations. The Christian who knows God’s Word best should know God’s will best, and he should be the most effective in his prayer life. It is no wonder that George Mueller was so effective in his prayer life – it is reported that he read the Bible through 155 times.

“He hears us” – God hears the prayers of Christians who pray according to His will. This also implies that He will answer those prayers.

5:15 – “We know that we have the petitions” – Even though the answer may not have actually come, the believer can have confidence that his prayer will be answered when he knows God has heard (has accepted) his prayer. His confidence can be so certain that he can count on it as if it were already done. If the prayer were offered only once with a clean heart, according to His will, it will be answered. Of course, continuous prayer is encouraged when new thoughts arise and are added to the original prayer.

“We desired of Him” – The verb is the same as those translated “ask” in 5: 14, 15, but it is in the perfect tense. The request has been made of God and that request continues with God. He will not forget it. There is no advantage for repetitious prayers. If the prayer were offered according to God’s will the first time, He will answer it without further begging or pleading. If it were not offered according to God’s will, then the believer ought to examine his request in the light of the Scriptures so that his prayer can be corrected and asked properly.

5:16 – “If any man see his brother sin” – If a believer sees a fellow Christian continuing in sin (present tense participle), he has a responsibility to pray for him under most conditions. It is a responsibility of love for a brother (3:23). It is also an opportunity to pray effectively (5:14, 15).

“Sin which is not unto death” – This is sin for which there is forgiveness. It is not rebellious, high-handed sinning which leads to an early judgmental death.

“He shall give him life” – All sin leads to death eventually, unless the rapture comes first, but not all sin leads to an early judgmental death. However, if sin is allowed to persist, God will judge by physical death. The Christian who prays for his sinning brother is giving him a new lease on life when he prays for him to repent and confess his sin (cf. James 5:15-20; Gal. 6:1).

“There is a sin unto death” – There have been many interpretations of this statement. It should be noticed that “a” should not be inserted before sin. That makes it too specific. The passage is not talking about a particular sin, but a state of sin. The brother who is sinning without an attitude of repentance is living a dangerous life. God’s judgment is likely to fall upon him and take away his physical life (cf. Acts 5:1-11; I Cor. 11:30). It should be noted that all the prayers of all Christians could not save a brother from death unless he is willing to repent.

“I do not say that he shall pray for it” – John is not forbidding prayer for such a brother, but it is certain that he cannot pray for such a Christian with any confidence that his prayer will be answered (5:14-15).

5:17 – “All unrighteousness is sin” – Even though John was speaking of two kinds of sin in the previous verse, he makes it clear that all sin is wrong.

C. Assurance of Personal Holiness – 5:18

5:18 – John is summarizing in these final verses what he has said earlier and adds some final thoughts.

“Sins not” – He does not sin when he abides in Christ and lives by his divine nature (cf. 3:6-9).

“Keeps himself” – This means he guards his actions so that he does not fall victim to the snares of the devil. He is alert and depends on God’s power to protect him.

“Wicked one touches him not” – Satan is not able to get a grasp on him and drag him into sin when he abides in Christ (cf. 4:4; 5:4-5). The Christian is able to maintain a holy life (1 Peter 1:15-16).

D. Assurance of Divine Birth – 5:19

5:19 – “We are of God” – When we have victory over Satan’s attempt to drag us into sin (5:18), we know we are of God. Likewise, when we have victory over sin in our lives that we could not conquer by his own power, we know God gave us that power through abiding in Christ.

“The whole world lies in wickedness” – The world has no help for overcoming sin, because it is full of sin. It is foolish for Christians to go to unsaved counselors to resolve sin problems in their lives. The world is bound by Satan so his counselors cannot help anyone with sin problems. Victory is of God through Jesus Christ, His Son.

E. Assurance of Absolute Truth – 5:20

5:20 – “The Son of God is come” – This is the crux of the whole Epistle – God came to earth in the Person of Jesus Christ. This is the most important Person that ever walked on the earth. The reason for His coming is explained in the rest of the verse.

“Has given us an understanding” – Through Him believers are able to know the true God. The Gnostics believed they could know God through pure reason, but they were wrong. It took Jesus Christ to reveal the true God. He could do this because He is the truth about God (Jn. 14:6-11).

“Know Him that is true” – The reference is to God the Father. “Know” refers to knowledge gained by experience. Through Jesus Christ believers are able to know the true God by experience.”

“We are in Him that is true” – Believers are also brought into a vital union with the true God by being in His Son Jesus Christ. “Even” should not be added to the text (it is in italics and was added by the translators).

“This is the true God and eternal life’ – This is a clear reference to God’s Son, Jesus Christ. He is God and has to be God to reveal His Father to us. He had to have the same nature as His Father to be His Son and manifest Him fully and perfectly to us. John’s epistle begins with Jesus Christ who was with the Father and manifested Him to us (1:1-2). His epistle ends with a similar statement.