

## Module 24: 1 John 5:18-21

### Group Exercise 1

What title do you suggest for the paragraph in 1 John 5:18-21? What words do you see as important in this paragraph? How does this paragraph fit into the flow of its immediate context?

### Group Exercise 2

What are three affirmations that John gives in these concluding remarks of his in 1 John 5:18-21? Are they new points or summary points? If summary points, does he add any new truth in his summary?

### Group Exercise 3

How do you think the reference to “idols” fits into the context? What do you think John is referring to by the term “idols”?

#### 1) Observations and Observational Questions that guide Interpretation

- a) Read 1 John 5:13-21 for context.
- b) What words do you see as important, either because they are repeated often or they are part of a key teaching in verses 5:18-21?
- c) What title do you suggest for the paragraph starting in verse 5:18?
- d) Transition – links to previous verses
  - i) Immediate context:
    - (1) “know”
      - (a) *Eido (oida)*: (cf. 2:11, 20, 21 twice, 29; 3:1, 2, 5, 14, 15; 5:13, 15 twice, 16, 18, 19, 20)
      - (b) A subset of the above as “we know” (3:2, 14; 5:15 twice, 18, 19, 20)
    - (2) “Son”
      - (a) *Huios*: (cf. 1:3, 7; 2:22, 23, 24; 3:8, 23; 4:9, 10, 14, 15; 5:5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 20)
      - (b) A subset of the above as “Son of God” (3:8; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12, 13, 20)
      - (c) A subset of the above as “His Son Jesus Christ” (1:3; 3:23; 5:20)
    - (3) “life” (cf. 1:1, 2; 2:25; 3:14, 15; 5:11, 12, 13, 16, 20)
  - ii) Book context:
    - (1) “born of God” (cf. 3:9 twice; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18 twice). Also, “born of Him” (cf. 2:29; 5:1)
    - (2) “keep” – *tereo*: (cf. 2:3, 4, 5; 3:22, 24; 5:3, 18)
    - (3) “evil one” (cf. 2:13, 14; 3:12; 5:18, 19)
    - (4) “world” (cf. 2:2, 15 thrice, 16 twice, 17; 3:1, 13, 17; 4:1, 3, 4, 5 thrice, 9, 14, 17; 5:4 twice, 5, 19)
    - (5) “true” (cf. 2:8 twice; 5:20 thrice)
    - (6) “sin” as a verb (cf. 1:10; 2:1 twice; 3:6 twice, 8, 9 twice; 5:16, 18)
    - (7) “little children” (cf. 2:1, 12; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21)
  - iii) Assurances

- (1) Eternal life (13)
- (2) Answered prayer (14-17)
- (3) Three affirmations and an exhortation (18-21)
- iv) “The Epistle ends characteristically . . . with the statement of three clear and candid certainties, each introduced by *oidamen, we know*. Here are no tentative, hesitant suggestions, but bold, dogmatic, Christian affirmations which are beyond all dispute and which neatly summarize truths already introduced in earlier parts of the Epistle.” (Stott)
- e) “We know that no one who is born of God sins;” (18a)
  - i) Concerns every child of God and admits no exception.
  - ii) “who is born”
    - (1) Perfect tense participle
    - (2) New birth event with the abiding result of membership in God’s family
  - iii) “sins”
    - (1) Ongoing, continuous, habitual sinning. This is NOT possible for the true believer who is born into God’s family.
    - (2) This is in contrast to the habitual sinning of the unbeliever in 16 and 17 (which either may lead to death or not lead to death, but nevertheless is habitual while from an unbeliever).
  - iv) Previously taught in 1 John 3:9.
  - v) “Sin and the child of God are incompatible. They may occasionally meet; they cannot live together in harmony.” (Stott)
- f) “but He who was born of God keeps him;” (18b)
  - i) “but” – strong adversative indicating the reason for the assurance of 18a.
  - ii) Textual difference
    - (1) “he who has been born of God keeps himself” (*heauton*), NKJV.
      - (a) Similarly, KJV and Codex Sinaiticus.
      - (b) The believer keeps himself.
      - (c) For ‘keeping oneself’ see 1 Timothy 5:22; James 1:27; Jude 21; 1 John 3:3.
    - (2) “He who was born of God keeps him” (*auton*), NAS.
      - (a) Similarly, ESV, NIV, Alexandrine and Vatican Codices, and the Vulgate choose to use “him”
      - (b) Christ keeps the Christian.
      - (c) Cf. 1 John 3:9; Jude 24; 1 Peter 1:3-5.
    - (3) I lean toward the second translation.
- g) “and the evil one does not touch him.” (18c)
  - i) “But why does he need to be ‘kept’? If he has been begotten of God, is he not immune to temptation? No. The devil, *that wicked one*, is maliciously active. Strong and subtle, he is more than a match for him. But the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil (3:8), and if He ‘holds’ (*terei*) the Christian, the devil will not be able to ‘lay hold of’ him.” (Stott)
  - ii) “touch”
    - (1) Only other occurrence in John’s writings is John 20:17.
    - (2) See also Psalm 105:15 (LXX)
    - (3) Present tense

- iii) “Observe that the three verbs are all in the present tense. They indicate abiding truths. The devil does not touch the Christian because the Son keeps him, and so, because the Son keeps him, the Christian does not sin.” (Stott)
  - h) “We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” (19)
    - i) “we are”
      - (1) 1<sup>st</sup> person plural, unlike the previous third person singular in 18.
      - (2) John associates himself with his readers.
      - (3) Contrast to “the whole world”.
    - ii) “of God” vs. “in the power of the evil one” (Stott)
      - (1) Being born of God (18), we now are “of God”.
      - (2) John didn’t say the world is “of the power of the evil one”, but “in the power of the evil one”. The world is in his grip and under his dominion.
      - (3) The world “lies” there. Not struggling actively to be freed, but quietly lying, perhaps even unconsciously asleep, in the arms of Satan.
      - (4) Just two categories, ‘us’ or ‘the world’. No third category.
    - iii) Cf. 2:13, 14; 3:8, 10, 12
  - i) “And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true:” (20a, b)
    - i) Christianity is both historical and experiential.
    - ii) “has come” and “has given” are both perfect tense verbs. His gift will not be taken away.
    - iii) “understanding” – ‘the power or capacity of knowing’ (Ebrard).
    - iv) “true” – real
    - v) “may know”
      - (1) *ginosko*, to know in experience
      - (2) present tense
      - (3) “continuous and progressive apprehension” (Westcott)
  - j) “and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ.” (20c)
    - i) Not only do we know Him (God); we are also *in Him* (God).
    - ii) Cf. 1:3; 2:5, 24, 27-28; 3:24; 4:4, 12-13, 15-16)
    - iii) Jesus is given His full title at the end of the Epistle as at the beginning in 1:3.
      - (1) Jesus, the man
      - (2) Christ, the messiah,
      - (3) Son, God’s eternal begotten one.
  - k) “This is the true God and eternal life.” (20d)
    - i) Does “this” refer to God the Father or Jesus the Son?
    - ii) Advocates on both sides.
    - iii) I accept this as a reference to Jesus Christ.
    - iv) “Everything depends on his deity, and his deity means no less than this, that as the Father who is made known to us by him is the only real God (I Thess. 1:9), so also his Son Jesus Christ “is the real God” and eternal life. If the Son is less, if he is not the real God even as the Father is the real God, then this entire epistle and all that it declares about his blood, expiation, our fellowship with God, etc., are futile.” (Lenski)
  - l) “Little children, guard yourselves from idols.” (21)

- i) “Little children”
- ii) “guard” phulasso, only occurrence in 1 John is here. (3x in John 12:25, 27; 17:12 twice)
- iii) “idols”
  - (1) General warning?
  - (2) Illusory vs. reality (Blaiklock)
  - (3) Pagan idolatries of the time in Ephesus? (Barclay)
  - (4) Untrue mental images of the false teachers? (Brooke)
- m) What other observations do you see? (Words, grammar, construction, history, content, etc.)

## 2) Interpretation

We know with certainty that not any one who is born of God sins habitually; but on the contrary, the One who was born of God, that is Christ, keeps the believer, and the evil one, that is Satan, does not touch this believer.

We know with certainty that we are of God and belong to Him, and that every one else in the entire world quietly lies without struggle in the power of Satan, under his dominion.

And we know with certainty that the Son of God, Jesus, has come to earth and has given us the power of knowing so that we may continuously and progressively apprehend God the Father who is real; and we are in God the Father who is real, made possible by His Son, who is Jesus the man, and Christ the Messiah. This Jesus is the real God and eternal life.

My dearest children in the faith, do your part to protect yourselves from all things that promote any other thinking except Jesus as the true God and eternal life. Remember the false teachers that were with us, but left? That includes them.

## 3) Applications

- a) How do you respond to the truth that the evil one cannot touch you and make you sin habitually, if you are a believer?
- b) How do you respond to the whole world that is not of God?
- c) What does it mean to you that you can have a growing relationship with the “true God” and “eternal life”?
- d) What other application do you have?