

That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life

Three Affirmations

1 John 5:18-21

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October 10, 2021

Three Affirmations

Scripture

Today we are going to conclude the First Letter of John. Last time I mentioned that as John comes to the end of this letter, he wants to instill certainty in his readers about the assurance of their salvation. So, he takes up the theme of what it is that we know in 1 John 5:13-21. John uses the word “know” (*oidamen*) seven times in these nine verses. We have examined three certainties that John asserted in 1 John 5:13-17. Now, as John concludes his letter, we will examine three affirmations.

Let’s read about John’s three affirmations in 1 John 5:18-21:

¹⁸ We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

¹⁹ We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

²⁰ And we know 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, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. ²¹ Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:18-21)

Introduction

In 2006, CNN aired a program about Wilfredo Garza, who lived the life of an illegal immigrant for more than 35 years. Year after year, he eked out a living crossing the border from Mexico into the United States – some days finding work,

some days not. Regardless, he was constantly looking over his shoulder. He was caught by the Border Patrol four times during those 35 years and bused back to Mexico every time. Undeterred by each apprehension, he swam back across the Rio Grande to try again.

The cycle would likely have continued for several more years if not for an amazing discovery. One day, Wilfredo worked up the courage to walk into an immigration lawyer's office. There, incredibly, he found out that since his father was born in Texas and spent time working there, Wilfredo was actually a U.S. citizen!

All these years he possessed the very papers – his father's birth certificate and work records – that proved his citizenship. Yet, for 35 years he lived in guilt and fear.

Today, he has a certificate of US citizenship. He no longer has to sneak across the border. He can walk through the main gate.¹

This story reminds me of people who profess to be Christians. They attend worship services. They give money to support the worship and work of the church. They attend Bible studies. They are even active in a ministry in the life of the church.

Yet, they have no certainty of their status. They have no assurance of their salvation. They wonder what will happen to them after they die. Will they go to heaven or to hell?

The Apostle John wrote his letter to assure his readers that they may know that they have eternal life. He did not want them to live with uncertainty. He did not want them living in fear regarding their spiritual status and their eternal destiny.

¹ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2007/december/5110606.html>.

Lesson

First John 5:18-21 gives three affirmations that Christians know regarding their spiritual status.

Let's use the following outline:

1. We Know How to Live (5:18)
2. We Know Whose We Are (5:19)
3. We Know Whom We Believe (5:20-21)

I. We Know How to Live (5:18)

The first affirmation is that we know how to live.

The first of the “we know” statements at the end of John’s First Letter occurs in verse 18, where he writes, **“We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.”**

John makes two assertions about how to live.

A. *We Do Not Keep on Sinning (5:18a)*

First, we do not keep on sinning.

Look again at what John writes in verse 18a, **“We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning.”** A believer is described as one **“who has been born of God.”** God has given new life to the believer. He is now a new creation in Christ. He is now adopted into the family of God. Therefore, a believer who has been regenerated by God the Holy Spirit does not continue in habitual sin. The new birth causes new behavior in the new believer. John Stott puts it this way: “Sin and the child of God are incompatible. They may

occasionally meet; they cannot live together in harmony.”²

Throughout his letter, John has stated and restated three tests by which a person may know that he is a child of God. One of the tests is that of obedience. John has mentioned previously that Christians do not keep on sinning. For example, he said it most clearly in 1 John 3:9, “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.”

I became a Christian when I was nineteen years old. I was in the South African Air Force at the time. In the months leading up to my new birth, I was drinking a lot and often getting drunk. My language was filthy. However, when I was born again, one of the immediate evidences to me that I was a Christian was that I no longer wanted to get drunk and my foul language stopped. In other words, I no longer wanted to sin but I wanted to obey Jesus.

B. We Rest in Jesus’ Protection (5:18b)

And second, we rest in Jesus’ protection.

The second assertion about how to live is that we rest in Jesus’ protection.

John writes in verse 18b, “...but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.” The expression “he who was born of God” does not refer to the believer. Rather, it refers to Jesus. John is teaching that the believer does not protect himself. Instead, Jesus protects the believer. Indeed, the believer is protected by Jesus so that the evil one does not make effective contact with him.

² John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 192.

I sometimes wonder if we fully understand how truly life-transforming regeneration is for every Christian. We are new creations in Christ. We have been transferred from darkness to light. We have switched from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God. We are no longer children of the devil but we are children of God. There has been a massive change so that the evil one no longer has effective contact with believers. It is true that he still tempts and harasses believers. But, the believer has the Jesus dwelling within him so that he can resist the temptations of the devil. What a wonderful encouragement that is to every child of God!

So, the first affirmation is that we know how to live.

II. We Know Whose We Are (5:19)

The second affirmation is that we know whose we are.

The second of the “we know” statements at the end of John’s First Letter occurs in verse 19, where he writes, **“We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”**

Jesus sets down two truths about whose we are.

A. *We Belong to God (5:19a)*

First, we belong to God.

John says in the first part of verse 19, **“We know that we are from God.”** The believer has been born of God and therefore belongs to God.

In the days before COVID (that is, BC!), the children in our New Tampa Christian Academy would sometimes play outside in the courtyard. The parents would mingle and chat with one another while watching their children. Let’s say I

walked outside and noticed that one of the children was looking sad. I might ask the parents, “Whose child is this?” And one of the parents would say, “That child belongs to me.”

In a similar way, all believers belong to God. One of the blessings of assurance is that we know that we belong to him. We love our Heavenly Father. We begin to imitate our Heavenly Father. We want to represent him well to others in this world. We want to make our Heavenly Father proud of us by the way we honor him and live for him.

B. We Do Not Belong to the Evil One (5:19b)

And the second truth about whose we are is that we do not belong to the evil one.

Listen to what John says in the second part of verse 19, **“...and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”** John is telling his beloved flock that they are the children of God. In contrast, all unbelievers (**“the whole world”**) belong to the devil and they lie under his power. John has been teaching that all people in the world belong either to God or to the devil. There is no third group or middle ground.

The vast majority of unbelievers would be surprised to learn that they belong to the devil. They are not making any conscious allegiance to him. They don't feel oppressed by him. Nevertheless, that just shows the power of the **evil one**. He is so powerful that most people are unaware that they are under his power and control.

One of the reasons I left South Africa is because I knew that my entire life's experience was lived under apartheid. I wanted to remove myself from it so that I could get an outsider's perspective of apartheid. It took a while but over time I was able to see apartheid differently. Similarly, when a person

becomes a believer, he eventually comes to see more clearly the power of the evil one under whose power he was living.

So, the first affirmation is that we know how to live. The second affirmation is that we know whose we are.

III. We Know Whom We Believe (5:20-21)

And the third affirmation is that we know whom we believe.

The third and final of the “we know” statements at the end of John’s First Letter occurs in verses 20-21, where John writes, **“And we know 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, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”**

John makes two statements about whom we believe.

A. *We Believe in the True God (5:20)*

First, we believe in the true God.

In verse 20, John writes, **“And we know 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, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”** John directs his readers to the **“Son of God,”** that is, Jesus. He reminds his readers that Jesus is the one who gives understanding. The false teachers are not the ones who give understanding. The false teachers are incapable of pointing people to **“him who is true.”** Only Jesus can do that. Moreover, those who are believers are **“in his Son Jesus Christ.”** They are the ones who have a relationship with God and who

have eternal life.

In today's pluralistic society, people believe all kinds of things about God and what happens after this life. It seems that a growing number of people don't claim any religion in particular but they simply assert that they are "spiritual" – whatever that means. Perhaps they are hedging their bets just in case there is a God and they are hoping to be "good enough" to be accepted by him.

However, as believers, we know the truth and that is that Jesus is the Son of God in whom alone is eternal life. There is no other way to know God personally and relationally than through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. He alone is the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through him, as John wrote in his Gospel (in John 14:6).

B. We Do Not Believe in False Idols (5:21)

And second, we do not believe in false idols.

John concludes his First Letter with these words in verse 21, **"Little children, keep yourselves from idols."** John uses his favorite expression for his beloved flock: **"Little children."** He is an old man writing to people who are most certainly much younger than he is. He loves them deeply and they are like little children to him. He loves them deeply and calls them by the enduring expression of **"little children."**

The Greek word for **"idols"** should be understood in view of John's entire letter. John probably is referring to "false gods" rather than "false images." He has been correcting the false teaching of the false teachers and he wants his flock not to buy into the false teaching, which will lead them to worship a false god. So, far from being a statement that seems somewhat out of place and disconnected to the letter, it is instead a

very apt summary statement to end John's First Letter.

One of the challenges facing the church today is a push to accommodate our culture. Our culture now accepts so-called same-sex marriage and is pushing for the acceptance of gender transformation. Pastors are pressing for the church to accept these identities for some who also claim to be Christians. We are told that we are not loving people well if we do not accept them by their own self-identification, no matter how mistaken they may be. I sometimes have to stop and ask, "What would Jesus do? How would he interact with such people?" I believe that Jesus would love them well. He would talk with them. He would invite them to follow him. But he would also tell them that to do so they would have to repent of their sin and sexual confusion and conform to the Biblical teaching of sexuality. He would not want them to believe in false idols.

So, the first affirmation is that we know how to live. The second affirmation is that we know whose we are. And the third affirmation is that we know whom we believe.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the three affirmations in 1 John 5:18-21, let us be assured that we belong to Jesus.

Question 1 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* asks: "What is thy only comfort in life and in death?" The wonderful answer to that question begins with these words, "That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ...."³

Norman Clayton took this truth that we belong to Jesus

³ Heidelberg Catechism, *Heidelberg Catechism*, Revised Edition. (Cleveland, OH: Central Publishing House, 1907), 19.

and wrote a wonderful song titled, “Now I Belong to Jesus.” Mr. Clayton has authored and composed numerous other fine gospel hymns, but “Now I Belong to Jesus” is still his most widely used song. He writes that one of his greatest thrills in life was hearing a 10-year-old deaf girl sing his song at a camp for handicapped children.

Here are the words of Norman Clayton’s song:

Jesus my Lord will love me forever, from Him no pow’r
of evil can sever; He gave His life to ransom my soul – Now
I belong to Him!

*Chorus: Now I belong to Jesus; Jesus belongs to me – Not for the
years of time alone, but for eternity.*

Once I was lost in sin’s degradation; Jesus came down
to bring me salvation, lifted me up from sorrow and shame –
Now I belong to Him!

*Chorus: Now I belong to Jesus; Jesus belongs to me – Not for the
years of time alone, but for eternity.*

Joy floods my soul, for Jesus has saved me, freed me
from sin that long had enslaved me; His precious blood He
gave to redeem – Now I belong to Him!

*Chorus: Now I belong to Jesus; Jesus belongs to me – Not for the
years of time alone, but for eternity.⁴*

My dear brother and sister, if you belong to Jesus, you know how to live, you know whose you are, and you know whom you believe. Never forget that!

If you do not yet belong to Jesus, you can do so. Repent of your sin and believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the savior of your soul. Do it now! Amen.

⁴ Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996), 186.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
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