

9. 1 John 5:13-21 of a Verse by Verse Study of the Letters of John and Jude

In 1 John 5:9-12, John establishes that God's testimony is greater than the testimony of man because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. The testimony of God is in the heart of the believer. To reject the testimony of God about his Son is to make God a liar. The Hebrew writer wrote in Heb 6:18 that it is impossible for God to lie. The sum of God's testimony and the argument made by John in this letter is that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. If we have the Son, held truly in our hearts, we have eternal life. If we do not have the Son, we do not have eternal life. This is the summary argument of the letter. What follows are practical admonitions flowing from this summation:

Confidence in Approaching God

1 John 5:13-15:

13 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. 14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.

This passage covers two of the greatest blessings of the child of God: We know that we have eternal life, and that God our Father answers our prayers. Jesus affirmed our eternal life in many places. In Luke 18:29-30, he taught that our blessings are here and now and in eternal life:

29 "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God 30 will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

It was that we might have eternal life that God gave his Son, according to John 3:16, "16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Paul describes eternal life as the gift of God in Rom 6:22-23:

22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The other great blessing is that God will answer our requests. Jesus established that his house would be a house of prayer in Matt 21:12-13:

12 Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. 13 "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"

James spoke of the power of prayer in James 5:16, "16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." In 1 Peter 3:10-12, Peter quotes a prophetic passage and applies it to Christians:

"Whoever would love life
and see good days
must keep his tongue from evil

and his lips from deceitful speech.

11 He must turn from evil and do good;
he must seek peace and pursue it.

12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous
and his ears are attentive to their prayer,
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

In Rev 8:3-5, the Revelation shows us how our prayers go up before God and how that answers of the most powerful kind follow

3 Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. 4 The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

If we ask, according to his will, he hears us, and we know that we have what we asked of him.

Sins Not unto Death

1 John 5:16-17

16 If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

The key to understanding this passage is that we differentiate between sinning, which we all do as human beings, and continuing in sin, which we must not do. John started this letter by saying that we all sin in 1 John 1:8-9:

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

However, when we sin, we have God-given remedy in his Son. John teaches in 1 John 2:1-2:

1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

The Hebrew writer warns against backsliding in the strongest terms in Heb 6:4-6:

4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6 if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

He also warns against deliberate sins in Heb 10:25-27:

25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

When we see a brother sinning, but not backsliding, we should pray for that brother, and God will forgive him. When we see a brother sinning, but not deliberately, we should pray for that brother, and God will forgive him. However, when a brother continues in sin and backslides into the world, he is sinning a sin unto death, and there is no forgiveness.

Sins unto Death

When we see a brother sinning a sin unto death by continuing in the sin or by sinning willfully, individuals and the church must act. If the sin is against us, we are to follow the teaching of Matt 18:15-17:

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

If a brother becomes immoral and continues in that immorality, we must follow the teaching of 1 Cor 5:1-5, 11:

5 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. 2 And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? . . . 4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

11 But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

The church must also deal with those who continue to be rebellious and teach false doctrine, according to Titus 1:10-14:

10 For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. 11 They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach – and that for the sake of dishonest gain. 12 Even one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." 13 This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith 14 and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth.

Safe from the Evil One

1 John 5:18-20

18 We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. 19 We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. 20 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 – even in his

Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

Therefore, anyone born of God does not continue in sin. This is how God keeps us safe. The evil one, who controls the whole world, cannot harm us. Not only does the evil one control the world, but he lurks seeking to destroy us, according to 1 Peter 5:8-9:

8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Paul described this world of the devil in Eph 2:1-5:

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.

Our struggle is against this ruler of the kingdom of the air. Paul also wrote in Eph 6:12:

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Rev 12:9 teaches that the devil leads the whole world astray, “9 The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.”

Freedom from Idols

1 John 5:21

21 Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

Col 3:5 teaches that greed is idolatry. Is this not the great sin of the 21st century? The great idol is named by Christ in Matt 6:24, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”