

Lesson 16 – 1 John 5:13-21

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Review/Introduction

John is writing to believers so that we may know that we have eternal life (1 John 5:13). John does this by presenting tests to determine if true saving faith has been exercised or are the believers deceived. He makes it very clear that a profession of possessing salvation without the evidences that flow from salvation is self-deception.

He presents the objective truths (1 John 5:11-13) and subjective evidences that give assurance of salvation.

The objective basis of assurance is the finished work of Christ and His promise to those who exercise true saving faith. John's inspired writings give a plethora of objective truths (John 3:15-16; 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-26; 1 John 5:1).

The Scriptures are clear that true salvation is accompanied by a changed life. The subjective evidence for assurance includes the witness of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16; 1 John 3:24), fellowship with God's people (1 John 1:3), walking in the light (1 John 1:6-7), hatred and confession of one's own sin (1 John 1:5-2:2), walking in obedience (1 John 2:5; 3:5-6), walking like Christ (1 John 2:6), not loving the world (1 John 2:15), purity (1 John 3:3), love (1 John 3:14; 18-19), overcoming the world (1 John 5:4), etc.

John presents his tests in four spirals laying out doctrinal and conduct tests or evidences of true, real, actual regeneration. John uses repetition to present his simple, yet profound, truths to encourage his readers and us.

- I. Introduction – Christ is the way of fellowship (1:1-4)
- II. Evidence of true saving faith – Spiral 1 (1:5-2:17)
 - A. Doctrine – Hold fast to truth – The way of salvation from sin (1:5-2:2)
 - B. Conduct – Obedience (2:3-6)
 - C. Conduct – Love (2:7-11)
 - D. Conduct – Sin (Don't love the world) (2:12-17)
- III. Evidence of true saving faith – Spiral 2 (2:18-3:24)
 - A. Doctrine – Hold fast to truth – Don't Apostatize (2:18-27)
 - B. Conduct – Christ's coming is a purifying fixed hope (2:28-3:3)
 - C. Conduct – Sin/obedience (3:4-10)
 - D. Conduct – Love (3:11-18)
 - E. Conduct – Confidences (3:19-24)
- IV. Evidence of true saving faith – Spiral 3 (4:1-21)
 - A. Doctrine – Hold fast to truth – Test false teachers (4:1-6)
 - B. Conduct – Love (4:7-21)
 - C. Conduct – Obedience (5:1-5)
- V. Evidence of true saving faith – Spiral 4 (5:6-21)
 - A. Doctrine – Hold fast to truth – Christ is the way of salvation (5:6-12)
 - B. Conduct – Confidences (5:13-20)**
- VI. **Conclusion (5:21)**

Today we will look at the last conduct test – the believer's confidences.

Spiral 4 – Conduct – Confidences (5:13-21)

1. Confidence of Eternal Life (5:13)

¹³These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. (ESV)

John begins with giving the purpose for which he has written. But what are “these things”? Does that refer to immediately preceding or the entire epistle.

Note the parallel with John’s summary statement in his gospel.

³⁰Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but **these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.** (John 20:29-31)

In John’s gospel “these things” refer to the entire gospel. Similarly, “these things” refer to the entire epistle. “These things” are all the objective truths and subjective evidences John has given that prove regeneration and provide assurance of salvation.

He wrote these things to those who “believe” or literally those who keep on believing. Those that keep on believing in the name of the Son of God have exercised true saving faith. As we have seen throughout the epistle, those who keep on believing are the ones who have been changed, they have been regenerated. And regeneration results in a persevering faith.

The purpose is so that his readers may “know” that they have eternal life. “Know” means absolute, beyond a shadow of a doubt knowledge. The grammar usage speaks of a permanent knowledge.

“You have” means to have or to possess. Its usage speaks of a continual possession. Eternal life (quantity – forever in heaven and quality of life – regenerate, abundant life in Christ now) is the believer’s present permanent possession.

❖ **Do you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are saved?**

2. Confidence of Answered Prayer (5:14-17)

¹⁴This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. ¹⁶If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and *God* will for him give life to those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is a sin *leading* to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. ¹⁷All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not *leading* to death.

¹⁴And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. ¹⁶If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. ¹⁷All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. (ESV)

Interestingly, unlike the ESV, the NASB does not translate the “and” at the beginning of the Greek sentence. The “and” connects the assurance of eternal life to the confidence we have in prayer. Believers have confidence in prayer founded on the assurance of eternal life. Without eternal life, there is no way to pray according to the will of God. Similarly, in Hebrews:

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, **let us hold fast our confession.** ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are, yet* without sin. ¹⁶Therefore **let us draw near with confidence** to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

“Ask” mean to “keep on asking for something to be given”. This is persistent prayer.

The Scriptures are clear in teaching and example that God responds (and is more than able to respond) to prayer: Moses (Ex 32:10-14); Jabez (1 Chron 4:10); Elijah (James 5:17-18); Daniel (Dan 9-10); Amos (Amos 7); and Peter and the believers (Acts 12).

⁷**Ask, and it will be given to you;** seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸**For everyone who asks receives,** and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Matthew 7:6-8)

²¹And Jesus answered and said to them, “Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it will happen. ²²**And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.**” (Matthew 21:21-22)

¹⁶“You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that **whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.** (John 15:16)

It is unfortunate that individual believers and “Christian” organizations and churches take these verses and think, “I can have this or that”, or “I can get whatever I want if I believe enough and use a verbal formula.” However, there is a qualifier for answered prayer.

The prayer that will be answered in the positive is the prayer that is according to God’s will, not our desires: “if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us”.

“His will” is God’s sovereign will. This is God’s predetermined, perfect plan in which He is directing all events according to the counsel of His will and for His glory (Ephesians 1). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events. All things are under His rule and control; nothing happens without His direction or permission. God is sovereign in all things and uses various means to bring about that sovereign purpose. God has elected certain individuals for salvation, but He uses the preaching of the gospel to bring them to Himself (Acts 10). Similarly, God has ordained all things that will come to pass and He uses prayer to accomplish that means.

“His will” also includes the way in which God is approached.

¹⁸**If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;** ¹⁹But certainly God has heard; He has given heed to the voice of my prayer. (Psalm 66:18-19)

❖ **When you pray, are you coming to God in repentance and humility?**

“Hears” means to attend to, consider what has been said, or give thoughtful attention to. The usage shows that God continually “hears” us.

So how do we make sure we are praying according to God’s will and not our selfish desires?

¹What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ²You lust and do not have; *so* you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³**You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.** ⁴You adulteresses, do you not know that **friendship with the world is hostility toward God?** Therefore **whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.** (James 4:1-4)

First, you pray the Scriptures.

⁹For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. (Colossians 1:9-12)

Second, you delight yourself in the Lord. You commit your way to Him.

³Trust in the Lord and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. ⁴**Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart.** ⁵Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. (Psalm 37:3-5)

❖ Do you pray according to God’s will?

Verse 15 takes verse 14 to the next step. Both “knows” in this verse speaks of absolute, beyond a shadow of a doubt knowledge. This is different than the experiential knowledge. The usage also speaks of an enduring knowledge. Here is the progression:

Ask anything according to God’s will -->

God has regard (hears) for your prayers -->

Know you will have what asked

If we ask anything according to God’s will, we have confidence that He has regard for our prayer and it is an already accomplished event that we will receive those requests, even though the accomplishing will be according to God’s plan and not ours. So, there is no reason to pray in doubt, because God has given us this wonderful promise.

❖ Do you have confidence in your prayers?

In verses 16-17, John gives an example that, like last week, is perplexing. John knew the meaning of the “sin not leading to death” and the “sin leading to death”. His readers knew also. Unfortunately, 2000 years removed, we do not 100% know the meaning. But we can use a consistent hermeneutic to discern the Holy Spirit’s meaning.

Some view this section as an example of God answering a prayer according to His will. Yet, the petitioner appears to know the difference between the two sins and is exhorted to pray in one instance and not in another.

Let's start with defining terms and context. "Brother" means brother or near kinsman. Figuratively, it describes fellow believer. Every time it is used in 1 John (except for Cain and Abel in 3:12) it refers to fellow Christians. So, if "brother" refers to believers, then "death" must not refer to spiritual death, but to physical death.

There are OT passages that indicate that unrepentant sin and the accompanying Holy Spirit conviction can cause physical manifestations.

¹How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! ²How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! ³**When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long.** ⁴**For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.** Selah. ⁵I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. (Psalm 32:1-5)

¹O Lord, rebuke me not in Your wrath, And chasten me not in Your burning anger. ²**For Your arrows have sunk deep into me, And Your hand has pressed down on me.** ³**There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; There is no health in my bones because of my sin.** ⁴**For my iniquities are gone over my head; As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me.** ⁵**My wounds grow foul and fester Because of my folly. ...** ¹⁸For I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin. (Psalm 38:1-5, 18)

For the believer, what sin(s) lead to physical death? There are also two NT passages that illustrate that sin can lead to physical death.

²⁷**Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.** ²⁸But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. ³⁰For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. ³¹But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. ³²**But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.** (1 Corinthians 11:27-32)

¹But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ²and kept back *some* of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. ³But Peter said, "Ananias, **why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?** ⁴While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? **You have not lied to men but to God.**" ⁵And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. ⁶The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. ⁷Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸And Peter responded to her,

“Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?” And she said, “Yes, that was the price.” ⁹Then Peter *said* to her, “**Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test?** Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out *as well.*” ¹⁰And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹**And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.** (Acts 5:1-11)

In both cases, the specific sins test God’s patience with flagrant rebellion that dishonors Christ and which have rapid discipline. The sins are such that God in His sovereignty decides it is better for you and the body that your negative influence due to your choice to sin is removed.

Unrepentant sin in the believer’s life results in discipline.

⁷It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? ⁸But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness. ¹¹All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Hebrews 12:7-11)

❖ Are you quick to repent?

But, how do we know if physical suffering is God’s discipline for sin? As we saw above, in some cases sickness and even death are described as God’s discipline of sin. In other Scriptures, sickness is not related to personal sin, but directly to God’s glory.

¹As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. ²And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?” ³Jesus answered, “*It was neither that* this man sinned, nor his parents; **but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.** (John 9:1-3)

We cannot know if sickness is God’s discipline. However, we can know if we are willfully sinning or not. If you are walking in the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18+; 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20), spending time in God’s word allowing the words of Christ to richly dwell within you (Colossians 3:16+), involved in intimate body fellowship (Hebrews 10:24-25), and praying for God to open your eyes to your sin, then God will show you your sin.

²³Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; ²⁴And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. (Psalm 139:23-24)

²Examine me, O Lord, and try me; Test my mind and my heart. (Psalm 26:2)

That sin He shows you requires repentance! True repentance will be demonstrated by an earnestness, indignation, fear, longing, zeal, avenging of wrong (2 Cor 7:9-11), and doing everything we can to heal relationships and live at peace with all people (Matt 5:23-24; Rom 12:18; Heb 12:14).

Once repentance is present, the believer is to understand that the continued experience of the natural consequences of sin are what God has ordained at this time and are for His glory and their sanctifying good (Romans 8:28-29). In these situations, God calls the believer to rejoice (James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-8) and persevere (Romans 5:3-4).

❖ **Are you walking in a way that sin can be easily pointed out to you?**

3. Confidence of Victory in the Truth War (5:18-21)

¹⁸We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. ¹⁹We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one. ²⁰And 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. This is the true God and eternal life. ²¹Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

¹⁸We 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. ¹⁹We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. ²⁰And 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. ²¹Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (ESV)

John has said the same thing before regarding the incongruity between the believer and lifestyle sin.

⁹No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (1 John 3:9)

But this time, John adds the point that Christ keeps (or guards something which is in one's possession) the believer and the evil one does not touch him.

²⁷My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸and I give eternal life to them, and **they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.** (John 10:27-28)

³⁷All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹This is the will of Him who sent Me, **that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.** (John 6:37-39)

Verse 19 makes it clear again that those who surrender their life to Christ are no longer citizens of this world. And they are no longer subject to the ruler of this world.

John wants his readers to understand that though the evil one does not touch the believer and we are no longer subject to the ruler of this world, the battle rages on. That battle is for truth. Christ has given the redeemed “understanding”. Satan is trying to cloud your understanding so that you have split devotion.

³But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity *of devotion* to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:3)

The battle is for your mind.

⁴I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument. ... ⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (Colossians 2:4, 8)

³For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. ⁵We are **destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,** (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

The battle for you mind is won because you know Christ and are in Christ who is true. The battle is won through the two words of God – Christ and the Scriptures.

❖ **Are you fully engaged in the battle for your mind?**

Christ is man, but He is also the true God and only processor and giver of eternal life.

John ends with what seems like an odd statement. But in context, it makes sense. You are of the one who has truth and of the truth. Do not be overcome by the false teachers and their idolatrous teaching.

Paul says a similar thing.

¹³No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. ¹⁴Therefore, my beloved, **flee from idolatry.** (1 Corinthians 10:13-14)

❖ **Are you fully surrendered and committed to the only one who is true?**

Conclusion

John is writing to present tests of true saving faith. His purpose is to ensure that his readers know if they have eternal life (actual, true, real regeneration) or not. **Are you assured and confident of your position and resources in Christ?**

Additional Study

1. Each time you come to the Scriptures, pray for the Spirit to give you understanding.
2. Read 1 John once this week a chapter at a time (one chapter a day for five days).
3. Pray that God would show you personal applications from today's passage.
4. Read today's passage noting repeated words/ideas and ask yourself what John means.
5. Re-read the notes from today and contemplate the thought questions.