



## Three Things We Know

1 John 5:18-21

February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Big idea: We can rest assured in Jesus, safe from the evil one.

### Intro

It is deeply unsettling when something we *know* ends up not to be true.

Someone *knows* their parents will never get a divorce – and then they do.

Someone *knows* they will get into medschool and be a doctor – and then they don't.

Someone *knows* they will marry by 25 and have 3 kids by 30 – but they're still single.

It feels unsettling because we weren't expecting it and maybe because something we assumed to be true or solid, even if it was just our own plan for our life, turned out not to be so solid.

What do we do then? We go to the rock, the solid rock, the rock that is higher than I.

**Psalm 61:1b-2** Hear my cry, O God; Give heed to my prayer. <sup>2</sup> From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart is faint; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

We go to Him and what we know to be true about Him.

1 John 5:18-21 gives us three things we know. Three things that we can grab hold of that are solid and sure, even if our heart feels faint or the world feels unsteady.

1. We are ***kept*** by Jesus. (5:18)
  - a. No one who is born of God sins (v. 18a)
    - i. John gives a statement completely without nuance but consistent with a theme that runs throughout the whole book.
      1. **1 John 2:29** If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.
      2. **1 John 3:3** And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.
      3. **1 John 3:9** No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.
    - ii. It could be easy to come to the wrong conclusion:
      1. If no one who is born of God sins
      2. And I sin
      3. Then I must not be born of God
        - a. That leads to a lack of assurance rather than assurance.
    - iii. The tense of the verb "sins" is important.
      1. It is a present active tense that has the idea of an ongoing practice, just as in 3:9.
      2. While I like the NASB, the ESV and NIV and even the NLT translate this in a way that is more clear.
        - a. **ESV 1 John 5:18** We know that everyone who has been born of God does not ***keep on sinning***,
        - b. **NIV 1 John 5:18** We know that anyone born of God does not ***continue to sin***;

- c. **NLT 1 John 5:18** We know that God's children do not make a *practice of sinning*
    - 3. You won't be sinless but you will sin less as God works in your life.
    - 4. Stott – The new birth results in new behavior. Sin and the child of God are incompatible. They may occasionally meet; they cannot live together in harmony.
      - a. We *believe* and then we *become*.
      - b. The *believing* comes before the *becoming*, we can't reverse the order or we had human works and obedience to the gospel.
      - c. But we can't leech out all meaning from this verse either. It means *something*. If we simply say, "well, we know we all still sin and we know we aren't saved by our obedience." And then dismiss this passage as irrelevant, then that's a mistake also.
  - iv. Do you read this as a hope filled statement or as a threat or condemnation?
    - 1. How encouraging this is! Not merely the penalty of sin is broken but also the power of sin!
      - a. How discouraging if we were stuck in something without ever having hope that we can get out.
    - 2. It doesn't say change is easy or quick or painless. It doesn't give a time frame. It doesn't spell out all the resources God gives us to move from sin to obedience. But it gives hope.
- b. But we are kept by Jesus.
  - i. Deliberate parallel between us as "born of God" – that is, born again, given new life – and Jesus, who is born of God when He came to earth for us.
  - ii. **John 17:11-12** "I am no longer in the world; and *yet* they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, *the name* which You have given Me, that they may be one even as *We are*.<sup>12</sup> "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.
  - iii. **1 Peter 1:5** who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
  - iv. **Jude 1:24** Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,
  - v. We are "kept" in that we are secure in Him, made secure by Him, and Satan cannot pull us away from God.
- c. Satan can do no harm that would sever us from God.
  - i. **2 Timothy 4:16-18** At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them.<sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth.<sup>18</sup> The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.
    - 1. Paul likely died in prison as a martyr not long after sending this letter to Timothy. Did God fail to rescue him from every evil deed? No. He brought him safely to His heavenly kingdom. Nothing disrupted his security as God's child. Like 1 John, he had no reason to fear judgment.

- ii. **Luke 22:31-32** "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; <sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."
  1. Simon Peter stumbled badly but his faith didn't fail and he did strengthen the other disciples, ending up as a leader among leaders.

2. We ***belong*** to God. (5:19)

- a. Remember, this letter was written first to a group of people with a particular problem – some of their members had broken away ("they went out from us" 2:19) and were claiming to be the true followers of God.
  - i. The people who remained were probably discouraged and disoriented – wondering if those who left were right.
  - ii. So he points out the three tests of truth, love, and obedience as markers of those who are "of God."
  - iii. Not to stoke up pride or exclusivity, as if they did something to set themselves apart. Rather, they marvel at the kindness of God to love them in such a way, and not give in to fear about those who had broken away and are lobbing grenades back into their midst.
    1. **1 John 3:1a** See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are.
  - iv. That allows them (and us) to rest with assurance in all that they don't know.
    1. We don't know what the economy will do this year. We don't know how the next election cycle will go. We don't know if or how the war in Ukraine will escalate or if skyrocketing egg prices are just the first indicator of other prices that will go up. The economy may settle and do fine. Ukraine may drag on or resolve without pulling in other countries. Food prices may settle.
    2. But we belong to God and we can rest in Him.
- b. This is contrasted with the whole world that lies in the power of the evil one.
  - i. Stott – the world is not "of" the evil one as we are "of God", although stated in 3:8, 10, 12, but rather "in" him, in his grip and under his control. Moreover (again literally) it "lies" there. It is not pictured as struggling vigorously to be free but as quietly lying, perhaps even unconsciously asleep, in the embrace of Satan.
    1. Picture a sleeping child rocked to sleep in the arms of his or her parent.
    2. He deceives, accuses, tempts – but not always blatant and obvious.
    3. His first subtle deceptions were to challenge what Eve thought God had said, "Has God really said...?" and then to disagree "you will not surely die"
    4. "death is far off" – but teach us to number our days
    5. "no one can really know what is true" – but He is the way, the truth, and the life
    6. "just do what makes you happy" – but our hearts deceive us
    7. "life is too painful for God to be good and real" – but what is the better answer for evil and suffering
  - ii. 2 Corinthians describes him as blinding the minds.
    1. **2 Corinthians 4:3-4** And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, <sup>4</sup> in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving

so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

- iii. Matthew describes him as snatching out the gospel that was sown before it takes root.
  - 1. **Matthew 13:19** “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil *one* comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.
- iv. But it is this imagery of the world rocked to sleep in the arms of the evil one that has stuck with me.
  - 1. Contrast that with the encouragement in
  - 2. **1 Thessalonians 5:4-8** But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; <sup>5</sup> for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; <sup>6</sup> so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober... <sup>8</sup> But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.

- a. Alert and sober

### 3. We **know** God. (5:20-21)

- a. John ends the letter right where he began – with Jesus!
  - i. The emphasis is historical and experiential
    - 1. Jesus came (historical)
    - 2. Jesus gave us understanding so we can know God (experiential)
  - ii. The word for “true” is like “real” – this is the real God.
    - 1. Four fundamental questions everyone must ask and answer
      - a. Origin – where did I come from?
      - b. Meaning – why am I here?
      - c. Morality – what is right and wrong?
      - d. Destiny – where am I going?
    - 2. Don’t you want to know that your answers to those questions are tethered to reality not merely what seems right or what has been unchallenged?
- b. The ending warning about idols seems to drop out of nowhere, unless you see it in contrast to the real God of v. 20.
  - i. Why go to idols when you can have the real thing?
  - ii. And yet that is obviously a temptation or draw that believers have faced and continue to face.
  - iii. Be on your guard for God-substitutes.
    - 1. That’s easy to see when they are little statutes that people bow down to.
    - 2. It’s harder to see when they are idols of the heart.
      - a. When we start to answer those four fundamental questions with answers that leave the real God out of it, we drift into idolatry.
      - b. Why am I here? To make money. To merely survive another day. To be endlessly entertained.

- i. Work becomes an idol rather than a good thing in a broken world to bless others, provide, and use God-given talents.
    - ii. Entertainment becomes an idol rather than an outlet for creativity that opens up insight into the world.
    - iii. Or is it to know and enjoy the God who is real and the world He has made?
  - c. What is right and wrong? What I feel. What society says. Or there is no answer.
    - i. Or is it what matches God's character, is imprinted on every conscience, and printed on the pages of God's Word?

#### 4. Applying the Word

- a. **Rest** in what you know to be true in Jesus.
- b. Guard yourself from **idols**.



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