

## 1 John 5 – Chapter Study

### INTRODUCTION

The first verses of chapter 5 are a continuation of the last 2 verses of chapter 4, so let's read those first.

**20**If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? **21**And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also.

Throughout chapter 4, John has shown how a genuine love for God will manifest itself in love for other believers.

His main theme in all of 1 John is an intimate relationship with God.

He shows again and again how an intimate relationship with the Father will lead to a life of holiness, truth, and love.

And here in the last 2 verses of chapter 4 he makes it crystal clear that love for God is proven by love for others, specifically for other believers.

John knew that love for others was a command Jesus had given them.

In John 15:17 He said -

**These things I command you, that you love one another.**

This ought to make it clear that the kind of love the Lord means is not merely some kind of emotional sentimentalism.

It's a mindset, a determination of our will to be good-willed toward others, specially other Christians.

The word for love that is throughout 1 John is the word *agape*, and means to seek for the highest good of another with no thought of what one is going to get in return.

It is an out-going good-will that does not measure itself out or apportion itself on the basis of what it's going to get back.

It's crucial we understand this lest we read what John writes here about loving one another, and then think, "Okay, I will love others as soon as I *feel* love toward them. But until I *feel* love, I can't love them."

This love is not a feeling, not an emotion – it's an action, it's a mindset, a posture of active good and blessing toward others.

A good way to think of it is as Jesus said in the Golden Rule – "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Think about the way you treat yourself – you love yourself constantly!

But you don't *feel* emotionally in love with yourself.

Your mode of living is usually just to take care of your own needs and concerns.

That is the mindset we ought to have toward others – being sensitive to their needs because we are being mindful of them, and then seeking to attend to their needs as we possess the capacity to do so.

It's clear that Jesus intended His followers to comprise a new community that would be marked by this kind of others-oriented love & good-will.

For He said, "By this will all men know that you are My disciples – by the LOVE you have for one another."

And indeed, one of the most common remarks that outsiders made of the early church was, "See how these Christians love one another."

Because love is a priority to the Lord, and because it is such a powerful testimony to the reality of the gospel, Satan takes great delight in attacking the Body of Christ and destroying our love for one another.

He stirs up strife and envy.

Many churches have been broken up by conflicts that arise between members over petty things. But think of this – God loved us while we were still sinners and alienated from Him!

God loved us in the *midst* of our sin and brokenness; in the middle of our frailty and weakness.

It was that love that changed us and empowered us to change and grow into the image of Christ. That is the love you and I are to show to one another.

We are to love one another in the *midst* of our failure and weakness.

As we do, as we remain committed to one another even in the midst of disappointment and hurt, then we find the strength to grow and rise out of all those things that are weak and failing.

1 Peter 4:8 says that

### **Love covers a multitude of sins.**

The love God is calling us to show to one another does not rise from *within us* – it's His love flowing *through us*, and it comes as a part of the new life we possess through faith in Christ.

Romans 5:5 says that the -

**. . . love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**

The Holy Spirit was given to us the moment we were born again – and John is saying in this passage that *if* we've been truly born again, then we will love God and loving God will be made visible in what?

Loving other believers!

He makes this even clearer now in the next verses . . .

## **1 JOHN 5**

**<sup>1</sup>Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot**

Meaning the Father -

**also loves him who is begotten of Him.**

Meaning other believers.

John is once again saying we all comprise *one spiritual family*.

**<sup>2</sup>By this we know that we love the children of God,**

Here's a test for determining if we are truly loving our spiritual brothers and sisters -

**when we love God and keep His commandments.**

But what has John just told us God's command is?

And what's the evidence of a genuine love for God?

LOVING ONE ANOTHER!

**<sup>3</sup>For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.**

In John 14-16, which is the heart of the message Jesus gave to the disciples during the Last Supper, He repeatedly *linked* love & obedience.

**John 14:15 • If you love Me, keep My commandments.**

**John 14:21 • He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”**

**John 15:10 • If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have**

## **kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.**

The more you study 1 John the more you realize it's really just a running commentary on these three chapters of his gospel.

Truly friends, Christ's commands are *not* burdensome!

They're not burdensome because EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM IS GIVEN TO PROTECT AND BLESS US!

They are not heavy obligations that advance someone else's agenda at our expense.

All of the commands of God have one goal – and that is to protect the freedom and blessing He desires for us!

And the chief command, the one thing the Lord calls us to that sums up all other commands is to love Him and one another!

Is that a burdensome duty? Not at all!

It may seem like it at first, but it isn't – it is liberty!

You see, by loving others as Jesus commands, it frees us from the prison of self-preoccupation!

Nothing is more miserable than a person consumed with themselves.

And no one is more free and blessed than the one who has forgotten self and lives to be a blessing.

This is the way God designed us, and life only works when this is our orientation.

So God's commands are not burdensome – they are the key to freedom!

This thought moves John to see that a *whole new kind of humanity* has been made possible because of faith in Christ – so he writes . . .

### **4For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.**

You'll remember that in 2:15-17, John sets the world in *opposition* to God and His people.

By *the world*, he means that ordered system of rebellious mankind, under the inspiration and tutelage of the devil.

The word "victory" in v. 4 is the Greek word "nike" (nee-kay).

It spoke of a victory obtained in a military, athletic, debate or courtroom.

It always involved some kind of conflict or test in which one side was pitted against another.

John sees the Family of God in a contest with the world.

Our victory in this contest is guaranteed by our faith in Christ because He has already overcome.

John is thinking of Jesus' words in John 16:33 -

**These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."**

Let me use an illustration of how our faith in Christ overcomes the world.

Are you a good swimmer?

How about if we dropped you 2 miles offshore?

Maybe you're pretty good in a pool or along the shoreline playing in the surf, but if we dropped you a couple miles offshore, chances are you'd never make it to shore.

But now, let's say that a Coast Guard cutter came along and just as you were going under, reached out and hauled you in.

As long as you abide in that boat – you're safe.

In fact, that ship can sail all over the world, and you'll be secure – as long as you stay in the boat!

Jesus saved us from drowning in an ocean of sin.

As long as we abide in Him, we are utterly secure, though we still live in the midst of a fallen world dominated by sin.

**<sup>5</sup>Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**

This is another jab John makes at the error of docetism that we've been encountering again and again in 1 John.

The docetists would have said that the "Christ-spirit" was "a" son of God, but they would have flatly denied that the man "Jesus" was "the" Son of God.

They also denied that Jesus and Christ were one and the same and that they comprised one flesh and blood person – so John quickly goes on to say -

**<sup>6</sup>This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. //**

Okay – I don't want to get bogged down here, but have to let you now that this verse has proven to be one of the most difficult interpretive problems in NT studies.

It's a challenge simply because no one is quite sure just what John means by "water & blood."

- 1) Luther & Calvin said that *water* speaks of *baptism*, and *blood* speaks of *communion*.
- 2) Augustine and others said the "*water and blood*" describe that which flowed from Christ's side when He was pierced on the cross.
- 3) According to some of the first commentators on this passage, guys like Tertullian said that the *water* referred to *Jesus' baptism*, and the *blood* spoke of *His crucifixion*.
- 4) But using John's gospel as the *model* for 1 John, I think that another view best explains what John means here.

In John 3 we read the story of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus.

Jesus told him that he must be born *again*, and when Nicodemus expressed his lack of understanding, Jesus said that a person must be born both of the water & the spirit.

By being *born of water*, Jesus meant natural birth; being *born of water* was a Jewish idiom for being born of a woman, as this was attended by the flow of water just prior to the delivery.

Being born *again* by the Spirit meant the inner work of the quickening of the Spirit through faith in Christ.

Surely that is what John means here.

As He is refuting the error of the docetists who said the Christ-Spirit only used the man Jesus for a short time, John is saying that Jesus Christ is *one person* who came by natural birth – *water*; and then went to the cross to die for our sins; *the blood*.

Our faith which overcomes the world is *activated* by the work of the cross, which is the knockout punch in the contest between the world and the people of God.

It's the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit to bring the victory of the cross home to believers, so John goes on in v. 6 and says -

**And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. <sup>7</sup>For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. <sup>8</sup>And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.**

As I read that, if you have an NIV or other modern version, you'll notice it read VERY DIFFERENTLY!

There's a good reason for that – and just as last week we showed how most modern translations follow an ancient fraud in translating 4:2&3, now we see how the KJV includes a passage here in 5:7 & 8 that has a dubious origin.

But let me make this comment before getting into it.

Being aware of translations problems ought not shake our confidence in the Scriptures – the exact *opposite* is the case.

You see, the field of NT studies is so advanced, and there is so much manuscript evidence for our Bibles that scholars actually have great confidence today that our text of the NT is solid and

reliable.

Now we *know* that 4:2 & 3 were edited by *Gnostic influences*.

And now we know that 5:7-8, called the *Comma Johannian*, were actually a scribal margin note of late origin.

Look at the passage again – starting with “in heaven” in v. 7 and all the way through “on earth” in v. 8 – these words were more than likely added to the text much later.

They occur in *no* Greek manuscript prior to the 14 Century, except for one 11 Century and one 12 Century manuscript in which they have been added to the margin of the text by a *different* writer.

The earliest controversies that rocked the church dealt with the nature and identity of Christ, was He God, or man, or both?

Why then, if these words were a part of John’s original letter, were they *never* quoted in all the debates?

We find them in no writings of the early church fathers.

And yet if you destroyed every NT on the face of the earth, you could recompile the entire text just from the writings of the Fathers – except this passage!

Though none of the ancient Christians quote the Comma Johannian, several of them do quote from 1 John 5:6 and 1 John 5:8.

In all *ancient* translations – the Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopian, Coptic, Sahidic, Armenian, Slavonian, and so forth, this disputed passage is *not* included. <sup>[1]</sup>

It only appears in late versions of the Latin Vulgate.

Almost all scholars now believe that it’s best to regard these words as a note written in the margin of a manuscript.

The problem is, when that manuscript was *copied*, the copyist inserted them *into* the text itself, probably thinking the note was actually an *emendation* by the *prior* copyist, that the lines had been inadvertently left out when copying from the prior manuscript, so when the copyist realized his error, he, or an editor, added them to the margin.

This one copy was then copied again and again until a minor tradition of this text had arisen.

The most popular language for European Bibles was the Latin Vulgate, and eventually the *Comma Johannian* worked its way into the Vulgate.

The real problem began when in 1520, when a great scholar named *Erasmus* produced a new, accurate edition of the Bible in ancient Greek.

He was seeking to produce a standard Greek text of the NT for teachers and scholars to work with.

But when they studied Erasmus’ Bible, and compared it to the Latin version, they noticed he left out this passage, and criticized him for it.

Erasmus said, that this passage wasn’t in any ancient Greek manuscripts but that if one surfaced, then he’d amend his text.

Guess what - a manuscript with the suspect words appeared though it was a fraud and Erasmus knew it.

But he couldn’t prove it beyond any doubt and so in keeping true to his promise, he added the lines to his Greek text in the 1522 edition.

He also added a footnote, saying he thought that the new Greek manuscript had been written on purpose, just to embarrass him.

That manuscript, the *Codex Montfortii* is on display in the library of Trinity College, Dublin and is recognized as a forgery. <sup>[2]</sup>

Erasmus’s Greek text became one of the premier sources for the translators of the KJ bible.

As I mentioned earlier, passages like this give us no reason to fear that our New Testaments are unreliable.

In the entire NT, there are only fifty passages which have any sort of question regarding the reliability of the text, and *none* of these disputed passages are the sole foundation for any

Christian doctrine or belief.  
Our faith is not built on proof texts or singular references.  
Our faith is a whole body of clear revelation that is spread all through the Scriptures.  
If 50 disputed passages sounds like a lot, then consider this:

That's no more than 1/1000th of the total text! <sup>[3]</sup>

So, the text ought to read -

**<sup>7</sup>For there are three that bear witness - the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.**

As we consider what John is saying in this passages, this makes far more sense.  
John is refuting docetism and here gives the three proofs of docetism's error –  
The Spirit of Truth, the water of Jesus's birth and the blood of His cross.

**<sup>9</sup>If we receive the witness of men,**

And we do – in a court of law, in legal proceedings, the witness of a human being is binding.

**<sup>9</sup>If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater;**

That makes sense since it is impossible for God to either lie or to be fooled and see things amiss.  
So if we accept the testimony of a human being, how much more must we accept the testimony of  
God Himself?

**for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son.**

The Father has given His testimony that Jesus is His Son!  
That ought to be enough!

**<sup>10</sup>He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself;**

The one who's been born again has an inner awareness of the presence of Christ.  
Romans 8:16 says –

**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.**

**he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.**

While Christians agree with the Father's testimony regarding His Son, those who do *not* believe in Christ are in effect saying that God is a liar and that His testimony regarding Jesus isn't true.

Not a very smart thing to do – call God a liar!

**<sup>11</sup>And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life,**

How did we get eternal life? God GAVE it!  
We didn't earn it or work for it – God *gave* it!

This word "gave" is in an *indicative aorist*.

*Indicative* means that it is a *certain fact*, and *aorist* refers to *simple completed action*.

We might say it's a *done deal*.

God gave us life! But where?

**and this life is in His Son. <sup>12</sup>He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.**

The gift of eternal life God offers comes wrapped in a package called Jesus Christ.  
If you are "in Christ", meaning you've put your trust in Him, then you have eternal life.  
If you haven't put your trust in Christ, then you lack eternal life.

All you possess is biological life and a certain level of soulish life.

But you are missing out on real life.

So let me ask – and it's important everyone know the answer to this: Where is Life?

In the Son – In Christ.

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

John writes to those who believe in Christ, so that they may know in the fullest sense imaginable that they possess eternal life – and so that they may go on into deeper and deeper levels of knowledge and experience with God.

It's interesting that John uses a different word for know here in v. 13.

The word he's been using most often in 1 John refers to *experiential knowledge*, but here he uses a word which speaks of an *intuitive kind of inner awareness*.

This kind of knowledge is no less *real* than experiential knowledge, but it is far more *intimate* because it's a knowledge that merges with one's personality.

Another illustration may be helpful.

You and I know each other at a certain level.

That is, we've met, we've talked – you can see me up here and know something of me because of the stories I tell and the fact that I talk a lot when teaching.

We may chat in the hallway or fellowship room or foyer.

Maybe we exchange a few e-mails.

The point is, our mutual experience of each other means we have a certain *knowledge* of one another.

It's a *knowledge* gained by *experience* – and it's real.

But there are a small number of people whose knowledge of me is deeper than mere experience – it's *intuitive*.

My family knows me like that.

My wife and children, my mother and sister.

These people are so close to me and have gotten to know me so well that my life has actually affected theirs.

My personality has made subtle changes in theirs.

My wife has an intuitive knowledge of me, as do my children.

That's the word John uses when he says –

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

Because we are the children of God and part of His spiritual family, our knowledge of God has moved into something profoundly deep and intuitive.

That knowledge alters us and makes us more and more like Him.

John says that he writes that this process of intimate knowledge and abiding faith may go on and on.

**14** **Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. <sup>15</sup>And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.**

If we know God with the kind of knowledge he's described in v. 13, then we will know God's will, and knowing His will we can have great confidence when we pray.

**16** **If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. <sup>17</sup>All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not *leading* to death.**

Okay, here's another difficult passage.

The main question is, what does John mean by "sin leading to death?"

Again, the commentators are all over the block on this one.

The most common explanation is that John is referring to something similar to what Paul speaks about in 1 Cor. 11.

Some in the Corinthian church were partaking of the Lord's Supper in an *unworthy manner*, and so had fallen gravely ill and some had even died.

Paul saw those who had perished as believers, but who had been caught up in sin, and as a corrective, God had taken them in death rather than allow them to fall away completely or to pollute the church with their immorality.

Some think that's what John is referring to here by sin leading to death.

But there's another view that seems to better fit the context.

John has been speaking about eternal life and throughout his letter he's been defining the human race as belonging in one of two camps: The family of God and the World.

Those who are born again obey and love God and one another.

The lost continue to practice sin and do not love God or others.

Therefore, what John is saying here is that when we see a brother or sister who's caught in sin, we ought to pray for them and God will give them victory.

However, not everyone who claims to be a brother *is* one, and their lifestyle will prove it.

When we pray for the lost, we don't pray for their *sin* to be forgiven, we pray for *them* to be forgiven. We pray for their salvation!

You see, I think what John is doing in this section on prayer is saying that it's God's will to give His children victory over sin and as we pray for one another in this regard, God will do a great work of helping us *overcome* – which is a major theme in this chapter.

Watching a person overcome sin and move into a sanctified lifestyle is an evidence of eternal life.

But on the reverse – *no victory* over sin is evidence of a *lack* of eternal life.

That person is on the path to eternal death.

So John tells us to pray for our brothers and sister to gain victory over sin, but when it comes to praying for the lost – we don't pray for victory over individual sins, we pray for salvation!

John ends it by saying that while all sin is unrighteousness, not all sin is evidence of a lack of life.

Christians sin – but they also consistently show victory over sin.

The next verse bears out what we've just said about vs. 16 & 17.

**18 We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.**

John is not saying Christians live a life of *sinless perfection*.

But he *is* saying that the man or woman who has been born again does not live by the *principle* of sin.

We are American citizens.

We were born and raised in this country.

Our lifestyle is the American lifestyle.

We speak English, we eat American food and we wear American fashions.

Take us to another country, and we will still look and sound and live like Americans because that is what we are!

As Christians, we've been born again and are being raised by the Holy Spirit in the culture of the Kingdom of God.

Though we live in a foreign land, we speak the language of love, eat and wear clothes reflective of Biblical values.

Do we occasionally give in to the pressure of this alien landscape in which we live and sin?

Yes!

But it's not the norm. Righteousness is our norm.



And because our King is Jesus, the ruler of this age has no authority over us – he cannot touch us.  
He can lie to us – that’s what he does best.  
But the only power he has the what we lend him by believing his lies.

**19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies *under the sway of the wicked one*.**

See how clearly John divides the human race into two camps?  
We belong to God while the rest of the world lies under the deceptive influence of Satan.

**20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, 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.**

Christ, who is the *supreme embodiment* of all Truth, has opened our eyes so that we can see things as they really are.

We are no longer under the deceptive sway of the evil one - We live in the truth.

Remember that about the lost – apart from the Spirit of Truth opening their eyes and softening their hearts, they are blind and stone-cold to the gospel.

All our words and witness will fall on deaf ears unless the Lord by His grace works on them to make them receptive.

Pray for the lost – that God would open their eyes and ears and soften their hearts.

**21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.**

I find it fascinating that John ends his letter with this pointed and provocative little exhortation. It’s provocative precisely because of who he addresses it to – to Christians he affectionately calls his little children.

Christians don’t worship idols! So why this warning?

This will be our text for Sunday.

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[1] Guzik, David, comments of 1 John 5:7&8

[2] *ibid* - The “Johannian Comma” (as this passage is sometimes called) is in only three Greek manuscripts. The *Codex Guelpherbytanus*, which was written in the seventeenth century. We know this manuscript is from the seventeenth century because it contains a quote from a book written in the seventeenth century. The *Codex Ravianus* or *Berolinensis*, which is a copy of a text printed in 1514. We know it was copied from that text because it repeats the same typographical mistakes the 1514 text has. The third manuscript is the one “discovered” in the days of Erasmus, the *Codex Montfortii*.

[3] *ibid*