



1 John Chapter Five

Summary of Chapter Five

John continues on the theme of love but comes to it again with a different variation, for the love of God a believer has leads to the faith that is required to be obedient to him, which will then assure the believer that they have the victory and can endure whatever life and the world has to throw at them.

John then states that it is both God and the Spirit that give witness to Christ as being born of water and the blood. Those who have faith in Jesus as the Christ of God are preserved from the harmfulness of sin. They can be assured of the promises of God and will receive the reward of eternal life in the presence of God. Those who do not come to Christ will not have life.

John now concludes the letter in a non-standard way that brings a summary statement of the main issues addressed. People who sin are to turn to God through the Son to ask and receive forgiveness for that sin. Those who believe in the Son will be assured of that. The church is to pray for those that they see sinning so they too may come to forgiveness. There remains the polar situation of those who are of God and those who are of the evil one. Believers are to abstain from anything that is considered idolatrous.

V. 1 John 5:1-12 - Faith in the Son of God

So far, John has spoken much of love and obedience but not so much of faith. The emphasis now shifts to believing in the Son. Of this letters ten references to believing, seven are here in Chapter 5.

V.a 1 John 5:1-5 - Faith keeps the commandments of God

The road to love, which is such a great concern of John's, is paved with faith in Jesus as the Christ of God. Loving the Father means loving the Son; loving both of them requires a response of obedience to the commands of God.

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.

1 John 5:1

Everyone who marks out two parallel statements in the sentence, where one points to the importance of faith in Jesus, the other to the importance of loving each other. These are not two separate commands that one must keep in order to become a child of God; rather, they are two expressions of what the child of God does. Faith and love are each expressions of the work of God in a person's life. Each is centred in the person of Jesus Christ: a believer's faith is in Jesus as the Christ of God, who provides the fundamental manifestation of God's love for all who call on the name of the Son.

Everyone who believes that. In this, the first parallel statement, the word that underscores that saving faith has a particular content. It is not a vague religious commitment but a wholehearted trust in the saving work of Christ.

Jesus is the Christ is assurance that he is the promised Messiah, the Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, the Son of God by nature and anointing, and designated the King and ruler of the entire Kingdom of God.

Everyone who believes is born of God. Regeneration precedes faith: <<*If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him*>> (1 John 2:29), <<*No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God*>> (1 John 3:9), and: <<*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God*>> (1 John 4:7). God starts the process by giving believers new spiritual birth for they are dead in their sinful nature before God gives them new life in order that they can come to Christ in faith.

This principle of faith, and the new nature that comes through it, or from which it springs, are ingenerated by the Spirit of God; and so sonship and adoption are not now appropriated to the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, not to the ancient Israel of God; for all believers in Christ, though by nature sinners of the Gentiles, are spiritually descended from God, and accordingly are to be loved by God. This fulfils God's covenant promise made to the spiritual father of all believers: <<*The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"*>> (Genesis 12:1-3).

Everyone who loves the father marks the second parallel statement that shows that because accepting Christ means loving the Father, then equally loving the Father means the acceptance of Christ as his only begotten Son, i.e. loves his child as well.

Born of God, father, and child all have roots in the same Greek verb *gennaō*. A literal but wooden translation would read, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah has been begotten of God, and the one who loves the one who begets, loves the one who is begotten of him". John emphasises the

inevitability and necessity of loving both the child and the parent, since the one is intimately related to the other.

² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.

1 John 5:2

It seems but natural that he who loves the Father should love the children of God also, and that in some proportion to their resemblance to their Father and to the Father's love for them; and so he must first and principally love the Son of the Father, as he is most emphatically styled: <<*Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love*>> (2 John 3). Such love for other believers was described earlier by John as a key test for a believer's authenticity.

It is also worth noting that such love does not come because the other person is wealthy, influential, gives something in return or is simply a nice person; it is solely because they are a child of God that love is demonstrated freely and naturally for them. It is of course a demonstration of obedience to a divine command but that should be of secondary importance, not the only motivating factor.

Obedying God's commandments or carrying out his commands in Scripture is the way to love both God, and also to love the children of God, because God's commands show believers the true way to do good for others: <<*The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself"*>> (Romans 13:9), and: <<*The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself"*>> (Galatians 5:14). Love and law are complementary, especially the law made perfect through Christ: <<*But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does*>> (James 1:25).

³ This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,

1 John 5:3

To obey his commands is an expression or natural outworking of a believer's love for God and since it is clearly plural it must also include the command to love others: <<*And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother*>> (1 John 4:21), as well as a call to faith: <<*And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us*>> (1 John 3:23).

His commands are not burdensome. God's love in his people gives them the desire to love and please him. So with eagerness they obey his commands. Rightly understood and followed, God's commandments bring believers great joy and freedom, not a sense of oppression: <<*Come to me, all you who are weary and*

burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light”>> (Matthew 11:28-30). King David too acknowledges that the commands of God are not burdensome: <<I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free>> (Psalm 119:32).

That his commands are not burdensome also shows that this should not be interpreted as meaning that people have to do more in order to win the approval of God as if it is something that can be measured statistically. Rather it shows that it is the natural outworking of the love for God a believer has that will lead to the obedience of his commands and that actually being obedient will become a source of pleasure for the believer, not a tiresome requirement to demonstrate love. God does not impose himself on people but calls them to come to him willingly.

⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

1 John 5:4

Overcomes the world. The word translated overcomes is Greek nikao and has the same root as the word victory, Greek nike. It manifests itself in different ways in 1 John, e.g. <<I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one>> (1 John 2:13-14), and: <<You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world>> (1 John 4:4). However, it is essentially one victory and that is over everything that opposes God that would draw a believer away from him. Genuine Christians are not defeated by the world's hostility or compelled by it to turn from Christ. By overcoming they will gain another world that is most pure and peaceful, blessed and eternal.

The positive language used by John also enlightens his readers, throughout all generations, that the victory is not a future event but is real, tangible and is in evidence in their own lives, providing they continue to abide in Christ for they have already passed from death to life, from darkness to light and out of the clutches of evil into that which is only good.

Even our faith. Faith is the key to salvation for the world is a trap and a snare, as John explains: <<For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world>> (1 John 2:16), but for those who do hold on to their faith have assurance from Paul: <<Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord>> (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). Faith is not a means to the goal of victory or an enabling factor for a believer to obtain that victory. Faith itself is the victory!

⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

1 John 5:5

Only he who believes. This is a victory for the believer that should bring praise and glory to God as it is not just their victory: <<*For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory*>> (Deuteronomy 20:4), which Paul confirms in his opening address to the Galatian churches: <<*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father*>> (Galatians 1:3-4), before proclaiming: <<*May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*>> (Galatians 6:14).

To have such faith is to have the kind of trust in God that children should have in their natural parents, although for many that has not been possible. Those who have had a really positive upbringing have such trust because of their experience of the faithfulness and love of their parents for them. So the call for faith and the call for love are really one. Although John repeatedly emphasises the importance of Christian love for one another, that obligation is not arbitrarily imposed. Rather the call to love is derived from the very nature of God, who is love, and who loves his children and encourages, commands and empowers them to love. For John, 'God is love' is not romantic idealism or the last straw: it is the ultimate truth.

V.b 1 John 5:6-12 - Faith receives the testimony of God

Having taught and urged so many things in his letter, including the recent assertion of the victory over the world for the believer in Christ, John now underscores the basis for his authority: the testimony of God in the coming of Jesus (v.9), which John personally witnessed. Many NT writers and indeed disciples throughout the ages might at this point turn to Scripture to support their assertions. Here, John calls on the Holy Spirit in his Christological witness. This is not a figment of the human imagination but one of divine revelation concerning an historic account.

⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

1 John 5:6

The one who came by water and blood. At first glance this has all the ingredients of a human birth but there is so much more to it than that. Having said that, it is still a highly significant part of the story of God, for his people had expected the long awaited Messiah would be a warrior king coming to release his people from oppression, as will occur one day: <<*I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war*>> (Revelation 19:11), but approximately 700 years before his birth, the prophet had indicated how it would be: <<*Therefore*

the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel>> (Isaiah 7:14).

Water most likely refers to Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist: <<At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased">> (Mark 1:9-11). It also played a significant part in the teaching of servanthood in the church: <<It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them">> (John 13:1-17). That is how Jesus also cleansed his bride, the church: <<Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless">> (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Blood was significant in the law as a sign and process for the atonement of sin: <<In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness">> (Hebrews 9:22). Here, it mainly signifies Christ's atoning death on the Cross: <<At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" – which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah." One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to

drink. *“Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last*>> (Mark 15:33-37).

Paul summed up the whole process of purification and atonement by blood: <<*God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus*>> (Romans 3:25-26), for it is by the blood that believers are justified, reconciled, and presented righteous to God

However, putting the two water and blood together, as John does here, cannot help but remind the reader of what happened when Jesus died on the Cross, as was so clearly witnessed and described by John: <<*Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken,” and, as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced”*>> (John 19:31-37).

Due to the scourging that Jesus received prior to his crucifixion, often a cause of death in itself, and then having to carry the Cross part of the way to Golgotha, no doubt brought on hypovolemic shock, causing his collapse and also accounting for his thirst. Prior to death, the sustained rapid heartbeat caused by hypovolemic shock also causes fluid to gather in the sack around the heart and around the lungs. This gathering of fluid in the membrane around the heart is called pericardial effusion, and the fluid gathering around the lungs is called pleural effusion. This explains why, after Jesus died and the Roman soldier thrust a spear through Jesus’ side, probably his right side, piercing both the lungs and the heart, blood and water came from his side just as John recorded in his Gospel. John would not have understood the medical reasoning behind what he saw but faithfully and accurately recorded it: <<*This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true*>> (John 21:24).

The Spirit who testifies. The structure of the verse emphasises that it is the characteristic work of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the fact that Christ came (see v.6a). It is the inward work of the Spirit in the heart of the believers to convict them of their sin and to open their eyes to see the truth of who Christ is, in order that they might truly understand the meaning of his atoning death for their sins (v.10). Likewise, the indwelling presence of the Spirit is given to abide in believers and to teach them the truth of God’s Word: <<*As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is*

real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him>> (1 John 2:27), and: <<We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit>> (1 John 4:13).

The Spirit is the truth because he speaks the words of the Father and is himself fully God. He was sent to teach and guide in truth, just as Jesus had promised: *<<If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you>> (John 14:15-17).*

Verse 6 is a truly amazing Scripture that shows that the testimony of the Spirit of Truth is worked out through the eyes and ears of a human being in that John was present at the crucifixion to witness the water and the blood flow from Jesus' side as the spear was plunged deeply into his body. John gives three elements to testify to the truth of Jesus divinity that is not just shown by John's witness of the Cross; it permeates throughout this epistle and indeed his Gospel. Then by concluding that all the elements agree, the Godhead in v.7 and the Spirit, water and blood in v.8, John gives further clear demonstration to the authenticity of the Gospel message.

There are some very early manuscripts that omit v.7 but just as many that include it, and it has been generally agreed by the early church fathers that those where it was omitted are copyist errors. That would make sense for to read v.6 and v.8 without the Trinitarian testimony makes the text cumbersome and would not flow as John's style of writing does.

⁷ For there are three that testify: ⁸ the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

1 John 5:7-8

Three that testify. The Gospel is not based on merely human testimony but on that of the Trinitarian Godhead. John then elaborates on the outworking of their testimony in that there are in fact three that testify, namely, the witness of the Spirit, the water baptism of Jesus, including the Spirit descending on him like a dove with the affirming voice of the Father from heaven, and the blood, which cleanses believers from all unrighteousness through Jesus' atoning death on the Cross.

Following the writings of Facundus of Hermiane in the 6th Century, there have been those that believe that v.8 also refers to the Trinity but the case does not hold for several reasons. First the word order is incorrect for he reads water to be God the Father that is listed 2nd and the blood to be the Son, listed 3rd. Also, based on his eyewitness testimony of the Cross, if John had meant blood to be Christ then he could just as easily have used water to mean him as well, for both simultaneously emanated from his body.

The Spirit testifies about Christ in many ways. It was he who supernaturally impregnated the virgin Mary (Luke 1:35), descended on Jesus at his baptism (Matthew 3:16), provided Jesus with the power to drive out demons (Matthew

12:28), empowered the apostles as Jesus had promised (Acts 2:2-4), and through the empowering of his church as required for it to complete the work he requires of it (1 Corinthians 12:7).

The three are in agreement, thereby providing persuasive confirmation for believing in Jesus as the Son of God (v.10). The OT taught that every charge must be confirmed: <<*On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness*>> (Deuteronomy 17:6), a principle continued in the NT: <<*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’*>> (Matthew 18:16), and: <<*This will be my third visit to you. “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses”*>> (2 Corinthians 13:1).

In agreement was translated as **these three are one** in earlier versions of the bible. In relation to v.7, the 3rd Century Carthaginian bishop and martyr Cyprian considered the testimony of the apostle John as relating to the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit; for he says, “the Lord says, I and the Father are one; and again, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit it is written: ‘And these three are one’”.

⁹ We accept man’s testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son.

1 John 5:9

We accept man’s testimony. As recently noted but worth repeating for confirmation, the Law of Moses states: <<*One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. The matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses*>> (Deuteronomy 19:15), which Jesus concurred with in the NT era: <<*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’*>> (Matthew 18:16), which was immediately accepted by Paul: <<*This will be my third visit to you. “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses”*>> (2 Corinthians 13:1). Jesus had the testimony of his twelve apostles, eleven of whom were trustworthy and true, while one was chosen as the betrayer. In addition, there were hundreds of others that became disciples and eyewitnesses of his ministry and resurrection: <<*After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep*>> (1 Corinthians 15:6). Then there is the testimony of the four written Gospels, two written by eyewitnesses (Matthew and John), one (Mark) on behalf of an eyewitness (Peter), and the fourth written by the historian Luke, who spoke personally with many eyewitnesses. This was far more witness testimony than was required by the Jews under their Law, and should be more than sufficient for the rest of the world to accept that Jesus is Lord of all.

The testimony of God. In the strongest possible terms, John claims divine authority for his teaching. It is not merely his **testimony**; it is God’s. The testimony of the Father was in full evidence at the baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:11), his transfiguration (Luke 9:35), throughout his great teaching and miraculous works

(John 10:37-38), at his death (Matthew 27:51), and subsequently by raising Jesus from the dead (Mark 16:6), and accepting him back into heaven (Luke 24:51).

¹⁰ Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.

1 John 5:10

Has this testimony in his heart. This is the inward testimony of the Spirit, the internal realisation that Christians have of the Holy Spirit's presence and work within them.

Anyone who does not believe God includes everyone who rejects the Spirit's witness through John of Christ's role in bringing eternal life to those who would follow him. In doing so they are rejecting God's own testimony concerning his Son and thereby rejecting God, leaving themselves with no other option than to tread the wide road to hell: *<<Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it>>* (Matthew 7:13).

Has made him out to be a liar. People who reject the Son of God as Saviour, or are indifferent to the Son, are provoking God to his face. God clearly and unequivocally acknowledged Jesus as his Son at his baptism and transfiguration as already noted. Rejecting this acknowledgement is to call God a liar.

¹¹ And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

1 John 5:11

The testimony supporting faith in Christ is not a vague spiritual inkling but has definite substance. It is the message of Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection, through which eternal life has been made available through faith in his Son.

A question that remains for those who have rejected the witness of God concerning his Son is 'where then will they find salvation?' There are, of course, many humanists who deny any life beyond this one despite all the evidence to the contrary, not just Christian faith-based witness but also that of other faith groups and the spiritual realm itself. There are many more people who do believe in a life to come, and are right to do so, but they are misguided as to how to ensure that life is spent in a peaceful, loving environment, controlled by the creator God, rather than spending it alienated from God; an existence of darkness, bereft of love and life.

¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

1 John 5:12

Has the Son implies a faith that is evident in love for others and devotion to God.

Has life. Jesus as the Christ of God is in essence life itself: <<*In him was life, and that life was the light of men*>> (John 1:4), and: <<*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us*>> (1 John 1:1-2). For those who have believed, then remain obedient and united to him, the promises which Jesus brings go so much deeper than just life on earth, as good as that is, for he is eternal life: <<*When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory*>> (Colossians 3:4).

Whoever does not have life is subject to eternal punishment: <<*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him*>> (John 3:36).

In summary, then, this section presents the content of the confession about Jesus Christ that believers are to have and hold. But it also suggests, explicitly and implicitly, how believers know the truth. In the final analysis, the truth is known by individuals because God's Spirit guides them into understanding and accepting it: <<*But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you*>> (John 14:26), and: <<*But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come*>> (John 16:13).

However, appeals to inspiration are always dangerous, because they are so subjective. Aware of this problem, John reminds his readers of an historical event – the blood and the water that flowed from Jesus' side at his crucifixion – that was reported and interpreted to them by a trustworthy follower of Jesus: <<*the disciple whom Jesus loved*>> (John 13:23b). If, on occasions, the Spirit speaks what seems to be a fresh or new word, then the truth of the testimony ought to be measured against the witness, guarded by dependable and faithful individuals and communities, and against the witness of Scripture itself. For the Spirit, who guided the original witnesses of events and inspired the interpretation of them, does not speak a contrary word to the church today.

VI. 1 John 5:13-21 - Concluding Remarks

John summarises and extends many things already discussed. 'Know' occurs seven times in these verses, indicating his focus on the assurance and even certainty of Christian faith and salvation.

VI.a 1 John 5:13 - The confidence that faith furnishes

Belief can be shaky, and John writes to believers who have seen their congregation split: <<*They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going*>>

showed that none of them belonged to us>> (1 John 2:19). John's primary purpose in writing has been to offer pastoral encouragement, to instil confidence and hope by reminding his readers of their fellowship with God and with each other that they now enjoy.

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.

1 John 5:13

I write these things. John urges them to stand fast and to remain loyal in their commitment to God. John's overarching tone has been one of encouraging steadfastness and endurance, for they have the victory in their faith in Christ.

The commitment that John entreats them to hold, is to believe in the name of the Son of God. In trusting themselves to the Son of God, they are granted eternal life, as well as the confidence of having that life. To have eternal life is not about living forever, it is to have everlasting fellowship with God: *<<Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent>>* (John 17:3), and: *<<The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ>>* (1 John 1:2-3).

That you may know implies that it is possible for Christians to have assurance of salvation: *<<We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands>>* (1 John 2:3), and: *<<We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death>>* (1 John 3:14). From his prison cell Peter also wrote: *<<Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall>>* (2 Peter 1:10).

Believers in the Christian faith should be diligent to confirm their calling and election, Greek eklogē. God calls believers to faith through the Gospel, but he has also chosen or elected them: *<<before the creation of the world>>* (Ephesians 1:4b). But God's grace in salvation should not be taken for granted. Growing in the Christ-like virtues will give believers increasing confidence that God really did call them and really did elect them to salvation before the foundation of the world. Thus, they may know that they have eternal life as a sure foundation.

VI.b 1 John 5:14-17 - The prayer that faith enables

Prayer is central to a living faith. By refining his readers' understanding of prayer, John promotes healthy and growing faith. He also clearly states that God's response to prayer is according to his will and not the will of the person praying. Thus prayer is a response to God, not a battle to try to impose human will on him, or bring his divine will down to the level of human will. It is about having faith to allow the believer's will to grow to be more like and in accord with God's.

¹⁴ This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

1 John 5:14

This is the confidence we have in approaching God. Because a believer's fellowship with God is personal and intimate, because it is the relationship between a loving Father and his child, those who have eternal life also have confidence in approaching God. Here the confidence in view is the confidence to come to God in prayer: *<<Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us>>* (1 John 3:21-23). But believers are not merely told that they may approach God with confidence, but that they have confidence because they know that God hears them. To say that God hears prayers means more than God acknowledges that they have prayed. Hearing implies that there is a response, and that the response is favourable. Jesus is confident that God always hears him, as recorded following the death of his friend Lazarus: *<<So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me">>* (John 11:41-42). The promise that God hears his children is the assurance that God listens to them favourably and grants them their requests, irrespective of what they ask for, although it may not always appear that way from the believer's perspective, for the qualification is that the prayers will be offered by those who are obedient to God and are offered according to God's will, so that a believer has to come to a place to be able to discern his will: *<<Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will>>* (Romans 12:2).

To ask God according to his will does not mean that, before Christians can pray effectively, they need somehow to discover God's secret plans for the future, sometimes referred to as his hidden will or 'will of decree': *<<The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law>>* (Deuteronomy 29:29). Rather, it means they should ask according to what the Bible teaches about God's will for his people, sometimes called God's revealed will or will of precept. If Christians are praying in accordance with what pleases God, as found in the teaching of Scripture, then they are praying according to his will: *<<your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven>>* (Matthew 6:10), and: *<<Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is>>* (Ephesians 5:17).

¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.

1 John 5:15

To know that he hears us in whatever we ask is enough, because communion with God is the main objective of all prayer. It is not the desire for the outcome of prayer but having the faith to pray that is important.

We have what we asked of him. Human experience testifies that Christians do not always receive all the things they ask from God, even things that seemingly accord with his revealed will. This verse must be understood in light of other passages of Scripture which show that praying according to God's will includes the need to pray in faith: <<*If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer*>> (Matthew 21:22), and: <<*But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind*>> (James 1:6); with patient perseverance: <<*Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'"*>> And the Lord said, "*Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"*>> (Luke 18:1-8); in obedience: <<*If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened*>> (Psalm 66:18), and: <<*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*>> (1 Peter 3:12); and in submission to God's greater wisdom: <<*"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done"*>> (Luke 22:42), <<*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*>> (Romans 8:28), and: <<*So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good*>> (1 Peter 4:19).

It should be noted that if a believer's prayer, or even that offered by the church, is not answered it does not necessarily mean that anything is lacking or deficient in any individual or group of people. God does not answer prayer based on the amount or quality of faith but on the basis that faith is present.

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.

1 John 5:16

If anyone sees. This does not imply that John is referring to visible sins, i.e. publically committed actions rather than thoughts, for John can equally mean sin that is perceived or discerned.

If anyone sees his brother commit a sin. It is often the habit of Christians to be critical or even judgemental over others in the church, whom they believe are not walking the way they should. This Scripture shows what the correct response should be; to raise such people up to the Father with a petition that he will grant a prayer of forgiveness for those who are perceived to have sinned, if indeed there is anything to forgive.

Sin that does not lead to death is sin for which forgiveness is possible because:

1. Forgiveness is sought through repentance, and
2. God is willing to grant it, which seems most likely due to his grace and mercy.

In essence, this is sin that is committed by a believer, although it could be true of unbelievers who subsequently come to faith, for they will then repent of all their past sins, at least generically, for it is impossible for any human to remember or even know all their sins.

Death and eternal life are present spiritual states as well as ultimate actual destinies, i.e. hell and heaven respectively. Although the locations and the exact details of what life will be like in these places is not known, they do exist and the eternal destinies of all mankind will be in one of these two. There is nothing else!

God will give him life. The believer's prayer, i.e. he should pray, should be to ask God to draw all men into his Kingdom through his Son. Those who then accept his offer, which stands open to all who will come to him through the Gospel message, will indeed have life.

A sin that leads to death may imply Jesus' statement on what is called the unpardonable sin: <<***But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin***>> (Mark 3:29), but it is more likely to be:

1. Sin that has not been repented, normally by an unbeliever as a disciple of Christ should always have a penitent heart.
2. Sin of the kind or nature that John has warned about throughout this letter, i.e. resolute rejection of the true doctrine about Christ, chronic disobedience of God's commandments, persistent lack of love for fellow believers, all of which are indications of a lack of saving faith, and such sins will not be forgiven. In essence, it speaks mainly of the sins of unbelievers, for their sin has led them into the clutches of the evil one.

I am not saying that he should pray about that. It seems to go against all that a believer stands for, not to offer up prayer for a sinner, for it is at the core of their belief and hope to see everyone come to salvation through Christ. It may be that John is looking more at the sinner than the sin and that a believer should not ask for the life of a person without them repenting of that sin. There have been occasions when God has specifically forbidden prayer for those who have become so hardened against him that he knows they will not repent: <<***So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you. Do you not see what they are doing in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?***>> (Jeremiah 7:16-17), and: <<***Do not***

pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them, because I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their distress. “What is my beloved doing in my temple as she works out her evil schemes with many? Can consecrated meat avert your punishment? When you engage in your wickedness, then you rejoice”>> (Jeremiah 11:14-15).

The idea seems to be that if someone sees the Holy Spirit in operation and calls it demonic, he is rejecting God altogether and will not be forgiven. It can also be taken to mean that if such a person ever has a radical change of heart, they will accept the Spirit and be forgiven. It seems that John is drawing a line between those who are in the family of God and those who are not. Those who are in the family will sin, but not habitually for the hold of sin on them has been broken because of their relationship with God. Therefore, those who are in Christ will be protected from death but for those outside, sin leads to death. A believer's prayers aid in the process of protecting them from spiritual death.

Ultimately, final impenitence and unbelief in earthly life will lead to eternal spiritual death, separation from God forever. It would be better for them if death meant absolute death but it does not, which is desperately sad for both them and for those who do believe.

I am not saying. John leaves open whether to pray about that situation if it arises. It would be better in such cases to pray for repentance. There will always be those for whom a believer's prayers will not be answered: <<***Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden***>> (Romans 9:18), but it is doubtful that John means that believers should act as judge over who they should pray for and who they consider to be eternally doomed. The prayer should then perhaps be for a person to change their ways and come to repentance rather than asking God to forgive that sin without the proactive actions of the sinner.

¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

1 John 5:17

All wrongdoing is a matter of grave concern given God's utter perfection and zealous love. However, there is sin that does not lead to death, so Christians should be proactive in praying for their own forgiveness and, indeed, for that of all others.

VI.c 1 John 5:18-21 - The understanding that faith grants

The letter concludes on a note of high confidence and deep spiritual insight. John closes his letter with three statements of assurance, each beginning we know. Each statement points to a truth that John affirms as well as to a reality that his readers have experienced.

By assuring them that they can properly claim these realities for themselves, John reaffirms to the community its identity as those who are rightly related in fellowship to God. As he does regularly throughout the epistle, he tells his congregation not only what they are to believe, but what belongs to them as

children of God. In short, he is eager that they reflect on who they are and on how they gained their identity.

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.

1 John 5:18

Other translations have touch for harm, i.e. <<*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*>> (v.18 ESV). This is consistent with the OT translation, where the LXX uses the same word: <<*Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm*>> (Psalm 105:15), and: <<*For this is what the Lord Almighty says: “After he has honoured me and has sent me against the nations that have plundered you – for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye”*>> (Zechariah 2:8).

We know is a positive statement that give assurance to the promises of God that a believer has received both through Scripture and those that are written into the hearts and minds of all those who are in fellowship with God.

Anyone born of God are those who have come to God in the name of Jesus, although there are certainly those of the OT era who are saved. Some would say there are those in the NT era who may have died before they had the opportunity to know Christ or lived in circumstances where coming to Christ was not an option for them, but who God knows by their hearts would have come to him had their circumstances been different. There is no scriptural support for this notion, and it would be a very dangerous thesis to promote to anyone!

Does not continue to sin. All people sin and most believers, if not all, continue to sin after coming to faith. However, there has to be a determined commitment by the true believer to work with the Holy Spirit in minimising further sin, ensuring they immediately repent of it and do all they can not to continue in that way. In essence, their lives are not characterised by their sinful nature. Refer to comments made on 1 John 3:6-7 and 3:9-10.

The one who was born of God is a reference to Jesus Christ, who in his physical birth was born of God in that he was sent from God the Father and was conceived by the Holy Spirit: <<*The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God*>> (Luke 1:35), and in his resurrection from the dead was once again born of God, in that he was brought back to life: <<*And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy*>> (Colossians 1:18).

For born of God points to a divine action on a believer’s behalf that transfers them to the sphere where the future realities of eternal life are already lived out, even if only in part. Purity from sin is just such a future expectation now appropriated by believers through trusting in Christ: <<*Everyone who sins breaks the law; in*

fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother>> (1 John 3:4-10).

God keeps him safe. Just as Jesus prayed for the perseverance of his followers: <<*I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours*>> (John 17:9), and he continues to intercede for forgiveness. Therefore, the church is charged with the role of interceding for those who confess their sin (v.16). God will answer these prayers, and the sinner will be forgiven and kept safe in eternal life. The prayer for life for another believer who is committing a sin that does not lead to death (v.16), is not simply one example of the kind of petition God hears; it is precisely the prayer that God hears, even as God answered Jesus' prayers that his followers be given life; for it is the heart of God's will to grant life to those who believe.

The evil one cannot harm believers in the sense of causing permanent spiritual loss: <<*You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world*>> (1 John 4:4). God's children have the assurance that they are guarded and kept by the power of God. They are neither immune to temptation nor free from sin. But they are not in the hands of an arbitrary God who, on a whim, may desert them, nor will they fall under the control of the evil one. Those who are truly children of God cannot lose the life they have in God providing they remain in Christ.

¹⁹ We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

1 John 5:19

We are children of God. Christians have been spiritually reborn and are in that sense children of God.

The whole world. All of creation was cursed through Adamic sin and thus all of humankind throughout history is controlled to varying degrees by their sinful nature. Anyone who does not explicitly worship and serve God serves the devil and his purposes. They are therefore under the control of the evil one, whether by intent or simply through ignorance of the truth.

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.

1 John 5:20

Has come points to the incarnation of God, an historical fact and well-witnessed truth: <<*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth*>> (John 1:14).

Given us understanding. Christians receive grace in order to grasp biblical teaching and receive the will to put it into practice. Full understanding came following the resurrection of Christ: <<*He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself*>> (Luke 24:25-27), and: <<*He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high”*>> (Luke 24:44-49).

So that we may know him. True knowledge of God is a gracious act and gift of God: <<*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God*>> (John 1:13).

Who is true. Through Christ a person can come into fellowship with God and find out that what is said about him in the Scriptures is true, which is much more reliable and secure than some of the myths and guiding fictions that people, who do not know him, have based their decisions about him on. They have often made up their own minds or learned of God through a different faith and come to a misguided perception of the true God, as can be seen in Christ.

He is the true God and eternal life. John was in a unique position to make such a bold statement that Jesus is in fact God, for he had spent three years of his life in his physical presence and the rest of his life guided and driven on by his Holy Spirit. There was no doubt in John’s mind that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are no less than the one true God. In AD325 the First Ecumenical Council was formed at Nicæa and concurred with John. There is no reason for anyone to disagree in this age. In fact, further evidence has come to light to give testimony to what was discovered such a long time ago.

²¹ Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

1 John 5:21

Dear children. This is the 9th occurrence of this expression of love and care for his flock, those that had been entrusted to him as a senior elder in the church in Asia. He also has addressed them as ‘dear friends’ on six occasions. The overall tone of

his letter demonstrates that his affection is clearly genuine and that he has taken the Gospel teaching to heart in his own life of faithful service to his Lord and Saviour. By passing on what he has seen and heard he makes his own joy complete.

Most NT letters contain final words of warning in their closing lines. **Keep yourselves from idols** means keep yourselves from trusting, obeying, revering, and following – that is, in effect, worshipping – anyone or anything other than God himself, his Son Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit, all of which are the one true God. This does not necessarily refer just to pagan gods of stone or wood, or modern materialism and wealth that become the idols of many, but it also includes a false picture of God that causes one to stumble and fall away from a relationship with the one true God. John's readers are to keep themselves from every kind of false belief, for loyalty to a false god leads to death, but allegiance to the true God brings eternal life.

John's letter has been a symphony of love that has addressed many and varied themes, moved away from them only to return, building up to the crescendo to exhort his readers to love and obey God then to demonstrate that love by loving each other; the true way of Christian life.

Whether it is said to a student writing a thesis or a person giving a public address or writing a report, the advice throughout the ages has always been:

- Tell them what you're going to tell them!
- Tell them!
- Tell them what you told them!

John's first epistle has done just that.