

1 John 5:18-21

We Know

After 19 weeks we have now arrived at the conclusion to the apostle John's first letter. The most striking feature in the last four verses is the recurring phrase "we know." That is a jolting statement today when it is said that we cannot know anything for sure. But what we know as Christians or what we should know, gives to our lives poise, patience and power in living life.

As Christians we know things that other people do not. I do not say this smugly, but with great humility and thankfulness to God. We know certain things not because we are smarter, but because God has revealed things to us in His Word and we believe Him. Therefore anyone can know what we know if they are willing to take God at His Word. And because we know these things we can live differently than others in this world. We can live with faith, hope and love so that our joy is full.

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.
(1 John 5:18)

The first certainty before us is the assurance of righteousness. "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin." Now, the apostle is not saying that we are sinless. We know by experience as well as the Word of God that we are not perfect—by any means. What John means and what the Greek text really says is that **we know** that whoever is born of God does not make sin a life-style choice. We do not make it a habit or a practice to sin and neglect the things of God.

Our new nature from God motivates us to obey God, to love God and other people and to practice living righteously. As the apostle Paul put it we are striving "toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."¹ Our lives have changed course. We are no longer pursuing our own desires, but the liberating and satisfying will of God.

This is not true for someone who is not saved. In our natural fallen state we are very open to a life of ongoing sin. And that sin does not have to mean that we lie or steal or cheat or whatever. It can mean and does mean an

¹ Philippians 3:14

indifference to the things of God. In our fallen state we rebel against God sometimes boldly and sometimes quietly. But we are born of God and we know that we are striving daily to live in the sweet center of God's will. We also know something else that gives us great comfort.

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.
(1 John 5:18)

The New King James Version of the Bible does not translate the second part of this verse in the best way. Perhaps in your Bible you may have a note showing that the word "himself" should be "him." Here is how the English Standard Version translates verse 18.

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.

In other words we who are born again will never fall back, unredeemingly, into a life-style of sin because the Only Begotten One, Jesus Christ, keeps us safe. Therefore the evil one, Satan, can never own us again. The devil can tempt us, frighten us and harass us but he will never, ever again have us as slaves of unrighteousness. What a tremendous truth! The Word of God says that "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."² Jesus said in John 10,

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸ And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand.
(John 10:27-29)

Satan can never cause us to lose our new birth or return to the pollution of a life-style of sin. The Lord Jesus Christ watches over us, protects us and prays for us when we are in evil's path. We can see his care and concern for us in his high priestly prayer in John 17.

Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep

² 1 John 4:4

through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. ¹² While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept;[d] and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

¹³ But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.

¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

¹⁷ Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸ As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.
(John 17:11-18)

When we feel weak and helpless in this difficult, ever changing, evil world, remember that Jesus Christ has prayed for you and he send you into the world with a goal and a mission. Your goal is to become more and more like your Lord Jesus. He has given you the gift of God's Spirit so you can change and grow into a righteous, joyful, loving person. And your mission is to be Christ's ambassador to a world lost in sin. Now, 1 John 5:19 reveals another certainty in the Christian life.

We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies *under the sway of the wicked one.*
(1 John 5:19)

Here is the certainty of our fellowship with God. We know, we are sure, we are certain that we are of God. "Well," says someone, "what a pompous presumption! That's the trouble with you Christians you think you are better than everyone else. You think you are so superior." Here's my response: no, not superior, just separated. I am not better, I am blessed. And the blessing that I have is available to anyone who wants to receive it.

We know that we are of God. A radical redirection has occurred in our lives. We have been delivered from this present evil age;³ from the power of

³ Galatians 1:3-5

darkness into the kingdom of Christ.⁴ The world on the other hand “lies *under the sway of the wicked one.*” They live under his power, his influence and his tyranny.

What do I mean by that statement? I mean that fundamentally the troubles in our world are not merely biological, or economic, or intellectual or political. The problems in our world have a moral and spiritual base. Remember, according to Ephesians 2, all of us walked or had our life-style “according to the course of this world”⁵ a world manipulated by Satan. But we were saved.

This is the truth about the world. It is satanically controlled. Jesus Christ called Satan “the ruler of this world.”⁶ The apostle Paul calls him “the god of this age”⁷ who blinds men and women to their need of redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ. Without redemption in Jesus Christ men and women are slaves to the world. People don’t like to hear this but all of us are either pursuing the will of God or we are deceived by an evil and wicked spiritual force.

The wicked one, Satan, causes people to reject God, to fight among each other and to desire and strive for things that ultimately will not satisfy or last. Think of all the pain and sorrow, the jealousy, hate, murder, corruption, the cheating, the distorting of truth in homes and classrooms and political parties. Why all the lies and evil and sorrow? It is the work of the one Jesus Christ called a liar and a murderer from the beginning.⁸

The only way of escape from this wicked one is by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ. God loves the world and wants to save it not condemn it.⁹ God loves you and wants to save you. We can say “We know that we are of God.” And it is not smug superiority that says that. It is gratitude! God’s love and mercy ransomed us. How grateful we should all be. And the love and mercy that God has shown to us we should share with others as well. If I can be saved so can anyone. Now, we come to yet another certainty; the certainty of reality.

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.
(1 John 5:20)

⁴ Colossians 1:12-14

⁵ Ephesians 2:2

⁶ John 12:31

⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:4

⁸ John 8:44

⁹ John 3:16, 17

Please notice how many times the word “true” is used: “we may know Him who is true,” “we are in Him who is true,” and “This is the true God.” The Greek word translated “true” means “reality.” Here is reality—it comes from Yahweh, the one true God, the Creator of everything. Through Jesus Christ and the written Word we have an understanding about God and all of life. We are able to see things that are hidden from others. We can discern between the sometimes razor thin line of truth and lies.

By God’s grace and mercy we can begin to understand life as it really is and what it should be. We know, **we know** that the Son of God, he who is the way, the truth and the life¹⁰ has come and given us an understanding. He has opened blind eyes to reality that we may know and love the One who is reality, God Almighty. What a tremendous blessing and privilege!

I wonder if it ever really dawns on us how much we have been given, how much we know and how much we need to enjoy our relationship with God and Christ. If we truly understood all that we have and who we are because of God’s love we will share this truth with the world. There are some things you can only know by revelation. God has revealed to us the meaning and purpose of life by His written Word and His Son Jesus Christ.

Now, finally, the apostle John warns us of the thing that will rob us of fellowship with God and thus rob us of joy.

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.
(1 John 5:21)

Perhaps you are thinking “Idols? Whew! I’m good. I don’t have any pagan religious statues in my house.” That’s not exactly what an idol is. An idol can be more than a wood or stone image. Here is what I mean. There is so much to enjoy in life. And Scripture says that God “gives us richly all things to enjoy.”¹¹ But it also says that we should trust in Him and not in things.

If there is anything in your life that is more important to your significance, to your comfort to your security and to your pleasure more than God, that is your idol. And that idol will continually command you saying “Serve me.” Anything that holds my life, my devotion, anything that attracts me and motivates me more than God is an idol. The ultimate idol is ourselves. If I put myself, my concerns and my pleasure where God ought to be I have made myself an idol.

¹⁰ John 14:6

¹¹ 1 Timothy 6:17

What makes you enthusiastic? To what do you invest your time, talent and money? What do you regard as supremely important? The apostle John says, the Word of God says, "keep yourselves," you do it, you decide, "from idols." Why? John wrote,

that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.
(1 John 1:3, 4)

Amen! Be joyful!