

— 1 John —

Lesson #18 Chapter 5:13-21

In this lesson we'll look at John's final words in his letter to his beloved friends. Just like anyone's last words, John's closing admonitions and encouragements come packed with extra emphasis that call us to take notice. Ask the Lord to help you heed these important truths as you study His Word!

1. Who has John been addressing in his letter? See 1 John 5:13. What was his reason for writing according to verse 13?
  - a. What else do you notice from the following verses that goes along with John's purpose in verse 13? See John 20:31; 1 John 1:2; 2:19, 25; 4:9; 5:11, 20?
2. What comfort do you gain from John's encouragement in 1 John 5:13 when life is hard, when you are tempted and beleaguered by sin, when you feel you are failing the Lord in every area of your life, when you are accused by others, or when you are threatened by false teaching? You don't have to answer all those scenarios specifically, though you're more than welcome to do so if you want! What I would like is for you to consider how John's reassurance sustains and helps you in times of difficulty.
3. In verses 14-15 John continues ministering to the hearts of his readers, which includes us. In verse 14, what *confidence* do we have? What are the parameters of that carte blanche statement?
4. Define *confidence* [Strong's #3954]. John enjoys using this word! What do you learn from how he uses it in 1 John 2:28; 3:21; 4:17; 5:14?

5. How can we be so sure of ourselves when it comes to prayer? See 1 John 3:1-2, 10.
  
6. If we meet the “criteria” of verses 13-14, what do we *know* according to verse 15?
  
7. How should these truths from verses 13-15 impact how you pray? What insights do you gain into God Himself as you think of these verses? If these truths haven’t already prompted you to stop and pray for some of the situations in your life, then please stop right now and take your cares to the Lord for His help and provision.
  
8. What’s the connection between the assurance of answered prayer and salvation (1 John 5:13-15)?
  
9. First John 5:16-17 is admittedly a bit challenging to understand properly. The first rule of Bible study is to consider the *context*, so we’ll start there. In verses 14-15, John has been discussing God’s faithfulness to answer prayer. Now in verses 16-17, he teaches on a real-life example that his dear children have faced. From 1 John 5:16-17 describe the situation John brings up *as it relates to the context of God answering prayer*.
  - a. Next, describe what’s happening with the “brother committing a sin” from verses 16-17. Now describe the struggle that the praying brother (the one who *asks*) finds himself in according to verses 16-17.

- b. Now consider what you know about sin. Explain what happens *when anyone* sins. See Romans 2:5; 5:12; 6:23; James 1:15.
- c. *When anyone* turns to Christ in faith, repenting of their sin, what is the result? See Acts 26:18; Colossians 1:13-14; 1 John 1:9.
- d. Look up the following verses and describe the situation where someone's hard-hearted rejection of the Lord's grace and mercy results in judgment, wrath, and eternal damnation. From these verse references, specifically note *what the person knows* about the Lord, *what the person does* with that knowledge, and what happens *as a result of their rejection* and why: Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:23-29; 2 Peter 2:20-22; 1 John 2:19.
- e. Phew! You are close to unraveling this little Scripture quandary! Your persistence brings such joy to the Lord when you puzzle over His Word and study it so you might know and understand it better! To pull everything together, now try to summarize or restate verses 13-17, adding in what you've discovered from question #9a-d.
- f. Next, you can read Dr. Jack Hughes' short article about these verses, which is attached to this lesson. I think you'll find it helpful, especially after you worked so hard to figure out what John wants you to know and understand when it comes to being sure of your salvation and the rights and privileges that stem from it.
10. In verse 18, what do you learn about the one who is "born of God"? Now look at 1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4.

11. When you read in verse 18 that no one who is born of God sins, what *other* truths must you keep in mind? See 1 John 1:8-10; 3:7-10.
- a. Why would John make such broad statements, like he does in verse 18 and throughout the book, when he's writing to *encourage* his beloved children? As you answer, remember the believers have been struggling with false teachers (1 John 4:1) and "professed" believers who defect from the faith (1 John 2:19).
12. From verse 18, who is the one who *keeps* (ESV *protects*; NIV *keeps him safe*) believers? What else do you learn about our keeping from the following verses? See John 17:12, 15-16; 1 Peter 1:5; Jude 24; Revelation 3:10.
- Just a note: The NKJV misses when it translates this phrase as "he who has been born of God keeps himself." The better reading for the phrase can be found in the NASB, ESV, HCSB, or NIV. In his commentary, D. Edmond Hiebert writes, "In support of the view that the expression refers to Christ is the fact that the keeping or protection of the believer is a task that the Fourth Gospel assigns to Christ."
13. What absolute truth is presented at the end of verse 18 that should encourage every believer? This holds true even though we experience what reality according to verse 19?
14. How can we counter any fears we might have about the power Satan or his demons have to harm us? See Romans 16:20; Ephesians 6:11-17; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9; 1 John 2:13-14.

“The Christian has an active enemy, but he has also a watchful guardian.” ~B. F. Westcott<sup>1</sup>

15. How does John sum up what he wants his dear children to know and understand in 1 John 5:20?
  
16. What further insights do you gain about Him who is *true* from John 1:9; 7:17-18; 17:3; Revelation 15:3; 19:11.
  
17. John lovingly gives one last admonition to his little children. What is it (1 John 5:21)? How does this command naturally follow what John just said about the *true* God?
  
18. What things hang in the balance and are affected when we don't know or abide in the true God or worship Him who is true?

“It is best to take ‘idols’ as ‘anything which occupies the place due to God’ (cf. 1 Thess 1:9). This wider understanding of idolatry fits well with other texts of the New Testament (cf. Eph 5:5; Col 3:5).” ~Daniel Akin<sup>2</sup>

“John was probably not talking about actual idols but about those things that rob Jesus of the worship due him as true God (5:20)” ~Grant Osborne.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay, William. 2002. *The Letters of John and Jude*. 3rd ed. The New Daily Study Bible. Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>2</sup> Akin, Daniel L. 2001. *1, 2, 3 John*. Vol. 38. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>3</sup> Osborne, Grant, Philip W. Comfort. 2007. *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 13: John and 1, 2, and 3 John*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

“Christians must never be lost in the illusions of idolatrous religion; they must never set up in their hearts an idol which will take the place of God; they must keep themselves from the infections of all false faiths; and they can do that only when they walk with Christ.” ~William Barclay<sup>4</sup>

19. What truths from 1 John have impacted you? In what way has your walk with the Lord been fine-tuned by your time in this book?

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<sup>4</sup> Barclay, William. 2002. *The Letters of John and Jude*. 3rd ed. The New Daily Study Bible. Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

## What is the Sin Not Leading to Death in I Jn. 5:16-17?

by Dr. Jack Hughes

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In 1 John 5:16-17, John, in the preceding context, has just finished saying that if we ask anything according to God's will, God will hear us. Then he gives an example of the kind of prayer that God answers in verses 16-17, "16 *If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.*"

This is a much-debated text, and it contains some interesting statements that have puzzled even the best of scholars. It raises many questions, so let's ask some of them, then I will give you the two best answers and why. We don't have time to cover all the views, so to make things clearer, I will only share the two best views.

Questions that arise when you read this text:

1. *What is the sin leading to death?*
2. *How can you avoid committing the sin leading to death?*
3. *What sins are not the sin leading to death?*
4. *What can you do to help a person if they commit a sin not leading to death?*
5. *How can you tell by looking if a person is committing a sin leading to death or not to death?*
6. *Why shouldn't we make request for the person who commits sin leading to death?*
7. *If the wages of any sin is death, then why does he say "there is a sin not leading to death?"*
8. *What does John mean by death, is he talking about spiritual death or physical death, or both?*
9. *What does the text mean when it says, "God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death?"*
10. *Who is John talking about when he speaks of sin leading to death and sin not leading to death? Are both of these groups believers, or unbelievers, or one of each?*

Those are just some of the questions that the text raises. Those questions don't even include all the grammatical and syntactical questions that have been asked of various portions of the text. I will answer those questions for the two best views.

***Here is what I believe is the second-best view:***

1. The second-best view would understand the sin leading to death as basically any sin that is continued in and not repented of. Do you remember the people in I Corinthians 11 who were taking the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner? Some were struck with sickness, while others were killed by God because they would not repent of their sin (I Corinthians 5).

2. You would avoid the sin leading to death by *not* continuing in any sin with an unrepentant heart.
3. The sin not leading to death would be any sin that a person might be struggling with, but which was repentant about and trying to overcome.
4. You can help a person committing a sin not leading to death by praying for them and asking that God would help them overcome their sin, knowing that as you prayed that is the will of God.
5. You could see if a person was committing a sin not leading to death if you saw genuine repentance in their life.
6. If you did see a person committing a sin leading to death, a sin that they were unwilling to repent of, a sin that caused them to be excommunicated from the church, then you would cease to pray for them knowing that they would be out of the body of Christ and under the judgment of God. (This is a weakness of this view, because when someone continues in sin, even if they are disciplined, we should still pray for their repentance and restoration.)
7. When the text says “there is a sin not leading to death” it is talking about any sin that is confessed to God and repented of, so it does not lead to death.
8. When John mentions death, he is talking about physical death, as the consequences of sin and God’s judgment.
9. When the text says “God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death” it means that God will not punish a believer with physical death if they are faithful to confess and repent of their sin.
10. John is talking about believers in both the sin leading to death and the sin not leading to death.

That is one, legitimate view and a doctrine taught in other places of Scripture that I think holds merit, yet the best view for these verses is the one that follows.

***The best view for the passage, which I think answers the questions we raised about the text, explains what John is communicating about prayer and so fits the context best.***

1. The sin leading to death *is the sin of apostasy*. A person professes to be a Christian, hangs around the saints, hears the gospel completely and thoroughly, then rejects Christianity and gets involved in some sort of aberrant religion. This fits the context of John better. John has already talked about apostates in the near context of I John 2:19, “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have

remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.”

2. Again, an apostate is a person who has received full revelation about the gospel and has hung around the church and has received as much revelation and experienced the presence of the saints and seen and heard testimonies about the truth, then rejected Christianity and turned away from the faith.
  - a. Let me show you two texts concerning apostates which I believe will help you see why I think this view is the best, and then we will answer the rest of our questions.
    - i. Hebrews 6:4-6 says, “4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, *it is impossible to renew them again to repentance*, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.”
    - ii. Hebrews 10:23-29, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. 26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. 28* Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?”
  - b. Second Peter 2:20-22 tells us the last state of an apostate is worse than the first, meaning that in the first state, they are unsaved and yet we can have hope that they might become saved. But the last state—that of an apostate—is someone who is unsaved and has no hope because they have rejected Christ after having seen and heard the truth. For the apostate, the last state has become worse for them than the first.
3. You would avoid committing a sin leading to death by repenting of your sins and being saved.
4. The *only* sin leading to death is the sin of unbelief, and specifically, the sin of apostasy.
5. If a person does commit a sin not leading to death, *which is any sin*, you pray for them.

6. You can see a person committing a sin leading to death if you see them reject Christ and depart from the faith.
7. The reason John says, “I do not request you pray for an apostate” is that there is no hope for them. I don’t think John is saying you can’t pray for them, but remember, that in the verse immediately preceding this text, John talks about praying according to God’s will and God answering your prayer. God says there is no hope for an apostate, so by praying for someone caught in the sin of apostasy you would not be praying according to the will of God.
8. The reason John says “there is a sin not leading to death” is that anyone who has not gone apostate, is either saved or might be saved and therefore it is legitimate to pray for them when they sin.
9. When John talks about death, he is talking about spiritual death leading to the second death, the lake of fire. The apostate, though dead in sin, seals his doom by rejecting the truth he has been thoroughly exposed to, which leads to certain spiritual death and eventually the second death, which is the lake of fire.
10. The text says that by praying for the person committing a sin not leading to death, “God will for him give life.” God both forgives Christians and saves unbelievers who have not gone apostate, giving them life.
11. When John talks about sin leading to death, he is talking about unbelievers who are apostates.