

S E S S I O N T W E N T Y - F O U R

The Victory and Privilege of Those Born of God*1 John 5:1-21***I. INTRODUCTION**

A survey of commentators reveals that there is absolutely no consensus concerning the structure and divisions of thought in 1 John 5. Several would see the discussion about *brotherly love* in chapter 4 continuing into the early part of chapter 5, thus grouping the first three or four verses of chapter 5 with the last of chapter 4 (so Zane Hodges, I. H. Marshall, and Hall Harris). While I would agree that verses 1 and 2 of chapter 5 make mention of *brotherly love*, this is overshadowed by the topic of faith in Jesus and being born again. In the Greek text, the phrase ὁ πιστεύων ("he who believes") found in 5:1 and 5:5 indicates to me that 1 John 5:1-5 forms a unit that should not be broken and which is thematically related.

Most commentators will also place verse 13 of chapter five with the following material, thereby establishing a major break between verse 12 and verse 13. I find such a suggestion difficult for two reasons: (1) the topic of eternal life introduced in verse 11 obviously reaches its full conclusion with verse 13 where it appears again; and (2) verse 14 clearly introduces a new subject with the confidence that believers can have in prayer. Hence, I would place a major break between verse 13 and 14, not between verse 12 and 13.

II. THE VICTORY OF FAITH THAT RESULTS IN ETERNAL LIFE (5:1-13)

This section is in harmony with John 20:31, where the apostle had declared, "these things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." For John, it is faith *and nothing else* that secures eternal life.

A. The Victory of Faith That Enables Obedience and Love (5:1-5)

In 1 Jn 4:7-21, John called for the readers to exercise true Christian love with one another. In this section, he indicates that the capacity for such "obedience" stems from the New Birth experience that one receives when he believes in Jesus.

1. True Faith is Vitally Related to Obedience and Love (5:1-3)

- a. John begins with the assertion that what makes one "born of God" is his faith that Jesus is the Messiah.
- b. One who is "born of God," however, is then introduced into a relationship with both God and His other children. Because of this, there is obligation to love both God and His other children.

This inter-relatedness is much more apparent in the Greek text with the play on the word "to beget" (γεννω):

- (1) "born of God" = γεγενναται
- (2) "the Father" = γεννησαντα (Lit., *the One who begat*)
- (3) "the child born" = γεγεννημενον

- c. The point of vs 2 is that love for other children of God stems from the concern that one has to love God and keep His commandments. John is thinking of love as one of the commandments.
- d. In vs 3 "the love of God" is probably an objective genitive, i.e., *love for God*. One's love for God is shown in keeping His commandments, and they are not burdensome (βαρειαι). The use of this term in Mt 23:4,23 suggests that they are not "heavy" in comparison with the commandments of men developed in the Jewish oral law (cf. Mt 11:30).

2. The "New Birth" Makes Obedience Achievable (5:4-5)

The conjunction "For" (Gk ὅτι) at the beginning of vs 4 indicates that vv 4-5 are giving the *reason* why God's commandments are not burdensome. In the Greek text, the words "victory" and "overcome" are related and occur four times. Faith in Jesus as the Messiah (cf. 4:15) makes one a *victor*, i.e., he is no longer in bondage as part of the world system headed by Satan. Col 1:13!!

B. The Witness of God to Eternal Life Through Jesus (5:6-13)

In the preceding paragraph, John spoke of being "born of God" through faith in Jesus. In this section, he discusses the ground of assurance for this (God's witness to Jesus) and the blessed result of *eternal life*.

1. The Nature of the Witness of God (6-8)

- a. Numerous suggestions have been made as to what John means by the witness of "water and blood"

- (1) Ordinances (sacraments) of Christian baptism and the Lord's supper (translate "came with")
- (2) The Incarnation (supposing that John's opponents are docetists—denied the reality of the human body of Jesus)
- (3) Both terms refer to the *death* of Jesus (so Harris)

This view sees a link to Jn 19:34 (though the order is reversed). "Not with water only" would be the claim of the opponents (i.e., at baptism). John argues that Jesus was still the Christ at his death (where the water and the blood was seen). Problem: makes "water" to mean two different things.

- (4) The *baptism* and *death* of Jesus (so Hodges and many). The Christ did not come upon the human Jesus at His baptism and depart before His death. The Christ really died.

- b. Elaboration
John is writing with an OT principle in mind—3 witnesses to confirm (Dt 19:15). In addition to the numerous ways the Spirit bore witness to Jesus as Messiah, the Spirit's confirmation was seen at Jesus' baptism (Jn 1:32-34). Also, the voice of the Father at His baptism (Mt 3:17). There was also the general witness of His death.
 - c. Textual Note
Verse 7 in the Arabic Bible is there by mistake, though it is in the *KJV* as well. Only a few minor mss have this reading. But it is not in A, B, \aleph , 33, 81 or *Byz*. These words were inserted into the early Gk edition of Erasmus, and thus into the TR on which the *KJV* of 1611 was based.
2. The Value of the Witness of God (9-10)
If we believe things that are testified to by men, how much more should we believe what is testified to by God. Since we have the Spirit within us, we have His witness in us as well.
 3. The Result of the Witness of God (11-13)
 - a. In vs 11, John probably means that the *witness* of God described in vv 6-8 concerning Jesus *confirms* (i.e., this witnesses to the fact) that God has given "eternal life" to those who believe Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Since eternal life is in Him, then he who "has the Son" has eternal life. To "have Him" means to be in relationship with Him (cf. 1 Jn 2:23). One either has this relationship or he does not, but it all rests on believing in Him and being born of God (as 5:1 made clear; cf. Jn 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:35-40, 47).
 - b. "These things" (vs 5:13) refers not to the whole epistle (as though this were the primary theme) but to verses 6-12 where the matter of God's witness and eternal life have been discussed. Hence, the epistle should not be seen as *tests* to know if one has eternal life or not. Confirmation: recall 2:25 where John paused to assure his readers that they had eternal life. Point—this truth (about eternal life) was under attack from the false teachers. They had it—they must not be deceived into thinking they did not. This verse does indicate that a believer can have assurance of salvation!

III. THE PRIVILEGE OF THOSE WHO HAVE ETERNAL LIFE (5:14-21)

Beginning with verse 14, the author turns from discussing the issue of the new birth and eternal life to considering the privilege of those who do have eternal life—first in regard to prayer and then in regard to their deliverance from the evil one.

A. Privilege in Regard to Prayer (5:14-17)

These verses should be seen as a unit.¹ The Greek verb for "ask" (αἰτέω) in vv 14-15 (note also the related noun "requests" [αἰτήματα]) is used to form a connection with vs 16: "he shall ask" (fut. tense of αἰτέω). Verses 14-15 lay down the basic principle, while vv 16-17 discuss a particular application.

1. The Confidence to Ask of God in Prayer (5:14-15)

We should note, first of all, the parallel these verses make to 1 Jn 3:21-22. In that case, *asking and receiving* was based on keeping His commandments and doing the things pleasing in His sight. Such a person who lives this way is more apt to "ask according to His will." Cf. Jn 16:23b-24 and 14:13-14 where Jesus encouraged His disciples to ask *in His name*.

2. Praying for Brothers Taken in Sin (5:16-17)

Note that this principle concerns a "brother" who sins, not just anyone. These verses make a distinction between sin unto death and sin not unto death.

a. Various Proposals

- (1) The sin unto death represents very serious sin or perhaps "the unforgiveable sin" of Mt 12:32 that would result in a believer losing "life" (i.e., salvation). See I. H. Marshall for a modified view.²
- (2) Spiritual death is in view: believers can commit "sin not unto death" but only unbelievers can commit the "sin unto death." For Hall Harris, the latter is specifically the apostasy of John's opponents (the unsaved false teachers).
- (3) "Sin unto death" represents serious sin in a believer's life that results in physical death. The principle is found in Prov 10:2; 11:4; 12:28; and 11:19; and NT examples are found in Acts 5:1-11 and 1 Cor 11:27-32.

b. Discussion

Part of loving a brother is to be concerned for his spiritual welfare, knowing that sin is destructive to his life. In cases of sin that does not lead to death, we have a responsibility to pray for them.

B. Privilege in Regard to Deliverance from the Evil One (5:18-20)

That these three verses form a unit is confirmed by the fact that all three begin with the words "We know" (οἶδαμεν) in the Greek text.

¹ We can have a new unit beginning with καὶ as we did in 1 Jn 1:5.

² For Marshall, a Christian can apostasize and finally be lost. The sins are those incompatible with being a Christian—refusal to believe in Jesus, to follow God's commands, and to love one's brothers. [I think he means all of these, not just any one of them].

1. The similarity to 1 Jn 3:9
The similarity of 5:18 to 3:9 suggests that John is talking about the same thing. Once again, it does not seem likely that John is talking about *habitual sin* (present tense verb), and the preceding verses have already established that a "brother" can commit sin unto death. The mention of the world, the devil and being "of God" in the following verse reveal a link in thought to 1 Jn 4:1-6 where false teachers "from the world" were in view. Hence, this verse seems to be concerned with sin *like unto that practiced by the false teachers*.

Hall Harris is probably correct when he writes,

This statement is essentially the same as the one made by the author in 1 John 3:9, "everyone who is fathered by God does not practice sin...and thus he is not able to sin, because he has been fathered by God." There we concluded that the "sin" which the person fathered by God cannot commit is the sin of the opponents with their false christology, and that the author is speaking on a polemic level, in an absolute sense, against the opponents who, as moral indifferentists, are saying that sin is unimportant for the Christian and does not interfere with one's relationship to God.³

2. The Meaning of 5:18b
 - a. "He (Christ) who was born of God keeps him (the believer)" (cf. Jn 17:12)
 - b. "he (the believer) who was born of God keeps himself"
Note: The choice of the final pronoun depends on the resolution of the textual problem. "him" would be αὐτόν (so A* B* B² vg Jerome); but "himself" would be ἑαυτόν (so \aleph A^c 33 81 Byz).
 - c. "he (the believer) who was born of God, He keeps him" (cf. Gk of Jn 17:2)
 - d. "he (the believer) who was born of God keeps it"
In the latter case, the final pronoun refers not to the person but to "the commandment" (3:23; 4:21; 2 Jn 4-6) or "His Word" (2:5). Support: the verb "to keep" (τηρεω) is used 7x in 1 John, and in all other instances refers to the believer keeping God's commandments.
3. The Meaning of 5:18c – "the evil one does not touch him"
The "evil one" is obviously Satan (3:12). The verb "touch" (ἀπτεται) can mean to "take hold of" or to "lay hold of." If this verse has a link to 3:9 and its context, then this is saying that the believer is not "of the devil" and living by the attitude toward sin practiced by the false teachers. Rather, he is "born of God" and has overcome the world—he is no longer part of Satan's domain.

C. Final Admonition Concerning "Idols" (5:21)

FINAL LESSONS FROM OUR STUDY

³ Hall Harris, "Exegesis of 1 John 5:13-21" [<http://www.bible.org/docs/nt/books/1jo/harris/123c-12.htm#TopOfPage>], Nov 15, 2000.