

Series: 1 John
Title: Things We Know
Text: 1 John 5: 18-21
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When a brother or sister departs from assembling with us, never presume that they have committed the sin unto death—that they have rejected Christ. Never presume they have ceased to abide in the doctrine of Christ in truth. Never imagine that they have forsaken assembling with God’s saints altogether.

Instead pray for them that, if it be God’s will, they may keep abiding in Christ under the gospel of Christ with God’s saints in another place.

When brethren depart from us, as long as they commit themselves to another local assembly where Christ has provided his preacher to preach the gospel in spirit and in truth, they have not apostatized from Christ. The apostate is he who rejects Christ, renouncing the doctrine of Christ. He forsakes (abandons) assembling with God’s saints under the gospel entirely. He either abides alone without assembling anywhere or he unites with those who preach a false gospel which mixes law and grace.

I want this to be a message that we can refer to anytime we are faced with the heartbreaking news that a professing brother or sister has departed from us. When such a thing happens it breaks our heart. It fills us with all sorts of questions. True believers examine ourselves because God’s grace makes us willing to take the blame. We know what sinners we are. Therefore, God’s child is more willing to point the finger at himself rather than at departing brethren.

When the Lord told his apostles that one of them would betray him, “*they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?*” (Mt 26: 22) Knowing what sinners they were, they knew they were capable of doing so. Therefore, they did not point the finger at their brethren. Each one pointed the finger at himself, “Lord, is it I?” The actual betrayer was last to do so. He copied them. But they meant it.

But brethren, if any *can* depart where Christ is preached in truth, without moving to another assembly where the truth is proclaimed, the problem is not in God’s people but in the heart of those who depart. I want this to be a message that answers our questions by declaring the heart of the matter.

When professing believers depart where the gospel is preached in truth, without going to another true local assembly, the circumstances may differ from case to case, but the underlying principle is always the same. Throughout this 1st epistle, John declares that underlying, fundamental principle. Speaking by the Spirit of God, John declares plainly why some can forsake Christ and why others cannot commit the sin unto death.

The Spirit of God moved the apostle John to assure God’s children that we can never commit the sin unto death. As I read our text, take note of the three times John says, “*We know.*” They will make up our divisions.

First, we know that those born of God do not sin—**1 John 5: 18: WE KNOW that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.**

Secondly, we know that we are children of God and the world lies in wickedness—**1 John 5: 19: And WE KNOW that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.**

Thirdly, we know all things because Christ is our teacher—**1 John 5: 20: And WE KNOW that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may KNOW HIM that is true, and WE ARE IN HIM THAT IS TRUE, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.**

Lastly, we will hear the application—**1 John 5: 21: Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.**

Proposition: Children born of God have an unction from the Holy One and know all things because we are taught of God.

WHOSOEVER IS BORN OF GOD SINNETH NOT

1 John 5: 18: WE KNOW that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

“We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not.” This is not vain presumption nor speculation.

In Adam we died. Therefore, all who are unregenerate, sin. All we could do is sin. And now that we are regenerated by the Holy Spirit, we know that in our flesh dwells no good thing. Our flesh is sin and only produces sin. But being born of God, sin no longer has dominion over us: not the guilt of sin nor the reigning power of sin. Those born of God delight in the law of God after the inward man. We love what God loves and hate what God hates. Therefore, we hate sin and love righteousness. God creates a new walk in his child so that sin no longer dominates our walk.

But there is far greater news here! Before the law and in our new nature, we cannot commit sin. We cannot commit any sin. That includes the sin unto death, which is, apostatizing from Christ Jesus the Lord.

Before the law of God, Christ has put away our sin so that we have no sin. God remembers our sin no more. We are righteous in Christ Jesus our Righteousness. He that does righteousness, that is, believes on Christ, is righteous even as Christ is righteous.

1 John 3: 7: Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

In our new nature, being born of Christ's incorruptible seed, with his seed remaining in us, our new nature is righteous and holy. In our new man, we cannot commit sin, including the sin unto death.

1 John 3: 9: Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

We cannot cease believing on Christ and in Christ is no sin. By his seed remaining in us, we cannot cease abiding in the doctrine of Christ. By the keeping grace of God, we cannot cease assembling together with God's saints under the preaching of Christ in spirit and in truth. Since these things are how we love the brethren, we cannot cease loving our brethren.

John said, *“Hereby we know that we love the brethren, when we love God and keep his commandments.”* God's commandments are that we believe on Christ and love our brethren. God commands us to never cease believing on Christ. God commands us to never cease assembling together under the gospel of Christ. We love our brethren by believing on Christ and abiding in him. Those born of God cannot sin by ceasing to believe on Christ and abide in him.

One reason it hurts me when professing believers walk away is because I see how you have laid down your lives, sacrificing dearly, so that everyone in this place can have the gospel preached to them. It hurts that that can mean so little. Even more, it hurts that anyone who knows anything at all about their sinfulness would be willing to walk away from the gospel of Christ our Redeemer!

“But he that is begotten of God keepeth himself.” He that is begotten of God is kept by God. God shall finish the work he has begun in his child.

Philippians 1:6: Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

Therefore, by God’s keeping grace, he makes us keep ourselves. As Paul told Timothy, we *“keep ourselves pure”*—not being partakers of other men’s sins but bathing in the sin-cleansing fountain of Christ’s precious blood (1 Tim 5:22). As Jude says we *“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life”* (Ju 1:21) Christ said that we are to abide in him for without him we can do nothing. Therefore, by Christ’s keeping hand, we keep ourselves abiding in him. As James exhorts we *“keep ourselves unspotted from the world”* (Ja 1:27). As the Psalmist said, *“I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me”* (Ps 39:1). As Solomon exhorts, *“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life”* (Pr 4:2). Please do not misunderstand me. Apart from Christ we can do nothing. But by Christ’s keeping grace, we do these things by keeping ourselves in Christ’s hand, under his gospel, assembling with our brethren.

“And the wicked one toucheth us not.” Christ may permit the devil to sift us as he did Peter. We may depart from assembling with our brethren and be set on returning to our old life. We may do so for some time. But the devil cannot touch us so as to make us fall away. Christ prays for us that our faith fails not. In Christ, by Christ putting away our sins, our victorious Redeemer has crushed the devils head. In Christ we are more than conquerors!

1 John 2: 14...I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

WE KNOW THAT WE ARE OF GOD

1 John 5: 19: *And WE KNOW that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.*

John has been declaring the manifest difference between believers who are born of God and children of the devil. So he says here, *“We know that we are of God, and the world that lieth in wickedness.”*

1 John 3: 10: In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

Believers cannot cease believing on Christ—that is what John means by *“doing righteousness.”* And because we cannot cease believing on Christ we cannot cease loving our brethren. It is by believing on Christ that we love one another. It is by providing one another with the gospel of Christ that we love one another. Love believes on Christ and does all to help brethren believe on Christ and continue in him. But a natural man cannot believe on Christ therefore he cannot love the brethren. Therefore, *we know the whole world lieth in wickedness.*

By Christ abiding in us, we cannot hear lies spoken against our Savior. But the world, who does not have Christ abiding in them cannot hear anything but the lies of the world.

1 John 4: 4: Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. 5: They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. 6: We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

Knowing this is true, we know this is what God works in his people. Never look at men to discern what God does or does not do in his people. Hear the word of God alone to discern what God does in his people. Men like to imagine they are the exception to how God saves. There are no exceptions. God saves the way God declares in his word. If it is not according to the word of God it is not true.

When it comes to a believer who departs from a local church, the apostle John says that if he is of us, he will, no doubt, continue with us. Christ will either correct him so that he returns or Christ will plant him in another assembly where the gospel is preached in truth. It may take time. He may commit great error. But no matter how a believer has to deny himself, no matter what suffering it causes him, by God keeping him he shall follow Christ. In that case, he has not apostatized from Christ.

Brethren, that is our prayer. Pray for any and all brethren if any depart this place. Pray for them that this might be the case with them. Pray for them that God might keep them abiding in Christ and keep them under the gospel in truth.

One born of God, one taught by God in spirit and in truth, one moved and motivated by God, cannot settle for a place where works are mingled with grace. He may have to sell his house and move. But he cannot sit under a false preacher preaching lies against his Savior, mixing law and grace. Christ does not provide preachers for his church who teach lies. If law is mixed with grace then it ceases to be grace. Believers born of God know that. Christ said, *"I will give you pastors after mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding"* (Jer 3:15). That is prophecy! Christ fulfills all prophecy. Concerning false preachers who mix law and grace, Christ said, *"Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD."* (Jer 23: 32)

Those born of God cannot commit the sin unto death because Christ's incorruptible seed abides in us. God keeps us. Therefore, we keep ourselves in Christ, under his gospel, together with true brethren. Apostates are those who depart and never commit themselves to a local body of believers where Christ has established the gospel in spirit and in truth. Or they unite with will-worshippers believing and promoting a false gospel. They have apostatized from Christ. But make no mistake, they were never born of God. They were never *"of us."*

1 John 2: 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. 20: But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things...27: But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

WE KNOW THE SON OF GOD IS COME

1 John 5: 20: And WE KNOW that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may KNOW HIM that is true, and WE ARE IN HIM THAT IS TRUE, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

By the unction we have from Christ, we know that it is Christ who has come and given us an understanding so that we know him that is true. And we are in him that is true. We are in God's Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God. He is eternal life.

"We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true." The first hour we were made to hear the gospel was a trial. Some of you endured a great trial of afflictions as you received opposition from loved ones. But in that trial, Christ came and gave you an understanding that you might know him that is true. Therefore, Christ made you pass the test.

As we walk through the life of faith, God gives us more trials. Some are tests that God gives through heresies and divisions. The apostle Paul said, *"For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you."* (1Co 11:19)

When divisions occur, it is not a matter of siding with one brother against another. It is a matter of standing with Christ on the side of truth. When the apostle John warned his brethren, calling certain men by name, the brethren that he warned had to believe John to be saved from the error of men like Diotrephes. Those who did not believe John were led away with the error of the wicked and proved themselves apostate. But it was not merely about taking sides with John against Diotrephes. It was about standing with Christ, standing for the truth as it is revealed in God's word.

Take for instance, if a division is due to a brother's character. Knowing that scripture teaches that character is as important as the gospel a man believes and/or speaks, though I love him, though he may be a true brother, if he has committed an error in judgment, I must stand with Christ on the side of truth. We must stand with whatever God declares to be right in his word. It is not about taking sides with one brother against another brother. It is not about questioning if one is a brother—judge nothing before the time. It is about standing for the truth.

But when God gives a trial, there is no way of removing yourself from it. There is no neutrality. How we respond puts us either on Christ's side or we ourselves make an error in judgment siding against the Truth. But there is no neutrality from the trial God gives—*"For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you."* (1Co 11:19)

But if we are Christ's, as he did in the first hour, Christ will come and give us an understanding, that we may know Christ that is true. *"We know"* only because Christ is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true. Brethren, did you know the truth when you first came to Christ? Yes, because *"ye have an unction from the Holy One and ye know all things."*

In every trial since, if we committed an error in judgment, we were only trying to save our life rather than denying ourselves. That is what the apostle Peter was doing when he told the Lord not go to the cross. But Christ will make us deny ourselves that we might stand with him, as he did the apostle Peter. We may try to save ourselves suffering rather than taking up our cross and suffering for Christ's sake. But Christ will come and give us an understanding and make us willing to suffer for his sake. We may follow our own wisdom into error but Christ will come and give us an understanding and turn us and make us follow Christ. That is what Christ did to the apostle Peter. It may be as painful as it was when Christ first came and gave us an understanding. But he will continue to do so to them that are his. If we err, he will bring the believer to side with Christ in truth turning us from any and all effort we might make to save ourselves suffering.

It is because ***"we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."*** This is why we are kept and the wicked one cannot touch us—*"we are in God who is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ."* This is why we can never go after lies. This one we are in is *"the true God."* This is why a child of God can never commit the sin unto death. This one we are in is *"eternal life."*

From the beginning of this epistle to these last verses, the Spirit of God has been declaring through John that Christ shall not lose one for whom he died. He bought us with his precious blood. Our Redeemer shall not allow one for whom he died commit the sin unto death. This is the difference between the children of God and the children of the devil. Christ will keep us walking in the Truth. Christ will keep us walking in the Light. Christ said, "*He that doeth truth cometh to the Light that his deeds might be manifest that they are wrought in God*" or worked by God. When Christ has spoken to us prisoners of hope, saying, "Show yourselves", he makes us come to Christ the Light. From that day forward he keeps us in Christ the Light. The unction we have from him teaches us to abide in him. "*We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.*"

APPLICATION

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

An idol is anything that comes between us and Christ. An idol is anything that makes us forsake the gospel that Christ himself has provided us. That Christ himself is! An idol is anything that makes us forsake our brethren that Christ has given us. Whatever that person or thing is, it has become an idol to us. *Little children, keep yourselves from idols!*

Brethren, pray for one another that God will keep us from idols and teach us to keep ourselves from idols. Pray for brethren overtaken in a fault. Brethren, keep yourselves from idols by keeping yourselves in Christ's hand.

Amen!