

1 John 5 • The Test of Truth

Introduction

The second half of 1 John – the last 3 chapters – is a 3-part sermon dealing with how to test for true sonship. This is seen by the repeated use of the phrase “born of God” found throughout this section. His first sermon point in chapter 3 is that a true child of God will prove their spiritual birth by being obedient to God’s Word. In chapter 4 the second point is that a true child of God proves it by their love. And this, his final point, is that it’s proved by the test of truth. The repeated phrase John uses in this last chapter is “we know”. What is it that true children of God “know” which qualifies the authenticity of their relationship to God through Christ?

¹Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.

²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. ³For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. ⁴For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

⁵Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

[Read v.1-5]

Q: Do you think that most people in the world know what a Christian is or how they can become a Christian?

A: Although they may have their own ideas or labels, it's almost certain that no one understands what a Christian is according to biblical standards.

Q: What do you suppose are the characteristics the world identifies in their own false standard of what a Christian is?

A: It's probably things which depend on the energy of the flesh such as religious works or good intentions.

Q: But how does God define it?

A: A Christian is someone who is born again.

Point: *It is faith in the whole and complete work of Christ which transforms a child of disobedience into a child of God.*

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:12-13

In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

James 1:18

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Peter 1:3

Q: John uses the phrase “born of God” seven times in this epistle. How does each one describe a kind of “birthmark” for believers?

1. 2:29 – They practice righteousness.
2. 3:9 – They do not practice sin. (“Born again” is used twice in this verse.)
3. 4:7 – They love one another.
4. 5:1 – They believe Jesus is the Messiah.
5. 5:4 – They overcome the world.
6. 5:18 – They keep themselves from Satan.

Application: How might these characteristics speak to the fact that a Christian is proved by doing much more than merely believing in something? [Answer: It's putting it into practice.]

Q: How does John here emphasize that the true test of sonship is found in one's love, obedience, and truth?

1. It begins with love. (v.1-2) If we have God as our Father and love Him, then we'll love His other children.
2. This love leads to obedience. (v.3) We keep His commandments, forsaking the ways of the world for His ways alone.
3. Christians are overcomers of the devil, the world, and false teachers. (v.4-5) By faith in God's Word – the truth – true children prove they love not the world but God alone.

Sermon Point #1: True children of God know what a Christian is.

[Read v.6-13]

⁶This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷For there are three that testify: ⁸the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. ⁹If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. ¹⁰The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. ¹¹And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹²He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

¹³These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Q: What appears to be the prerequisite for a sinner to be saved and born into God's family?

A: They must believe that Jesus is the Messiah and that He died for their sins.

Q: What is John's point in using the phrase "the water and the blood"? What is he trying to prove?

A: The most prominent false teaching of John's day was the false notion that Jesus was merely a man and that "the Christ" came upon Jesus at His baptism and then left Him when He died on the cross. This would actually mean that we have no Savior at all. John witnessed that our Savior Jesus Christ was declared to be the Son of God at His baptism (Jn. 1:35-36; Mat. 3:16) and proved to be the Son of God at the cross. (Jn. 8:28; 12:28-33). The symbolism also reminds us of the brazen altar (the blood) and the laver (the water of the Word) in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple.

Q: How is God witnessing to the entire world that Jesus is His Son?

A: By the Spirit, the Word (water), and the cross (blood).

Q: So what is the end result of rejecting this witness?

A: By instead accepting the witness of men instead of the witness of God, they make God a liar. (v.10)

Q: How do v.11-13 summarize the assurance we have in Christ?

A: God has witnessed to the fact that we have eternal life in Christ. If we believe God's witness, then we have this life within us.

Point: Christian assurance is not a matter of "working up" religious emotions, but simply a matter of taking God at His Word.

Sermon Point #2: True children of God know who Jesus is.

¹⁴This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

¹⁶If 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. ¹⁷All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.

¹⁸We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. ¹⁹We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

²⁰And we know 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, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

²¹Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

[Read v.14-17]

Q: When John touched on this previously in v.3:22, what was the precondition he established?

A: "...because we keep His commandments..." The underlying assumption is that we're obedient to begin with.

Point: When we're obedient to His Word, we find ourselves in the middle of His will, which in turn gives us "the confidence" to "ask anything according to His will".

Q: This issue of NOT praying for someone – are there any biblical examples of when believers were commanded NOT to pray for someone?

A: Jeremiah was told not to pray for rebellious Jews. (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). In Ezekiel, rebellion was so bad that God pointed out that not even the most righteous men in history – Daniel, Noah, and Job – could have prayed for the rebellious Jews and saved them. (Ez. 14:14, 20) (NOTE: The sin of rebellion is the most common reason peoples and nations were judged to the point of death by God in the Old Testament.)

Point: The "sin leading to death" is not the unpardonable sin, but a deliberate sin in defiance of the Word of God, something that other believers can see and recognize as rebellion. It's not the temporary rebellion of the Prodigal Son, but the working against God as in all the examples of rebellion throughout the Bible.

Application: Prayer is not a way of overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness. How does our prayer life, like the rest of our Christian walk, conform to His will and Word? How is it to be just as discerning as who we associate with, what teachings we accept/reject, etc.?

Sermon Point #3: True children of God know how to pray with confidence.

[Read v.18-19]

Q: If everyone is a sinner, then how is it possible that "no one who is born of God sins"?

A: The Greek verb in v.18 is better understood when translated "does not practice sin". It's speaking of a lifestyle.

Application: Christians must live with their eyes wide open to the fact that they live **IN** the world, but being born again they no longer live **OF** the world.

Sermon Point #4: True children of God know how a Christian acts.

[Read v.20-21]

Q: How do we know that the Spirit and the Word always agree?

A: Because back in v.6 it's stated that "the Spirit is truth", and in John 17:17 that God's Word is truth.

Point: The witness of the Spirit within the heart will never contradict the words of the Spirit in the Bible.

Q: How is John here challenging the false teaching of his day that only those belonging to a special "inner circle" could understand the spiritual?

A: John affirms that **ANY** true believer can know God's truth.

Point: Seminary and education can definitely provide a boost to one's knowledge but it is not a prerequisite. This is because ultimately every Word of God must not be simply understood intellectually, but put into practice.

Q: How does an idol make a dramatic contrast to the One True God?

A: Idols are false gods, the very opposite expression of truth where God is concerned. It is **MAN'S** concept of god.

Point: God made mankind in **HIS** image, but in rejecting the truth turn around and make gods in their **OWN** image.

Sermon Point #5: True children of God know the truth.

Overall Application

Here is how you can absolutely know whether or not someone is a true child of God:

- They know what a Christian is. (v.1-5)
- They know who Jesus is. (v.6-13)
- They know how to pray with confidence. (v.14-17)
- They know how a Christian acts. (v.18-19)
- They know the truth. (v.20-21)

When someone fails one or more of these tests of the truth, it doesn't automatically mean we know for sure they **AREN'T** a true child of God, it only means we can't positively say for sure. It provides us with the areas of discipleship which we should address on their behalf to complete the work of Christ in their life.