



FELLOWSHIP IN FAITH - 1 JOHN 5

INTRODUCTION

Up to this point, John's letter has clearly shown the difference between a believer and non-believer. John has presented his evidence through a series of contrasts so readers can evaluate both the positive and negative sides of each issue and be assured that they know and abide in Jesus Christ. Following are the six main contrasts presented by John and a brief explanation of their significance.

1. Believers walk in the light. Non-believers walk in darkness. (1 John 1:5 - 2:11)

Only those who walk in the light can fellowship with God because God is light.

2. Believers are spiritual. Non-believers are worldly. (1 John 2:12-17)

Believers are called to be separate from the world and they have overcome the evil of the world through Jesus Christ.

3. Believers acknowledge Christ. Non-believers deny Jesus Christ. (1 John 2:18-28)

Believers know the truth and abide in God and in His Son Jesus.

4. Believers live in righteousness. Non-believers live in sin. (1 John 2:29-3:24)

Assurance of salvation comes from living a righteous life and following Jesus' example of love.

5. Believers have the Spirit of God. Non-believers have the spirit of the antichrist. (1 John 4:1-6)

Those who have the Spirit of God discern the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

6. Believers love. Non-believers live in fear and hate. (1 John 4:7-21)

When believers love one another, they have confidence in their position in Christ.

Having assured his readers of the genuineness of their salvation and position in Christ, John presents the encouraging reality of victory in Jesus through faith. It is through faith that fellowship is enabled to continue.

As believers practice their faith (as presented by John in the first four chapters) they enjoy true fellowship and continually experience victory over the world, a victory which has already been won by Jesus Christ (John 16:33).

In the last paragraphs of his epistle, John ties together all the truth which he has presented. He closes his arguments with a challenge and with strong encouragement to continue in the faith. He shows that Christian faith is powerful, true, based upon sure knowledge, and beneficially effectual in our everyday lives.

OUTLINE OF 1 JOHN 5

- I. Faith Overcomes The World - 1 John 5:1-5
- II. Faith Believers God's Witness - 1 John 5:6-13
- III. Faith Has Confidence - 1 John 5:14-20
- IV. Faith Puts God First - 1 John 5:21

I. Faith Overcomes the World - 1 John 5:1-5 and Hebrews 11

Faith is not a passive word. Faith is not just intellectual belief or heart belief; rather faith is a practice. The power of faith is experienced only through the practice of faith. That is a truth which is illustrated over and over again in Hebrews chapter eleven, sometimes referred to as the "Hall of Fame of the Faithful." In that chapter, we learn that faith is the foundation of everything we hope for, and it is the evidence or proof of our belief, which is unseen. Abel proved his faith by the sacrifice which he offered to God. Noah proved his faith by building the ark. Abraham proved his faith by following God even when he didn't know where God was taking him. Moses proved his faith by turning his back on all the riches of Egypt, choosing rather to endure ill treatment with the people of God. The list goes on and on of faithful people who practiced what they believed. How do you practice what you believe? How is your faith made visible in your life?

A. Root of Faith - 1 John 5:1-2a

The root of faith is belief in Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah who came to take away the sin of the world. By believing, one is born again, spiritually joined to God and interacts with God who is love (1 John 4:8 and 4:16). This new birth through faith in Christ is the reason that Christians love one another.

Christians don't love others because they find them lovable. Christians have the power to love even those who are unlovable. They love because they are brothers and sisters in Christ, having the same Father, who is God. Love for God and love for brothers and sisters in Christ are inseparable. Love for the Father necessarily involves love for His children.

B. Fruit of Faith - 1 John 5:2b-5

1. Obedience to God - 5:2b-3a

In 1 John 3:18, John called his readers to love one another not merely in *word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth*. Now he goes further to say that love for one another is expressed through love for God and keeping His commandments. In 1 John 3:22-23, John has already stated that keeping God's commandments consists of belief in Jesus Christ and love for one another. A Christian who obeys God's commandments is showing love for God and also love for others. Do you show love for God and others through obedience to His word?

2. Victory - 5:3b-5

a. Through commandments which are not burdensome - 5:3b

Keeping God's commandments is not meant to be burdensome. God's commandments are not designed to weigh us down or to cause us grief. They are designed to enable us to live the victorious life in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and My burden is light* (Matthew 11:29). Obedience to God is not stressful and will not wear you out. Obedience to God will give you rest for your soul. What a wonderful promise!

b. Through new birth - 5:4a

Additionally, we can be assured of victory because, as children of God, His power within us works to overcome the world. Notice that 1 John 5:4 John does not say "whoever" *is born of God overcomes the world* but *whatever is born of God overcomes the world*. It is not we, ourselves, but our new birth from God which overcomes and wins the victory for us.

c. Over the world - 5:4b-5

We have already seen that the world stands in opposition to God. All that is in the world — *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life* — are not from God but from the world (1 John 2:15-17). Believers experience victory over those things through faith. Even more, it is a victory which has already been accomplished. *And*

this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith (1 John 5:4).

d. Through Jesus Christ - 5:5b

Our victory was actually won when we put our faith in Jesus Christ. When we abide in Christ and He abides in us (1 John 2:24-28), we share His victory. Jesus said, *be of good cheer, I have overcome the world* (John 16:33). The battle has been fought and the enemy has been defeated! (See Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Romans 8:31-37; 2 Corinthians 2:14; Revelation 3:21 and 12:11.) Remember that John has already written that believers are overcomers because *He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world* (1 John 4:4). The natural conclusion, which John reaches in verse 5, is that those who lead lives of victory over the world are those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. If you have placed your faith in Christ and practice that faith in your life (and the two must go together), then your life will be one of victory over the temptations of the world! Are you experiencing this victory in your life?

II. Faith Believes God's Witness - 1 John 5:6-13

Jesus, the object of our faith, is the one who *came by water and blood*. It is through both the water and the blood which God bears witness to His Son Jesus Christ. Both the water and the blood point to historical facts in the life of Christ while He was here on earth. They are still witnesses for Him today. "They must not be interpreted symbolically, but understood of something so real and powerful, as that by them God's testimony is given to believers and eternal life assured to them." (Word Studies in the New Testament, Marvin R. Vincent) Jesus came with the water of baptism and with the blood of redemption.

A. Witness of the Water - 1 John 5:6

The *water* refers to the water of Jesus' baptism at the beginning of His public ministry (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-34). All four gospels give the account of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River when the dove descended from heaven and the voice of God testified to Jesus being His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased.

B. Witness of the Blood - 1 John 5:6

The *blood* refers to Jesus' death on the cross which bought eternal redemption for those who believe. This was the purpose of God in sending His Son into the world. *We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sin, according to the riches of His grace* (Ephesians 1:7 — See also Hebrews 9:11-14 and 12:24).

C. Necessity of Both Water and Blood -
1 John 5:6

In the second part of verse 6, John stresses that Jesus did not come by water only but by the water and the blood. This is most likely in answer to the false teachers, particularly the Cerinthian Gnostics (followers of Cerinthus) who taught that Jesus' divinity descended upon Him at His baptism, but left Him before the crucifixion. Their contention was that it was merely the human Jesus who died and not the divine Christ, the Son of God. According to their belief, Christ had come by water but not by the blood. This teaching is contrary to the basic doctrine of atonement which is reconciliation between God and man through the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. (See Luke 24:44-47; Romans 3:21-25; 1 John 4:10.)

Note: Some commentators believe this passage may also allude to the blood and water of John 19:34 when, after the crucifixion, Jesus' side was pierced with a spear and blood and water came out.

D. Witness of the Spirit - 1 John 5:8

The Spirit is the present witness and can be believed because the Spirit is truth. John has said, *You have an anointing* (the word of God comprehended in the heart and mind through the power of the Holy Spirit) *from the Holy One, and you know all things* (1 John 2:20). God has given His word of truth in the Holy Bible. He has also given all believers the Holy Spirit which is the *Spirit of truth* (John 15:26 and 16:13) to guide believers into all the truth, glorify Christ, bear witness, and disclose the truth (John 15:26 and 16:13-14). Therefore, the Holy Spirit is a present witness within all believers, confirming the message of Scripture and convincing us that the baptism and death of Jesus testify to His being the Messiah, the Son of God.

The Spirit also bears witness through the word of God written down by the Old Testament writers and the prophets who spoke in His name, including John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. Therefore, the Spirit witnessed in the past, even before the coming of Jesus, and continues to witness today, establishing the validity of all historical witnesses.

E. Agreement of the Witnesses - 1 John 5:8

1 John 5:7 in the New King James Version, *For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one*, is omitted in most versions of the Bible. It is quite certain that these words were not part of the original text because they are not found in any Greek manuscripts prior to the fourteenth century. Neither are they quoted by scholarly writers prior to the middle of the fifth century. Early

Bible scholars took the passage in its original form to be symbolic of the Trinity, and this interpretation may have been originally written in as a marginal note and later inadvertently added to the text.

The three witnesses are the Spirit, the water, and the blood. They agree as one that Jesus is the Son of God (reference back to verse 5). One may not pick and choose, but must accept the witness of all three as they all center upon one truth.

F. Certainty of God's Witness - 1 John 5:9-13

1. Witness concerning His Son - 5:9-10

When the testimony of men is corroborated, it is accepted. How much more then should we accept the greater witness of God! The witness of God is that *He has testified of His Son*. Therefore, it follows that anyone who believes that Jesus is the Son of God accepts God's witness and anyone who does not believe in the Son of God is calling God a liar. It is impossible to say you believe in God and not believe what God has said. A person who says he believes in God and rejects Jesus as His Son is calling God a liar. It is imperative that one's beliefs be wholly consistent with God's word. To reject any part of God's testimony concerning His Son is to bring judgment upon oneself.

2. Witness concerning eternal life - 5:11-13

Anyone who rejects Jesus as the Son of God also rejects the eternal life which God has given through Him. There is no access to eternal life other than through God's Son: *This life is in His Son* (1 John 5:11). *He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life* (1 John 5:12, NASB). Are you confident that you possess eternal life because you have believed God's testimony concerning His Son Jesus Christ and put your faith in Him? John has written this letter for the express purpose that you may know for sure that eternal life is yours right now. Eternal life is a present reality of fellowship in the light, in Christ, in love, in truth, and in faith. It is a fellowship which will be perfected and endure forever. Praise God!

III. Faith Has Confidence - 1 John 5:14-20

Because believers have assurance of eternal life, we can have confidence before God. Christianity is based upon certainty. The Bible was given so that we may *know the things that have been freely given to us by God* (1 Corinthians 2:12). The Holy Spirit has been given to teach us, to guide us, and to apply the truths of Scripture to our lives. Our faith is not blind. It is not just based upon hope and longing. Christian faith is based upon knowledge. John has picked up his pen and written this letter because he knows that his

readers know the truth (1 John 2:21). Unfortunately they have been confused and led astray because they have forgotten that they know.

All believers can and do know the truth. John has already made it clear that believers can know that *we know Him, if we keep His commandments* (1 John 2:3). *We know that when He (Christ) is revealed, we shall be like Him* (1 John 3:2). *We know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin* (3:5). *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren* (3:14). *We know love, because He laid down His life for us* (3:16). We know that we are of the truth when we love one another *in deed and in truth* (3:18-19). *We know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us* (3:24 and 4:13). We know the Spirit of God and how to distinguish His Spirit, *the spirit of truth*, from *the spirit of error* (1 John 4:2-6). We know we are truly loving one another *when we love God and keep His commandments* (1 John 5:2). John now closes his letter by reminding his readers of five more very important things that all believers can know. We can know that God hears us, He answers our prayers, He sends help in time of need, He has given us a great hope, and He has given us ability to understand the truth.

A. We Know God Hears When We Ask -
1 John 5:14

A believer who approaches God in prayer, in accordance with His will, can have confidence that God hears. John has already stated that keeping His commandments and doing those things which are pleasing in His sight are our assurance that we will receive whatever we ask from Him (1 John 3:22). Now he adds that we must also *ask according to His will*. Jesus gave us the example when He taught His disciples to pray, *Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6:10, NASB). He also set the example for us in His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane: *Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done* (Luke 22:42). (Also compare Matthew 26:42 and Mark 14:36.) As we yield ourselves to God and ask according to His will, God delights to accomplish His will through us.

How are we to know that we are truly asking in accordance with God's will? As we come into His presence, we must focus our thoughts upon Him. Jesus taught His disciples to begin their prayer, *Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name* (Matthew 6:9, NASB). As we draw together all of our scattered, straying thoughts and turn them upon Him, we quiet our spirits before Him in worship and the focus of our desire becomes His will. Then the Holy Spirit is free to move within us and intercede for us as Paul describes in Romans 8:26-27. When you pray, do you take time

to contemplate the greatness of God and His goodness in your life?

Do you begin prayer with a time of praise and thanksgiving to God for who He is? Do not rush to ask of God until you have brought your own will into line with His. For a beautiful example of humble prayer which honors God and recognizes His blessings, read Jacob's prayer in Genesis 32:9-12.

B. We Know He Answers Our Prayers -
1 John 5:15-17

1. Confidence in prayer - 5:15

Since we know that God hears us when we pray in His will, we can also be assured that we already possess whatever we ask. When John says *We know that we have the petitions*, he uses the Greek present tense which expresses possession now, and not sometime in the future.

2. Challenge to pray - 5:16-17

Having given an assurance of answered prayer, John goes on to give a challenge to pray for others. If a Christian becomes aware of another Christian committing *a sin which does not lead to death*, he is to pray for that one and God *will give him life*. (See James 5:20 for a similar thought.)

a. Sin leading to death - 5:16

John does not encourage prayer for those who are committing *sin leading to death*. In his mention of *sin leading to death*, John was most certainly thinking of the antichrists described in 1 John 2:18-19, those who had been a part of the church but had left. They were refusing to admit and confess their sin (1 John 1:18-19), refusing to confess Jesus as the Christ, God's own Son (1 John 2:22), and refusing to love their brothers (1 John 3:15). Sin leading to death would therefore be sin which obstructs the bond of Christian fellowship. It is the same kind of sin Numbers 15:30-31 describes as presumptuous sin (or defiant sin, NASB). It cuts a person off from God's people because *that one brings reproach on the Lord*. (The NASB says *that one is blaspheming the Lord*.) He or she has despised the word of the Lord, and broken His commandment. It is the sin of unbelief.

b. Sin not leading to death - 5:16-17

The most common sin for a Christian is that which is committed unintentionally when a person is overcome by temptation. Even though we may love God and believe in Jesus Christ, we are still sinners. All wrongdoing is sin, even if we didn't mean to do it. *If we say that*

we have not sinned, we make Him (God) a liar (1 John 1:10). We desperately need one another's prayers so we may live righteous lives in this evil world. Who can you pray for this week? Who will you ask to pray for you?

C. We Know He Sends Help in Time of Need -
I John 5:18

John again repeats his statement from 1 John 3:6 and 9, *Whoever has been born of God does not sin*. I. Howard Marshall in The Epistles of John, takes this as both a promise and a demand. The promise is that the true nature of the child of God is ultimately sinless. Certainly all Christians look forward to the day when Christ is revealed and we shall *see Him as He is and be like Him* (1 John 3:2).

Sinlessness is also a demand because the one who has been begotten of God (that is Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God) keeps us safe, and satan cannot touch us. When trials and temptations come, Jesus is our safeguard and our protection. He said, *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand* (John 10:27-28). Our security is in Jesus Christ. He is our refuge who keeps us safe from the wiles of satan.

D. We Know the Hope Which is Ours -
1 John 5:19

We know that the world lies in the power of the wicked one, but believers are separate from the world (1 John 2:15) and have overcome the world through Jesus Christ (1 John 4:4) because we are the children of God. This is our anchor of hope in a world which is evil and passing away (1 John 2:17).

E. We Know We Have an Understanding of the
Truth - 1 John 5:20

Jesus Christ came to earth as a human being in order to convey to those who believe in Him an understanding which permits us to know God. Jesus Christ, the Son of God is the revelation of God. He is *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God...* (2 Corinthians 4:6) He is the truth revealed, and those who accept His truth come to know God. The Father cannot be known except through the Son. The two cannot be separated (1 John 2:23).

IV. Faith Puts God First - 1 John 5:21

John's final appeal in his letter is, *Little children, keep yourselves from idols*. He has set the truth before us plainly and with loving encouragement. The God of the universe loves us and has sent His only begotten Son into the world to communicate His love to us through the giving of truth and life. Our response must be to welcome His Son, believe His Son, abide in His Son, and walk as He walked in perfect obedience and submission to the will of God. Christians must guard against anything which might come between themselves and God. God's children must keep themselves from idols — from any beliefs, life-styles, or attitudes which are contrary to the truth brought by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the true God. He is the only way to eternal life.

Applications

1. We have spent six weeks studying John's letter. Through the anointing of God's word, applied by the power of the Holy Spirit, positive and powerful changes have come about in your life. How is deeper knowledge of God's love shown through Jesus, *the way, the truth, and the life*, making a difference in your life?
2. Is living for Jesus the number one priority in your life? How much time do you spend in fellowship with Him daily reading your Bible, studying, memorizing Scripture and praying? What idols need to be put out of your life so Christ can have first place?
3. How has God's love been manifested in new ways through you since beginning the study of 1 John?
4. What do you now know, after studying John's letter, that has given you more confidence in your relationship with God and the Lord Jesus Christ?