

## “Walk with Confidence” (1 John 5:14-21)

One of the greatest joys for a new parent is to see their child take his or her first step. That vision will be remembered for years to come. From the time our son Joshua was two months old, he would not sit on our lap. He insisted on standing while we supported his arms. Because of this we assumed he would be an early walker. While he was earlier than his siblings, he didn't set any early-bird walking records. It took him 13 months to take that first step. Justin, not one to miss the opportunity to show his skills, even so was 15 months old before venturing forth, in front of about 35 people. Then there was Jena—our compliant, mellow baby, who was perfectly content to wait until she was 18 months old. Why walk when someone would carry you??? It took sheer, late-night delirium to give her the courage to toddle forth. If you have ever been a parent or witnessed another child's walking moment, you know this is a monumental occasion. Walking is the first big step in life towards growth and maturity.

Likewise, the Bible often refers to the Christian experience as a walk. This is an important observation. God's Word never talks about a mad dash or sprint. While Paul occasionally speaks of running,<sup>1</sup> far more frequently the Bible speaks of walking. Throughout the book of 1 John, the primary goal of the apostle John is to teach Christians how to walk with confidence. The term that John uses throughout his book is “abide.”<sup>2</sup> Again, “abiding” refers to remaining, continuing, and persevering in our fellowship with Christ. In 1 John 5:14-21, John concludes his book with a primer on walking with confidence. In these eight verses, he urges us to pray with confidence and persevere with confidence.

**1. Pray with confidence (5:14-17).** In 5:14-15, John writes, “**This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.**” Verses 14-15 are closely connected with 5:13. Although it is not clear in our English versions, the Greek text of 5:14 opens with the word “and” (*kai*), showing that John is continuing his thought from 5:13.<sup>3</sup> The point is that confidence in prayer is grounded in the assurance that we have eternal life. This means the promise of our text is only for God's children. So if you want to pray according to God's will so that God will respond to your prayers, believe in Jesus Christ and become His child today. If you are already a believer, notice these four prayer observations that stem from 5:14-15.

*(1) We should have confidence when we approach God in prayer.*<sup>4</sup> Our confidence is never in ourselves, but rather in Christ. In the book of Hebrews we are reminded that Jesus Christ is our sympathetic, high priest. In light of this reality, the Hebrew writer declares, “Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (4:16). We can and should possess confidence because of our relationship to Jesus Christ (see Eph 3:12). Our confidence is not based upon our performance but Christ's performance. Ultimately, it is His attributes, works, and promises that give us confidence to pray.

*(2) We must come before God when we pray.* Although this should be obvious, often it isn't. We are all busy and frequently preoccupied with many things. Therefore, we need to be continually reminded of the need to approach God with humility and awe. It is crucial to bear in mind that prayer is coming before the living God. It is the greatest privilege in this life.

Warren Buffett is one of the greatest investors in our day, and he is also the second richest man in the world, with an estimated worth of \$44 billion. Buffett is so famous that a special edition of the Monopoly board game features him and his companies. In June 2005, Buffett decided to help raise money for his charitable foundation by offering an online auction for someone to have lunch with him. The winning bid was \$351,100—the price of access.<sup>5</sup> Do we recognize the privilege of our access to the eternal God? If we just stopped for a moment and reflected on this we would pray more often than we do.

(3) *If we ask anything<sup>6</sup> according to God's will, He hears us.*<sup>7</sup> Since God “hears” everything and even knows the unspoken secrets of our hearts, John means that He hears us favorably by coming to our aid (cf. John 9:31; 11:41-42). He does this when we pray “according to His will.”<sup>8</sup> Jesus modeled this best. His will was always one with the Father (John 4:34). He always did the Father’s works (6:38-40), and He always spoke what the Father wished Him to say (3:34; 8:55; 14:10; 17:8).<sup>9</sup> How can we know whether or not we are praying according to God’s will? Consider the following questions:<sup>10</sup>

- Is my request in line with what God has revealed in Christ and the Scriptures? Do I know what God’s Word says or am I asking Him to respond to requests that He prohibits?
- If God grants my request, will it draw me closer to Him? Some of the requests that we ask of God will cause us to neglect Him. Other requests will have an adverse affect on our spiritual lives.
- Will granting my request be the best thing for everyone? Or will some people be hurt or hindered in their spiritual growth?
- In making this request am I seeking first the kingdom of God? Can I honestly say, “Lord, it’s not about me; it’s about you. Lord, it’s not what I want; it’s what You want.” God wants to respond to our prayers, but only when we pray according to His will.

My wife, Lori, always hears our three children cry out in the middle of the night. Since I am a sound sleeper there are times that I don’t hear a thing. But Lori always hears their cries and jumps out of bed to meet their needs. Likewise, our heavenly Father responds to the cries of His children. He hears our prayers when they are legitimate and they are in accordance with His will.<sup>11</sup>

(4) *If we know<sup>12</sup> that He hears us, “we know<sup>13</sup> that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.”* The idea of 5:15 is that we know we *presently* have whatever we have asked in accord with His will. We may not actually see it for many years, but it’s as good as done. There is much in Scripture about waiting on God.<sup>14</sup> So we would be mistaken to think that God is promising that if we pull the prayer lever, all the goodies instantly come out of the chute. Sometimes in His purpose and wisdom, God delays the answers to our prayers for years. Yet, in another sense He has already granted the requests.

We need to realize that prayer is not a spiritual crowbar that allows us to exert leverage upon God causing Him to do what He would otherwise be reluctant, unwilling, or unable to do. A small boy was writing a letter to God about the Christmas presents he badly wanted. “I’ve been good for six months now,” he wrote. But after a moment’s reflection, he crossed out “six months” and wrote “three.” After a pause, that was crossed out and he put “two weeks.” There was another pause, and that was crossed out too. He got up from the table and went over to the little nativity scene that had the figures of Mary and Joseph. He picked up the figure of Mary and went back to his writing and started again: “Dear God, if ever you want to see your mother again...”<sup>15</sup>

Like a loving Father, God wants to respond to our prayers but He will only do so on His terms. This is why prayer is also not a blank check in which we can receive anything or everything, anytime we have the gall to ask. Contrary to the prevalent “name-it-and-claim-it” theology of our day, prayer is not about getting what we want. Prayer is about conforming *our wants* to *His will*. To “have what we asked” is not the same thing as “getting what we want!” To “have what we asked” means to have God’s will revealed in our particular situation; since what we asked for, we asked “according to His will.” *God’s will* is always more personally exciting, practically beneficial, and spiritually instructive than *our wants*.<sup>16</sup>

Prayer is a sovereignly designed means to the outworking of God’s will, in which believers commune with God, worshiping and submitting to Him.<sup>17</sup> The bottom line is this: Prayer doesn’t change God, it changes me.

Before we wrap up these two verses, I must confess that I don't completely understand John's words. I have prayed for the salvation of people who have not gotten saved. I have prayed for the restoration of sinning Christians who have not repented and been restored. I have prayed for the reconciliation of many Christian marriages that have broken up. Some try to get God off the hook by saying, "He gives people free will." But if God cannot subdue a sinful person's will, then He can't do anything!—which would mean that sinful man, not God, is sovereign! And it means that prayer is useless and impotent. If God promises to answer our prayers, then He has the power to answer them! I'm sure that the fault is with me, not with God's promise! I am probably lacking in understanding God's perfect will and lacking in faith. Nevertheless, I am committed to keep praying.

In 1921, Thomas Edison, with many inventions to his credit, said, "We don't know the millionth part of one percent about anything. We don't know what water is. We don't know what light is. We don't know what gravitation is. We don't know what electricity is. We don't know what heat is. We have a lot of hypotheses about these things, but that is all. But we do not let our ignorance about all these things deprive us of their use."<sup>18</sup>

John's three themes: loving God, obeying God, and loving others intersect once again in 5:16-17. The implication seems to be that we cannot truly fulfill these three conditions for fellowship with God unless we have concern for the obedience of our fellow Christian. John states: **"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. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death."**<sup>19</sup> Since these are such difficult verses, we need to carefully consider what John is saying here. Let me simply walk through these two verses and offer a simple commentary paraphrase. John writes, "If anyone sees..." The word "anyone" refers to any believer in Jesus Christ, including you and me. If we "see" or observe firsthand another believer's sin, we are to pray for that believer. John does *not* say, "If anyone sees his brother sinning, go tell the pastor so he can deal with it." Nor does he say, "If anyone sees his brother sinning, call up all of your friends and tell them about it so that they can pray." That is a thin spiritual cover for gossip. Nor does he say, "If anyone sees his brother sinning, he should shake his head in disgust and ask, 'How could he do such a thing?'" That is called "judging your brother." Rather, he says that if you see a brother in sin, pray for God to give life to him. While we all are responsible for our own sins, only God can truly deliver us from sin, because only God can impart life. So we're dependent on God to deliver, but at the same time, the sinning brother is responsible to turn from his sin and take the necessary steps not to fall into it again. Also, before we speak to a brother about his sin, we need to speak to God about the brother. Prayer is essential in the restoration process! The word "sees" also seems to indicate that the sinning involves some overt action, probably something that affected the entire assembly of believers. It is also worth noting that since the Greek language does not have the indefinite article ("a" or "an"), a better translation is: "There is sin leading to death." This implies that "sin leading to death" is not a single, isolated act, but one that is repeated over and over again by the disobedient child of God.

John is suggesting that it is possible for a Christian (a "brother") to sin in a way that God takes him or her home early.<sup>20</sup> The truth is many Christians do not die in bed. God does not allow them to live out their full amount of years. He jerks them up short and takes them home to be with Him. He takes them home with a dishonorable discharge. That is a miserable way to go home to meet God. God saves their soul so as by fire. He saves some people by the skin of their teeth.<sup>21</sup> That physical death is in view is suggested by the fact that "death" is contrasted with physical life. Elsewhere in the epistle, when "eternal" life is meant, the adjective "eternal" is included. John instructs his readers to pray for their "brother" that he might not experience death but "life." How can we pray for a brother to obtain eternal life? A "brother" already has eternal life.<sup>22</sup> But if abundant life is meant, then the phrase not only makes sense but fits well with the thrust of the epistle: fellowship and joy (1:3-4). Also it makes good sense to pray that God will spare a sinning brother and restore him to fellowship.<sup>23</sup>

The Bible mentions people who died because of their sin. Nadab and Abihu, the two sons of Aaron the priest, died because they deliberately disobeyed God (Lev 10:1-7). Moses committed the sin unto death by striking the rock (Num 20:8, 12). Korah and his clan opposed God and died (Numbers 16). Achan was stoned because he disobeyed Joshua's orders from God at Jericho (Joshua 6-7). A man named Uzzah touched the ark and God killed him (2 Samuel 6). Ananias and Sapphira lied to God about their offering, and they both died (Acts 5:1-11). Some believers at Corinth died because of the way they had acted at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:30).

In the case of sin leading to premature death, John revealed that prayer will not avert the consequences. Therefore, praying in these situations will not avail. However, John did *not* say we should refrain from praying about them. We may not know when God will judge with premature death. In such cases we can pray that God will bring His will to pass for a sinning Christian.

Because some sin does not lead to premature death, we should pray for our brethren when they sin (cf. 1:9). Prayer for a sinning Christian is a concrete demonstration of love for that brother or sister (3:23). We should demonstrate concern about the obedience of others as well as our own obedience. When we become concerned about our obedience we will become concerned about the obedience of our brethren. God gives us eternal life, but we can give physical life to others in some situations as we ask God in prayer to be merciful to them.<sup>24</sup>

As part of the community of believers, we have a responsibility to intercede for others when we notice that they are not walking in right fellowship with God. At the same time, when we ourselves are walking in darkness we can count on the prayers of others on our behalf (assuming we are part of a healthy Christian assembly). In the community of believers, sin is a serious matter.

When I was growing up, I used to love watching *The Cosby Show*. Bill Cosby played the role of a husband, father, and medical doctor (Dr. Huxtable). Cosby had had a hilarious relationship with his screen son Theo. Cosby frequently spoke to Theo about "The Circle of Life." He then proceeded to say, "Boy, I brought you into this world and I can take you out."

While this is a classic line, this statement also applies with God! Now I know this view of God is not preached today. However, it is nevertheless true. God corrects, disciplines, and judges. He is a consuming fire (Heb 10:30). We need to pray that God will do whatever is necessary to get the attention of a wayward child.

A final question worth asking is: Who are potential candidates for sin leading to death? I would suggest the following:

- Those in high profile, leadership positions who have a wide sphere of influence (Jas 3:1)
- Those who have been blessed with a vast degree of knowledge and biblical insight (Luke 12:48)
- Those who are jeopardizing the gospel message (2 Tim 2:18)
- Those who willfully wallow in their sin (2 Pet 2:22)
- Those whose sin affects the entire church (Acts 5:1-11)

May we do all that we can to keep ourselves from sin and also to pray for our brothers and sisters who are in sin. May we not lose heart. Rather, may we function as intercessors that may extend their lives.

[Now we come to the epilogue of the epistle (5:18-21). John concludes his letter by synthesizing the major thoughts he had presented, to reinforce and review them for his readers.<sup>25</sup>]

**2. Persevere with confidence (5:18-21).**<sup>26</sup> In 5:18, John writes, **“We 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.”** The phrase “we know” introduces this verse and the following two verses. Like the apostles, John wants his readers to have absolute certainty in their fellowship with Christ.<sup>27</sup> The idea that no one born of God sins harkens back to 3:9-10 where John expressed the concept of the sinlessness of the new nature.<sup>28</sup> When we as Christians live according to our new nature, Satan is foiled. The moment we live in the flesh, Satan foils us. Fortunately, even in our failures we have divine enablement. The phrase “He who was born of God” refers to Jesus.<sup>29</sup> He is the one who keeps us (cf. John 17:12, 15). Satan can attack, entice, trick, and derail the believer but he cannot remove the believer from Christ’s protective hold.<sup>30</sup>

When John says that “the evil one does not touch him,” he does not mean that we are completely isolated from Satan’s assaults. The enemy can tempt us and sift us like wheat (Luke 22:31), with God’s permission. But he cannot lay hold of us to make us captives of sin for the rest of our lives. The New Testament uses the word “touch” in two places, here and in John 20:17. The idea is to lay hold of or snatch up. Satan cannot snatch us out of God’s hand. Satan cannot “touch” believers because they do not belong to him. Christians are in God’s family and belong to Him. You may remember the old M.C. Hammer song, “You Can’t Touch This.” That’s what John is saying to the devil!

In 5:19, John writes, **“We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”** John reminds us again that we are of God. However, he also goes on to remind us that Satan has power over the world order. Just as a child sits in the lap of his father, “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” The entire world system is in the lap of the devil. John does not want us to get carried away by fleshy confidence in our new nature. Although Satan is a foe who is defeated, he must be reckoned with while we are on earth. We can’t afford to underestimate him. Picture Satan with the whole world in his hands singing, “Rock a bye baby/on the treetop/when the wind blows/the cradle will rock.” Satan is singing a lullaby while he cradles the world. When the world becomes an adult and is full grown, it looks just like its daddy!

In spite of this, John continues his confident assertions in 5:20:<sup>31</sup> **“And 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.<sup>32</sup> This is the true God<sup>33</sup> and eternal life.”<sup>34</sup>** We can know Jesus Christ with this type of confidence because we have spiritual “understanding”<sup>35</sup> through the Holy Spirit He has given us (cf. 2:20). Sadly, the primary reason people reject Christ is because they outsmart themselves (1 Cor 2:14). Man too often attempts to outthink his Creator. Yet, man will never be able to understand spiritual things until God gives him spiritual eyes (1 Cor 2:15-16; Eph 1:18).<sup>36</sup> This verse teaches that Jesus Christ is the ultimate reality. He is “the true God and He is eternal life” (cf. John 14:6). This is one of the clearest announcements of the deity of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Jesus is the only way to God. He is our only hope of heaven (see Acts 4:12). Apart from Jesus, we’re utterly lost! Therefore, it is crucial that we never forget the privilege it is of being “in Him” and being able to “abide in Him” as well.

Our book concludes in 5:21 with these parting words: **“Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”** At first glance, 5:21 seems like an abrupt, even odd way for John to end his letter. Was he in a hurry to make the next courier headed for the outlying towns around Ephesus? Not likely. Rather, John knew that the very existence of the Christian faith was at stake, because false teachers were undermining and destroying its unique foundation—the person and work of Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup> John addresses his readers one last time as “little children.”<sup>38</sup> He then says, “guard yourselves.” This Greek word means to watch something closely, like a guard watching over a prisoner or a bodyguard protecting a celebrity.<sup>39</sup> We must be diligent and alert—never passive—when it comes to taking care of ourselves. In other words, this is something only you can do for yourself. Your parents can’t do it for you, your spouse can’t do it for you, your church can’t do it for you, I can’t do it for you, but each of us must guard our own lives.

What must we guard ourselves from? Idolatry! Now in the ancient world an idol was a carved image of a god or goddess—something that a craftsman made and that people bowed down to in worship. The first two of the Ten Commandments both forbid idolatry (Exod 20:3-4; Lev 19:4; Deut 5:7). Idols are often viewed symbolically in the Bible as anything that competes with God.<sup>40</sup> Now in our modern world we rarely encounter literal idols made of wood or metal, but there are still lots of false gods that clamor for our attention in our culture today. An idol is anything that squeezes God out of the center position towards the margin of my life.<sup>41</sup> Thus, idolatry is simply “trusting people, possessions, or positions to do for me what only God can do.”

We can tell if we are idolaters by what we give our commitment, attention, interest, energy, time, or money. Whatever controls our thoughts is our god. What do you get animated about? That is your god. It is the very thing that will crush your Christian life.

The problem of idols is essentially a problem of faithfulness. When we come to know Christ personally we enter into a relationship of faithfulness, where He promises to stay with us, walk with us, forgive our sins, and where we promise to walk with Him, obey Him, and trust Him. When we embrace an idol—a god substitute—we are unfaithful to that promise, like a spouse who breaks a marriage vow.

Today, what is your idol? Is it materialism, success, adventure, leisure, or comfort? Is it your family, your work, or your ministry? Is there anything in your life today that you can honestly say is more important than Jesus Christ? If so, would you simply confess your idolatry to Jesus and seek to renew your fellowship?

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**Scripture Reading**

1 John 5:14-21  
Psalm 34:15-16; 66:18  
Proverbs 15:29; 28:9  
Matthew 6:9-10  
James 1:5-8  
Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:14  
Colossians 2:4, 10

**Study Questions**

1. John expects us to have confidence in our prayer lives (5:14-15). To what degree do I exude confidence? What is the balance between faith and foolishness? Does praying, "Your will be done, Lord" nullify praying in faith? Why or why not? What role do our feelings play in the matter of assurance of answered prayer?
2. God calls us to pray for other Christians (5:16-17). Am I presently praying for a believer that is caught up in a lifestyle of rebellion and sin? How has this helped my own heart? How has praying for this person kept me from gossiping about him or her?
3. John uses the phrase "we know" three times in 5:18-20. He possesses a great confidence in the work of Christ in a believer's life. Do I share John's confidence? Why or why not? Am I daily cultivating my confidence in God's sovereignty, power, and faithfulness? If so, what have I done that has fostered confidence in me? Who can I share this with today or this week?
4. John exposes Satan's work in our world (5:19-20). What kind of authority has God granted Satan? To what extent can Satan adversely affect a believer's life? When have I seen Satan at work in my own life and the lives of those I love? What can I do to guard against this (5:21)?
5. According to Pastor Keith, an idol is anything that takes the place of God in our lives (5:21). What idols do I struggle with the most? How can I guard myself against idolatry? Have I come to the place in my Christian life where I can acknowledge and confess to God and others any propensity toward idolatry? Presently, is there a person in my life that I can share my struggles with?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., 1 Cor 9:26; Gal 2:2; 5:7; Phil 2:16; and 2 Thess 3:1.

<sup>2</sup> See 1 John 2:6, 10, 14, 17, 19, 24 [thrice], 27 [twice], 28; 3:6, 9, 14, 15, 17, 24 [twice]; 4:12, 13, 15, 16 [thrice]; cf. 2 John 2, 9 [twice].

<sup>3</sup> In the UBS 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Greek text, the paragraph break is at 1 John 5:12 with a new section beginning at 5:13. I chose to include 5:13 with 5:1-12 because of how the assurance emphasis in 5:13 ties back to 5:6-12.

<sup>4</sup> The word “confidence” (*parresia*) is used in 1 John 2:28 and 4:17 in the context of future judgment. It is also used in 3:21-22 in reference to prayer.

<sup>5</sup> Preaching Today Citation: eBay Bidder to Pay \$351,100 for Buffett Lunch, [www.msnbc.msn.com](http://www.msnbc.msn.com), accessed 7/2/05; submitted by Aaron Goerner, Utica, NY.

<sup>6</sup> Notice John conditioned the promise “whatever” (5:15) with “according to His will” (5:14).

<sup>7</sup> John is echoing here the repeated promises of Jesus (Mark 11:22-24; John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:24).

<sup>8</sup> The Greek word translated “will” (*thelema*) here can be used two distinct ways: First, it can mean someone’s inmost desire, someone’s heart’s desire. Or, it can mean something that’s planned or intended (See Louw and Nida, Electronic Ed.). I think both meanings come together whenever we read of God’s will, because God’s will reflects God’s heart, what He desires, and God’s plan in our world. I believe that praying according to God’s will is exactly the same thing that the Bible means when it tells us to pray in Jesus’ name. To pray according to the will of God is to pray according to the heart of God and the plan of God. When we learn to pray this way God is responsive to our requests.

<sup>9</sup> Gary M. Burge, *The Letters of John*: NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 216.

<sup>10</sup> These questions come from Ridenour, *How to be Christian Without Being Religious*, 206-207.

<sup>11</sup> Instead of using “according to His will” as sort of a divine filter to keep the prayers from reaching His throne room, which are contrary to divine providence, the better sense might be to pray according to what we know the desires of God are. In other words, pray according to His revealed will, something we already know to be His will. If we do this, then we know He hears us, and we can be confident He will answer.

<sup>12</sup> This particular Greek word that is translated “know” (*oida*) is used in 1 John 2:11, 20, 21 [twice], 29; 3:2, 5, 14, 15; 5:13, 15 [twice], 18, 19, and 20. John also uses another word for “know” (*ginosko*) in 1 John 2:3 [twice], 4, 5, 13, 14 [twice], 18, 29; 3:1 [twice], 6, 16, 19, 20, 24; 4:2, 6 [twice], 7, 8, 13, 16; 5:2, and 20.

<sup>13</sup> John does not write, “We shall have the requests,” but, “We know that we have the requests.” The verb “know” (*oidamen*) is present tense. We may not see the answer to a prayer immediately, but we have inner confidence that God has answered. This confidence, or faith, is “the assurance of things hoped for” (Heb 11:1). It is God witnessing to us that He has heard and answered.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., Abraham prayed for a son and God promised to give him that son. But it was 25 years before Abraham held Isaac in his arms.

<sup>15</sup> Preaching Today Citation: Mark Ashton, *A Voice in the Wilderness* (OM Publishing); submitted by Owen Bourgaize, Guernsey, United Kingdom.

<sup>16</sup> Or as Marshall writes, “When we learn to want what God wants, we have the joy of receiving his answer to our petitions” I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*. NICNT Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 245.

<sup>17</sup> Brad McCoy, “1 John 5:14-17: One Thing NOT to Pray For.” Tanglewood Bible Fellowship unpublished sermon notes (9/8/96).

<sup>18</sup> Cited by Lehman Strauss, *Sense and Nonsense About Prayer* (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 122.

<sup>19</sup> Smalley observes, “. . . John’s warning against sin, and the failure to maintain orthodox faith (2:24; 2 John 8-9), shows that while he expected his readers to walk in the light as sons of God (1:7; vv 18-19), he did not ignore the possibility that some believing but heretically inclined members of his community might become apostate.” Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*: WBC series (Waco: Word, 1984), 299.

<sup>20</sup> We should not confuse “sin unto death” with the unpardonable sin. Only unbelievers can commit the unpardonable sin and only unbelievers of Jesus’ day at that. These are two different situations altogether. The unpardonable sin was the sin of attributing the work of Christ to the work of Satan (see Matt 31-32).

<sup>21</sup> Jerry Vines, *Exploring 1, 2, 3 John* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1989), 210.

<sup>22</sup> There is no reason to suggest that by the term “brother” John means “professing” brother, no reason except a prior commitment to a theological system! Had John meant professing brother, he could have said so.

<sup>23</sup> The writer of Proverbs understood the death-dealing consequences of sin (10:27; 11:19; 12:28; 13:14; 19:16; 21:16; cf. 1 Cor 11:30; Jas 1:15; 5:19-20).

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on 1 John* (<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1john.pdf>, 2006), 59.

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<sup>25</sup> The writer's fundamental thought here is that if the readers perceive the truths he mentions, they will be fortified against the allurements of the idolatrous pagan practices around them. Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 241.

<sup>26</sup> John is careful to devote the same portion to the closing that he did to the opening (cf. 1:1-4).

<sup>27</sup> A reference to the apostles alone is not likely at this juncture of the letter. Elsewhere in the epistle, outside the prologue, the apostolic "we" appears with the use of an emphatic Greek pronoun for "we" as is the case at 3:14 and 4:6. In both cases, the emphatic "you" is also found close by. This does not occur in 5:18 and so it is likely that the "we" is inclusive of both the apostles and the readers. Hodges, *The Epistles of John*, 241.

<sup>28</sup> Some interpreters attempt to render "does not sin" (present tense) to be "does not *continue* to sin" or "does not *continuously* sin" in order to say that one who is a true believer [whatever that means] does not continuously or habitually sin. However, this rendering would add words to the passage that are not there in the original text. It also ignores the fact that after ceasing from sinning, *any* single sin is a continuation thereof and all believers are certainly guilty of that on a regular basis. E.g., the ESV plays their hand by rendering 5:18a, "We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning..." The translators understand John to be speaking of habitual sin, not absolute sin. I disagree.

<sup>29</sup> See A. E. Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*: ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), 148-49; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John*. (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 1970; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 126; Burge, *The Letters of John*, 216. C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*: Moffatt New Testament Commentary series (New York: Harper and Row, 1946), 138; Michael Eaton, *1.2.3 John: Focus on the Bible* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 1996), 196; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 303; John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John*: TNTC series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 192; Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John: The Greek Text with Notes* 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 194. Another view is that "he who is born of God" refers to the believer who keeps "himself" from sin. See Hodges, *The Epistles of John*, 242; Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 252, n. 37. Another view is that this is a reference to God the Father (see NET and study notes).

<sup>30</sup> Eaton, *1.2.3 John*, 196.

<sup>31</sup> Barker writes, "The third and final affirmation of John is in fact the summary of the epistle. It affirms the point of dispute with the false teachers. Christian faith has to do with Jesus Christ. He is the 'Word of life' (1:1), 'the eternal life' (v. 2) that was with the Father and through the Incarnation came into human history. By his coming, humankind is enabled to know the true God and to have fellowship with him. But the false teachers said that this relationship was apart from the Son. Fellowship with God as they taught it came through divine knowledge of the subject. It was received through a process of speculative inquiry. From the beginning John denied this teaching. The reality of God can be known only through apprehending the reality that is in the Son. This comes through revelation, but it is a revelation grounded in the facts of history. It requires that one know Jesus Christ as God's Son and that one live his life entirely in him. One knows by this experiential life in the Son that he is also in the Father and that the Son is none other than the true God, the author of eternal life." Glenn W. Barker, "1 John," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981 [2001]), Electronic Ed.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. 1:3, the only other site of the full title "His Son Jesus Christ" in the epistle. Thus this title "bookends" the epistle in an *inclusio*.

<sup>33</sup> Conservative scholars are divided over whether the last phrase, "This is the true God," refers to the Father or to Jesus. Several commentators suggest "this" refers to "Him who is true," in which case all three uses of "true" refer to the Father. But, many early church fathers, as well as the Reformers, argued that the phrase refers to the closest antecedent, namely, to Jesus Christ. If so, this is one of the strongest direct statements of the deity of Christ in the New Testament. In light of John's polemic against the false teachers, who denied Jesus' deity, it would seem fitting at the end of the book to refer to Jesus as "the only true God and eternal life" (see 5:11; cf. John 11:25; 14:6). Furthermore, 5:21 seems to support this interpretation. As Eaton suggests, "If a false Christ is an idol, the true Christ is God! Verse 21 in itself implies the deity of Christ and makes god sense after a statement about the deity of Christ." Eaton, *1.2.3 John*, 198.

<sup>34</sup> "Eternal life," for John, is a relationship with the Father and the Son. It begins in the present when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, but it continues uninterrupted into the age to come.

<sup>35</sup> This is the only time John uses the word "understanding" (*dianoian*) in this letter. It speaks of a spiritual radar system or search light the Holy Spirit uses to direct us to the true God.

<sup>36</sup> A perfect example of this is found in 2 Kings 5, the story of Naman the leper.

<sup>37</sup> In John's day, idolatry was prevalent among the Greco-Roman world. Even though idolatry was not mentioned previously, the underlying concept was present. It was presumed that any sin or moral compromise would result in literal idolatry because pagan worship was so widespread.

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<sup>38</sup> John's final challenge is to the family of God (2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4).

<sup>39</sup> John only uses the word "guard" (*phulasso*) three other times, all appearing in his gospel (12:25, 47; 17:12).

<sup>40</sup> Paul gives idolatry an elastic meaning in Eph 5:5 and Col 3:5.

<sup>41</sup> David Jackman, *The Message of John's Letters: The Bible Speaks for Today* series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 172.