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# *The Epistles of John*

“Restoring the Fallen”

## **1 John 5:13-21**

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**C**hristendom seems to be a place where the “PC” quotient is the basis for deciding what’s right or wrong. A few years back the Church of England came to the conclusion it was acceptable to ordain women priests, allowing them to fulfill all the roles related to that office. My focus here isn’t the issue of women priests, it’s how decisions are made.

*The basis for this decision isn’t related to what Scripture teaches. It is a product of conforming to social consciousness. It was allowed to occur because the decision was a politically correct one, even if it was biblically incorrect. This isn’t to say the Church hasn’t been in great error in limiting women’s involvement in ministry. But clearly, scripture teaches women are not to be elders, therefore not exercising spiritual authority over men. This is the case even though it is clear God has greatly used women in the pulpit where the men have rejected Him.*

*We have seen many such decisions made within Christendom. Positions of doctrine are not based on Scripture, whether discussing the role of women, homosexuality or adultery as sin, or the Virgin Birth and physical resurrection of Christ as basic fundamentals of Orthodox Christianity. Positions are based on what is politically, socially, or personally expedient.*

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### **I Introduction**

### **II Confidence in God**

**Verses 13-15**

### **III Commitment to God**

**Verses 16-17**

### **IV Children of God**

**Verses 18-21**

### **V Conclusion**

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John comes from a different position. Not only does he call believers to hold to the teachings of sound doctrine, but he requires an acknowledgement of sin as such and dealing with it. That which is contrary to God, is of the devil, even if appearing positive. We are to reject that which is false, and to help those in the body who have been led astray.

What is our responsibility to restore one another? Does loving each other and demonstrating unconditional acceptance of people mean we are also to excuse their sin?

In this closing section of the first epistle of John, the author moves from a focus on discriminating against the false prophets’ non-biblical doctrines. Instead, he identifies the benefits we have as believers and expresses concern over the problem of sin within the church. He provides some direction as to how to deal with this sin.

First, John has already made it clear that believers are no longer bound to sin.

*“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin” (1 John 2:1a).*

John also makes it clear when we do sin we have an advocate with the Father.

***“But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense— Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (1 John 2:1b).***

John goes on in this section to show we have a responsibility to one another. We are to help each other to deal with sin in our lives.

**II Confidence in God: Verse 13:** *John wrote this to you. What has he said specifically?* First though, John once more reminds us of all we have. Our greatest blessing, which comes with being a child of God, is eternal life. The outward manifestations of eternal life include: faith in God, love of Him and other Christians, and obedience to His commands for our lives. We receive eternal life at the time of the “New Birth.”

***“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15).***

*Do you get the feeling that John is concerned with the importance of love within the church?* At times, the call to love is used as an excuse to not take a stand on any issue. “If we love we don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings. It wouldn’t be loving to tell Joe Doe he shouldn’t be involved with a woman outside of his marriage.” But clearly, John is not only saying believers are to love, but they are to also hold fast to truth in the context of love. This has been demonstrated by his tests of orthodoxy.

One of the tests of faith is the requirement for a clear view of who Christ is. Without such understanding it is impossible to have a relationship with Him. And only in such a relationship, do we find eternal life. John isn’t mincing words when he states without a relationship with Christ there is no eternal life. Rejection of Christ means eternal death.

***“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” (John 3:36).***

God may be a God of love, but, He is also the God of righteousness and justice. The price for sin will be paid. The only question is who will pay it, Christ or the individual?

**Verses 14-15:** First John has show a benefit of salvation is eternal life. The next benefit is the opportunity to come to God in prayer. This is a now blessing. It is an experience we have available to us at any time.

*How have you experienced the reality of God’s listening?* John says we can have confidence in approaching God in prayer. What is the basis of this confidence? Whatever we ask is heard by God. He always hears our prayers. There is never a time when God doesn’t hear the prayer of a believer.

It appears God will give us anything we ask, because He hears us. God is concerned with the needs of His children. He hears our requests, and He answers them. How do we reconcile this with the fact that He sometimes answers our prayers “No!”?

Obviously, John isn't teaching positive confession. He says God will give us what we ask, if we ask according to His will. The purpose of asking isn't to "force" God to do as we "demand." As we abide in Him we will be more accurately in touch with His will. As we keep His commands, loving Him and loving others, we will ask in line with that love and therefore be consistent with His will.

***“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him” (1 John 3:21-22).***

We will ask in a way that will please the Lord. Accordingly, the promise of answered prayer is conditional upon the foundation by which we are praying. Implicit is trust in the Lord. When someone is praying for relief, which seems to be in line with God's intent and still the answer is wait, then the assumption should be God knows best. This is real faith, in that we are able to wait on the Lord, though the reason for waiting isn't obvious to us.

Our confidence then is grounded not in our prayers, or the wisdom behind them, but in who God is. As we come to truly understand this, then we can find peace even in the most difficult of situations. If I understand this, I can accept things may not proceed in my circumstances as rapidly as I might like. Instead, I need to truly be able to say, ***“... not my will, but Your will be done.”***

**III Commitment to God: Verses 16-17:** *What is our responsibility to one another?* With salvation comes the blessings of Eternal Life, and access to the throne of God. Also, comes the responsibility to care for one another within the local church. This is what it means to love Biblically. We are to pray for the member of the body that is in sin. Intercessory prayer is one of the responsibilities of a priest, a role which we are all called to. appropriate vs. here. And, the prayer of intercession for a brother or sister is always consistent with the will of God. After all, He died for our sins.

It is unclear why John is calling for one member of the body to pray for the sin of another. Any analysis would be speculative. Baker expresses his understanding this way.

*“The brother may need to be forgiven through intercessory prayer as an expression of the community's forgiveness, the need to confess the sin to another and to have received assurance of forgiveness may have had special significance. Also, there might be an allusion here to Jesus' words in the Gospel of John.”<sup>1</sup>*

***“If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (20:23).”***

The second half of the verse, is even more difficult to follow. John makes an exception to this call to pray. We do not need to pray for the one who has committed the sin unto death. What on earth is the sin unto death? Clearly, the readers of John's letter understood what he was referring to. This is obvious since he doesn't clarify his meaning. Just as clearly his intent has been lost. Any attempt to identify what he refers to, will lead to non-productive con-

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<sup>1</sup> Baker, Glenn W., The Expositor's Bible Commentary, “1, 2, 3 John, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids MI, 1981, p 355.

clusions. The identification of a specific sin as being deserving of death, can also be very destructive resulting in judgmental behavior. Since we do not know what this sin might be, clearly we should pray for a sinning brother.

We can't even be completely clear on what John means when he speaks of death. Baker believes it is eternal death, but since John is speaking of a brother, and believers can't lose their salvation, I think physical death would be a better understanding his thrust. The point John makes though is that there is a sin that leads to death and other sins that don't. Maybe *we'll get a chance some day to get him to clarify what he meant.*

**IV Children of God: Verse 18:** But, regardless of what the sin unto death refers to, clearly the life of the believer is no longer typified by sin as is the case for the unbeliever. We are no longer under the control of sin.

Next, because we are Christians, we are kept safe from the evil one (*which is the best reading of this verse.*) And the confidence that comes from this truth should extend to our reaction to living in a fallen world. Just as we are protected from Satan, so too are we protected from his world. Since we aren't protected from circumstances, we must conclude that we are protected from the spiritual destruction that exists in the world around us.

**Verse 19:** The world lies comfortably in the power of the Evil One. Christians don't. Those who live in the physical world are either abiding in God, or they rest comfortably in Satan. There is no middle ground. Just as one is either Jew or Gentile, one is either a child of God or a child of the devil.

**Verse 20:** Finally, John reemphasizes there is only one way to be a child of God. To be in relationship with God means to be in relationship with Christ Jesus. And those who are His know Him because they have the understanding of who He is. This understanding of course comes from the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives. There is no way to know God, except as He makes himself known. And, just so there is no mistake, John once again reminds his readers that God is Christ Jesus incarnate. Only through the acceptance of this fact does a person really know Christ and is truly saved.

**Verse 21:** And, to follow after any other Christ, just like the one of the false prophets, is to follow an idol. People don't really understand the implications of false doctrine. It is just as much the practice of idolatry as worshipping a pagan image. It turns one from truth. It turns one from God. And in the final analysis it leads to eternal judgment.

The closing message of John is that each believer is responsible to discern false doctrine always turning from it to that which is true.

**IV Conclusion:** In the first epistle of John, we are given responsibility for the soundness of our faith. In a day when so many, who call themselves Christians, are confused by false doctrine, John provides a message of clarity which can be used as a basis to stand firm for truth. Just as with Paul, John is concerned that believers are grounded in God's truth.

*“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14).*

The church is to be the environment committed to truth. In love we are to stand against false doctrine perpetrated by those who represent themselves as Christians. We are to teach truth, expose lies, and test all that is written, said, and shown in light of the message of Scripture.

All this is to be carried out in God's love. We are to care for one another. We are to pray for a fallen brother or sister. We are to encourage one another. Love and truth, going hand-in-hand are the basis for a healthy church and healthy believers. And, as long as we allow God to be God, that is, not allowing a false christ to become an idol, we will fulfill the intent of John's letter.

May we, in the spirit of John, always remember that to love God is to keep His command to do all that we do in love.

***“... ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” ... “A new command I give you; Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Matthew 22:37-40; John 13:34-35).***

### ***All to Jesus I Surrender***

*All to Jesus I surrender,  
All to him I freely give;  
May I ever love and trust him,  
In his presence daily live.  
I surrender all, I surrender all.  
All to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.*

*All to Jesus I surrender,  
Humbly at his feet I bow;  
Worldly pleasures all forsaken,  
Take me, Jesus, take me now.  
I surrender all, I surrender all.  
All to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.*

*All to Jesus I surrender,  
Make me, Savior, wholly thine;  
May thy Holy Spirit fill me,  
May I know thy pow'r divine.  
I surrender all, I surrender all.  
All to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.*

*All to Jesus I surrender,  
Lord, I give myself to thee;  
Fill me with thy love and power,  
Let thy blessing fall on me.  
I surrender all, I surrender all.  
All to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> VanDeVenter, Judson W., “All To Jesus I Surrender,” public domain.

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### **I Introduction:** *(1 John 2:1)*

### **II Confidence in God: Verse 13:** *(John 3:14-15, 36)*

### **Verses 14-15:** *(1 John 3:21-22)*

### **III Commitment to God: Verses 16-17:** *(John 20:23)*

#### **IV Children of God: Verse 18:**

**Verse 19:**

**Verse 20:**

**Verse 21:**

#### **IV Conclusion:**

*(Ephesians 4:14; Matthew 22:37-40; John 13:34-35)*

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Personal Application: May we, in the spirit of John, always remember that to love God is to keep His command to do all that we do in love.

**Prayer for the Week: Lord, help us to be biblically sound, and loving of Your and our brothers and sisters. In Jesus' name, amen.**