

STUDY GUIDE 9

1 John 5

As the Apostle John winds down his letter to believers in the areas around Ephesus, the structure and primary points of his letter become clear. We will spend a bit of time this week looking back at how John presented these principles which will assist us in understanding and applying them.

Study warm-up: With what criteria do you determine something is living?

OBSERVATION – Lord, help me to discover it!

Read 1 John 5.

1. Read 1 John 5:1-4 again. List everything mentioned that is true of those *born of God*.

Now look at what John had previously written about those *born of God*. (Emphasis added.)

1 John 2:29

If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is **born** of Him.

1 John 3:9

No one who is **born** of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is **born** of God.

1 John 4:7

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is **born** of God and knows God.

Review what John had previously writing about *liars*. (Emphasis added.)

1 John 2:4

The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a **liar**, and the truth is not in him;

1 John 2:22

Who is the **liar** but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.

1 John 4:20

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a **liar**; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

2. In essence John has presented three tests that distinguish those *born of God* from *liars*; what are the tests? (All three tests are restated in 1 John 5:1-4.)

Read 1 John 5:5-12.

3. John uses these next several verses to expand on the test concerning Jesus.
- What is the testimony (declaration about truth) that God has given?

- What/who testifies (gives evidence) to this truth? (You may have questions about these – we'll look at them in a bit!)

- c. What aspect of Jesus is John emphasizing in these verses?

Read 1 John 5:13-15.

4. What assurance(s) does John desire for his readers?

Read 1 John 5:16-17.

5. Fill in the following table to capture some of the nuances of these verses:

	the sin NOT leading to death	the sin leading to death
a. Who is committing this sin? (if specified!)		
b. What instructions are given about praying about the situation?		
c. Who is to pray?		
d. Review what John has stated in verses 10-15. To what sin(s) is John referring in verses 16 and 17?		

Read 1 John 5:18-21.

6. From these verses, what do believers *know* and how do they know it?

INTERPRETATION – Lord, help me to understand it.

From Iraneus' *Against Heresies*, written in the second century, we have evidence that John may have had the Cerinthian Gnostic sect (and possibly the Ebionites as well) in mind when he penned his letter. A brief review their beliefs:

- ❖ Jesus, the natural son of Joseph and Mary, was more righteous, prudent, and wise than other men. (*Against Heresies*, Book 1, Chapter 26, paragraph 1)
- ❖ When the Christ spirit settled on Jesus at his baptism, the God that Jesus proclaimed was the Supreme Being, not the God of the Hebrews. (Refer to drawing at the end of Study Guide 3.)
- ❖ The Christ spirit departed from Jesus before His crucifixion.
- ❖ Jesus (the man) did rise from the dead, but without future association with the Christ spirit.
- ❖ Like other Gnostic sects, escape from the physical, material world was only possible by awakening mankind's divine spark through secret knowledge possessed by the sect. Those saved by this knowledge were granted admission into the Pleroma (Heaven.)

7. Review John's teaching in chapter 5. How does John refute the beliefs of the Cerinthians?

There are differing opinions about John's statement in 1 John 5:7, 8 in which he says the Spirit, the water, and the blood testify about Jesus' divinity. John's intent behind *the water* and *the blood* distinguishes the different interpretations. Given that John offers no additional explanation, we can surmise that his audience would immediately understand John's point. Let's consider some potential interpretations:

Interpretation 1

- ❖ The water and the blood refer to baptism and communion, specifically the wine.
- ❖ A view held by Martin Luther.
- ❖ Weaknesses of this view:
 - It is unlikely John would omit the body of Christ if communion was intended.
 - Verse 6 says that Jesus *came by* water and blood; whereas communion is an ongoing sacrament, not something completed in the past.

Interpretation 2

- ❖ The water and the blood refer to Jesus' [supernatural] human birth and His death on the cross.
- ❖ Weakness of this view:
 - None of John's writings put any emphasis on Jesus' human birth. If anything, his writings highlight that Jesus existed at the beginning, emphasizing He was not a created being.

Interpretation 3

- ❖ The water and the blood refer to Jesus' death on the cross; specifically, as mentioned in John 19:34 where a soldier pierces Jesus' side and blood and water flow from the wound, testifying that He was indeed dead.
- ❖ Weakness of this view:
 - In 1 John 5, the water and blood are the witness to Jesus' Sonship. In John 19:34 the blood and the water are evidence of Jesus' human death.

Interpretation 4

- ❖ The water and the blood are a reference to Mosaic Law cleansing/purification rituals. In testifying about Jesus' divinity, water and blood invoke the cleansing/purification that His death afforded His people.
- ❖ A view held by John Calvin and Charles Spurgeon.
- ❖ Weakness of this view:
 - Christ's atoning work on the cross does not seem to be the Apostle John's focus in chapter 5. Rather, John seems more focused on refuting the heresy denying Jesus' divinity.

Interpretation 5

- ❖ The water and the blood are a reference to Jesus' baptism (and beginning of His earthly ministry) and His atoning death on the cross.
- ❖ God Himself testified about Jesus at His baptism:

Mark 1:9-11

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening,

and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; ¹¹ and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

- ❖ John stresses Jesus' divinity remaining on Him throughout His time on the cross stating in 1 John 5:6b ...not with water only, but with the water and with the blood. (This would have been contrary to the Cerinthian position.)
- ❖ Only through Jesus' divine nature could He conquer sin and death via the cross.

1 Corinthians 5:21

He made Him who knew know sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

8. What does it mean to be *born of God*? (John 3:1-5, 1 Peter 1:3-5, and 2 Corinthians 5:17 will help.)

9. In this chapter (especially in verses 5-15) John assures the readers that they have eternal life. Think about how confidence of salvation impacts one's life compared to insecurity about salvation. Why is confidence of salvation so important?

10. Look once more at 1 John 5:13-15. Is John saying that if we ask, God will give us whatever we request? Explain.

11. Evaluating chapter five's context carefully, what is the sin that leads to death as mentioned in 1 John 5: 16, 17? (John 20:24-31 may help.)

Among the sins to which the human heart is prone, hardly any other is more hateful to God than idolatry, for idolatry is at bottom a libel on His character. The idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than He is - in itself a monstrous sin - and substitutes for the true God one made after its own likeness. Always this God will conform to the image of the one who created it and will be base or pure, cruel or kind, according to the moral state of the mind from which it emerges. A god begotten in the shadows of a fallen heart will quite naturally be no true likeness of the true God. "Thou thoughtest," said the Lord to the wicked man in the psalm, "that I was altogether such as one as thyself." Surely this must be a serious affront to the Most High God before whom cherubim and seraphim continually do cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth." Let us beware lest we in our pride accept the erroneous notion that idolatry consists only in kneeling before visible objects of adoration, and that civilized peoples are therefore free from it. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It begins in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place.

A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

12. How were the Gnostic teachings a form of idolatry?

APPLICATION – Lord, help me to live it!

13. How are the three tests that John has presented of use to you? (Refer back to this study guide's warm-up question if you need help getting started.) You may have chosen different descriptors in question 2, but one way to classify the tests is:
- 1) Obedience to God's commands (a moral test),
 - 2) Love of the brethren (a social test), and
 - 3) Believing Jesus, the Son of God, is the Christ – fully human, fully divine (a doctrinal test.)
14. How has John's teaching influenced your understanding of prayer?
15. Think about John's appeal at the end of his letter. What kind(s) of idolatry attempt to entice you? How do/will you guard yourself?

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION OR CONTEMPLATION:

- I) In light of the witnesses cited by John (the Spirit, the water, the blood) it is interesting to think about the process by which Levites received the priesthood under Mosaic Law. The priest-to-be was washed with water, anointed with oil (a parallel to the Holy Spirit) and then the blood of a sacrificed ram [of ordination] was applied to their right ear, right thumb and right big toe. (Leviticus 8) Then the priest was ready for service. Hebrews 5 highlights Jesus as our perfect High Priest – from 1 John 5 we have seen that Jesus was similarly readied for service!
- II) Why does prayer so often result in aligning our desires with God's will?
- III) How would you help a fellow believer who lacks confidence in their salvation?

REFERENCES

Stott, J. R. W. (1964). *The Letters of John* (2nd ed.). InterVarsity Press.

Tozer, A. W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. Fig, 2012.

 *Cole Women's Bible Study Writing Team, 2023*

Additional Scripture for Study Guide 9

☐ John 19:34

³⁴ Yet one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

☐ John 3:1-5

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; ² this man came to Jesus at night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." ³ Jesus responded and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

⁴ Nicodemus *said to Him, "How can a person be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother's womb a second time and be born, can he?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born of water and *the* Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

☐ 1 Peter 1:3-5

³ 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, ⁴ to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in *the* last time.

☐ **2 Corinthians 5:17**

¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *this person is* a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

☐ **John 20:24-31**

²⁴ But Thomas, one of the twelve, who was called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

²⁶ Eight days later His disciples were again inside, and Thomas *was* with them. Jesus **came*, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace *be* to you." ²⁷ Then He **said* to Thomas, "Place your finger here, and see My hands; and take your hand and put it into My side; and do not continue in disbelief, but *be* a believer." ²⁸ Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus **said* to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you *now* believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed."

³⁰ So then, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name.



4. Briefly, what is John's aim in this letter?

Read 3 John. (Again, we are looking for the big picture!)

5. What do you observe about the recipient of the letter?

6. What do you see about John?

7. Briefly, what is your first impression of Diotrephes (pronounced dee-ot-ref-ace)?

8. Briefly, what is your first impression of Demetrius?

9. Briefly, what is John's aim in this letter?

INTERPRETATION – Lord, help me to understand it.

10. What do you find similar and different in John's purposes behind 2 John and 3 John?

APPLICATION – Lord, help me to live it!

11. Is there anything from John's character or approach in either letter that you find worthy of emulating? Explain.

12. What are your initial thoughts regarding the handling of false teachers – those from outside the church, as well as those who are discovered within the church?

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION OR CONTEMPLATION:

- I) What similarities do you see between the difficulties facing the church of today compared to the first century church?
- II) In what ways are *love* and *truth* so closely connected?

 *Cole Women's Bible Study Writing Team, 2023*

