

Our Common Convictions as Believers

1 John 5:18-20

Next week Brian will close out our series in the book of 1 John by looking at the very last verse in chapter 5, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” Today we are considering verses 18-20. In each of these three verses John writes about things that “We know. . .” He is discussing convictions that he and his readers share in common, especially after he has discussed them in detail throughout this letter. John is laying out common convictions that we as believers should hold together.

As I studied this passage this week I kept thinking, “What would Faith look like if these were **our** common convictions as a church?” I have come to the conclusion that agreeing with John on these three convictions would shape the culture of this church in some very dramatic and life-giving ways. In other words, these convictions would have implications for the way we pursue our mission of loving God, loving one another, and loving our neighbors.

As we look at these three common convictions, I’ll try to draw out some of the ways that they might shape the culture of this church.

We know that we do not keep on sinning. (*1 John 5:18*) This verse speaks to our obedience.

18 We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

The first thing “we know” is that “everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning.” He writes that this is our common conviction (something that “we know”): everyone born of God does not keep on sinning. He’s not talking about a few uber-committed believers; he’s talking about every believer.

So in what sense is it true that every believer “does not keep on sinning”? A few observations from the entire book of 1 John help us here. First, John stresses in this letter and in his gospel that when you are born of God through faith in Jesus, something miraculous happens. God puts his Spirit within you and lives his life through you. You aren’t just supposed to act like a child of God; you **are** a child of God.

Second, John isn’t talking about sinless perfection here. In chapters 1 and 2 John established that genuine believers do sin. When we sin, we confess our sin to God and experience from him a fresh cleansing. As well, Jesus is our Advocate before the Father, addressing any accusations that the enemy might make against us.

Third, throughout this letter John has been saying that if you are born of God, you will live a life of obedience, especially a life of love. For example, in 4:8 he wrote, “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” When you are born of God, you have the desire and the capacity to be like your heavenly Father. Obedience isn’t automatic; you don’t become a robot. You still have to engage your will and choose

to be obedient in specific circumstances. But our deepest longing is to be like our heavenly father.

In that context John says, “We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning.” Again, it’s not that we never sin. But when sin is revealed in our lives, we do whatever it takes to quit sinning. Depending on a number of factors, to “quit sinning” might be rather straightforward, or it might be hand-to-hand combat for quite some time. But being born of God is like changing careers: “I used to be in the business of sinning. But now I’m making a career out of loving God.” Loving God involves obedience because Jesus said, “If you love me you will keep my commandments.”

Notice where John goes in his logic. He doesn’t go to our strength or our resolve. He goes to God’s strength and God’s resolve! Positively he writes, “he who was born of God protects [keeps] him.” John has just referred to believers as those who are “born of God.” It’s unlikely that he’s referring to believers here because he would be saying that the believer protects him/herself. It’s best to take “he who was born of God” as a reference to Jesus in the sense that he was sent by God (Galatians 4:4) and conceived of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). As well, Jesus is called the “firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18, Revelation 1:5). Positively, Jesus protects/keeps us and keeps us on a path of obedience. John isn’t giving an ultimatum but a promise!

Negatively, the evil one does not “touch” us. To “touch us” is a euphemism for destroying us (Stott, p. 195). He’s not saying that Satan is no threat whatsoever. Peter wrote that the devil “prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Satan is a powerful and intelligent being, but he is no match for Jesus. As Paul said at the end of Romans 8, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. The reason we can be done with sinning is because Jesus is protecting us from the evil one.

This verse suggests the common conviction that ***since we are born of God we do not keep on sinning***. Another way of saying this is that God expects us (as his children) to be obedient. If that’s God expectation of us, that’s what we should pursue. This common conviction sets our expectations of obedience.

My first question: If you are born of God, are you convinced that God expects you to not keep on sinning. . . and that he expects you to pursue a life of obedience? Are you convinced that God has provided everything you need to put away sin and to pursue a life of obedience? That’s what 1 John 5:18 teaches.

My second question is, “If we do hold the common conviction that we shouldn’t keep on sinning, how might that shape the culture of the church?” A couple things come to mind.

For starters, ***we would seek God like never before***. Have you ever tried to quit sinning in your own strength? You can’t do it. You need massive amounts of grace from God. Therefore if we as a church want to pursue a life of obedience, we’ll seek God through

the Word (to see how God has promised us grace) and we will seek God in prayer (drawing near to the throne of grace).

As well, we will cultivate deep spiritual friendships in which we help each other get past specific sins. As we discussed last week in verse 16, we'll confess our sins to one another pray for one another to experience healing. We'll speak the truth in love (such a powerful combination). We'll take seriously our God-given role in each other's lives.

We know that we are secure. (1 John 5:19) In verse 19 John speaks about our security as believers.

19 We know that we are from God [or "of God"], and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

John is making a statement about God's comprehensive ownership over the life of the believer. God's promise in the new covenant is, "I will be your God and you will be my people." Of course, this new covenant was enacted with the blood of Jesus. At infinite cost to himself and his Son, we are now "of God" when we believe. We now belong to him eternally.

As God's people, we are not left as orphans or as sheep without a shepherd. The opposite is true: he indwells us and empowers us through his very Spirit. Therefore John wants us to live our lives with the knowledge that we are God's eternal possession (Yarborough, p. 317). We are secure.

By contrast, "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." Whereas we saw in verse 18 that the evil one is not able to "touch" the believer, the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

Interestingly, the only other place in 1 John where we read of "the whole world" is in 1 John 2:2 where John wrote:

2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus wasn't merely the atoning sacrifice for those who currently believed; he is the propitiation for the whole world. That's why we share the gospel freely. And so there's no sense in which John is adopting a hostile or antagonistic relationship toward those who don't yet believe. Rather, Jesus died so that the whole world might be reconciled to God. Everyone who believes has been transferred from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God.

This verse suggests the common conviction that ***we know we are secure.*** We know that we are God's eternal possession and that we are freed from the power of the evil one. This common conviction gives us confidence in the spiritual battle. Sometimes the spiritual battle is very overt and (demonic manifestations that affect people physically, visions, night terrors, etc.); other times the spiritual battle is more subtle (patterns of

thought, clever temptations, etc.). Our confidence in the spiritual battle comes from knowing that since **God has already won the war** for our lives, surely **he will fight our battles**.

This doesn't mean we're passive or complacent or flippant; it means that we will be alert and vigilant, careful to put on the full armor of God - basically disciplines of faith, truth, obedience, the gospel, and prayer.

One way that this confidence in the spiritual battle can shape the culture of the church involves freedom from strongholds in our lives. Instead of living in bondage to our fears, anxieties, and lusts, we will experience the power of God to live in freedom. We will experience greater and greater wholeness (*shalom*) as a church.

We know that we know the true God. (1 John 5:20) One of the core truths that John emphasizes in this letter is that Jesus is the Son of God who came in the flesh. In verse 20 John presents this as a common conviction, something we as believers know as historically and spiritually true.

20 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. He is the true God and eternal life.

Beginning with 1 John 1:1, John has stressed that Jesus has literally come in the flesh; he wasn't a mirage or a concept that his followers invented after the fact. John had seen and heard and touched Jesus. So he wrote with confidence, "And we know that the Son of God has come. . ."

Furthermore, he "has given us understanding, so that we may **know** him who is true" (in the sense of being "real" or "genuine"). You may remember that some had left the church and they had a different understanding of who Jesus was and of what his life meant. John is reminding and assuring his readers that they didn't need to be intimidated by such persons because the Son of God had already given them the understanding they needed to know **the real, genuine God**. Whenever we hear a different gospel, we can reject it out of hand because we know that we already know God.

John says that we not only know him who is true [God], we are **in him** who is true [God] and **in his Son Jesus Christ**. In other words, we are in the closest possible association with the one true God. Whereas the world lies "in [the power of] the evil one," believers are in God and in his Son Jesus Christ.

John finishes this verse by declaring of Jesus, "He is the true God and eternal life." This is one of the clearest statements in the entire New Testament about the divinity of Jesus. Jesus himself said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) as well as, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Jesus is the true God and is eternal life.

This verse suggests the common conviction, “We know that we know the true God/ Jesus Christ.” This common conviction gives us confidence about the gospel. Instead of being tentative and unsure about knowing God and his Son Jesus, John wants us to have confidence in the gospel we have believed. We always have room to grow in terms of our application of the gospel, but when it comes to the gospel itself, we can know that we understand the truth. This gets back to John’s overarching purpose for writing this letter: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”

This common conviction will shape the culture of the church in at least a couple of ways. First, if we know that we know God, ***we will seek God with more confidence***. Instead of feeling like we’re always on probation with God, if we know that we know God, we’ll experience him as the good Father that he is.

Second, our confidence about the gospel will give us the freedom to ***share the gospel with others with more confidence***. If we’re not convinced about the truth of the gospel, we certainly won’t be convincing when we share the gospel.

One of the main reasons I came to Christ as a sophomore in college was because I met some people who actually knew Jesus Christ. Almost everybody I knew growing up went to church, but I’m not sure I knew many people who actually knew Jesus Christ and his heavenly Father. But I met a group of guys who knew that they knew Jesus. They had a very free and easy way of talking about Jesus. The gospel was credible because they had this conviction: “We know that we know the genuine/true God, Jesus Christ. And you can know him too.”

We long to be a church comprised of disciples who share our faith as a natural way of life. This will only happen if we know that we know God.