

1 John Chapter 5 Exegetical Notes

1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

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Brother love demanded by family relationship

The third reason we are to love the brethren is because of our family relationship. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God and becomes part of God's family. As a result, it is natural that we love members of our divine family kove the members of our earthly family.

It interesting to see how John weaves the three major themes he has talked about time and time again into this one verse. These three themes are:

1. Only those who confess that Jesus is the Christ are born of God.
2. Those that are born of God love him.
3. Those that claim to love God must love their brother also.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

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Brother love evidenced by love for God

Finally, brother love is evidenced by the fact that we love God. Burdick gives the reasoning behind John's statement on page 83 of his commentary:

1. Love for God is the same as obeying his commandments - John 14:15, 21
2. One of God's two greatest commandments is to love one another - John 13:34-35.
3. Therefore, when we truely love God, we know that we are loving our neighbors.

One further note is that the verbs in this verse are in the present tense, and as such denote continuous action.

Again we see the masterful interweaving of John's themes, love for God, love for others, and obedience to God's commandments. All of these are intextricably linked in the life of the believer. Lack of one denotes lack of all.

The external witness of historical facts and the Holy Spirit

Upon first reading this is a very difficult verse to understand and interpret. However, if we merely keep in mind the reason John wrote this book, this verse becomes clear.

John wrote to deal with the heresy of Cerentian gnosticism, which taught that Jesus *became* Christ at this baptism and *ceased* being Christ just before his crucifixion. John, however, stresses that Jesus is shown to be God by the water AND the blood. Cerentius would agree about the water, since according to him it is by Jesus' baptism that the Christ spirit descended. Hence, the Christ spirit came by the water. But he would not agree about the blood. What is the blood? It is Christ's shedding of blood on the cross.

Note that the two major times the Father visibly showed the world that Christ was his only son was when Christ was baptized and the voice spoke from heaven, and when the whole world became dark at Christ's crucifixion.

The stress in this verse is on both the water and the blood. In fact, John uses the definite article "by *the* water and by *the* blood" and furthermore insists that both are necessary. Water alone will not suffice, it must be both water and the blood.

To the witness of water and blood John adds the witness of the Holy Spirit. The bottom line in true belief is the revelation of Christ's divinity through the agent of the Holy Spirit. Unless God removes the blinders it is not possible to truly believe.

In John 16:8-11 Christ states that the activity of the Spirit will be to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. And quite honestly, unless the Holy Spirit convicts, no unregenerate person will be convinced of the truths about Christ's claims.

John uses the title, "Spirit of Truth" to refer to the Holy Spirit (John 15:26). This is in distinction to the spirit of the world which is a lie.

7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

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Once we get to this verse we find ourselves in hot water on many fronts. The reason for this is that there is near universal agreement from New Testament scholars that this verse, and the first part of verse 8, are later insertions into the text and should not be there. The overwhelming manuscript evidence would suggest that verses 7-8 should read, "For there are three that bear record, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three agree in one."

Why is this assertion made about the *comma Johannine*? Note the following points:

1. There is no ancient Greek manuscript that contains this passage. The earliest manuscript including this passage is dated in the fifteenth century.
2. Only four manuscripts have this passage in them. There are thousands that do not.
3. This verse does appear in ancient copies of the Latin Vulgate, and most likely made their way into later texts from the Latin.

The experiential witness of eternal life

John now turns from the external witness regarding Christ to the internal witness. Paul tells us in Romans 8:16 that “*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.*” How can we know we are saved, by the internal confidence and assurance of God.

The present tense of believe, which denotes a past act with continuing results, speaks against the “easy believism” mentality which says that if a person once confessed Christ then they are forever saved even if their life is devoid of the fruit of that salvation. It is not the one who walked down an aisle or said a prayer that is a true believer, but one who shows out of a changed life that he really believed.

Who is the one who does not believe? In context, it is the Cerentian gnostics who deny that Jesus is Christ. They have made God a liar, because they do not believe that which God said of his Son, the do not believe the witness (*martyr*) of the Father. They refuse the witness of the water, and the blood, and the Spirit.

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

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John now tells us what the record (*martyr* - witness) is that we have which is eternal life. Emphatic position is used for eternal life, which means that the witness is the eternal life he has given us.

How does that eternal life become a witness?

1. It shows our relationship with God.
2. It shows our believe in Christ as God’s Son.
3. It shows our acceptance and belief about who Christ is as given by the witness of the Father.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

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John stresses the point that he that has (present tense) the Son has (present tense) eternal life. He that does not have (present tense) the Son does not have (present tense) eternal life.

In any case, one’s proof of eternal life is inextricably interwoven with one’s relationship with the Son. To claim eternal life, as Cerenthus and his follows claimed, but yet deny the Son proves that one is a liar.

13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

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Christian Certainties

The certainty of eternal life

John now looks back on the epistle as a whole as he begins to wrap up the letter. He reminds his readers that the reason he wrote this letter was so that they could know that they had eternal life. Specifically:

1. A believer is one who walks in the light - 1:7.
2. A believer is one who confesses their sins - 1:9.
3. A believer is one who obeys Christ - 2:3-5.
4. A believer is one who loves other believers - 2:9-11; 3:14-17.
5. A believer is one who believes in Jesus as God's incarnate Son - 2:22-23; 4:1-6; 5:1, 5.
6. A believer is one who practices righteousness - 2:29; 3:6-10.

Our eternal life is not based on some subjective, secret knowledge, but on objective truths that we can see and measure in our lives. By the way, "know" is in the perfect tense, which depicts an present reality based on past events.

14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

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The certainty of answered prayer

The second great certainty that we have as believers is answered prayer. The word for boldness, *parrhesia*, refers to the confidence of speech that we have towards God. This is not a demanding boldness, nor a usurping boldness, but a boldness based in the relationship that we have with the Father.

John must, however, stipulate that it is our requests which correspond to God's will that get answered, and not merely our selfish whims. This is not a blank check, which we can use to twist God's arm in answering any request that we have, rather it is a confidence that when we ask for the right things, God is willing and ready to answer.

15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

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If we ask according to God's will, we know that he will hear us. As a result, we can be confident that we have (present reality) our request answered. Although it may be some time before that answer is manifested, it is ours nevertheless. Why? It is because God delights to answer the requests of his children.

A third great certainty in the Christian life is the certainty of victory over sin. This victory is not a continuous and unceasing victory, as we all sin from time to time, nevertheless it is only the child of God that has any hope at all of victory over sin.

As in the rest of 1 John, the word “born” is in the perfect tense and indicates past action with continuing results. The believer does not habitually engage in sin. Acts of sin may be committed from time to time, however a general pattern of sin and lawlessness is not present in the true believer’s life.

Why is this? Is it because of our own power and strength. No! It is the power of the one who was begotten (aorist tense) which is Christ. Christ keeps the believer, not the believer himself (1 Peter 5:7). This is a great truth. Victory in my life over sin does not fully and finally depend on my own power, but the power of Christ in me (Galatians 2:20).

This keeping power of Christ is so powerful that Satan cannot even touch one born of God. The word for touch, *hapto*, means to fasten to. Satan cannot get his clutches onto the child of God. He may touch him in a physical sense, but he cannot grab him and hold onto him.

19 And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

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The certainty of two great relationships

When everything is distilled down to its most foundational basis, there are only two relationships in the universe to which a person may belong. They either may be of God, or be of the world, headed by Satan.

John emphasizes the “we” to his readers. Those that are born again are of God, while everyone else is of the world, and belongs to “wickedness” (*ponaron* - wicked one).

20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

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The certainty of the incarnation

John again reminds his readers of the certainty regarding Christ’s incarnation. He was not a ethereal spirit as claimed by the Docetic gnostics, nor was he a deified man as claimed by the Cerenthian gnostics. Rather, he was and is the incarnate Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, eternal God.

One of the great certainties about Christ is that he has given us the spiritual ability to understand who he is. Again, without divine revelation about Christ no one would see him as God.

Who is Christ? He is the true God and eternal life.

21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

John concludes his letter with an exhortation to true believers to stay away from idols. What is an idol? It is anything that takes the place of God.

In context, it appears as though John is encouraging his readers to live like believers, and not like the unbelievers. Although our nature is changed, we can sometimes externally act and live like unbelievers. Such living and acting is contrary to our nature as Christians, and as such we should not exhibit the same characteristics as those who are perishing.