

1 John

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1 John 5:18-21

Vss. 18-20

- As we come to the end of John's letter, we find that we are back at the beginning in that from start to finish John sees things as either Good or Evil, of God or of The Evil One. There is no middle ground, no gray area for John. One cannot be partly saved. Here, John concludes with three great promises that clearly divide the saved and the lost.
- First, we are forever protected from the power of sin. How? Because "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). So, the one who has been born again is born of God and "God keeps him and the evil one does touch him." Again, it is not that once someone is saved and becomes a Christian that they will never sin. John just gave direction to the church as to what to do if they see a brother sinning (1 John 5:16). Rather what John is saying is that the believer does not keep on sinning, does not live a life of sin. Evil and the sin it brings does not dominate the life of a Christian. The Christian's life belongs to God and by the power of the Holy Spirit continues to grow to become more and more like God every day. Therefore, the Satan does not touch him in the sense that the follower of Jesus Christ is a slave to Christ, not to Satan and is beyond Satan's power and grasp. The follower of Jesus Christ is lost to Satan. This is how John can say in 1 John 2:19 that those in the church who chose sin "went out from us, but they were never really of us." This is who and what Jesus is speaking of in the Sermon on the Mount when He declares that "Not everyone who says to Me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 7:21). There may be people who joined the church but they never joined Jesus. They do not keep His commandments, nor do they truly love their brother and sister. They are a part of the church for their own reasons, but Jesus does not know them and as such they do not belong to God and are still under the power of the evil one. But here John says that those who are truly born of God are kept by God and Satan cannot touch them.
- Second, the whole world lies under the power of Satan, but we are with God. We are on God's side in the battle against the world. You and I live in a world where

pornography can be freely viewed in a public library but you likely will not find a Bible on the library's bookshelf because that may offend someone. An atheist is now the head chaplain at Harvard but a high school cannot have a chaplain. In John's time even the Roman writers lamented the cesspool of sin that the Roman world had become. Extra-marital affairs had become so commonplace, so disrupting of the social fabric that Caesar Augustus lost his temper and declared adultery to be a capital offense...at least until his favorite daughter had an affair. The third wife of Emperor Claudius (41-54 AD), Valeria Messalina, once famously initiated a contest with Rome's most notorious prostitute to see who could accommodate the greatest number of lovers in one night. The empress won. It has been well said that the moral climate of our contemporary world is more like that of Rome than at any other time in 2000 years, and who could argue? In this battle we who have been born again have chosen God and He has chosen us and keeps us.

- Third, because of Christ we now have a legitimate understanding of the nature of God. Moreover, we now live a life IN God and He lives IN us. We CAN know God by the relationship He has invited us to join Him in. Cynics say we can never know what God is like. Not true, says Jesus, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father" (John 14:9). Now we can have understanding and have greater and greater understanding as we grow in Christ. Where did it all come from? What does it all mean? What is my purpose in life? Is this all there is? What happens when I die? The world grasps at straws with these questions and will never know the answers. But in Christ, though we see through the glass darkly, there is much we can know, and one day we will fully know (1 Cor. 13:12).

Vs. 21

- It would seem that John had brought his letter to a close. Perhaps there was one line of space left at the bottom of the parchment. What had he left out that he could say in one line? If he had one sentence left, what would it be that he hadn't already said? "My dear little children guard yourself against idols." Hmmm?
- John ends vs. 20 by stating that, "This is the true God and eternal life." Another way of thinking of vs. 21 is by understanding that an idol is any untrue god, anything which occupies the place where God belongs. Many things in our world can become idols:

our work, money, prestige, sports and recreation, even church. We used to say our allegiances were to God and country, but some put country first, making country an idol. Idolatry is pervasive in our culture even if it can be difficult to define. I have heard a lot of people lately say that individual freedom is the most important thing to them. At that point freedom itself becomes an idol.

- And John is writing most likely in Ephesus, a city built entirely around the worship of idols. The Temple of Artemis was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. Knowing well what it is like to live every day in pagan culture, John is simply reminding his people to keep themselves free from the pollution and sin of pagan worship. Las Vegas at its worst is a Sunday School retreat compared to Ephesus in John's day. But more than just keeping one's self free of idolatrous paganism, John here is imploring his people to keep their eye on the ball, to keep the main thing, the main thing. Our God is the only one and true God. There is no other. Never make the mistake of jumbling up your priorities so badly that you replace God with something far inferior in your life in order to try to give your life meaning. Nothing but the God who is the Father of Jesus Christ will ever do.