



# International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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## **1 John 5:13-21 Commentary New International Version**

**Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse [International Bible Study Commentary](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Study Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Study Forum](#).

**(1 John 5:13) I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.**

John wrote his gospel to help people come to believe in Jesus as the Christ (God's promised Messiah, the Anointed One). John also wanted to give his readers good and sufficient reasons to believe in Jesus as the Son of God. John wanted his readers to learn and believe the truth about Jesus so by believing in Jesus that they might receive the gift of eternal life. As he concluded his gospel, in John 20:30-31, John wrote, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." [Note: in the writings of John, "life" and "eternal life" often mean the same. See the [International Bible Study Commentary](#) on the [Gospel of John](#).]

As John concluded his first letter, he stated that he wrote his letter because he wanted to help those who believed in Jesus Christ. All three of his letters were written to believers in Jesus. He wanted to teach believers more about

Jesus and the Christian life so those who already believed “in the name” of the Son of God might **know** (have assurance) that they have eternal life. [Note: as this letter concludes, give particular attention to how often John wants his readers to **know** (have assurance) of certain important truths.] To believe “in the name” means to believe in and trust in the nature, character, power, and wisdom of someone. In the case of Jesus, believing in the name of Jesus includes trusting in Jesus’ love and willingness to help everyone, especially those who believe in Him. To believe in Jesus’ name is to place your faith in His significance as the Son of God with the result that you entrust your life and future to Him with a commitment to obey His commandments as Lord and God. The word “believe” means “to live in accordance with.” To believe in Jesus includes living in accordance with all His teachings, living in accordance with all He revealed about the Father and the Holy Spirit, and living with a true understanding of the nature of reality as God created the world, as the world has become, and as the world will be someday when Jesus returns visibly as King of kings. To emphasize the fact that believing involves more than an intellectual state of mind, Jesus often spoke about following Him. A believer will follow Jesus as a sheep follows a shepherd, as John described in his gospel. Consider the Gospel of John, chapter 10, and especially John 10:26-28, “You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.”

**(1 John 5:14) This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.**

John wanted the followers of Jesus Christ to know that when they talk to Jesus or when they pray to Jesus that they can do so with boldness as a child of God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. A follower of Jesus does not need to approach Jesus or the Father with fear and trembling, because they have been forgiven for their sins and they have received the gift of eternal life through faith in the name of Jesus. Here, John stated a condition for Jesus to hear and answer our prayers. We must ask for things that are in accordance with the will of Jesus, the will of God. Briefly, before we pray for anything, we can first pray for Jesus to reveal the will of God to

us so we can pray according to His will. We also need to remember that God has revealed His will to us with many precious promises and commands in the Bible. For example, when we pray the Lord's Prayer as Jesus taught in the Bible, we have assurance that what we pray is in accordance with the will of God (see Matthew 6). John also explained how believers should pray according to the will of God in 1 John 3:21-23, "Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, *because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him*. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us."

**(1 John 5:15) And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.**

Because Jesus is the Son of God and His Father is our Father, the Holy Spirit will teach us how to pray as we ought; therefore, we **know** (have assurance) that God hears us when we pray. Remember what Paul wrote in Romans 8:26, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words." When believers pray according to the will of God, believers **know** (have assurance) that God will do what God has said He will do. These believers have obtained their requests, but time may need to pass for God to put everything in place for them to see His answer. Consider these words in James 1:5-6, "If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind." Believers know that if they pray according to this promise of God in the Letter of James that God will give them what they ask. When they ask God for wisdom, God gives them wisdom, but they also know that wisdom cannot be completely given in an hour or a day. God gives wisdom to believers when believers need wisdom, and wisdom accumulates or increases over time as believers pray, love, and obey Jesus. John wants us to **know** (have assurance) that we will obtain what we request when we pray according to the will of God or pray for the will of God to be done as Jesus taught His disciples in the Lord's Prayer.

**(1 John 5:16) If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that.**

A mortal sin is a deadly sin, a sin that can ultimately lead to physical and spiritual death if persistently practiced. A sin persisted in can lead to physical death from various natural consequences. Disobeying any of the Ten Commandments persistently can lead to physical and spiritual death. Thankfully, by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit a person who has persistently practiced sin can repent, turn to God, and pray to Jesus the Son of God for salvation from sin. From Jesus, they can receive forgiveness of sin, cleansing from sin, freedom from slavery to sin, and the gift of eternal life among many other blessings in this life and beyond this life. Because they love God and others, Christians can and will pray for those who do not know God and practice sin. They will pray that a person who chooses to practice sin will repent (turn from) practicing sin and turn to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Probably, the most mortal sin would be the sin of persistently rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and persistently refusing the gift of eternal life that He promises to give those who believe in Him as their Lord and Savior. Life is in Jesus. Eternal life is in Jesus. Eternal life is believing in the name of Jesus and loving and following Jesus as one of His sheep. The sin of persistently rejecting Jesus Christ can be compared to what Jesus taught in Matthew 12:31-32 about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, the One who leads sinners to understand the good news about Jesus and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

I think John is telling us that a follower of Jesus Christ does not need to persistently pray for someone who continues to resist the Truth and persistently reject Jesus Christ, the Son of God. With the limited time

believers have in this life to pray and serve God, many more will be helped by the prayers of believers when believers pray for sinners as the Holy Spirit leads them to pray. The Bible and the Holy Spirit must be the believer's guide in praying for fellow believers and slaves of sin who need to come to Jesus for salvation and forgiveness of sins.

**(1 John 5:17) All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.**

In 1 John 3:4, John wrote, “Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; *sin is lawlessness*.” Some will persist in lawlessness and persisting in lawlessness will lead to death. Persisting in lawlessness is a mortal or deadly sin. Here, John reminded his Christian friends that all wrongdoing is sin, but some wrongdoing is not mortal. A sinner or a believer who has done wrong can come to Jesus, pray to Jesus, grieve over their sin (even as they have grieved the Holy Spirit), repent or turn from their sin (the Holy Spirit will help them do so), receive God's forgiveness for their sins, receive cleansing from their sins, receive freedom from slavery to sin and the evil one, and know that God has restored them to a right relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Believers can pray for those who seem to persist in sin and for those who seek to be freed from slavery to sin. The prayers of believers can help sinners come to believe in and know Jesus is their Redeemer, Friend, and Shepherd.

**(1 John 5:18) We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them.**

John returned to reminding believers in Jesus of what they **know** (that they might have assurance of Christ's faithfulness to them in this world). Those born of God or born again or born anew are believers in and lovers of and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ—they are children of God the Father. They do not practice sin or persist in sinning, though they are still subject to temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil that they sometimes succumb to temporarily. They are not lawless. Lawlessness and disobedience are not their state of heart and mind. If they sin, they immediately feel sorrow and guilt and want to restore a right relationship

with God the Father and Jesus. The One who was born of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, will protect them by leading them to experience sorrow and true moral guilt when they sin to lead them to repentance. He will lead them to turn from their sin and ask Him for His forgiveness. He will give them assurance of His forgiveness and peace with God. He will move them to pray for His power to help them do right and obey His commands when tempted in the future. Believers also receive help in avoiding and overcoming sin from the prayers of others who are born of God. The prayers of believers can help other believers overcome temptations and return to obeying Jesus. The Bible calls this the process of sanctification.

Briefly, believers are *saved* from sin and death and given eternal life by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior (which is called justification). Believers are *being saved* from practicing sin by trusting in Jesus and the truth of God's Word (the Bible). Furthermore, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit who abide in them and with them will empower them and free them from slavery to sin (a process which is called sanctification). When Jesus Christ comes again and raises His followers from the grave, believers *will be saved*: they will be like Jesus (which is called glorification). John looked to the future in faith knowing that those who are born of God will be glorified someday; therefore, they do not sin, and they will never sin again.

John did not need to repeat the Apostle Paul's words in his letter, but they taught the same truths. Consider what Paul wrote to believers in Romans 6:19-23, "I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity (persisting in sinning), so now *present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification*. When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But *now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification*. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Paul briefly explained sanctification once again in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, saying the believer's sanctification (our

living lives that are set apart for the Lord Jesus Christ and His service) depends on the Holy Spirit who indwells the believer and their belief in the truth: “But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for *salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth*. For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The evil one cannot do ultimate harm or bring death to a follower of Jesus Christ because God indwells them. The evil one does not “touch” them; therefore, if a believer sins, they cannot give the excuse, “the devil made me do it.”

**(1 John 5:19) We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.**

If you love and follow Jesus Christ, John wants you to **know** (have assurance based on facts) that you are a child of God. Therefore, even though the whole world lies under the power of the evil one and you temporarily live in the world, the evil one cannot touch you (cause you to do evil and sin). Though this whole world lies under the power of the evil one, we know that at the right time Jesus Christ will return and be manifested to the world as the Holy One in ultimate power and authority. Paul described Jesus’ coming in 1 Timothy 6:15, “which he will bring about at the right time—he who is *the blessed and only Sovereign*, the King of kings and Lord of lords.” In the Book of Revelation, John also described Jesus as the “the King of kings and Lord of lords.” Until Jesus returns, in the world a battle between the evil one and its followers will rage against the Lord Jesus Christ and His followers. In Revelation 17:14, John wrote, “They (those united in yielding their power and authority to the beast) will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.” Know that as a follower of Jesus Christ, you are chosen and (will be) faithful as He is faithful. When Jesus returns and the whole world sees Jesus, they will see Him as John described in Revelation 19:16, “On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, ‘King of kings and Lord of lords.’” The evil one will exercise power in this world until evil is finally defeated. The battle continues, but the ultimate victory belongs to Jesus and His followers. The

evil one does not touch Jesus' followers because God indwells them and God will not permit the evil one to touch His children: they will be sanctified and glorified no matter what the evil one tries to do as part of the spiritual battle. Though the world lies under the power of the evil one, which explains why we see evil seemingly increasing in the world, John would have believers pray for one another as the Apostle Paul prayed for those he wrote to in Ephesians 3:18-21, "I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be *filled with all the fullness of God*. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." Remember: the evil one cannot touch a true follower of Jesus Christ because those born of God are "filled with all the fullness of God," and every believer prays as Paul prayed.

**(1 John 5:20) We know also 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 by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.**

John wanted those who love and follow Jesus Christ to **know** (have assurance) that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and His Father sent Him into the world as a real human being to teach the truth, to suffer and die as an atoning sacrifice for sinners (to save them from sin and death), and to rise from the dead and ascend into heaven to give them eternal life, the Holy Spirit, and life with Him and all God's children forever. The followers of Jesus know and believe the facts about Jesus Christ. They believe the facts about His first coming and His promised second coming are truthfully revealed in the New Testament. They know that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit have given them understanding of the Word of God written, and They will continue to give them understanding as they pray and obey and study the Bible. They know Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are the Truth and what They have revealed in and through the Bible is true. They know that all the fullness of God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) abides within them and they abide within the loving presence of the One God in



Three Persons. Finally, John summarized once again without reservation that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Jesus Christ is True. Jesus Christ is the true God. Jesus Christ is eternal life.

**(1 John 5:21) Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.**

John seems to end his first letter strangely, but the opposite of what John just wrote would be turning from Jesus Christ and turning to idols. Whatever we make more important than loving and obeying Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, the King of kings and Lord of lords, is our idol. With a term of endearment, “Little children,” John tells us, his readers, to have nothing to do with idols, but love, follow, and serve Jesus Christ the true God. Belief in Jesus Christ is not a belief in an idol, but belief in the true God.

**Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. Who did John write His letters to? Did he also write His letters to you? Explain your answer.
2. Why did John write 1 John?
3. Having studied 1 John, did he achieve his purpose in your answer to Question 2. for you? Explain your answer.
4. Why do the followers of Jesus have boldness when they pray?
5. How do the followers of Jesus know they have obtained their requests?

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