



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

SERIES: GOSPEL TRUTH FOR LIFE TOGETHER •

1 JOHN 5:16-21 • 11/19/2023

MAIN POINT

John challenges us to eliminate sin from our lives, affirm our relationship with Christ, and eradicate idols from our lives.

INTRODUCTION

What is the most memorable way God has used other believers to help you eliminate a certain sin in your life?

How has God used you to help encourage a Christian brother or sister in his or her battle with sin?

UNDERSTANDING

JOHN 5:16-17.

What did John say would happen when we pray on behalf of others who have fallen into sin?

Why do you think God expects us to hold one another accountable for our sins? In what ways is the body of Christ strengthened through this process?

John next turned from the subject of the believer's assurance in prayer to the Christian's duty of intercessory prayer. The joy of eternal life that we experience as believers should not result in a preoccupation with ourselves. Instead, it should lead us to care for other believers, whether their needs are material (1 John 3:17-18) or spiritual (5:16). Intercessory prayer is one of our highest privileges as believers and also one of our greatest responsibilities.

What are some of the things that distract you from praying about the spiritual well being of others?

In verse 17, John described sin as "all unrighteousness." What constitutes sin?

Why is it necessary that we eliminate sin from our lives, even though our relationship with God is rooted in His grace?

John's words challenge us to demonstrate concern and prayer for the spiritual condition of others. We should pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ that they will repent of all sin. In the case of persons who openly refuse to repent and believe, John did not require us to pray for such offenders. We should also take the sin in our

lives seriously. Our sin cost Jesus His life, and if we don't take it seriously, we abuse His sacrifice.

READ 1 JOHN 5:18-21.

John ends his letter with three certainties that characterize the Christian faith. What are they?

First, John states that as a believer, we are not to continue in sin. How is that possible?

Second, John reminds his readers that they are children of God. How should your identity as a child of God impact the way you live today?

Third, John emphasizes that our faith centers on Jesus Christ. Without Jesus and His work on your behalf, what would your relationship with God be like? What would your struggle with sin be like?

First, John declared once again that anyone who is born of God does not persist habitually in sin (see 3:6,9). This affirmation directly follows John's instructions regarding the need to pray for those who fall into sin. The Son of God Himself will keep them safe from the devil. John did not mean that Christians cannot be tempted but rather that the devil can never ultimately prevail. Second, John stated that believers know they belong to God. God is the source of their spiritual life and being. Third, our faith centers on the Son of God. He alone can rescue believers from the evil one and deliver them from the world. We can be confident of Christ's support and guidance as we live out our faith, but there is no knowledge of God and no power to live according to the truth apart from Jesus Christ.

What common word in verses 18-20 expresses affirmation to believers in regard to their relationship with God?

The verb know expresses the idea of knowing as a matter of fact. John was not presenting tentative suggestions but bold affirmations of the truth. He thought it vital that every Christian be able to claim as truth their power over sin, their identity as a child of God, and their relationship with Jesus.

Read 1 John 5:21 again. Why do you think John ended this letter with a warning for his readers to guard against idols?

What constitutes idolatry?

We are guilty of idolatry anytime we allow something to take the place of God in our lives. Think about your week. What are some of the idols that you worshiped? What would it look like if you replaced one of those idols with God?

John closed by challenging his readers to avoid anything that would lead them astray from the true God who has revealed Himself in Jesus: guard yourselves from idols. This abrupt warning at first seems out of place since the apostle had not previously mentioned in his letter the danger of worshiping material images and false gods that were a part of his culture. John urged his readers to have nothing to do with false ideas of God and the sins that accompany them. Apart from Jesus Christ, there is no genuine knowledge of God and no power to live according to the truth.

APPLICATION

As a Christian, how do you deal with the fact that you still struggle with sin?

What sin do you need to eliminate from your life? How can our group help you?

Is there another believer you need to prayerfully approach about the sin in his or her life? What is your motivation for doing so? How can you prepare to do that in a Christ-honoring way?

PRAYER

As you close your group time in prayer, pray that the people in your group would take sin seriously and would commit to eliminating it from their lives and holding each other accountable in love. Also thank Him for the sacrifice Jesus made in order to make a way for you to be in relationship with Him. Close by praying that this week God would bring to light any idols in your lives.

COMMENTARY

1 JOHN 5:16-21

In verses 14 and 15 John gives the reader assurance that God will answer prayer. Now he gives a specific encouragement to pray that God would restore a fellow believer (“brother”) who is sinning. There is, however, one limitation to such a prayer. If this person’s sin involves a “sin that leads to death,” prayer should not be offered. John has often mentioned the theme of sinning in this epistle (e.g., 1:7-10; 2:2, 12; 3:35, 89; 4:10). The believer is not without sin (1:8), but at the same time he is not characterized by an ongoing sinful lifestyle (3:89; 5:18). When a Christian “sees” his brother sinning a sin that does not lead to death, he is to pray for that person. The verb translated “he should pray” is a future tense verb (lit., “he will pray”), which expresses the Christian’s inevitable and spontaneous reaction. The result is that God will grant the sinning brother life.

But not every sinner is granted life as a result of answered prayer. The praying Christian can have confidence if the person's sin is not of the sort that leads to death. John does not strictly forbid prayer for such a person, but it is clear that he is in doubt about its efficacy. What exactly is the "sin that leads to death"? A few suggestions about the nature of the "sin to death" include the following: total rejection of the gospel, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, or a specific, deadly sin. We cannot be sure of the correct interpretation of the "sin to death." Thus, we need to focus on the positive point: we are to pray for our sinning brothers. This is certainly in line with God's will. Jesus prayed for Peter on the night Peter betrayed him (Luke 22:32), and we should do the same for one another.

John brings his first epistle to a close by summarizing three final affirmations, each introduced with the phrase, "we know": 1) A person born of God does not continue to sin and is kept away from Satan's harm. Jesus keeps him safe. The believer is secure in the grace of God, and Satan cannot take his salvation from him. 2) We are children of God, not under Satan's control as the world is. This reinforces the distinction between the satanically-controlled world system and the Christ-controlled body of believers who have been delivered from its power. 3) The Son of God has come into this world to give us understanding which leads to salvation. This strikes a one-two blow against the false teachers, the antichrists who claimed to have special inner knowledge of God and salvation apart from Jesus. God can be known in only one way—through Jesus. Truth can be known in only one way—through Jesus.