

Certain Faith in an Uncertain World

Reading: 1 John 5:13-21

Intro: What would a world controlled by Satan look like?

We would likely find opposition to the ways of God, persecution of those who follow God & enticing temptation & arguments to turn people away from God. We would likely see an undermining & corrupting of the truth regarding God, the world & humanity via false teachers & secular media. As well as this we would likely see people turning against each another – terrorising, hating, exploiting one another & the list could go on... The truth is we could go on describing what a world controlled by Satan would look like by simply observing the world we live in today.

If **“the whole world lies in the power of the evil one”** (v19b) were the only words we read it would be very depressing for us today. However the truth is these words are found in a section underlining why we can have confidence as believers. Why we can have certainty in the midst of the world under the control of the evil one! Why we can have certainty even when we hear another story of terrorism because! For the reality that the world lies in the power of the evil one is not the only truth we know. Yes we know that is true. We know Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers. We know he is the prince of the power of the air. However that is not all we know. In this final section John gives us at least five other things we can be certain of in a world that lies in the power of the evil one. And of course when John talks of the world he is not talking about God’s creation but the evil system which influences & drives so much of the world we live in (cf. 2:15-17).

Five truths every believer can know in enemy territory:

1. We can know that we have eternal life (13)

John writes; **“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.”** In this closing section John states the main purpose of his letter just as he does in his gospel (John 20:30-31). His Gospel was written so that we would believe & have life; his letter is written so we would know we already have eternal life because we believe.

John records in chapter 17:2-3 of his gospel; **“For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”** The world might well lie under the power of the evil one but Jesus has authority over all people & Jesus has given us eternal life! Jesus has the power to open the blinded minded minds of unbelievers & grant them eternal life. This is why we believe & John wants us to know we have eternal life because we believe.

What is eternal life? What does it mean to have eternal life? Keith Warrington writes *“Eternal life is not simply life that lasts forever. Rather, it is descriptive of the kind of life associated with eternity. It is not simply everlasting life but fullness of life that can be experienced because one has entered into a relationship with the eternal God himself.”* Eternal life is the life of the age to come. There is an age that is passing away & there is an age to come. John is telling us we can know that we now have the life of the age to come while we live in a world that is passing away. The work of the evil one is not the future, the life God has given us in Christ is the future! The world controlled by Satan is passing away but the eternal life we presently possess lasts forever! We are the possessors of the quality, confidence & hope of heaven in a world temporarily run by Satan.

2. We can know confidence in prayer (14-17)

How should knowing we have this eternal life affect how we live? One way it should is in how we pray which John moves to now. **Let’s read verses 14-17.**

In these verses John includes general prayer & specific prayer for others.

General prayer: In asking anything according to God’s will (14-15)

We should come to prayer with great confidence, with boldness in approaching God, with freedom of speech before him. Even if freedom of speech gets taken away in this world controlled by Satan, as believers we always have freedom of speech before our heavenly Father.

John Stott writes; *“Prayer is not a convenient device for imposing our will on God, or for bending his will to ours, but the prescribed way of subordinating our will to his.”* Sometimes prayer might start with us pouring out our hearts to God but its end is that his heart might be poured into us. John specifically says **“if we ask”** yet indicates prayer is more than asking. Prayer is two ways communication with God & therefore John’s emphasis on **“according to God’s will”** highlights that one key to answered prayer is listening to God first. Listening to his will so we know what to pray! For us this means especially listening to his voice through Scripture... The foundation for all Christian prayer is not my will be done but **“Your will be done...”** To pray his will we need to know his will...

John says when we pray this way we can know we have the requests we ask of him! Just as we have eternal life so we have the requests we ask for. That is a huge statement. To say we know he hears us is to say we know we have the answer. This gives great confidence in prayer (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20).

Specific prayer: In praying for others (16-17)

Our prayer life should not only be taken up with ourselves – with our own needs & concerns only. Our prayers should be full of compassion for others. We learn here that our prayers have the power to affect

the lives of others. In fact prayer has the power to bring life to others – here it’s in the context of a brother or sister who has committed a sin. **“He shall ask, & God will give him life...”** What might we need to pray for a brother or sister? That they see sin as sin & repent like in John’s example here... That they do not lose their assurance in Christ... That they are strengthened with grace...

E. M. Bounds wrote; *“Talking to men for God is a great thing, but talking to God for men is greater still. He will never talk well and with real success to men for God who has not learned well how to talk to God for men.”* R. A. Torrey wrote; *“Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God’s infinite grace & power. All that God is & all that God has is at the disposal of prayer. But we must use the key. Prayer can do anything God can do anything God can do anything, prayer is omnipotent.”* John wants us to know this.

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What does John mean by **“sin that does not lead to death”**? Here are some suggestions people have given:

1. In the sense it is a sin which lead to capital punishment in the context he was writing.
2. It refers to those talked about in 2:18-19.
3. John has something like 1 Cor. 11:30 in mind.
4. John is referring to the constant rejection of Christ – unbelief.

We can’t be sure & others have given other suggestions, I lean towards option 2 above. Perhaps having this here reminds us that it is not that Christians are certain about everything but that they are certain about the things essential to their faith.

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3. We can know victory over sin & protection from the evil one (18)

Three tactics of the enemy are to tempt us to sin, deceive us through false teaching & attack us through some form of persecution. John has touched especially on the first two in this letter & brought words of assurance again & again. Once more he writes to assure us; **“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.”** Near the beginning of this chapter John wrote; **“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”** In chapter 4:4 John also assured us; **“for he who is in you is greater that he who is in the world.”** The One who is in us is greater than the evil one who seeks to tempt, deceive or persecute.

The best way to read words by John like **“we know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning”** is not as a prescription of how to be a Christian, but as a description of the eternal quality of life we now have in Christ. It is our faith in what God says, including what he says about us, that gives us victory & while the evil one can tempt, deceive & persecute he cannot ultimately or personally touch us because Christ, who was born of God, protects us.

4. We can know that we belong to God (19)

John writes; **“We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”** John uses the term **“whole world”** for a second time here. He uses this term in 2:2; **“He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”** So even though the whole world lies in the power of the evil one there is still hope for the whole world in what Christ accomplished on the cross. This will help give us a balanced view towards the world we live in. However we need to know that we belong to God. Even though the world is in Satan’s grip we are in God’s grip & God’s grip on us is infinitely more secure than Satan’s grip on the world. **“No power of hell nor scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hands.”** The Message translates the first part of verse 19 like this; *“We know that we are held firm by God.”* This is why the evil one does not touch us. Jesus said in John 10:28-29; **“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”** We are held tenderly yet securely in the all-powerful hand of Christ & in the all-powerful hand of the Father & they are united in the protection of our souls. Add to this that we can also declare **“greater is he who is in us”**... because of the Holy Spirit within & we can know with certainty that we belong to the Triune God & he is not letting go!

5. We can know truth in Christ so that we can know the true God (20-21)

(*Read we can know... if time...)

We can know what we know because the Son of God has come & has given us understanding through his birth, life, teaching, death, resurrection, ascension, giving of the Spirit & promised return. The whole purpose being that we can know the true God & that we are in him because we are in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God & he is eternal life & therefore it is in knowing him & being found in him that we have eternal life. So when John writes; **“keep yourself from idols”** he is basically saying stick with what you know in Christ, stick with the one true God, don’t believe the false teachers, stick with the real testimony of God. This whole letter has been written that we might know that we know truth & life in Christ & therefore know the true God with certainty in an uncertain world.

Conclusion: Stick with what you know!

Stick with what you know is not always good advice but it is when it comes to apostolic truth regarding Christ, the only truth that truly brings us into fellowship with the true God! Note how verses 18, 19 & 20 all begin with a “we know...” underlining the note of certainty John desires his readers to know...