

4 Truths Every Christian Should *Know*

1 John 5:13–21

It's about 11:30 at night. I get a call. On the other end of the phone is a friend who is broken. I can tell he is fighting back the tears. A battle he will lose shortly. A child who beamed with potential and radiated with life had his life ripped away from him in a tragedy. A freak accident—a one-in-a-million type of situation—robbed a family of their only son.

On the other end of the phone a voice says, “I need you . . . I need you to tell me why this happened? Why did God take him? With all the drug addicts and drunks in the world, why him? Why couldn't I have died instead? Is it wrong to ask why? I am telling people things that I do not even believe. I am telling them God has a plan and it is all going to be okay. I do not even believe that. I'm mad. I don't *know* if it's right, but I am mad at God.”

I let him talk. There is a healing that comes just in being a presence. Sometimes people just need to talk. Finally, I asked him, “Why were you created?” He restated my question and put the word *we* in it: “Why were *we* created?” I said, “No, why were *you* created? What is the purpose of your life?” He said, “I have never thought about that before.”

Let me tell you. You were created for the glory of God. Your one purpose in life is to bring God glory. He was not created for you. You were created for Him. The truth is, some questions will never be answered. You will not understand why some things happen until you get on the other side and look back at the beautiful tapestry of your life that God has been weaving for His glory.

I told him that God can give peace—peace that passes all understanding. He wants understanding. He wants the “why” questions answered. God promises us a peace that is better than having the questions answered. It is a peace that passes (is greater than) having the questions answered (understanding).

Why tragedy comes into your life you will not always *know*. When this happens you must remind yourself of what you do *know*¹.

¹ Starting the “expositional rain” with the word *know* that will rain throughout the rest of the sermon to bring unity.

The word *know* appears thirty-nine times in the book of 1 John and five times in this section. I have really enjoyed walking through the book of 1 John. This is the last message in our Authentic Christianity series. We are coming in for a landing, but before we do John circles around the territory we have covered so far.

There are a total of 19 truths found throughout the book that we can *know*. I have them all listed in my notes, but let me give you a sampling:

1. We can *know* that we *know* God (2:3, 13, 14; 4:7).
2. We can *know* that we are in God (2:5).
3. We can *know* that it is the last hour (2:18).
4. We can *know* the truth (2:21; 3:19).
5. We can *know* that Jesus is righteous (2:29).
6. We can *know* that we will be like Jesus (3:2).
7. We can *know* Jesus appeared to take away sins (3:5).
8. We can *know* that Jesus is sinless (3:5).
9. We can *know* that we have passed out of death into life (3:14).
10. We can *know* no murderer has eternal life (3:15).
11. We can *know* love (3:16; 4:16).
12. We can *know* that God abides in us (3:24; 4:13).
13. We can *know* the Spirit of God (4:2).
14. We can *know* the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of error (4:6).
15. We can *know* that we love God's children (5:2).²

Transition: Throughout the book, John gives tests—some doctrinal, some moral, and some ethical—that you can take to see if you're authentically saved. Since you are a Christian, there are some things you should *know*. You should live with certain absolutes, certain truths that are so deeply anchored in your soul that no tragedy could shake you. Here is . . .

1. Truth #1 – You can *know* that you have eternal life.

1 John 5:13 says, "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 [emphasis added]."

² Daniel Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, & 3 John* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2014), 139–140.

When John says “these things,” he is referring to everything he has written in the epistle previously. John wants you to possess definite certainties. Eternal life is one of them.

John MacArthur, a pastor, theologian, and founder of the Master’s College in California, appeared on *Larry King Live*. Larry King is very open about the fact that he does not believe in the God of Christianity. I do respect him for having Christians on his show quite often. John MacArthur has been on his show many times dealing with issues like “What happens when a person dies?” “God versus Science,” “Is Homosexuality a Sin?” and “God and Politics.”

On one occasion, while they were off the air . . .

Larry King said, “Do you have any fear of death?”

John responded, “I have no fear of death.”

King said, “You don’t have any fear of death?”

John continued, “Well, you *know*, I have a normal antipathy toward pain and so I would like to minimize my pain in dying. That’s just kind of a normal thing. But death itself? No, I don’t have any fear of death.”

And King said, “Well, how is it that you have no fear of death?”

John said, “Because I *know* exactly where I’m going to go. I’m going to go to heaven.”

King – “And you’re sure you’re going to go to heaven?”

John – “Absolutely sure.”

Then Larry King said to John, “I wish I had that faith.”³

Are you sitting with Larry King this morning? Do you wish you had that faith? Do you wish you had a rock-solid certainty about where you will go when you die?

It is possible for Christians to doubt their salvation. That is why John provides all these evidences so you do not have to live in limbo. You can *know* where you will be in a million years. We must live for eternity, not for the present.

What if you went to a hotel room for a romantic getaway for three days? When you walk in, your wife says, “I love the place. The paint color is a little off though, the carpet is a little tattered, and I really wish we had a tiled shower from the floor to the ceiling. Honey, call the installers and see if we can get it done today.” The husband says (like every good husband does), “Darling, I will get right on that.” He calls the installers. They come and paint the hotel room, rip up old carpet and put down new carpet, and finally tile the shower from the floor to the ceiling.

³ John MacArthur, “Christian Certainties, Part 1,” recorded September 14, 2003, streaming audio, accessed June 3, 2016, <https://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/62-40/christian-certainties-part-1>.

Do you see anything wrong with this picture? Would you think that it was wasteful? Why would you feel that way? Because you are only staying in that room for three days! Why would you spend so much time and energy on something you will not take with you? You will leave it all behind.

Let me ask you, how much of your time, your energy, and your money are going to boats, houses, hobbies, and clothes that you will not take with you into eternity? You see, your home is not your permanent dwelling. Someone will likely live in it after you. You are not made to stay on earth forever. You are engineered for eternity.

Knowing that you have eternal life will sustain you when you get a call and your worst nightmare has just happened.

Transition: Truth #1 is that you can *know* that you have eternal life.

2. Truth #2 – You can *know* that God hears your prayers.

1 John 5:14–15 says, “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we *know* that he hears us in whatever we ask, we *know* that we have the requests that we have asked of him [emphasis added].”

While we wait at our temporary destination (earth) awaiting our permanent destination (heaven), we have a weapon. It is a privilege. It is prayer. In the meanwhile, while we are waiting, we have prayer. We are not left here with no communication into eternity. In the meanwhile, we have prayer.⁴

The Bible says in verse 14 that you have “confidence”; that little Greek word means “unreserved freedom.” We go before God’s face—literally face-to-face—and pray with unreserved freedom.

What can you ask? You can ask for anything.

How many of you in the auditorium use a debit card more often than you use checks? People are rarely using checks anymore. Checks, like tie-dye t-shirts, are going “out of style”—or, maybe more appropriately, “out of convenience.” What if you took out a check—a blank

⁴ John MacArthur, “Christian Certainties, Part 2,” recorded September 21, 2003, streaming audio, accessed June 3, 2016, <https://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/62-41/christian-certainties-part-2>.

check—and began to fill it out with an astronomical amount of money and tried to cash it at your local bank?

Let's picture this: you fill out the check and hand it to the attendant, and she says, "Sir, I am sorry. You do not have the funds in your account to cash this check. You wrote the check for a million dollars, but you only have \$17 in your account." You cannot cash that check.

Prayer is like that check. You have a blank slate. You can fill that check in with whatever you like. However, you can only cash that check in the bank of God's will. You have a freedom to ask God for anything that is permissible in His plan for your life.

If you ask a covetous prayer of wanting something material, and that is not God's plan for your life, then that prayer—like your check—gets bounced. Prayers are bounced for all types of reasons:

- Sometimes they are bounced because we ask with the wrong motives. James 4:3 says, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." Are some of your prayers not being answered because, ultimately, you want to fulfill an inner lust or a worldly desire?
- Sometimes prayers are bounced because stones and snakes are bad for us. Sometimes we are asking for things that we think are for our best benefit, but they are dangerous. Matthew 7:9–10 says, "Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?"
- Prayers are bounced for all sorts of reasons, and very soon I am going to be bringing a message on a Sunday night dealing strictly with prayer. Here is what we *know* for sure about prayer: God always answers prayer in a way that brings Him greatest glory.

You see, the Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ guide our prayers to the Father. They give them to the Father.

A child sees flowers in the yard. He runs to those flowers and pulls them out of the ground. He actually pulls as many weeds as he does the flowers. He takes the flowers to his dad, and his dad says, "Your mom will love them. I will take them to her in the house." Before going in the house, with his free hand the father begins to pick out all of the weeds and grass from the bouquet of yard flowers before giving it to the mother.

That is similar to what happens with our prayers. If there are prayers that are according to our will or are wrongly asked, they are taken out (or, you could say, answered with a “no”) because they are not God’s will.

Have you ever prayed and something different happened? That’s still an answer. The Holy Spirit says, “Father, this is what he’s asking, but this is what he really needs.”

Have you ever prayed and nothing happened? It is still an answer.

One scholar put it this way: Prayer is a lot like learning to color. When kids first start to color, they are outside the lines. They are also outside the correct shades of color too. If you look at a child’s drawing, you may have a purple tree, blue grass, or even basketball jerseys colored blue—a darker blue—a UK blue, and we all *know* that is an incorrect shade. It should be light blue—Carolina blue. That’s the way they were created. They only turned darker because of sin. Alright—I am digressing.

Prayer keeps the Christian in the will of God (in the lines of God). Nothing we ask for lies beyond the power of God except that which lies beyond His will, His purpose, His plan, His lines.⁵ Daniel Akin says, “God wants to give you what you would want God to give you if you were wise enough to want it.”⁶

Stephen Davey says there are basically four ways God will answer your prayers:

- He will give you a *no*.
- He will give you a *yes*.
- He will give you a *not that*.
- He will give you a *not now*.

Your prayers should not just be seeking God’s hand. They should also be seeking God’s face. Prayer is a means of communication with God. We do not pray to feel better; we pray to commune with Almighty God. Prayer is an exposure of your heart to God. In difficult times, be confident that God is hearing your prayers.

Transition: We should possess many Christian certainties. You can *know* that you have eternal life, you can *know* that your prayers are answered, and . . .

⁵ Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition*, 142–143.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 143.

3. Truth #3 – You can *know* you have victory over sin.

1 John 5:16–18 continues,

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. 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 [emphasis added].

The word *sin* appears six times in three verses. That means God really wants us to *know* something about sin.

Verses 16–18 are some of the most difficult verses to interpret in the Bible. There are entire messages and hundreds of pages of commentary devoted to these 3 verses. This is why I love expository preaching—laying a text open and allowing God’s intent in the passage to be my intent in the sermon. It’s possible to say a lot of true things, but the true things not actually come from the text. I strive to be textual and truthful.

The danger with topical preaching is that verses like these are sometimes neglected. If I only preached on topics, I would skip these verses. However, I want my preaching to teach people how to read the Bible. People read the Bible verse-by-verse, not three verses in Genesis then three verses in Psalms then three verses in Philippians, and so on—the typical layout of a topical sermon.

I heard this week that the average pastor studies two hours for a message. Two hours! Two hours to preach thirty to forty-five minutes. You ask, what’s wrong with that? Everything! Everything is wrong with that. The average expositor who really digs into the text might spend between twelve and eighteen hours for each message.

You will not always see everything that the pastor saw in those eighteen hours, but you will see the fruit of it. One man said it like this: “You always have more in your warehouse than in your show window.”

I have spent hours trying to grasp these few verses, and I am going to try to give it to you in about four minutes. Here it is . . .

John is dealing with three different people in these verses. **The first person** is a brother—a Christian—who has sin in his life (verse 16). We are to pray for him that he will repent (turn from) that sin and run to Christ for forgiveness. Notice verse 16: who are we to talk to about another person’s sin? God! Not someone else. When you pick up the phone or talk

quietly in a corner, you are gossiping. Proverbs 16:28 says that gossip is spread by evil people; they stir up trouble and break up friendships. If you are a gossip, I would stop and really ask myself the question, “Am I truly saved?” The Bible says wicked people (unbelieving people) spread gossip habitually. If you can gossip or tear someone apart who is not in your presence and go on without calling that person and asking for forgiveness, then at the very least you are not right with God—likely, you are not a Christian at all, because a Christian will be remorseful about that.

The second person, interestingly enough, is not called a brother. He is a non-believer. He is committing sin that leads to death. Notice the little word *a*—“a sin.” It is an indefinite article. Greek does not have an indefinite article, so the translators supply them for readability. Some translations say there is “a sin” leading to death. I prefer the ESV, which says there is “sin” leading to death. I do not believe there is a specific sin or a list of sins like the seven deadly sins. Daniel Akin found in his research three main ways people interpret this sin:

1. **A specific, deadly sin.** High handed sin, sin that is willful and deliberate; sin that is of a serious nature. Some, like F. F. Bruce, see the death as physical (ex. Ananias and Sapphira; Acts 5:1-11; incestuous man at Corinth; 1 Cor. 5:5; Corinthians abusing the Lord’s supper; 1 Cor. 11: 30).
2. **Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.** (Matt. 12:32; Mark 3:29). A deliberate, knowledgeable, willful, verbal and continual rejection of the truth that the Spirit bears witness to. It is a hardening of the heart to a point that prayer will not help.
3. **Total rejection of the gospel and Christ.** The sin of the false teachers who willfully and habitually oppose the witness of God to the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ (cf. 2:19). This one is not called a brother.⁷

The last option is what I would hold to without being dogmatic and while looking at other people’s interpretations humbly.

The third person is *you*. Verse 18 says, “We *know* that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning.”

Some translations like the King James Version and the New King James Version state that whoever is born of God does not sin. Again, I prefer the ESV which adequately pulls out the

⁷ Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition*, 144.

present tense by saying, “Everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning.” If you have been born of God, redeemed by Christ, and born again by the Holy Spirit, then you should not continue to live in sin. Sin is no longer a pattern in your life.

Occasional sins are not in view here, but persistent sins that people practice over and over again. This is not speaking of sinless perfection, but of a sinless direction.

When tragedy comes into your life, you are often at your weakest point spiritually. When you are asking a lot of “why” questions, that is prime time for Satan to tempt you where you are weak. *Know* this: you can have victory over sin.

Transition: The final Christian certainty that God desires for you to have is . . .

4. Truth #4 – You can *know* that Jesus is the real deal.

1 John 5:19–21 says,

We *know* that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

And we *know* 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, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols [emphasis added].

We have spent so much time throughout this study on the person of Christ. I will not belabor the truth here, but you should *know* that Jesus is the real deal.

The word *true* appears three times in verse 20. The word *true* mean “real.” Let’s read verse 20 and insert the word *real* where the word *true* appears:

And we *know* that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may *know* him who is **real**; and we are in him who is **real**, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the **real** God and eternal life.

John wants you to *know* that Jesus is real—so much so that he shows you in the next verse things and people who are not real: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”

John pits the real God against the false gods (idols). Jesus is the original. Jesus is not a copy. He is not an idol. He is not a tribal deity.

Jesus came so that you could *know* God. He is not a God you cannot approach. He is a Father with open arms. One man paraphrased like this: “Jesus is the true God and the real life. Dear children be on guard against all clever facsimiles.”

John says this plainly: No one is a Christian who does not believe this about Jesus.

Like Larry King, you can wish all you want, but if you do not believe Jesus is who He says He is, you will not have assurance of your eternity.

Conclusion

When tragedy comes into your life (and it will, because we live in a broken and fallen world), you find yourself asking, “Why?”

- Why did I have to get that doctor’s report?
- Why did I have to go through that divorce?
- Why did I have to lose that job?
- Why did he or she have to die?
- Why do I have to live with this situation?

When times like that come, you should remember that it is okay to ask why. God is not intimidated by your questions. Allow those questions to drive you to what you do *know* about our faithful Father.

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