

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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Pray & Do Not Pray

1 John 5:14 – 17

The first letter of John is a beautiful letter. It is a word of great encouragement that focuses on sublime truths. Since the truths espoused here are deep and profound, the expectations that the believer arrives at, are breath-taking. This is theology at its height. John has outlined the fact that we have fellowship with God (1:1 – 10) because we are in Christ, because our sins are forgiven, and because we are in the light. This fellowship with God is predicated on the forgiveness of our sins and the cleansing that is ours through the blood of Jesus. We have life in Christ because we partake of His life. Those who do not have this fellowship are in darkness, and the contrast between light and darkness is held out as a warning to walk in the light.

Forgiveness did not come easy – it cost the Lord Jesus Christ His life, and therefore, we must not presume upon our being forgiven as a pretext for further sin. We are under moral obligation to obey the commands of God (2:1 – 14). The principles of light and love go hand in hand and can never be divorced from each other. If we do not love our brethren, we do not exhibit the traits of those who say they are in the light. John reminds his readers to not love the world and the things in the world, because whoever loves the world does not love God, and such a person does not have the love of the Father in themselves.

John warns his readers that the last hour has come and with it many antichrists (2:18 – 28). These antichrists have demonstrated that they are apostates – “they went out from us because they were not of us” (2:19). John states that the true believer continues in the love of God and in fellowship with the saints (and God). These apostates or antichrists deny the coming of Jesus in the flesh and such a denial is proof of no salvation belonging to them (2:22, 23). The believer is to abide in Christ so that at his coming we might rejoice in Him and not be ashamed away from Him (2:28).

The anticipation of Christ’s return is supposed to encourage us to walk in holiness (3:1 – 10). We are to demonstrate our new life by loving each other – this is an indication that we have passed from death to life (3:14). The believer loves the truth and loves the people of God. (3:16 – 24). Since we live in dangerous times we are to be discerning and test the spirits (examine and watch out for false teachers and teaching). This reference to “*the spirits*” is a reference to the spirit of antichrist (4:3) which denies the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Discerning between the Holy Spirit and these false spirits is the test of whether a person is a believer or not. We recognize the truth in others because we have the Spirit of truth within us. This is how we judge error and heretical teaching (4:6). John persistently draws us back to God’s perfect love that we must emulate and practice (4:7 – 21). Proof of this love for God is through demonstrable acts of love.

In chapter 5, John gives definition of true Christianity or of true Christians (as if he has not been doing that all along). It is by being in Christ, by believing in Him that we overcome the world (5:1 – 5). John provides a defense of the person of Christ, and states that eternal life is to be found in Christ only (5:6 – 12). Any person who does not have the Son does not possess this eternal life. John concludes his exhortations to live in Christ (5:13 – 21) with words of encouragement and warning. He states confidently that if we believe in the name of the Son of God we can be assured that we have eternal life. This believing is linked to everything he has previously said both by demonstration of life and confession of faith. He uses the word

“confidence” in the sense of assurance. For instance, in verse 14, if we ask anything according to His will we know God hears us. Our asking and the assurance of receiving are linked to being in accordance with the will of God (5:15). The language of assurance is seen by the fact that John uses the phrase “we know” over and over again (see vv. 13, 15, 18, 19, 20²).

As Christians we have two obligations. John tells us to remain in God’s light and in God’s love. We remain in God’s light by walking in the light, by confessing our sins, by obeying God’s commandments and by loving one another. On the negative side, John states that we must not love the world and we must beware of the spirit of antichrist. The first two chapters are taken up with the subject of God’s light. Secondly, we remain in God’s love by purity of life, practicing righteousness, loving in deed and truth, testing the spirits and again, loving one another. This grand theology leads us to where we are now in chapter 5. John wants us to “know”, so he is concerned with our assurance. 1 John 5:13 – 21 is concerned with how to grow in assurance. John gives us three directives to attain assurance. First of all, we are to persevere in prayer (5:14 – 17). Secondly, we are to persevere in the things we know (5:18 – 20, and finally, we are persevere in guarding our hearts (5:21).

These three directives are headed by verse 13 which is an exhortation by John to his readers who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. They can be certain that they know they have eternal life because they believe. We must never forget that for John to arrive at this verse (5:13) all the preceding injunctions and exhortations apply. No person can claim assurance of eternal life if the issues connected with remaining or abiding in God’s light and love do not apply to them. In the first section (5:14 – 17, John raises two interesting facts. The first is that we can have confidence in God in our praying. The key issue is expressed in verse 14b – “that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us”. The ears of God respond to His will prayed over and prayed for. We should always desire the will of God in our praying. If we ask for anything not in accordance with His will, the implications of what John is saying, is that God will not hear us. Verse 15 progresses from our confidence in God’s will to the actual securing of what is asked for. Faith lays hold of the promises of God. However, in verse 16 John commences the second issue from the positive side. Here is a person who has sinned (but it is not sin that leads to death) whose sin will be forgiven on the basis of someone praying for him. Secondly, and from the negative perspective, John states that there is sin that leads to death and we should not pray regarding that (vs. 16). The question is then, what is the sin that leads to death, or the sin that God does not forgive? It is of course, the sin against the Holy Spirit as recorded in Matthew 12:31, 32? Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not forgiven in this age and the age to come. Blasphemy against the Spirit is attributing to the Holy Spirit the works of the devil. The Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, or the devil (Matt. 12:22 – 32). There is no forgiveness for this sin. It is interesting that 1 John speaks vehemently against antichrist and the spirit of antichrist. The apostate denies the Person and Work of Christ. It is the highest form of unbelief, and again, it essentially is blasphemy against the Spirit. We know that all sin leads to death (“the wages of sin is death” – Rom. 6:23) so John obviously must mean something else by the fact that there are sins that do not lead to death. It is his way of dealing with the unforgivable sin (of Matt. 12:31, 32). Sins that do not lead to death is a way of saying that these sins can be forgiven. Sin that does lead to death is John’s way of pointing out that there is no forgiveness for that sin, and the only sin this can refer to is the Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Obviously, these are people who at one time purported to be Christians, but now they have turned away from God and denounce God and Jesus Christ as a lie. This is to accuse of God of being the devil – for this, God says, there is no forgiveness. This is the spirit of antichrist and apostasy. Christians often wonder if they are guilty of this sin – they cannot be or otherwise they would not be believers. If they were guilty, then they would deny Christ vocally and by way of life. Is not this a serious condition? This is why John closes his letter with a warning to us to guard ourselves against idols. Let us keep ourselves in the love of Christ and pray according to His will, for in this God delights, and will surely answer us.