

1 John 5:18

[1 John 5:18-21](#) says,

^{1Jn 5:18} **We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.** ¹⁹ **We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies *under the sway of the wicked one.*** ²⁰ **And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.** ²¹ **Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.**

In this next to the final study, John closes out with the three phrases “**we know**” (v18-20). This has been his methodology and approach all along - that of reminding his readers of what they already “**know**”. John is simply continuing with his theme of assurance and confidence that every believer should have regarding their salvation. One of the evidences of genuine biblical salvation as John has consistently taught and is now reinforcing one last time is the believer’s attitude towards sin (5:18), the world (5:19), and the Son of God (5:20). These three verses serve as John’s summary statements for everything that he has previously taught in this letter.¹ In the five (5) chapters of [1 John](#), there are 40 uses of the verb “**know**”, or a form of that word. That is the greatest concentration of the use of the word “**know**” in the New Testament. The Gospel of John uses it more than any other book (137 times), but that is in 21 chapters. So, proportionately, John uses the word “**know**” more than any other writer in the New Testament. It is a very important element of his teaching – knowing truth, understanding truth, and then building your life around that truth.

A successful Christian life is always built on the foundation of biblical knowledge. A true knowledge of God is utterly indispensable in being able to live out the Christian life practically. Too often I am confronted by believers who seem to want to live out their lives very subjectively, very feeling oriented. It is like they always feed on a kind of mystical element that they entertain. I find nothing mystical about the Christian life at all. To the contrary, it is very objective in nature. Recently I was preparing for the new study on [1 Peter](#) and the very first thing that I did was to see how many imperative tense verbs that it had. There were 37 commands. The imperative tense exhortations remove all of the subjectivity and mysticism out of the Christian life. Rather, what it says is that because of the doctrine and truths that you have been taught, go live your life this way. It is like God is definitively saying that this is my clear and distinct will for your life. In essence, believers should constantly be applying to their life the well-defined objective truths that God has provided in Scripture. The success of someone’s Christian life is always centered on their obedience to the revealed truths of God’s Word. His truth is very objective and very tangible, and the moment that we become mystical and subjective with it we lose focus as to what is meaningful and godly. There is no mystery, nothing mystical about the Word of God.

In v18 John simply reiterates what he taught in [1 John 3](#), or that “**whoever is born of God does not sin**”. In fact, he made the same statement in [1 John 3:9](#),

^{1Jn 3:9} **Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.**

Both in [1 John 5:18](#) and [1 John 3:9](#) the verb “**does not sin**” is in the present tense indicating continuous activity – “does not sin continually and habitually as a pattern of their life”. These words refer explicitly to continual sin, habitual sin, persistent sin, practicing sin, and ongoing sin in a person’s life. Because the verbs are in the present tense, they do not and cannot mean or refer to an isolated act of disobedience or sin in the individual’s life, but rather to a very settled habit of sin in their life.² We might call it their lifestyle or their settled tendencies and propensities toward a particular sin in their life. It is their “bent”, their ongoing inclination. A true believer cannot remain indifferent to sin in their life because it simply cuts cross grain against their spiritual nature and because they have “**God’s seed**” which remains in them ([1 John 3:9](#)). A genuine spiritual birth issues forth in a godly spiritual life. What John has taught all the way through this letter is that one of the genuine evidences of someone being saved is that they are not living in habitual sin. [1 John](#) is as practical of a letter as someone will find in the New Testament. In these verses John is simply stating that if someone continues to live in sin as a prevailing and controlling pattern of their life without regard to the Word of God, then that person has never been saved.

The problem that the current Christian culture has is that it has created a spiritual perspective that places cultural compassion above biblical truth. No sincere Christian is against meaningful compassion, but not at the expense of biblical truth. As long as someone is willing to verbally confess Christ, then the church seems to always be willing to accept that person’s salvation as being genuine. The problem with that approach is that it often lacks spiritual discernment and judgment. In both of these verses, as well as [1 John 3:6](#) that uses the same phrase, John uses the word “**whoever**”. In the actual Greek text, it uses the word “**everyone**”. No matter which of those words are used, it is making a universal declaration that does not allow for exceptions. Now, without rehearsing all of this again, John’s declarative conclusion is that the individual who lives in habitual, persistent, practicing, and ongoing sin simply is not saved. John is clearly talking about the prevailing characteristic of a person’s life and not some isolated or momentary instance of sin that is common to every Christian. It is both unreasonable and unbiblical to think that someone who is defined as a “**new creation**” in Christ will continue to live as someone who is without Christ – yet the modern church seems to tolerate that as both normative and acceptable.

Now, John has this phrase that he uses in [1 John 5:18](#) which says “**but he who has been born of God keeps himself**”. Based on which translation that someone is reading, this phrase may be a little difficult to follow. The NASB, AMP, ISV, and RSV all seem to capture the true meaning. For instance, and this is probably the best translation, the NASB and RSV read “**but He who was born of God keeps him**”. The accurate meaning is that the “**He**” is referring specifically to Christ, so it is Christ who keeps or guards the believer. Jesus Christ is consistently identified in the New Testament as the “**only begotten Son of God**”, or the One who was born of God, born by God or out of God. For instance, [John 1:14](#) says,

Jn 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

[John 3:16](#) and [John 3:18](#) say,

Jn 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Jn 3:18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

1 John 4:9 says,

1Jn 4:9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

V18 is a great verse of encouragement because it specifically speaks of Christ's protection of the believer from Satan, or "**the wicked one**". The word "**keeps**" is in the present tense so it could be translated "**keeps and continues keeping**". It means to guard from loss or injury by properly keeping an eye on the individual. It means to watch over so that the individual can be preserved.³ It means to watch over something attentively, to keep the eyes focused and fixed on something or someone.⁴ It would be similar to a parent watching over a young child while they are playing outside near something like a pool or a busy street that could be dangerous to them.

Now, what John says is "**the wicked one does not touch him**". The word "**touch**" is "*hapto*" and it means to fasten on to something, to grasp it so as to exert a modifying influence on it.⁵ Just think about this for a moment. What John is clearly stating, and this is an amazing statement, is that God has not given Satan permission to grasp or lay hold of a believer to do them harm. He is not allowed to "**touch**" the believer to bring harm on his life without God's clear permission, and the way that this passage reads is that that is not something that God is going to normally do. He allowed it in the case of Job, but there is no reason for a believer to think that God is going to allow Satan to grasp and lay hold of believers to bring harm into their life. **1 Peter 1:5**, speaking of believers, declares,

1Pe 1:5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Very often the difficulties that believers may be experiencing are related more to God's discipline than Satan's attack against their life. That is not in any way to discredit Satan's attempts, but simply to acknowledge God's protection of the genuine believer.

The word used there for "**kept**" literally means to be guarded.⁶ The AMP, ESV, ASV, and RSV all use the word "guarded", the NIV uses the word "**shielded**", and the NASB uses the word "**protected**". Then to make it even better, it is in the present tense, passive voice which means that it is something that God is continually doing for the believer. God is continually keeping, guarding, shielding, and protecting the believer from the enemy and God will not allow the wicked one to simply grasp and lay hold of a believer's life. We are God's children, and as our Father, He will protect us from Satan. This should be a great encouragement to every believer. Obviously, if a believer does not keep themselves pure (**1 Timothy 5:22**), or if they are disobedient to the Word of God (**1 John 3:22**), if they do not keep themselves unspotted from the world (**James 1:27**), or they do not keep themselves in the love of God (**Jude 21**), then obviously that believer is opening the door for Satan to do great harm to their life – and he definitely will.⁷ Satan will take advantage of every opportunity that a believer gives to him. As a caveat to this, however, it still remains that God through His supernatural power will protect and keep the believer. **Philippians 1:6** declares,

Php 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

The point is that believers are ultimately and eternally protected by God, but if they willingly, knowingly, and intentionally open their life to sin then God may allow Satan to use that choice against them as part of their discipline. We cannot quantify the extent of that harm. Let us just assume that a believer does fail in their life in some measure, but it is not what could be deemed as a willing or intentional sin against God. It could just be a moment of weakness, or some kind of difficult trial that they are experiencing, or a very strong temptation in which they are momentarily captured. It is my understanding that in those kinds of scenarios which are very real to every believer that God will not allow the enemy to “**touch**” the believer. To the contrary, God will use those moments to teach the believer and to develop maturity in their life so that they can better reflect Christ in their life. We all learn more from our failures and mistakes than we do from our successes.

ENDNOTES

¹ Akin, 211.

² Stott, 130.

³ Strong, 1411.

⁴ Zodhiates, 1380.

⁵ Zodhiates, 245.

⁶ Zodhiates, 1456.

⁷ MacArthur, 207.

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