

1 John 5:19-21

1 John 5:19-21 says,

1Jn 5:19 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.**

When John says in v19 that “**we are of God**” he clearly means that the believer has been taken out of the darkness and depravity that has been imposed on the world by Satan and has become a part of a very different kingdom – the kingdom of God. “**We are of God**”. Nothing could be any more emphatic or any more encouraging than those words – “**we are of God**”. We were born in sin, we lived and indulged ourselves in sin, we were enemies of God, we disdained both Christ and His salvation, we had no time for God and no interest in Christ, but then God saved us. We were undeserving and had no spiritual merit whatsoever, but God in His grace removed us from the kingdom of darkness. We were redeemed and our entire life changed. When John says that “**we are of God**”, it means much more than the fact that we were saved. It would be exegetically incorrect and shortsighted to only interpret that phrase as dealing with what happened to a believer initially. What it means is that as believers that the very life of God is continually being imparted to us. His life within the believer is what motivates them. It is what moves them and should be what constantly controls them. In another sense, it means that everything that we are, everything that we have, and everything that will transpire in our life is totally connected to God’s will for our life. Everything about the believer’s life is totally dependent on God.

Once we became a part of His family, at that moment God became the defining and governing focus of our life. He guarantees our spiritual security, He provides what we need to live, and He gives us the spiritual strength needed to live out the Christian life in a way that honors Him. Everything that we are and have is completely dependent on God in every way possible. The very desire to live for God is completely dependent on His ongoing work in our hearts and lives. The way that Peter expressed this is that God has given to us His “**divine nature**”. **2 Peter 1:4** says,

2Pe 1:4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is in the world through lust.*

Having the nature of God creates the life of God in the believer, so anyone who is truly “**of God**” will manifest that reality in their life. It is a grave contradiction for someone to confess Christ, but then to live in such a way that does not reflect Christ. Once again, God’s life has been imparted and planted in the believer. The believer partakes and shares in the very nature of God Himself, and therefore their life has to manifest that work. Anything less is in opposition to the truth of their being “**of God**”. If we leave this idea of being “**of God**” to just mean that someone has eternal life because of some decision that they may have made, then we have denied the true biblical meaning of salvation. Apart from the initial work of being born again, salvation also includes the actual transformation of a person’s life. It is not that we are just good people or moral people or religious people – not at all, never. There are plenty of people in the world who are “good” by the world’s standards, and there are plenty of people who lead fairly moral lives, and there are plenty of religious people – but they are not saved.¹ On the

other hand, believers are “**of God**”. We have God’s life actively operating in us, we have had all of our sins completely forgiven, we have a new nature, and we are now in the most eternally safe place that there could be – we are “**in Christ**”.

One critical area of what it means to be “**of God**” is that one day we will actually be with Him. [Colossians 3:4](#) says,

Col 3:4 **When Christ *who is our life* appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.**

Whenever I travel, the first thing that I do is check in at the ticket counter, which includes my luggage. They place a destination tag on the luggage that follows me to every city that I am travelling to, and the last city on the baggage tag is my final destination. That is exactly what God has done for us. He has placed a final destination tag on our life, and no matter what happens to us, we know that we will arrive safely in His presence. We are destined to be with God in His kingdom. Lost people have a final destination tag on their life and it is called the Lake of Fire. Eventually, no matter what their life may have been like, unfortunately they will arrive at their final destination – a place made for the devil and his angels.²

The third thing that John says that “**we know**” is found in [1 John 5:20](#),

1Jn 5:20 **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.**

Believers know that Christ has come and that what he says is true and accurate. The reason for that is because John says that Christ “**has given us an understanding**”, and that understanding is so that the believer may know Christ. The word “**understanding**” is the Greek word “*dianoia*”. It refers specifically to the faculty of a person’s mind.³ As the word is utilized in this verse, it refers to a supernatural discernment that is given to someone.⁴ One very important observation is that the verb “**has given**” is in the perfect tense which means that the understanding is a permanent possession that was given to the believer by God at salvation and that “**understanding**” actually grows and increases in the life of a committed follower of Christ. This should be one of the defining attributes of a genuine believer that their faith and their commitment to Christ becomes more and more solid and enduring as they grow spiritually in their faith. [1 Corinthians 2:16](#) says that “**we have the mind of Christ**”.

1Co 2:16 **For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.**

What that means for the believer is that they are capable of not only knowing God, but of actually receiving teachings of the Word of God into their heart and life. There is always something amiss when someone who claims to be saved is always questioning and doubting the veracity of what the Bible teaches. Certainly there are things in the Bible that are often difficult to understand. [2 Peter 3:16](#) says,

2Pe 3:16 **as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures.**

However, that does not sanction or empower the believer to always be casting doubt on God's Word. Just because a believer may not understand something does not mean that God is incompetent and inaccurate in what He has communicated in His Word. [Romans 3:4](#) says it this way,

Ro 3:4 **Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged."**

[1 John 5:10](#) says that "...he who does not believe God has made him a liar..."

One way that we can think about the idea of "**understanding**" is by asking ourselves a very simple question. The question is this: "*When we think about life, do we think about it spiritually?*" How do we see life? Is everything that we relate to simply physical in nature? Is it something where we believe that we have all of the resources and answers to solve all of life's problems and issues? It seems that if someone is going to claim Christ and to profess Christianity and its teachings as the foundational element of their life, then they would be someone that sees life much more from a spiritual perspective. A true believer is someone who thinks like God thinks. If a believer is not committed to the Word of God, then they will build their life around worldly principles simply because they have not disciplined themselves to think like God thinks. The thoughts of God as revealed in the Word of God should become the thoughts of every believer. Those who wrote the words of Scripture were inspired by God to do so. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit to think a certain way, and that way was built solely around the words that God had given to them. One of the primary principles provided throughout the Word of God is simply that as a man thinks in his heart, so he will live out his life. **The reason that so many people live in an unbiblical way is because they think in an unbiblical way. What a man thinks determines how a man lives.** That is why it is so important for believers to embrace the Word of God into their life so that they can think like God thinks. That is how a believer's "**understanding**" actually grows – they feed on the Word of God. That is what allows them to think spiritually and not worldly. Many Christians seem much more worldly minded than they are spiritually minded. Their entire life seems to be utterly absorbed by worldly things, worldly pursuits, and worldly ideas, and the primary reason is because they are feeding their mind with worldly values.

Please notice in v20 that John uses the word "**true**" on three separate occasions. Each of those three words for "**true**" are the Greek word "*alethinos*". It comes from the Greek word "*alethes*" which literally means to not conceal something, not to hide something, but to clearly reveal it.⁵ So, "*alethinos*" is referring to the nature of God that He is always truthful in what He says. In practical terms for the believer, God is someone Who can always be trusted in what He says. [Hebrews 6:18](#) and [Titus 1:2](#) declare the following,

Heb 6:18 **that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.**

Tit 1:2 **in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began,**

Now, what John is addressing in the context of [1 John 5:20](#) should be very clear. When taken with his discussion in v18 and v19 of the simple fact that "**the whole world lies under the power of the wicked one**", what John is communicating is the criticality of the believer knowing and embracing the truth. Why? It is because the world is a place that is utterly filled and overflowing with the lies, the falsehoods,

and the deceptions of the devil. The reality of this is so strong and so prevalent that it simply cannot be denied. In fact, to deny the reality of Satan's presence and influence is evidence of his ongoing impact and effect on people. Just by comparison, think of the amazing and divergent differences between Christianity, Mormons, and Jehovah Witnesses – all of who claim to be using the Bible. Christians rightly believe that there is only one true God who is a triune God who is and always has been eternal. The Mormons, on the other hand, assert that the God of the Bible is just one among many deities and that when a male Mormon dies that they also will become "gods". The Jehovah Witnesses say that it is blasphemy to say that Jesus or the Holy Spirit are divine beings. Clearly, it is not enough for someone to simply say "*I believe the Bible*".⁶ Honestly, based on who is saying that, it means nothing at all.

Please appreciate that there is much significance related to the truth and its bearing on a believer's life, and all of it relates to knowing the true God. Because we live in a world that is utterly filled with the devil's lies and deceptions, knowing the truth is vital to being successful in the Christian life. It must be understood that Satan is called the "**ruler of this world**", so every part of the Christian life becomes one of spiritual conflict whether the individual realizes it or not. What has to be understood is that the impacts of life in this world are much more spiritual than physical. We generally see things as being physical, but in reality that is not the focus of what is taking place in people's lives. In the end, eternity hinges not on physical realities, but on spiritual realities. We all only live "X" number of years, but after that we spend the remainder of eternity in a very different dimension – either an incredible place or an incredibly bad place. There are no exceptions. [Mark 8:36](#) puts it all in perspective when it says,

Mk 8:36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

Anyone can live however they want. They can live a life fully committed to Christ or a life not committed to Christ at all, or anything in between. We all will make that decision – either consciously or unconsciously, and no one is exempt from having to make this decision. The issue is simple – we are all engaged in a very strong spiritual warfare whether we like it or not. The enemy will do everything that he can possibly do to deceive you, to trick you, and to make you think and believe that you do not have to really be concerned about all of this eternal "stuff" – and he works overtime on Christians. In [John 12:31](#), Jesus actually calls Satan the "**ruler of this world**".

Jn 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.

Because of this reality, every single part of life and the convictions and ideas that someone has about their life is in reality a spiritual battle that has eternal consequences associated with it. The devil will convince you that it is perfectly okay to ignore these realities and to disregard them as unimportant. He will lie to you and deceive you by using the world's philosophies, ideas, values, and beliefs as the basis of your decision making. He will make you think that you have a lot of time to make the right decisions. He will change your priorities so that the things of God in your life take a very secondary and subordinate role so that you can fulfill all of your worldly pursuits and goals. He will cause you to doubt the truth of God's Word and constantly question whether or not you need to be personally committed to it. He will convince you that indifference to spiritual values is very normal and not something that is to be taken very seriously. Listen – this work of Satan that is relentless, persistent, ruthless, and always working against a person. It never stops. So what is the point? The point is simple. As a believer you have two things that are utterly essential and vital to the spiritual realities that surround your life and the

life of your families. You have an “**understanding**” and you “**know Him who is true**”. You have the truth and you understand the truth. Just think for a moment of the tragedy that this creates in an unbeliever’s life because they simply do not believe that the devil even exists. They have no understanding and they reject that which is true. The genuine believer in contrast to the unbeliever and the pseudo and false believer is utterly different. What makes them different? It is this “**understanding**”. It is knowing “**Him who is true**”. A real believer can differentiate between that which is true and that which is false, between that which is temporal and that which is eternal, and between God’s light and Satan’s darkness. If someone does not have a certainty about these things, in all likelihood they are not even saved.

John closes out the last verse with the simple statement that believers are to “**keep yourselves from idols**”. Suffice it to say that idolatry is rampant in the culture in which we live. If we could define idolatry in very simple terms, it would be anything that people elevate above God in their heart and in their life. The culture in which we live is saturated with many distractions that absorb both people’s time and their resources. Ultimately, those distractions often become idols in people’s lives because they become more captivated and attracted to their activities and their pursuits than they are to Christ Himself. Jesus said that mammon, or money, was an idol that would quickly draw a person’s heart away from God. Not everything that someone pursues is bad, but it becomes bad when their mind is more focused on what they are pursuing rather than their relationship to Christ. At that point, the good thing begins to charm and culturally hypnotize someone into thinking that their worldly pursuits and endeavors have great value. They may have value, but not at the expense of detracting from that individual’s relationship to Christ. May our focus always be on Christ and Him alone.

1Jn 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

ENDNOTES

¹ Lloyd-Jones, 704

² Lloyd-Jones, 708.

³ Strong, 1038.

⁴ Harris, *dianoia*, electronic page.

⁵ Strong, 931.

⁶ Plummer, 79.

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