

THAT YOU MAY
KNOW

A STUDY OF FIRST JOHN

“Assurance and
the Effects of
Regeneration”

1 John 5:18–21



“None have assurance at all times. As in a walk that is shaded with trees and checkered with light and shadow, some tracks and paths in it are dark and others are sunshine. Such is usually the life of the most assured Christian.”

—Ezekiel Hopkins


Men of the Word

REVIEW


“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

—1 John 5:13

- **1 John 1:1–4 – “Assurance and the Historicity of Christ”**

 *Do you believe that the biblical testimony about Jesus Christ is true?*

- **1 John 1:5–10 – “Assurance and the Confession of Sin”**

 *Are you deeply aware of your sin and do you acknowledge it to God?*

- **1 John 2:1–2 – “Assurance and the Sufficiency of Christ”**

 *Do you believe that the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for your sin?*

- **1 John 2:3–6 – “Assurance and the Obedience of God’s Commands”**

 *Are you zealous to obey God’s revealed will for your life?*

- **1 John 2:7–11 – “Assurance and the Love of One’s Brother”**

 *Do you give yourself sacrificially for the benefit of other believers?*

- **1 John 2:12–17 – “Assurance and the Hatred of Evil”**

 *Do you loathe the things that are contrary to God and His ways?*


- **1 John 2:18–27 – “Assurance and the Persistence in Truth”**

 *Do you hunger for and persist in the truth of God’s Word?*


- **1 John 2:28–3:3 – “Assurance and the Anticipation of Glory”**

 *Does your longing for Christ’s return influence your life today?*


- **1 John 3:4–10 – “Assurance and the Practice of Righteousness”**

 *Are you convinced that sin is utterly inconsistent with your new life?*

- **1 John 3:11–24 – “Assurance and the Lifestyle of Love”**

 *Are you convinced that love is absolutely essential to your new life?*


- **1 John 4:1–6 – “Assurance and the Discernment of Error”**

 *Do you care about the truth and are you growing in discernment?*


- **1 John 4:7–10 – “Assurance and the Primacy of God’s Love”**

 *Does your love for others flow from an awe over God’s love for you?*

- **1 John 4:11–14 – “Assurance and the Reflection of God’s Love”**

 *Do you feel compelled to love others because of God’s love for you?*

- **1 John 4:15–21 – “Assurance and the Experience of God’s Love”**

 *Are you astonished by God’s love for you as shown through Christ?*


- **1 John 5:1–5 – “Assurance and the Triumph of Faith”**

 *Is your faith in Jesus Christ producing increasing victory over sin?*

- **1 John 5:6–12 – “Assurance and the Reception of God’s Word”**

 *Do you accept the apostolic testimony of the person & work of Christ?*

- **1 John 5:13–17 – “Assurance and the Success of Prayer”**

 *Do you believe God listens to and answers your prayers?*

“Assurance and the Effects of Regeneration” – 1 John 5:18–21

**Three Final
Assertions
(vv. 18–20)**

“We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and that 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. This is the true God and eternal life.”

**One Final
Exhortation
(v. 21)**

“Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”

I. Three Absolute Truths about the New Birth

1 John 5:18–20

"We know."



- Each of the three assertions of 5:18–20 begins with “We know that.”
- Each of the three assertions are intended to be understood as objective, absolute truths confessed by all genuine believers.
- Each of the three assertions describes an effect of regeneration—“the divine impartation of eternal life into the spiritually dead sinner” (MacArthur & Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 580).
- Each assertion assumes the assertion that follows, as John reasons backwards from the outworking of salvation (v. 18) to its origin (v. 20).
- Together, the three assertions serve as a summary of the contents of the entire letter—and as a final blow against the secessionists.

“Not, *We suppose, We hope, We should like to believe*—in the speculative, wistful tone common in these days of clouded faith; but *We know, we know, we know!* Here is the genuine Apostolic note, the ring of a clear and steady and serene conviction St. John speaks as a man sure of his ground, who has set his foot upon the rock and feels it firm beneath his tread.”

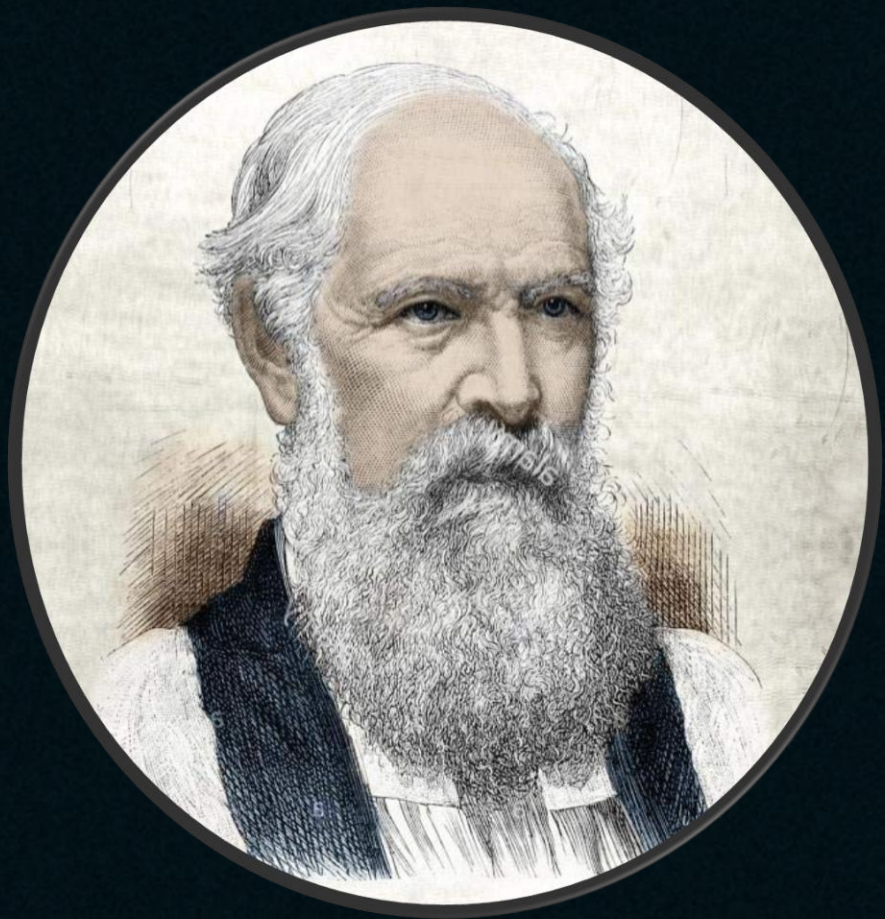
—George Findlay, *Fellowship in Life Eternal*, 415–16

ASSERTION #1: The new birth changes a person's practice.

“We know that no one who is **born of God** **sins**; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him” (5:18).

- **“Born of God”** – the instantaneous change from spiritual death to life; a repeated theme in John’s Gospel and first letter (John 1:12–13; 3:3–8; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 5:1, 4); emphasizes God’s sovereignty in salvation.
- **“Sins”** – a present tense verb emphasizing continuous practice—the practice of the dead sinner.
 - **1 John 3:6, 9** – “No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. . . . No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”

- But is this first assertion from John contradictory to the rest of the letter?
 - **1 John 1:8, 10** – “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. . . . If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”
 - **1 John 1:9** – “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
- John rejects the notion of *sinless perfection* for the Christian in this life; such a state will only be achieved in the life to come (1 John 3:2).
- But John insists upon the reality that regeneration necessarily brings *practical transformation*; “This we know!”—John asserts.



“A regeneration which a man can have, and yet live carelessly in sin or worldliness, is a regeneration invented by uninspired theologians, but never mentioned in Scripture. . . . In a word, where there is no sanctification there is no regeneration, and where there is no holy life there is no new birth.”

—J. C. Ryle

“We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him” (5:18).

- **“He who was born of God”** – some take this as referring to the believer (e.g., KJV); but the verb “was born” is not expressed the same way as in the previous clause (“is born”); it is best to interpret it as a reference to *the Son of God*, who was “begotten before all ages” (Nicene Creed).
- **“Keeps him”** – continuous action; the ultimate reason why those who have been born again can never die again (John 10:27–28; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; Hebrews 7:24–25; 1 John 2:1).
- **“The evil one does not touch him”** – “to make contact with a view to causing harm”; in addition to the Son’s preservation, we are guaranteed ultimate protection from the Destroyer (Luke 22:31–32; 1 John 4:4).

“Well aware of his own weaknesses and failures, the Spirit-guided believer can rejoice in the assurance that his own safekeeping does not depend solely upon his own efforts. . . . The security of every saint, even when he is tempted and sins, lies in the intercessory action of Christ on his behalf.”

—D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John*, 266

“Our security is not our grip on Christ but His grip on us.”

—David Smith “The Epistles of St. John,” 199

ASSERTION #2: The new birth changes a person's position.

“We know that **we are of God**, and that **the whole world** lies in *the power of the evil one*” (5:19).

- “**We are of God**” – a present, ongoing reality; an assertion about *origin* and *identity*; not only are we “born of God,” we are also “of/from God” — *we belong to Him, share in His life, and identify according to Him.*
- “**The whole world**” – the world order, marked by “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life” (2:16); it refers to all that which is not “of/from the Father” (2:16).

“We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of the evil one*” (5:19).

- “Lies in the evil one” – a reference to *position*; specifically with reference to *authority*; the world order is defined and ruled by the evil one (“the ruler of this world” – John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).
- The contrast is inescapable; not only are we protected from the *destruction* of evil one (v. 18b), but we are free from his *authority* as well; we *struggle* against him (Eph 6:12), but we do not *belong* to him.
- “It is a matter of lordship. For John there is no middle ground between these two spiritual masters and the realms which they head” (Hiebert, *Epistles of John*, 268).

ASSERTION #3: The new birth changes a person's perception.

“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. This is the true God and eternal life” (5:20).

- John asserts that the believer's perception has changed in three areas:
 - (1) “The Son of God has come” – we now recognize the nature of the Son's *incarnation* (He is both divine and human) and *mission*.
 - **1 John 4:9–10** – “By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.”

“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. This is the true God and eternal life” (5:20).

(2) “The Son of God . . . has given us understanding” – we now recognize that He has *enlightened* our once-darkened minds and granted us comprehension of the true significance of His coming (1 John 2:27); we embrace this as a *gift*, not an *achievement* (Matthew 16:15–17).

- **“So that you may know Him who is true”** – the goal of this comprehension is not merely to embrace historical/theological facts *about* Jesus, but to *know the only true God* (see John 17:3).

“Understanding Christian truth is not a matter of mastering doctrinal formulations, important though they are, or of grasping philosophical ideas like those the Gnostics propagated; but of meeting, knowing, and submitting to the person who is truth, ‘so that we may know him who is truth.’”

—David Jackman, *The Message of John’s Letter*, 170–71

“The supreme knowledge comes from without to ourselves; it is truth shown to us, not evolved within us nor reflected from our own ideas.”

—George Findlay, *Fellowship in Life Eternal*, 428

Men of the Word

“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. This is the true God and eternal life” (5:20).

(3) “We are in Him who is true” – we now recognize that we have a new spiritual existence: that we *abide in Him* and that *He is our life* (1 John 2:27; 4:13, 15–16).

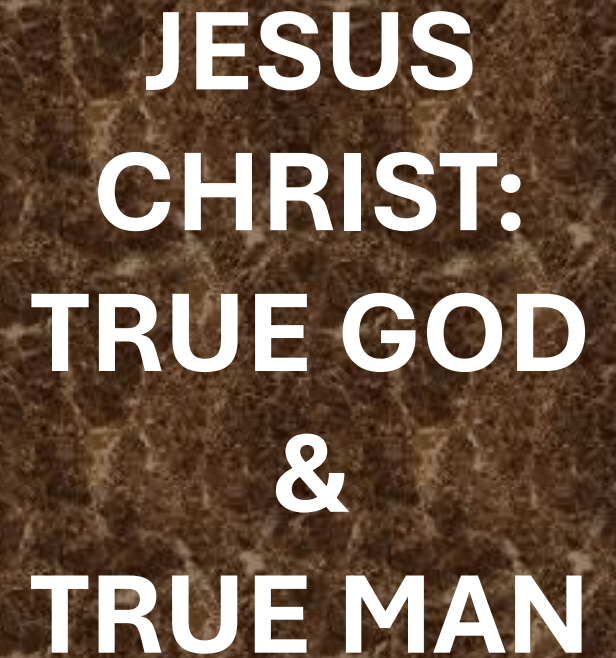
- “In [by] His Son Jesus Christ” – abiding in God is experienced only through the mediation of Jesus Christ as the propitiation for our sins (1 John 1:7; 2:2; 4:9–10) and as our Advocate (2:1).
- **John 14:6** – “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

“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. This is the true God and eternal life” (5:20).

- “This is the true God and eternal life” – John ends with the same focus with which he began—the exclusivity of Jesus Christ and the life He gives.
 - **1 John 1:1–3** – “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us”
 - **John 1:1, 20:28**

“For here the full identity of Jesus with God is recognized without reserve. . . . This seems to occur intentionally at the end of the letter, at the climax of the triumphant expression of faith. It is hardly an accident that it is precisely from the beginning (1:1, 18) and the end (20:28) of [the Gospel of] John that the light of Jesus’ divinity shines forth most fully. The climactic Christological confession becomes visible here in all its clarity.”

—Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles*, 263



**JESUS
CHRIST:
TRUE GOD
&
TRUE MAN**

“Everything depends on his deity, and his deity means no less than this, that as the Father who is made known to us by him is the only real God (1 Thess 1:9), so also his Son Jesus Christ ‘is the real God’ and eternal life. If the Son is less, if he is not the real God even as the Father is the real God, then this entire epistle and all that it declares about his blood, expiation, our fellowship with God, etc., are futile.”

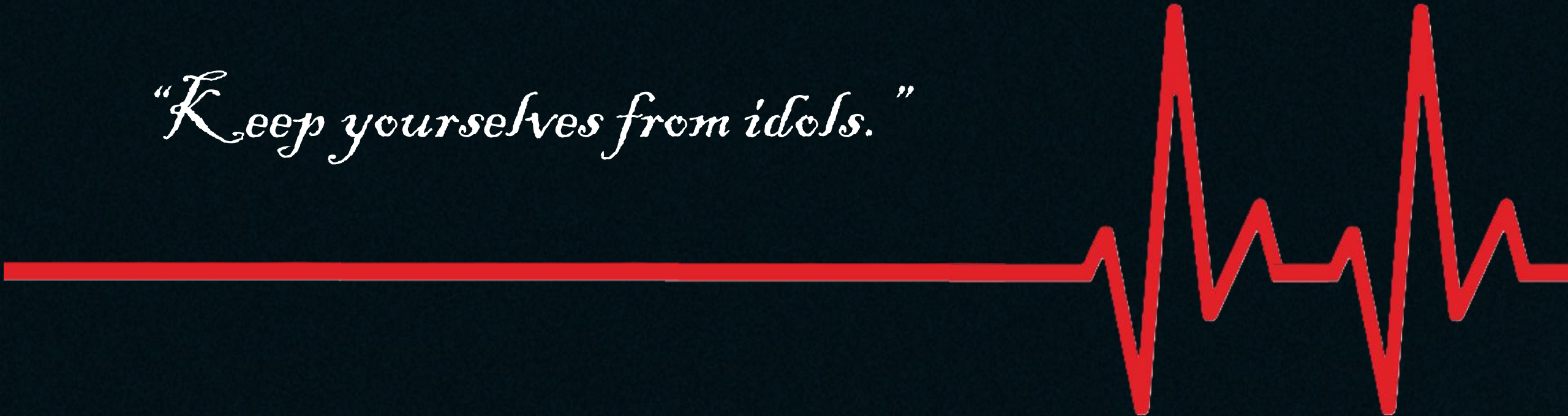
—R. C. H. Lenski, *The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude*, 542

**JESUS
CHRIST:
TRUE GOD
&
TRUE MAN**

II. One Final Exhortation in Light of the New Birth

1 John 5:21

“Keep yourselves from idols.”



“Little children, guard yourselves from idols” (5:21).

- **“Little children”** – not a disparaging description, but one of affection, authority, and affirmation (also 2:1, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4).
- **“Guard yourselves”** – “to protect by taking careful measures”; the Lord’s promise of protection from the evil one (v. 18) does not negate the need for one’s own vigilant, unceasing defensiveness.
- **“From idols”** – not necessarily a reference to the emperor cult or pagan idols that were so prevalent in the 1st cent. AD, but a reference to the *false Christs* promoted by those like the secessionists—the fictitious saviors and their counterfeit means of salvation.



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Do you know the
true Jesus Christ?