

“Precious Certainties”—Part 2

January 18, 2012

Text: 1 John 5:16-18

Francois Voltaire was an 18th century French philosopher who was famous for his philosophical skepticism.

His skepticism led him to argue that we should never believe anything until it is absolutely proven.

And since many things can't be proven for sure, the virtue of humility demands that we simply accept the fact that we don't/can't/won't know the truth, and say so publically.

Voltaire scorned those who claimed certainty of the truth, particularly Xns.

Today, most people, being unwilling to go to the intellectual effort of thinking things through and seeking real truth, have adopted Voltaire's attitude.

So their final solution to most things is, “I have my opinion, & you have yours, so let's just agree to disagree.”

Ultimately, that means, “We can never really know anything for sure.”

The Xn version of this is: “That's just your interpretation.”

That has led to the emergent church's denial that we can ever really understand God's revealed Truth.

The Xn who adopts Voltaire’s skepticism, robs himself of the confidence that Scripture is absolutely true, and that by understanding it, he can be confident about the Truth.

In his reticence to be dogmatic about biblical truth, he leaves himself no better off than a nonbeliever, having no more solid foundation on which to build his eternal hopes than a skeptic like Voltaire.

John’s whole 1st Epistle repudiates such a skeptical doubt-filled attitude, saying over/over: “We know, we know, we know.”

Unlike the Apostle Thomas, John had no problem w/ doubt at all.

Thomas had said=> *“Unless I shall see in His (Jesus’] hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe”* (Jn 20:25).

Thomas was as skeptical as Voltaire, and would accept nothing but conclusive empirical proof.

Refusal to believe like that is the result of fear that is trying to protect itself from being deceived/disappointed.

John had no such mental conflict, because he loved his Lord so much, his love cast out all such self-protective fears.

As we have seen from the very beginning of his epistle,

John spoke w/ dogmatic finality/confidence=> *“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld & our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life...”*
(1 Jn 1:1).

John knew what he had seen/heard, handled w/ his hands,
and leaned up against in the Upper Room.

If John had been more skeptical about what he had seen/believed,
he couldn't have been of much help to us & our faith.

He'd have said, "What we may have seen with our eyes, &
what I think we beheld..." and no one could place
much confidence/faith in that kind of equivocation.

But John's doubt-free confidence gives us reason for faith
ourselves, as he writes, "*What we have seen & heard
we proclaim to you also, that you also may have
fellowship with us; and indeed our [loving]
fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus
Christ*" (1:3).

Here is reliably confident/dogmatic teaching, borne out of
conviction, which in turn was borne out of John's
love for his Savior/Friend/Lord.

If the Church today loved Jesus as John did, she too would
speak about Him w/ much greater
confidence/conviction.

**Last time we began our study of John's concluding remarks
in his First Epistle.**

We saw that he concluded this epistle w/ a burst of short/pithy
statements about certainties w/i the Xn faith=>

- * Xns can be certain of eternal life
- * Xns can be certain of answered prayer.

5:14=> *“And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”*

Today’s text contains 2 more certainties—truths about which every Xn can/should be totally confident=>

* The Certainty of Xn Intercession

* The Certainty of the Xn’s Victory Over Sin

*** The Certainty of Christian Intercession**

We know that God responds to our prayers, as we intercede for others in the church, who are caught up in sin.

[1 John 5:16a]=> *“If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will **for him** give life to those who commit sin not leading to death.”*

John gives us a scenario here=> Someone sees his Xn brother involved in sin.

He doesn’t hear about it from others, but observes it himself.

He sees a single incident of this sin, but the word *“committing”* indicates that the witness somehow knows this sin is an habitual/ongoing pattern in the individual’s life.

This verse raises many different questions=>

1st, is this *“brother”* really a born-again believer? No.

* That’s clear because John says the result of the witness’s prayer for him is that God will give him life.

3 verses earlier John had said that all believers have eternal life already.

I Jn 5:13=> *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may **know** that you **have eternal life.**”*

If God is going to give this sinning “believer” life, he must not have it yet—he is spiritually dead.

5:12=> *“He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.”*

There’s a 1-to-1 relationship.

This sinning individual does not have the Son/life.

All men are born spiritually dead, and this “Xn” still is dead, as God hasn’t yet given him life.

* Later in today’s text (vs 18) John will write=> *“We know that **no one** who is born of God **sins** [as an ongoing pattern of life].”*

I.e., he doesn’t practice sin all the time (as nonbelievers do).

The fact that this man’s life is characterized by such a sinful pattern indicates that he is not born of God.

A 2nd question=> Why then does John refer to him as a “brother”?

Because he gathers with, and identifies with Xns, even though he hasn’t yet become born again himself.

He may in all good conscience consider himself a believer, because he doesn’t yet have enough understanding of biblical truth to realize that he actually isn’t one.

In passages we have studied prior to this, John has sometimes used “*brother*” to refer to such a person.

E.g. 1 Jn 2:9=> “*The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his **brother** is in the darkness until now.*”

If he hates “*his brother*,” what does he call himself?

A “brother” of the person he hates—i.e., a Xn.

He is mistaken in his assumption that he is truly a Xn and his hatred proves it.

We can apply this same reasoning to 3:15=> “*Everyone who hates his **brother** is a murderer; and you know that **no murderer has eternal life** abiding in him.*”

So John is describing a situation in which a regular church attender, who calls himself a Xn (and prob. believes himself to be one), isn’t.

And he is habitually involved in some particular sin, but fortunately, not a “*sin unto death.*”

Another question=> What does John mean by “*death*”?

Many scholars believe he is referring to spiritual death, not physical death.

That would make good sense as a contrast with the eternal (spiritual) life John has been talking about.

Additionally, how would we know whether/not someone had committed a sin unto physical death unless he actually died?

Then it would be too late to pray for him.

Again, 1 Jn 5:13=> “*These things I have written to you who*

*believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may **know** that you **have eternal life.***”

That’s the opposite of having eternal death (spiritual death).

But here in our text, “*death*” must also be used to refer to something beyond spiritual death, because John mentions a “brother” committing sin “*not leading to death.*” Scripture clearly teaches that all sin leads to death. E.g. Rom 6:23=> “*The wages of **sin** is **death***” (all sin). Jms 1:15—“*When sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.*”

The man in verse 16 must not be spiritually alive, because a true Xn is praying for God to give him life.

But neither has he committed sin leading to death.

He’s dead, but not as dead as he could become.

John must be talking about death beyond death—2nd death (that hopeless condition of final/unalterable separation of the soul from God).

Still another question=> Does God give eternal life to any so-called “brother” for whom a true Xn prays?

Yes (if he prays according to [12 God’s] will).

John makes this clear with the little dative pronoun translated “*for him*”=>

“*He shall ask and God will **for him** [the asker?] give life.*”

Moreover, this statement in vs 16 is one of the certainties John includes here at the end of his letter.

He doesn't soften/ameliorate the statement in any way, not even saying God "sometimes" answers such prayers.

And it's not a coincidence that this comes right after that strong/definitive assertion in verse 14=> *"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."*

That's very good news for Xns who are praying for the salvation of friends/family-members they love.

But what if that person for whom we're asking God to give eternal life isn't one of His elect?

That's where asking according to God's will (mentioned in verse 14) comes back into play, in a case like this.

God isn't willing that any should perish, & He desires for all men to repent/believe unto salvation (II Pet 3:9).

Moreover, Jesus calls all those who are weary/heavy-laden to come unto Him & find rest for their souls

(Mt 11:28).

But unfortunately, Rom 3:11 says no one who is spiritually dead ever does that, on his own.

Therefore, only God's elect, whom He has foreknown/predestined, will receive the effectual, irresistible call of the H.S. by which He draws (even drags) them into a saving relationship w/ Jesus X.

Jn 6:44 (Jesus)=> *"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me **draws** him."*

“Draws” (*helkuo*) means to drag or tug, as a fisherman drags his net onto a boat or onto shore (Jn 21:6);

Or as a accused person is dragged into court (Jms 2:6).

Someone: That’s not fair! God should draw everyone or no one.

He has no right to pick/choose like that.

Ans: Every human being was born a sinner in rebellion against God, as God’s enemy, having no claim whatever on His grace.

Anyone whom He draws into a saving relationship with Himself receives eternal life as an undeserved gift of His grace.

Neither he, nor anyone else, deserves it.

And no one has a right to presumptuously dictate to God how His grace should operate.

Instead of telling God how He should do His job and dispense His grace, born again believers use their tremendous privilege/power of prayer to ask Him for eternal life on behalf of unsaved friends/family.

Each of us as believers ought to recognize what a great responsibility that kind of power bestows on us to do so.

At the end of verse 16, John elaborates on this sin which he calls “*a sin leading to death.*”

[Verse 16b]=> *“There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.”*

Amazingly, John is not even suggesting that we pray for those who have committed the sin unto death.

I Tim 2:1 tells us to pray for the salvation of *“all men,”* but John doesn't say we should even make such requests of God, w/ regard to this sin, leading to death.

So what is this sin that is so horrendous John doesn't even tell us to pray for it?

Assuming (as we saw before) *“death”* refers to 2nd death, the only sin that could lead to such death in this life is apostasy.

An apostate is so persistent in rejecting Jesus X despite full knowledge of what God has revealed about Him, that ultimately the opportunity to believe is withdrawn from him by God.

He is the person described in Heb 10:26=> *“If we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, / but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES”* (26-27).

Throughout this epistle, John has alluded to false teachers who had been part of the church, but left it, rejected the Xn faith, and started teaching heresy.

Whether/not this last aspect of their apostasy is always part of the *“sin unto death,”* is not clear, but it certainly

must have enabled John's readers to identify those he was talking about.

Praying for aggressively anti-Xn apostates like this, is futile because God has already withdrawn from them any further opportunity to respond by faith to His grace.

Heb 6 compares them w/ ground that drinks up the rain God sends it, but produces only thorns/thistles.

Verse 8 says=> *"It is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned."*

X compared them w/ swine before whom pearls are thrown
(Matt 7:6).

It's interesting that John doesn't actually forbid us to pray for such people, but simply refrains from telling us to do so. That's the kind of request that is clearly outside God's will, and He would never grant it.

What a sobering truth this is=> That there are people who know the truth, but are so locked into their sin and the world, the God doesn't even tell us to pray for them (despite the power of Xns' prayers).

Meanwhile, we are to pray fervently for those who continue in sin, not yet being saved, though they think they are.

John alludes again to these folks in=>

[Verse 17]=> *"All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death"* (i.e., Second Death).

All unrighteousness is a serious moral/spiritual breakdown, and when we witness it in the church body, we need to pray with urgency for God to save the sinner, & give him life. When these folks have been deceived into thinking they are saved, we must help them realize they need to seek the Lord, & earnestly warn them against the danger of apostasy, which they could face.

We must urge them to seek God's forgiveness through faith in X and to escape that final/irrevocable separation from Him.

But the good news is, the certainty, that our intercession for them in prayer will play a powerful/decisive role in that process.

*** The Certainty of Victory Over Sin**

We find this truth in verse 18, & again John uses the language of certainty, uncompromised by any exception/deviation/equivocation.

[Verse 18]=> "*We know* [as another axiomatic truth] *that no one* [w/o exception] *who is born of God sins* [continuously practices sin]; *but* [strong adversative ("on the contrary")] *He who was born of God keeps him* [holds him inviolate] *and the evil one does not touch him.*"

Notice that there are 2 people "born of God" in this verse.

The only difference between the two is the tense.

* "*No one who is born of God*" refers to a believer.

The tense indicates he was born of God & stays born of God

He never loses his standing as a child of God.

* *“He who was born of God”* refers to Jesus X, born of God the H.S., at the time of His incarnation.

John uses this unusual designation of X to portray Him as a Man like us, who was *“born of God,”* but in a different sense.

We were “born again” of God, He is the “only-begotten (unique) One,” incarnated by God from His heavenly perfection into human flesh like ours.

He is God’s *“first born”* (*prototokos*—the prototype for all the rest of us to follow, the One to whom belongs all of God’s power/honor), & yet He is the Brother of every Xn and *“keeps”* every Xn.

Heb 2=> *“Both He who sanctifies [X] and those who are sanctified [Xns] are all from one Father; for which reason He is **not ashamed** to call them **brethren**, / saying, ‘I WILL PROCLAIM THY NAME TO MY BRETHREN’”* (2:11-12).

Jesus is the Son of Man who became one of us, dying on our behalf, serving as our sympathetic H.P., & going before the Father to plead our case, as our Advocate.

Most impressively, Jesus prays on our behalf that God will keep us from the evil one, just as we are to pray on behalf of “brothers” who aren’t yet saved (vs 16), that God will give them life.

If we have the assurance that God hears our prayers for them (verse 14), how much more likely is it that He will hear Jesus (our Big Brother's) prayers for us?

Rom 8:34 says Jesus is at God's right hand, interceding for us (in prayer).

He is the "*only begotten Son*," whom God sent into the world that "*we might live through Him*" (I Jn 4:9).

If that doesn't give you a sense of your eternal security as a child of God, listen to Jesus' own words in Jn 10:28.

*"I give eternal life to them, and they shall **never perish**; & no one shall snatch them out of My hand"*

(including the evil one).

In the Upper Room, Jesus prayed for the Twelve=> "*I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to **keep** them from the **evil one***" (Jn 17:15).

Then 5 verses later He added=> "*I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those **also** who believe in Me **through their word***" (Jn 17:20).

That's us! Jesus continues to pray for us as our Advocate/Mediator/Intercessor.

Here in verse 18 of our own text, we read that because of Jesus' intercession on our behalf, the evil one (Satan) "does not touch" us.

How can that be, in light of his sifting Peter, even though Jesus had said He would pray for Peter?

And what about Job? Didn't Satan "touch" him?

Obviously, we need to focus on that word “*touch*” and make sure we understand what it means—it’s not a superficial touch. Its most common usage by far in the NT refers to Jesus’ touching the sick and healing them=>

So *1st, it connotes power=> Lk 5:13—“*And He stretched out His hand, and **touched** him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ And immediately the leprosy left him.*” Lk 7:14—“*And He came up and **touched** the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, arise!’ / And the dead man sat up, and began to speak.*”

Jesus’ “*touch*” conveyed beneficial power to whomever He touched.

Jesus will never again allow Satan to exert his spiritual power over Xns as he once did.

He will never let the evil one “*touch*” us w/ the same strength as before our regeneration.

* 2nd, “*touch*” connotes control=> Jn 20:17—“*Jesus said to her, ‘Stop clinging to Me [“touching Me”], for I have not yet ascended to the Father.’*”

Mary had taken hold of the resurrected X, and she didn’t want to let go of Him.

She wanted to control His whereabouts.

Satan will never again be allowed to get control of us (to “*touch*” us) as he did before we were saved.

* 3rd, “*touch*” connotes familiarity/intimacy=> I Cor 7:1—

*“It is good for a man not to **touch** a woman. / But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife” (1-2).*

X will never again allow Satan to develop a
close/familiar/intimate relationship w/ us, like
the one he once had.

Because Jesus “keeps”/guards us from the evil one like this,

**John can say in our text=> “We know that no one who is
born of God sins.”**

John isn't saying that believers never sin.

He knows better than that, and so he wrote in 1 Jn 1:8=>

*“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving
ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”*

Here in verse 18, John is using a pres. tense verb, which
describes an ongoing/habitual state.

He's saying that a born-again Xn doesn't constantly
practice sin.

What was true of the nonbeliever in verse 16 who falsely
thought he was saved, is not true of us=>

His ongoing practice of sin made it obvious that he
wasn't truly saved.

He was “*committing sin*” (another pres. verb) as part
of his ongoing lifestyle/character.

And that's exactly what we don't do.

We don't do it, because X won't let Satan have a powerful,
controlling, intimate relationship with us.

So although a believer sins from time to time, a true believer cannot do so w/o repenting-of/confessing his sin afterward. And sin will never again become the norm for his life. The One who was born of God (His only begotten Son) keeps the ones who are born of God—believers—so we are spiritually secure.

Among the many truths we learn from the Bible, and can hold onto with absolute confidence, is the truth that we can always enjoy victory over sin, because the Son of God “keeps” us.

We were once its slaves, but no longer, and never again!

The world may revel along with Voltaire in its ignorance/doubt, but we *know*...

* We know because we are *instructed* by holy Scripture, and by the anointing of the H.S.

2:20=> “*You have an **anointing** [H.S.]from the Holy One, and you all **know**.*”

It is a joyful thing to be instructed from God’s Word that Jesus X, the Son of God, has come in the flesh, taken men’s sins upon Himself, & borne the wrath of God, for those who will believe on His name.

Be thankful to God that He has given us the Scriptures, so that we might be instructed in the Truth, & know it w/ certainty.

*We know because God has given us a deep *understanding* of the truths He has revealed to us, applying them to ourselves.

5:20=> “**We know** that the Son of God has come, and has given us **understanding**.”

We have had the tremendous privilege of mining the deep truths in God’s Word, which many Xns overlook.

* We know the truth in the sense that it has brought us into a *personal/saving knowledge* of Jesus, so that we know Him, and have a relationship w/ Him.

The rest of that verse (5:20) says=> “*We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might **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.*”

Knowledge of God’s Word has led to knowledge of Jesus, which has led to knowledge of God, which has led to our experiencing eternal life from God.

Knowing the Lord, has become the core of our lives, so we can say w/ fathers of the faith, we “*know Him who has been from the beginning*” (that’s all that really matters to us in the long run).

* We have gained *certain* knowledge of the Truth (i.e., knowledge of which we are absolutely certain).

We may still have doubts from time to time, but as was true of John, our love for Jesus X conquers our doubts.

Our certainty comes out of personal fellowship w/ Him.

And as John tells us in 5:19, although the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, “*We **know** that we are of God*” (Praise the Lord!).

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Text: 1 John 5:16-18

1. The Christian who adopts Voltaire’s skepticism robs himself of the confidence that Scripture is absolutely true, and that by understanding it he can be [22 confident] about the Truth.

Jn 20:25; I Jn 1:1, 3

Today’s text contains two more certainties—truths about which every Christian can and should be totally confident...

*** The Certainty of Christian Intercession**

[1 John 5:16a]

This verse raises many questions...

- *2. Is this “*brother*” really a born-again believer? [6 No].

I Jn 5:13; 5:12, 18

- *3. Why then does John refer to him as a “*brother*”? Because he gathers and identifies with Christians even though he [14 hasn’t] yet become born again himself.

I Jn 2:9; 3:15

- *4. What does John mean by “*death*”? [20 Spiritual] death.

I Jn 5:13; Rom 6:23; Jms 1:5

- *5. Does God give eternal life to any so-called brother for whom a true Christian prays? Yes, if he prays according to [12 God’s] will.

I Jn 5:14; II Pet 3:9; Mt 11:28

6. Only God’s elect, whom He has foreknown and predestined, will receive the effectual, irresistible [10 call] of the Holy Spirit by which He draws them into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jn 6:44

[Verse 16b]

I Tim 2:1

7. Assuming “*death*” refers to second death, the only sin that could lead to such death in this life is [18 apostasy].

Heb 10:26-27; 6:8

8. We are to pray fervently for those who continue in sin, not yet being saved though they [12 think] they are.

[Verse 17]

*** The Certainty of Victory Over Sin**

[Verse 18]

Heb 2:11-12

9. Jesus prays on our behalf that God will keep us from the evil one just as we are to pray on behalf of “brothers” who aren’t yet [12 saved] (vs 16).

I Jn 4:9; Jn 10:28; 17:15, 20

10. Because of Jesus’ intercession on our behalf, the evil one (Satan) does not [12 touch] us.

Lk 5:13, 14-15; Jn 20:17

11. Satan will never again be allowed to get [16 control] of us as he did before we were saved.

I Cor 7:1-2; I Jn 1:8

12. So although a believer sins from time to time, sin will never again become the [10 norm] for his life.

The world may revel in its ignorance and doubt, but we *know*...

*13. We know because we are [24 instructed] by holy Scripture and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

I Jn 2:20

*14. We know because God has given us a deep [28 understanding] of the truths He has revealed to us.

I Jn 5:20a

*15. We know the truth in that it has brought us into a [18 personal], saving knowledge of Jesus.

I Jn 5:20

*16. We have gained *certain* knowledge of the Truth; we may still have doubts from time to time, but our love for Jesus [18 conquers] our doubts.

I Jn 5:19