

### Benefits of Christian Fellowship

#### 1 John 5:13-21

1 John 5:13-21 - *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. <sup>14</sup> Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. <sup>16</sup> If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. <sup>17</sup> All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.”*

#### Background Notes

As we come to this last section of John’s first epistle, let’s briefly review what we’ve learned. The theme that emerges from this letter is “Christian Fellowship.” Not Christian fellowship in the sense of Christians getting together for coffee or golf or social functions - but Christian fellowship as it is defined in 1 John 1:3: *“That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”*

In other words, the essence of Christian fellowship is ***intimate communion with God Himself!*** This is what really unites us together, because only true believers are in the fellowship. Those who are not in the family of God are not in the Christian fellowship.

The purpose of 1 John is not evangelistic. This letter was written to believers to give them assurance of salvation. Verse 13: *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”* So 1 John is like a family picture album. If you’re a Christian, you’re in the family of God and you will recognize yourself in this epistle. If you’re not a Christian, you’re not in the Christian fellowship and you will not see yourself pictured in 1 John.

We've studied this book together, so let me ask you some questions. Have you seen your picture in 1 John? Are you experiencing the joy of Christian fellowship? Are you meeting the requirements of walking in the light and confessing your sins? Are you passing the test of obedience to the commands of the Lord, separation from the world, and separation from false teaching? Are you exhibiting the characteristics of the Christian fellowship: righteousness, brotherly love, and faith? I trust that all of you have seen your picture emerge as we studied the first epistle of John.

Several benefits of Christian fellowship are listed in the last section of 1 John 5. These benefits are for every Christian, but they are especially realized and enjoyed and experienced when you are in happy fellowship with the Lord and His people.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Assurance of salvation is a benefit of Christian fellowship.

Verse 13: *"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life."*

This verse gives us the purpose of the letter, but you can see how it's also a benefit for us. What a blessing to know that you're saved - and not have doubts about your salvation!

Have you ever had doubts about your salvation? Have you ever come home to an empty house and wondered if the Lord had returned, and you'd been left behind because you weren't a Christian?

Do you remember how "doubting Thomas" had his doubts removed? Thomas wasn't with the other disciples when the Lord first appeared to them after the resurrection. But when Thomas got back where he belonged - meeting in fellowship with the other believers - then the Lord appeared to Thomas and cleared up his doubts. It was when Thomas was back with fellow believers that his doubts were removed. Assurance of salvation is a benefit of Christian fellowship.

### 2. Confidence in prayer is a benefit of Christian fellowship.

Verses 14-15: *"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."*

Notice the gracious limitation to this promise in verse 14: *"if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."* Aren't you glad God doesn't say "yes" to all your prayers? Think of the mess we'd make of our lives if God answered "yes" to all our requests!

We are to “ask... according to His will.” So the next logical question is, “How do we know what God’s will is?” Most of the answers to that question are clear and obvious in Scripture. But what about matters that are not specifically covered in “black and white Scripture”? I think that’s where Christian fellowship comes in. The more we are meeting the requirements of Christian fellowship, and passing the test of Christian fellowship, and exhibiting the family characteristics of Christian fellowship, the more we’ll come to know God. We’ll come to know the will of God, and we’ll pray according to the will of God.

Here’s an illustration of praying with confidence: *“If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death” (v16-17).*

These verses say that if your fellow believer is sinning, but not “sinning unto death,” you can pray with confidence and that believer will be given life (v16). What’s that all about? I assure you that this is not an easy Scripture to interpret, but I’ll give you the last word [laughter]! Seriously speaking, various suggestions have been made for the “sin unto death” – for example, murder, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, apostasy (in view of the false teaching of the Gnostics), or simply going too far in sin.

Ananias and Sapphira were examples of “going too far in sin.” They lied to the Holy Spirit, and that resulted in disciplinary death (Acts 5). Another example of “going too far in sin” would be the Corinthian believers who were disrespectful and sinful in the way they participated in the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:30). The Lord removed them through death before they infected the congregation with their disrespectful and selfish behavior. So I believe that “going too far in sin” is the sin that is referenced here - not a specific sin, but “going too far” in any number of various sins.

God can use sickness and death as discipline in His family. This is not a pleasant subject, but it can actually be God’s mercy. Let me ask you: If you are involved in some serious sin, wouldn’t you prefer for God to remove you from the congregation through sickness - or even take you home to Heaven - before you really messed up and did more damage to yourself, your family, and the Christian fellowship? I hope your answer is “Yes”!

There is sin that can lead to disciplinary death in God’s family, and our prayers will not change that. *“There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that” (v16).*

However, there is sin that does not lead to disciplinary death, but rather to disciplinary sickness. We can pray with confidence for that person to be restored to the Lord, and for restoration to health and strength and happy fellowship. Read about the prayer of faith in James 5:14-16. Confidence in prayer is a benefit of Christian fellowship.

### **3. Protection from Satan is a benefit of Christian fellowship.**

Verses 18-19: *“We know that whoever is born of God does not sin [does not practice sin or continue to sin]; but he who has been born of God keeps [him] himself [translations vary here] and the wicked one does not touch him.”*

The variation in the translations of these verses is significant, because this is either a reference to the Lord Himself protecting the believer, or the inherent protection a believer receives as he or she walks with the Lord in the security of Christian fellowship. Both are true, of course, and both are taught in Scripture.

In either case, protection from Satan is the point. The whole world system is satanic in its operation, but the believer is protected. As long as you're walking with the Lord, and you're living in enjoyment of Christian fellowship, and you're not living a deliberately sinful lifestyle, Satan cannot touch you. That's what the spiritual armor is all about in Ephesians 6.

This protection does not mean that we will not be tempted. We **will** be tempted - but we are protected. Protection from Satan is a benefit of Christian fellowship.

#### **Practical Application**

#### **It's God we want to know, so the idols must go.**

The last two verses of the book have both a promise and a command: *“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. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.”*

The promise is in verse 20: *“that we may know Him.”* The command is in verse 21: *“keep yourselves from idols.”*

It's God we want to know. The Gnostics were proud of their knowledge - but they didn't know God! The true believer in Christian fellowship will come to know God - not just know **about** God, but to **know God Himself!** As a true believer walks in fellowship with God, he or she will come to know God more and more in an intimate and deep way.

But the idols must go. What idols are keeping us, as believers, from knowing God more? An idol is anything that takes the place of God or takes priority over God in our lives. Is it our prized possessions? Is it our interests or hobbies or pastimes? Is it our plans for the future? What - or who - are our priorities? How do we - and where do we - spend a lot of our money? That might be one good way to identify our idols.

We all need to examine our lives in reference to our “idols” - wouldn't you agree? If it's God we want to know, so the idols must go!