

The Authentic Christian and What We Know

Rich Nathan

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The Authentic Christian

1 John 5:1-13

Have you noticed that there's almost nothing these days that you can confidently say or assert that someone or some group won't immediately disagree with you on. So what if you're a doctor and you went to medical school for four years, did a residency for three years, and then a fellowship in your particular sub-specialty, and you have 20 years of experience. Hey, I did a search on the internet and I'm not sure that this is the right medicine for me.

If you're a teacher and you require your students to learn certain facts or work on a certain project, or say you're a music teacher and you ask your students to sing a certain song, you can be sure that at least some parents will object and tell you why those facts or that project or that song is either wrong or irrelevant or downright dangerous and you ought to be fired!

Or maybe you're a financial planner and you have years of experience in financial planning and multiple degrees. Despite your advice, your client wants to sell off their entire retirement portfolio and invest everything in bitcoins because they heard something from a guy screaming on TV that bitcoins were the best investment for the long-term. There is nothing you can say these days that won't be attacked no matter how clear the evidence is for what you're saying.

On the other hand, it doesn't matter how absurd the proposition is – there will be 100 websites arguing for the absurdity. The 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were not orchestrated by Al Qaeda, despite a mountain of evidence that it was. Rather 9/11 was orchestrated by our own government and Israel so that we could attack the Arabs and steal their oil. And the towers were not destroyed by planes hitting them, despite the photographic and the film evidence. Instead, the World Trade Center came down by a controlled demolition, that's why it burned so long.

Neil Armstrong did not walk on the moon back in 1969. The whole thing was staged in a Hollywood studio in a film directed by Stanley Kubrick, the director of *Clockwork Orange*.

If you state an opinion these days, especially in our "post-truth" environment, even if it seems completely obvious to you – any number of people will tell you why you're a dope and why no thinking person could ever agree with your opinion.

When every single assertion that anyone makes is controverted and every opinion elicits a contrary opinion – how can we confidently claim to know anything?

We've been studying a little New Testament book called 1 John. John tells us the reason he wrote this book in 1 John 5:13:

1 John 5:13

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

In fact, “knowing” is so important to John that he uses the word “know” 33 times in this little five chapter book. And he uses “known” or “knows” 8 more times. 41 times in 1 John – in radical contrast to our culture that says that anything and everything is up for grabs, it's all just a matter of opinion – the Apostle John says that you can confidently know things. You can know if you are a real deal Christian. You can know that the man, Jesus, is the divine Christ. And you can know you have eternal life.

Next week, I'm going to start a brief Advent series as we prepare our hearts for Christmas. But today as I finish up our series on 1 John about the Authentic Christian, I want to talk about “The Authentic Christian and What We Know”.

1 John 5:1-5, 13

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ²This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

In most of the world's religions, if you ask religious people “Will you be with God in heaven when you die?” They will answer, “I don't know. I hope so. I'd like to be. I want to be, but I don't know.” Religious Muslims, Orthodox Jews, even many Roman Catholics will often answer, “I don't know. I'm not sure and I can't be sure if I will be embraced by God's love in the end.”

John, as I've mentioned throughout this series, repeats himself over and over again saying, “You can know if you are an authentic Christian. You can know that you are saved. Period.” You don't have to hope you are. You don't have to wish you are. You can know. And in verses 1-5 that we just read, John tells us again that there are three tests to know that we are born of God.

Knowing that we are born of God

The three tests that we've seen throughout 1 John are the test of belief, the test of love and the test of obedience. An authentic Christian believes that the man Jesus is the divine Christ. An authentic Christian loves their brothers and sisters in the church. And an authentic Christian obeys God's commands. Now understand that these three things – believing, loving and obeying – are not a condition for us being born of God.

It's not:

If you believe, love and obey, you are born of God.

Rather it's:

You are born of God, therefore you believe, love and obey

You know, in the gospel of John, chapter 3, Jesus speaks to an old rabbi, Nicodemus, who is seeking a deeper relationship with God. Jesus talks to that old rabbi about his need to be born again or to be born from above. People ask, "Why do Christians talk so much about being born again or born from above as a condition for being saved?" Why is there so much discussion about the born again experience or being born from above? Because Christianity is fundamentally not a self-improvement program. It's not "You know I have all these faults and flaws and hang ups and bad habits so if I want to be a Christian, I need to work on myself, I need to set some goals. We're coming up to New Year's so I'm going to set goals so I can lose weight. I need to control my temper. I need to stop smoking. I need to be more generous with my money. I need work on myself. I need to improve myself and then I can have a relationship with God and be embraced by his love."

The Christian life is not a self-improvement program. It begins with God's activity. God must break in. God must step into our lives. God must intervene in our lives. The Christian life doesn't begin with what we must do. It starts with what God must do. Christianity is not good advice. Christianity is good news! When you hear advice, you have to do it for it to work for you. But if you hear news, the only issue is if you believe it or not?

Whenever I ask someone who may be coming to the church for a while, "Are you a Christian yet? Have you become a follower of Christ?" And they respond and say, "Well, you know, I'm trying. I'm working at it." I know that they don't get the gospel at all. They don't get the good news. Being born of God is something that God does to you, not something that we do to ourselves.

So we must be born of God to be saved. Now if one of the proofs that we are born of God is that we love God's children, then how do we know that we love God's children?

Knowing we love God's children

Here's what John writes in verse 2:

1 John 5:2

This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.

John is saying that the way we know we love our brothers and sisters in the church is because we love God. These two loves are so closely tied together that they cannot be separated. It's like the two beams of the cross. It's like a family, at least in a happy, healthy family, we not only love our parents, we love our parents' other children. So, as we see throughout the book of 1 John, you can't say "Jesus I love, but the church I hate." Jesus and the church are linked together as the head is linked to the body, as parents are linked to their family.

This goes in both directions. If I love God's children, I love God. If I love God, I love his children. Here's what John writes in 1 John 4:

1 John 4:20-21

²⁰Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

The next question is how do we know that we love God?

Knowing we love God

If loving God is proof that we love God's children, how do we know that we love God? To understand John's logic, how do you know that you love God's children? Because you love God. How do you know that you love God?

1 John 5:2-3

²This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,

The evidence for loving God is not that you look inside and see how emotional you get regarding God or how you feel at any given moment. You may feel at a certain moment excited about God or you may feel kind of blah. If you look inside yourself and say, "Pastor, I don't know. I don't feel this great passion for God." John, throughout this book, does not say the evidence that you love God is to look inside and look for feelings of love. John says, "The evidence that you love God is that you obey him. You yield to

him. You listen to what God says about your life and you do that. You say yes to God instead of no.”

Obedience to God’s commands, obedience to what you believe God is telling you to do is the proof, that’s the evidence that you love God. Do you love God? Well, do you obey him?

Now, I love this statement in 1 John 5:3:

1 John 5:3

In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,

This is an echo of what Jesus said. Here’s what Jesus said in Matthew:

Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

God’s commands are not burdensome. God’s commandments make life easier for us, not harder. It’s not like the Lord wants you to run with a 50 pound pack of commands on your back so that life becomes harder and harder because you have to obey God. Rather, obedience to God’s commands lift off of our backs a 50 pound pack of sin that we’ve been carrying around for years. Jesus said, “Come to me and I’ll take that pack of sin off your back. Obey me and life will be so much easier.” You’ll feel so much lighter!

God, who is purposeful, has a design to everything. God’s commands are perfectly designed to match with our design. When we violate God’s design, we destroy ourselves. There is a grain that runs through the whole universe and when you run your hand across the grain you pick up splinters. Let me apply this idea to two areas that are incredibly relevant for us right now – sex and forgiveness.

I don’t know about you, but I find the daily reports of sexual abuse and sexual misconduct and molestation from men in high positions to be deeply distressing. Matt Lauer, Al Franken, Harvey Weinstein, Roy Moore, Kevin Spacey, and on and on and on. God has a simple rule regarding sex. No sex outside of marriage and joyful self-giving, loving sex within marriage. This isn’t rocket science! God says, “Here are the boundaries. Play the game, but play on the field within these foul lines. Don’t play the game in the stands. Don’t play the game in the parking lot. And don’t play the game on the interstate. Play the game within these foul lines on the field and have a good time while you play!”

But contemporary society says, “No, the foul lines are so restrictive. How repressive can you get? Play the game just on the field? You can play in the stands or in the parking lot. In fact, you can play the game on the interstate, only don’t get hit. Just dodge the cars that are coming at you at 80 miles an hour. Do what you please. Play on the interstate, only play safe.”

Have you ever read the rules given to students who enter college these days regarding sexual consent? We say to 18 year olds, “You’re free from this restrictive, oppressive God rule of no sex outside of marriage and joyful self-giving, loving sex within marriage.” We say, “You’re free from all of that. Go to frat parties. Drink. Hook up. But make sure that there is affirmative consent for every particular sexual act.”

I want to read to you from a website on sexual consent for college students. Here’s what the site states,

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“The concept of affirmative consent dictates that “yes means yes”, and that only an enthusiastic “yes” constitutes sexual consent. In order to make sure a sexual encounter is ok with both partners, consent needs to be verbal, enthusiastic, and continuous.”

Two people at a frat party, they’ve had a few drinks and they don’t know what the rules are, so here are the rules:

If someone wants to stop in the middle of something, whether because it’s uncomfortable for them, because they’ve changed their mind about wanting to do it, or because they are just tired of it, you have to listen, or else it counts as assault just as it would if you said no from the start. Checking to see if someone’s body language is off could be enormously helpful in making sure this doesn’t happen.

Consent can be withdrawn at any time. Consent is a clear yes. Consent can be withdrawn at any time, even during the act. Silence is not consent. We must be sensitive to one another’s body language so that we can hear a vocal, enthusiastic and continuous affirmative consent.

These are simple rules to follow especially after you’ve had a few drinks!

Don’t get me wrong here. I am completely, 100%, 1000% on the side of consent without manipulation or coercion or pressure of any kind. But, I’m also in touch with human design and God is even more in touch with your design. God’s commandments are not burdensome, they recognize our design. His commandments correspond with his creation and with our fall.

Let’s take the example of forgiveness. Somebody says, “I know that God wants me to forgive this person for the hurt they caused in my life, but I don’t want to. Do I have to forgive? I don’t want to.” Friends, we need to understand that God is our Creator. His

commands are never meaningless or just busy work. God never says, "I just want to keep you guys occupied for a while so you don't make a mess of things or get in my way. Here's a bunch of busy work." God is our Creator. His commands are always designed for our liberation.

If we refuse to forgive, the hurt continues to shape us and control us. The more bitter we get about what happened to us, the more it controls us, the more it shapes our view of other people. Our refusal to forgive will drive us into the ground. God says that the best way that you can get free and to insure that the hurt that you experience is the least amount of damage that will happen to you is to forgive. The hurt happened already, but if you want to limit the hurt to what was done to you and not keep adding to the hurt, forgive.

You say, "I still don't know if I will make it into God's kingdom. I do try to love my brothers and sisters in the church. I try to love God. I try to obey his commandments and when I don't I always ask forgiveness. But, it is brutal out there. There is so much temptation and so many other messages. You know, the world's not like a church service. You don't know what it's like, pastor, at my job or in my family or in my school. When I leave church there's so much opposition to me. Sometimes I feel like throwing in the towel and giving up because I mess up so often. How can I know that I'm not only born of God now, but that I'm going to be embraced by the love of God in the end?"

Knowing we can overcome the world

We read:

1 John 5:4b-5

This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Our culture apart from God has so many ways to pressure us into conforming to its way of thinking. Our culture regularly communicates what's valuable. You need a certain sized house. You need to have a certain job. You need to choose short term pleasures over long-term loving relationships with your friends or your spouse or your children. Go for the short-term, for the immediate burst of gratification over the long-term.

If you want a great picture of our culture's values think of all the people who skipped Thanksgiving with friends or family in order to be the first in line at Walmart to get the latest video game console or iPhone or nerf blaster. Our culture tells us that we can find life by the accumulation of more things and by becoming really, really famous.

Here's what one writer said in a business journal not too long ago:

I would like People magazine – and for that matter, all the other publications lining the aisles of the grocery store – to start printing a big disclaimer on its cover: WARNING! THE PEOPLE FEATURED IN THIS MAGAZINE ARE NOT TO BE ENVIED OR EMULATED. IN FACT, THEY SHOULD BE PITIED AND PRAYED FOR BECAUSE THEIR FAME REALLY IS A TERRIBLE BURDEN AND SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASES THEIR CHANCES OF BECOMING MISERABLE.

Can you imagine reading a warning like this in People magazine?

There's a documentary that just came out on Netflix entitled:

Gaga: Five Foot Two

You see Lady Gaga saying to her celebrity stylist, Brandon, "I'm alone, Brandon. Every night." She's saying through tears, "And all these people will leave, right? They'll leave and then I'll be alone. And I'll go from everyone touching me all day and everyone talking at me all day to total silence."

A former teacher of the singer told her that this would happen. She said to her, "Stefani, (Lady Gaga's real name is Stefani Germanotta) you may get the fame and success you are longing for one day, but it will not last and it will not make you happy." The teacher said, "Whether she remembers what I said to her that day or not, I have seen enough of the trouble and sadness in the lives of students and families who had wealth and fame to know that it is not the path to happiness. As Jesus said in Matthew 16:26, 'For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul.' Or what will a man give in exchange for his own soul."

What is the "faith that overcomes the world" that John is talking about in 1 John 5? One definition of faith is to see life the way that God sees it. Faith cuts through the candy-coated poison lies that short-term satisfaction is the way to go, accumulating stuff is the way to go, becoming really, really famous is the way to go. Faith cuts through the candy-coated poison by believing God's Word and taking off the rose-colored glasses so that we can see life the way it really is according to God's design. God says, "Here's what will make you happy. Here's what will set you free." Listening to Jesus and what he teaches about life, that's the faith that overcomes the world!

John goes on and says this, here's something else you can know.

Knowing that the man Jesus is the divine Christ

Marlene and I were in New York recently and we walked by the Macy's store on 34th Street and Herald Square. They had this giant sign hanging off the store for Christmas:

Believe

I thought, “Well, that is a perfect expression for this 21st century culture.” Believe. As I looked at this sign, I thought to myself, “Believe what? Believe what’s true? Believe what you have evidence for?” No, just believe. Believe whatever you want to believe! Believe your version of the facts. Believe even if all evidence contradicts your version. Believe. Believe whatever you want to believe in this post-truth world.

The Apostle John says, “No, don’t just believe anything and everything. Believe that the man Jesus is the divine Christ.”

1 John 5:1a

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...

And the Apostle John says, “And don’t just believe that the man Jesus is the divine Christ because I say so. Here’s the evidence.”

1 John 5:6-12

⁶This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷For there are three that testify: ⁸the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. ⁹We accept human testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. ¹⁰Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. ¹¹And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

What is John talking about by Jesus coming by water and blood? Verses 6-7 are really hard to interpret. “This is one who came by water and blood.” I don’t think it’s likely that John is pointing to our baptisms that we did today or when we take communion in a few minutes. I don’t think water and blood are pointing to our baptism or our taking of communion. And John is likely not talking about the water and blood that came from Jesus’ side when a spear was thrust into Jesus when he hung on the cross. By water and blood, I think John is referring to Jesus’ baptism and the blood he’s referring to is Jesus’ death on the cross.

If you’ve been here through these messages, I’ve said over and over again that the churches that John oversaw were being invaded by heretics who said, “Jesus didn’t become the divine Christ until the Spirit came on him in his baptism and the Spirit left Jesus at the cross so that person who was baptized and the person on the cross was not the divine Christ. Jesus was just a man. Jesus was not God come in the flesh.”

John says, “No.”

1 John 5:6

⁶This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

The Spirit bore witness to Jesus at his baptism. The Father spoke through the Spirit and said, “This is the Son whom I love and with him I am well pleased.” This is the divine Son. At the cross, the Holy Spirit spoke through a pagan soldier, a Centurion, was assigned to make sure that Jesus was dead. He was standing by the cross watching him die. That Roman Centurion was forced to say,

Mark 15:39

And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

John says that the testimony of the water and the blood is corroborated by the testimony of the Spirit.

Slide 1 John 5:7-8

⁷For there are three that testify: ⁸the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

John said that the man Jesus is the divine Christ. He doesn’t just say, “Believe because I told you to. Believe that this man Jesus is come in the flesh because I say so.” Instead, he brings three witnesses forward. The witness of Jesus’ baptism. The witness of Jesus on the cross. And the witness of the Holy Spirit who speaks through God’s written Word and who speaks in our hearts. John says, “You can know that the man Jesus is the divine Christ by these three witnesses!” And as the Bible says – in the mouth of two or three witnesses let it be established.

So, John concludes his book in verse 13 by saying:

1 John 5:13

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

This whole book is written so that you can know whether or not you are an authentic Christian, a real deal Christian. You can know that you have eternal life. You can know that in the end you will be embraced by the love of God. Let me ask you a question as I close today. Do you know that you have eternal life? Do you know that you’re an authentic Christian? Are you certain? Are you absolutely confident that you have a personal relationship with Jesus that makes a real difference in your life?

If you're not, I'd like to pray with you now.

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1 John 5:1-13

- I. Knowing that we are born of God
 - A. Knowing we love God's children
 - B. Knowing we love God
 - C. Knowing we can overcome the world
- II. Knowing that the man Jesus is the divine Christ