

I never could figure out what direction we needed to go. But with my friend at my side, I knew I'd be okay. I used to go to a Pastor's Conference every spring held at the Moody Bible Institute in downtown Chicago. I would drive down there with a friend or two to enjoy some great speakers, relax and reflect on life and ministry. Moody is named after Dwight Moody, an American evangelist in the 1800's. He started the school with a dream to train young people in the Bible and then send them out on missions.

So the school's short name was Moody. And the short name of the conference became the Moody Pastor's Conference. That sounds like a lot of fun right – going to a conference with moody pastors. But it was spiritually renewing and fun except for one area: the tunnels. The Moody campus is fairly big. Chicago gets cold in the winter. So at some point they built some tunnels under campus so students could get around without going outside. We would use these tunnels to go from our dorms to the auditorium and then to the cafeteria.

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMrMkkOVN6s>)

But I could not find my way through them. I had no bearings. You couldn't see the sun or any outside marker. I didn't know the campus well enough to even know which building I needed to get to. So I would get lost and ask directions. This was before smart phones with maps. And it's a bit creepy being in a tunnel especially late at night even if it was on a Christian campus. You never know if you might run into some moody pastor.

But I had a friend who had taken some courses at Moody. He knew the tunnel system. So whenever I was with him, we had no problem. We even talked about different things. I didn't worry which turn to make or which direction to go. He would guide me. It was amazing how much more confident I was going into the tunnels with him. I had assurance that I would get to the other side. I could focus on other things. I really appreciated his gift for underground navigation. Even though I didn't always know the way, I felt greatly assured that we would get there because I had my friend with me.

It's kind of like that in life. When we know where we're headed it can give us assurance and purpose. Even if we don't know where we're headed, it can be very assuring to know that someone will help us and watch out for us. If you're a Christian here today, you have that someone in your life. His name is Jesus. Though you might not know

exactly where you're going or the dangers that lie ahead, you know the one who does know. **Knowing Jesus and His ongoing work on our behalf can give us hope, assurance and purpose for the days ahead.**

We discover this in the very last verse of the New Testament Letter called 1<sup>st</sup> John. We have spent 20 messages in this letter. I want to thank and congratulate you as a congregation for persevering through it. There have been some tough passages. Even last week we had to deal with the passage talking about the sin that leads to death. But John has been very real and straight with us. He has not disguised or sugar coated anything. He lays out clearly the marks of a true Christian and much about Jesus and His great work. John ends on a very positive note. He writes to assure and remind them of what they know. I pray God will use these same words to encourage and assure you of Jesus' ongoing work on our behalf. And I pray it will give you purpose to keep going with whatever you face today. To take the next step as a disciple and disciple-maker of Jesus Christ. So please turn or find on your phone or tablet the last verses of 1<sup>st</sup> John 5 – verses 18-21.

### **1 John 5:18-21**

[18] We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. [19] We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. [20] 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. He is the true God and eternal life. [21] Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:18-21 ESV)

### **What do we know?**

John claims **“we know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning.”** So every true Christian does not continue to sin. Everyone who has had their spirit regenerated by the Holy Spirit does not keep on sinning. But how can this be? We know that as Christians we still sin. We sometimes overcome temptation and other times give in. Notice John does not say we do *not* sin. He says “we do not *keep* sinning.” We may sin. But we do not continue in that sin. We do not make that sin a habit or practice or lifestyle. We fight it. We resist it. We struggle against it. If you are concerned about your sin, that is a pretty good indicator that you are born of God. People who aren't born of God may not really care about their sin. They may care about problems or messes that they want to get out of. But they may not care about sin. People born of God do care and do not keep on sinning.

But how do we not keep on sinning? Is it just a matter of getting some good old self discipline? Is it just trying harder? We may think so at first. We may believe that if we just get our act together, we can just stop sinning.

There was a man who planned to go into Christian ministry. He had opportunity to go in the upcoming term. But he waited a whole year. He told people he needed to save some money and there were some sins that he wanted to stop doing. So he tried all year to stop doing those sins. He kept stumbling and falling until one day someone impressed upon him that he could not overcome sin apart from Christ. He could not overcome his sin in his own strength. He needed the power of Christ working in him. When he appealed to Christ, things began to change for him.

We can't stop sinning on our own. We're like Paul crying out "wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ." We need to learn to turn to the Holy Spirit and depend on Jesus to help us overcome those sins. And the good news is Jesus is already at work to help us. John explains this. "We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but (here's the reason why we don't keep on sinning) he who was born of God protects him." Who is he who was born of God? It has to be Jesus. We who were born of God struggle with sin. We who were born of God need great help overcoming sin. But he, Jesus who was born of God (unique in the virgin birth) protects. So **Jesus protects those born of God from continuing to sin.** Jesus protects us from continuing to harm ourselves. Yes we sin. But we would sin much more without Jesus protection and work. Jesus constantly intercedes in prayer for us. Jesus cleanses us from sin. Jesus died a sacrificial death so we could be forgiven our sins. Jesus protects us.

He's kind of like some of the new Moms we have around the church. They put those no scratch mittens on their baby's hands. Why do Mom's do that? Well, babies fingernails grow. Sometimes the baby scratches itself without even knowing what it's doing. So the Mom puts protection over the fingernails so the baby can't hurt itself. Jesus' work is like that mitten to protect us from continuing in sin.

But Jesus does not only protect us from harming ourselves and others more than we already do. He also protects us from someone who wants to harm us. Middle half of verse 18 – "But he who was born of God protects him and the evil one does not touch him. **Jesus protects us from the evil one – the devil himself.** Jesus protects us from him. The devil opposes those born of God. The devil is your adversary and enemy. He does not rest in his attempts to

make us stumble. In 3:8 Jesus appeared to destroy the works of the devil. Jesus will not let the devil have those born of God.

But don't the words John uses imply that the devil can't even get near us? "And the evil one does not touch him." It seems like John says the devil cannot lay a finger on us because of Jesus' protection. But we know he does afflict and tempt us. We are commanded to be angry and not sin and not let the sun go down on our anger so we give no opportunity to the devil - Ephesians 4:27. Resist the devil. Ephesians 6:11 - Stand against his schemes. He lies to us and attempts to discourage us. He is like a roaring lion looking around for someone to devour. So is John wrong here? The word translated touch can mean to touch with an intention to harm or grab hold of with the intention to hurt. In that sense, the devil cannot grab hold of us and keep us to harm us. He might be able to strike a blow or scratch us a little as we pass by. But he can't sink his claws into us and stop us from persevering in the faith to the end.

It's similar to what the devil could not do to Jesus through Easter weekend. He could not hold Jesus back from going to the cross, paying the price for our sin, dying and rising again. The devil could not prevent Jesus from doing that which would ultimately defeat him. It's like the evil one couldn't get ahold of Jesus and stop him. He can't grab hold of us because Jesus protects us. Jesus said in John 10:28-29 "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand." Isn't that a wonderful image? Jesus has us in his hand. The devil cannot come along and grab us out of Jesus' hand. Jesus is not like the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk. Jesus doesn't fall asleep or fail to watch us. Jesus protects and preserves the lives and souls of those who trust in Him. Yes we face difficulties and assaults. But the devil can't own us or hold us. Jesus has us firmly in hand. So whatever we're facing and wherever we're headed, we know Jesus is at his protecting work. He protects us from continuing to sin and from the evil one. That's what we know.

But that's not all we know. Verse 19 – We know that we are from God and the whole world lies under the power of the evil one. **We are from God but the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.** John repeats what he's said in verse 18 but from a slightly different angle. Instead of "born of God," he describes us as simply "of God." We are his creation and recreation. We are his eternal possession. In a world of sin, the devil and death, knowing we are of God provides great hope.

But look at where the world finds itself – people who are not born of God. “The whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” He does not say “we are from God and the world is from the evil one.” The whole world lies in the power of the evil one. Lying under the power of someone is like being helplessly passive under their influence. The word “lie” is the same one used to say baby Jesus was lying in a manger. It’s like the people of the world lie in Satan’s arms and don’t even know it. This is a sad, troubling and disturbing reality especially when we consider our friends, family and neighbors who do not know Christ. It’s like being under the influence of some drug or alcohol and thinking that’s normal. People not born of God are under the influence or power of the evil one and think it’s normal.

But it makes God’s ownership of us all the sweeter. We are from God. We are His children. We no longer lie under the control of the evil one. We are not helplessly passive as he exerts his sway over us. The devil can’t snatch us out of Jesus hand nor get his claws into us. We can rejoice that we have been delivered from lying under the control of the evil one.

So we know that everyone born of God does not continue to sin because of Jesus’ protection from sinning and from the evil one. We know that we are from God and the whole world lies under the power of the evil one.

John finally says “we know that the son of God has come and given us understanding so that we may know him who is true.” **We know Jesus came and gave us understanding to know God.** Think about it. How much less would we know about God if Jesus had not come? How much less would you know about God if you didn’t have the New Testament? Jesus is the appearance of the invisible God in human history. Jesus came and gave us understanding so that we could know God. Satan constantly works to “blind the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” But Jesus came and unveiled our eyes so that we can see God and understand – opened up the blinds and showed us a whole new world. (Unveiling story?)

Within this final “we know” section, John makes perhaps makes one of the most striking, startling and crystal clear statements about Jesus in the entire New Testament. Look at the last phrase of verse 20. “He is the true God and eternal life.” Now the question is who is he? He could be God the Father. If John means God the Father, it’s a true and wonderful statement. God is the true God and eternal life. But John has just mentioned the Son Jesus Christ. Then he says he. If John says “Jesus is the true God and eternal life,” it is the clearest, plainest unmistakable statement of the deity of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. People today and throughout the centuries debate Jesus’ identity. But the

eye witness, John, has spent an entire letter testifying to his identity. Now he concludes with one final, glorious statement. Jesus is the true God and eternal life.

What a perfect way to end the letter! What a wonderful conclusion to this great letter of assurance. But wait. There's one more phrase. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." What? Why would John add that? Why talk about idols at the very end of this letter? It could be that the church in the first century was surrounded by literal idols. God's people had a history of allowing themselves to be led astray by idols. So John warns them – this is the way to clear the deck and walk more closely with Jesus. The entire benefit of this letter could be swept away if the readers went out and allowed themselves to be distracted from Jesus by some idol. The call to us is the same. Keep yourselves from idols like consumerism and accumulating stuff and living for the weekend or vacations or just for yourself. Instead invest your life in the one who is the true God and eternal life – Jesus – and follow where He leads you.

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep sinning.

We know that we are from God and the whole world is under the power of the evil one.

We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know God. Jesus is the true God and eternal life.

Though we walk through tunnels in life and aren't sure what's ahead or where we're going, we're not alone. Jesus will guide, assure and show us the way.

Now we are done 1 John. We have heard John say again and again:

True Christians believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

True Christians obey God's commandments and desire to obey them.

True Christians love one another.

What will you do from John's message? How will you respond? What needs strengthening? What do you need to let go of?