

## **The Root of All Uncertainty - I John 5:13-21**

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Certainty: Absolute Truths that Produce Joyful Assurance  
Certainty; Idolatry; Son of God; Truth / 1 John 5:13-21

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Let's imagine that we were interviewing the Apostle John, and he had just finished speaking to us the entire letter of I John. If we were to ask John, "How would you summarize the entire letter in one sentence?" What do you think he might say? It seems outlandish and completely out of place, but look at [I John 5:21](#). This is his summary:

**1 John 5:21 KJV 1900**

<sup>21</sup> Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

Why speak of the nature of God, the certainty of Jesus in the flesh, the evidences of true Christians, the marks of those who are antichrists, the birthmarks of believers, the love of God, and love for brethren? In John's estimation, anything that is contrary to the true God and the evidences of true believers is idolatry. This is his final admonition; the root of all uncertainty is idolatry. Why summarize it this way?

### **Because of what Idolatry Means:**

Definitions of Idolatry:

What is the cause of this "strange melancholy" that permeates our society even during boom times of frenetic activity, and which turns to outright despair when prosperity diminishes? De Tocqueville says it comes from taking some "incomplete joy of this world" and building your entire life on it. That is the definition of idolatry.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Keller, Timothy. Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters. Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Idolatry is huge in the Bible, dominant in our personal lives, and irrelevant in our mistaken estimations. — Os Guinness<sup>2</sup>

Idolatry isn't just one of many sins; rather it's the one great sin that all others come from. So if you start scratching at whatever struggle you're dealing with, eventually you'll find that underneath it is a false god. Until that god is dethroned, and the Lord God takes his rightful place, you will not have victory... The problem is that the instant something takes the place of God, the moment it becomes an end in itself rather than something to lay at God's throne, it becomes an idol... Anything at all can become an idol once it becomes a substitute for God in our lives.<sup>3</sup>

Because of what idolatry means and that it is the worship of any other god besides the true God, as He has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Thus, idolaters are those who worship variations of Jesus that are slightly or drastically different than Jesus as He was revealed.

### **Seeing God How We Want Him to Be**

Isn't it tempting to see God like we want him to be, rather than how he has revealed himself? In an interview with *Parade* magazine, the musician Elton John said, "I think Jesus was a compassionate, super-intelligent gay man who understood human problems."

One of the easiest ways to commit the sin of idolatry is to remake God in our image. For culture's view of God, see *Parade* magazine. For an accurate view of God, see the Bible.

—Jim L. Wilson and Rodger Russell<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Idleman, Kyle. *Gods at War: Defeating the Idols that Battle for Your Heart*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> 123 Dotson Rader, "Elton John: 'There's a lot of hate in the world,'" <http://www.parade.com/celebrity/celebrity-parade/2010/elton-john-web-exclusive.html>.

Wilson, J. L., & Russell, R. (2015). *Seeing God How We Want Him to Be*. In E. Ritzema (Ed.), *300 Illustrations for Preachers*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

How was Jesus revealed?

**John 20:24–29 KJV 1900**

<sup>24</sup> But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. <sup>26</sup> And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: *then* came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace *be* unto you. <sup>27</sup> Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust *it* into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. <sup>28</sup> And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. <sup>29</sup> Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed.

**Because of How We Are Created:**

You and I were created to worship God — to adore God and find our ultimate sense of self-worth and assurance in Him alone. Satan tempted Eve by telling her that they would be as gods, knowing good and evil. The temptation to replace God entered the human race in the Garden. It became the tendency of every other human.

If in doubt, consider the first of the famed Ten Commandments:

**Exodus 20:3 KJV 1900**

<sup>3</sup> Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

From this command flows all other commands. The next three commands show the removal of God from his rightful place. The last six commands explicitly show how and with what God is replaced. If you dishonor your father/mother, you are choosing to exalt your own authority above the Lord's established authority. It is the idolatry of the power of self. If you kill, you have chosen to exalt anger or vengeance. You could even say that you have idolized your own life above another's. If you commit adultery, you have idolized sexual sin or personal pleasure. If you steal, you have idolized

whatever motivated you to steal — the thrill of the steal, or you've idolized materialism. If you lie, you have idolized your own image or possibly whatever you get out of lying. Idolatry is at the heart of insecurity or a lack of confidence.

### **It's our Natural Human Tendency:**

Our natural response to this lack of assurance is to find lesser beings and things for our sense of meaning. This is the description of idolatry. Idolatry is attempting to find ultimate security and confidence in someone or something other than God. It is the enthronement of even good things in replacement of God Himself. It is attempting to fill the void we feel with someone other than God.

As it relates to the letter of I John, there are two kinds of people we must consider:

- Those who have **false confidence** or assurance — individuals who have confidence based in something or someone that is a variation of the true God or Jesus. They may be assured, but their assurance is false because it is based on a false god.
- Those who have **failing confidence** or assurance — Christians who have believed in the true God and true Jesus but who are struggling for assurance because of the temptation towards false gods.

› **The root of all false confidence and failing confidence is idolatry.**

### (1) Know that you are not immune to idolatry ([I John 5:13](#))

#### **1 John 5:13 KJV 1900**

<sup>13</sup> These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

This particular verse is one of transition as well as a purpose statement for the letter. [I John 5:13](#) transitions to the final remarks of John, but it also tells you why John wrote the letter. There are a couple things of primary

importance here. The fact that John is writing this to people who are believers confirms our suspicions that it is possible to be in relationship with God and lack assurance. But why? Because the distraction of a false god can cause one's faith to waiver. Christians are not immune in any scenario.

Today, this kind of idolatry may take on many forms, but one of the most glaring ways we see this is through the exaltation of educational knowledge to the status of identity and a person's value. What you know and why you pursue knowledge must be informed by the relationship you already have in Jesus. When you fall into the trap of knowledge idolatry, you are on the path to uncertainty and a lack of assurance.

## (2) Pray confidently for those in idolatry ([1 John 5:14-17](#))

### **1 John 5:14-17 KJV 1900**

<sup>14</sup> And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: <sup>15</sup> And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. <sup>16</sup> If any man see his brother sin a sin *which is* not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. <sup>17</sup> All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

When we are secure in our relationship with Christ, this gives a boost of confidence, but remember that any variation of Who Jesus actually is, is idolatrous. So, how does this confidence manifest itself? Through prayer for God's will. God's will is manifested first through God's Word and not first by impressions of the heart.

### **Luke 22:42 KJV 1900**

<sup>42</sup> Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

It is not just prayer for God's will, but it is intercessory prayer.

### **Luke 22:31-32 KJV 1900**

<sup>31</sup> And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

It could easily be said that Peter denied Jesus because of the idol of self, but we see how Jesus prayed. How should we pray for one another? We should pray for those battling against idols.

#### **400 Prayers for Preachers**

“We Have Been Polluted with Idolatry and Superstition”

Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29

Preaching Themes: Confession, Idolatry, Superstition

Prayer Type: Confession

O dreadful and most mighty God, who from the beginning has declared yourself a consuming fire against the condemners of your most holy precepts, and yet to the penitent you have shown yourself a favorable Father and a God full of mercy; we, the workmanship of your own hands, confess ourselves most unworthy to open our eyes unto heaven, for our conscience accuses us, and our manifest iniquity bears witness that we have declined from you. We have been polluted with idolatry and superstition; we have given your glory to creatures, and have sought support where it was not to be found. The manifest corruption of our lives evidently proves how far we have offended against you and against your just and most holy commandments.

We most humbly ask you, O Father of mercies, for Christ Jesus your Son's sake, to remove the remembrance of our past iniquities, and by the power of your Holy Spirit so to govern us in all times to come that all the actions of our life may tend to the advancement of your glory, and to the comfort of your troubled flock.

JOHN KNOX

#### **400 Prayers for Preachers**

“Deliver Me from Idolatry”

1 Timothy 6:10; 1 John 5:21

Preaching Themes: Idolatry, Love  
Prayer Type: Petition

Deliver me, O God, from all idolatrous love of any creature. I know infinite numbers have been lost to you, by loving those creatures for their own sake, which you permit, even command, to love subordinately to you. Preserve me, I ask you, from all such blind affection; be a guard to all my desires, that they fix on no creature any farther than the love of it tends to build me up in the love of you. You require me to love you with all my heart; I ask you that I may never open my heart to anything, but out of love to you.

Above all, deliver me, O my God, from all idolatrous self-love. I know, O God, that this is the root of all evil. I know you made me, not to do my own will, but yours. I know, the very corruption of the devil is, the having a will contrary to yours. O be my helper against this most dangerous of all idols, that I may both discern all its subtleties, and withstand all its force. O you who have commanded me to renounce myself, give me strength, and I will obey your command. My choice and desire is, to love myself, as all other creatures, in and for you. O let your almighty arm so establish, strengthen, and settle me, that you may ever be the ground and pillar of all my love.

JOHN WESLEY

### (3) Live with certainty about sin, self, and the Son ([John 5:18-20](#))

#### **1 John 5:18-20 KJV 1900**

<sup>18</sup> We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

<sup>19</sup> *And* we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. <sup>20</sup> And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in

him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

These final verses present three “we know” statements. We know how the person born of God relates to sin. We know who we are. We know the Son of God has come. John is doing here what he has done throughout the letter. He is helping them to see what is the outworking of faith established in absolutely certain truths. Satan is real, and the world is under his control. That is all those who do not know Jesus as He has been revealed. Give yourselves to pursuing a deeper understanding of the Son of God.

The greatest adversary of love to God is not his enemies but his gifts. And the deadliest appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable and almost incurable.

— John Piper, *Hunger for God*<sup>5</sup>

#### (4) Guard against idolatry intentionally ([1 John 5:21](#))

**1 John 5:21 KJV 1900**

<sup>21</sup> Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

This verse is both endearing and a call to arms. It is a verse that confirms we should not take for granted how subtle variations of God or Jesus may enter into the lives of Christians.

##### **10,000 Sermon Illustrations**

Worldliness, then, is a preoccupation with ease and affluence. It elevates creature comfort to the point of idolatry; large salaries and comfortable lifestyles become necessities of life.

- Consider Christ in [John 17:3](#):

**John 17:3 KJV 1900**

<sup>3</sup> And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

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<sup>5</sup> 1001 Illustrations that Connect (Illustration 228: The Poison in Everyday Things)



- Look for heart idols manifested by gossip:<sup>6</sup>
  - The idol of **approval** (I want the approval of the people I'm talking to.)
  - The idol of **control** (Using gossip as a way to manipulate/control others.)
  - The idol of **reputation** (I want to feel important, so I cut someone else down verbally.)
  - The idol of **success** (Someone is succeeding—and I'm not—so I gossip about him.)
  - The idol of **security** (Talking about others masks my own insecurity.)
  - The idol of **pleasure** (Someone else is enjoying life—and I'm not—so I attack her.)
  - The idol of **knowledge** (Talking about people is a way of showing I know more.)
  - The idol of **recognition** (Talking about others gets people to notice me.)
  - The idol of **respect** (That person disrespected me, so I'm going to disrespect him.)

- Be committed in a way that people know how to specifically pray for you.

**James 5:16 KJV 1900**

<sup>16</sup> Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

- › **The root of all false confidence and failing confidence is idolatry.** Conversely, the root of absolute assurance and lasting joy is a true heart of worship for the true God and His Son Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus came to give you.

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<sup>6</sup> Thune, Robert H.; Walker, Will. The Gospel-Centered Life: Study Guide with Leader's Notes (pp. 55-56). New Growth Press. Kindle Edition.