

## Introduction

### False Teaching

It is interesting as we read through the Old Testament that most of the warnings against false prophets warn about those **within** the nation, not those outside. When we read the New Testament, we see the same thing. Most of the warnings about false teaching warn us to guard against false teaching that arises from **within** the church, not outside.

The reason this is so important is because this week you will have access to (and may seek out) sermons, podcasts, lectures, or video clips from pastors or Christian influencers who profess faith in Jesus, yet are false teachers. *When you hear false teaching, do you recognize it as false teaching?* The sad reality is that Christians often hear blatant false teaching and recognize it as inspiration, not false teaching.

Victoria Osteen will say that you come to church for yourself, not God, and people will view it as inspirational, not false teaching. Steven Furtick, the pastor of Elevation Church, will say that if you have faith in Jesus that you are God Almighty, and people will view it as inspirational to their faith, not as false teaching. Yet, these teachings mirror what Satan said when he tempted Eve. “You will be like God” ([Gen 3:5](#)). Yet professing believers will listen to these false teachers and will believe them because they claim to proclaim Scripture.

### Separation from the world

This is the situation that was faced by the church in 1 John. They were battling false teachers from **within** the church. Yet, 1 John constantly reminds them that false teachers are of the world and Christians are not ([1 John 4:1-6](#)). They came from **within** the church, but they are not truly a part of the church ([1 John 2:19](#)).

[1 John 5:16-21](#) addresses this situation. We are in the world, but we are not of the world. This passage points out that **it is our faith in Jesus that makes us distinct**. Christian faith separates us from the world and from false teaching. As we read this passage, consider this question, *How do we as a church family live out our faith in a world that rejects Jesus?*

## Pray for one another

**First, we should pray for one another.** [1 John 5:16-17](#) “16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.”

### Sin unto death

*What is the “sin that leads to death” in this passage?* The Bible teaches that all sin leads to death ([Gen 2:17](#); [Rom 5:12](#); [6:23](#)). This passage distinguishes between sin that **does not** lead to death and sin that **does** lead to death (vs 16). Therefore, this must be talking about a specific category of sin.

Contextually, I think this refers to a rejection of Jesus. This letter (1 John) was written to a church who had recently faced false teachers who had left the church ([1 John 2:19, 26](#); [4:1-6](#)). According to 1 John, these false teachers denied Jesus ([1 John 2:22-23](#)). They denied that He was the Christ ([1 John 2:22](#)), that He was truly human ([1 John 4:2](#)), and that He was the Son of God ([1 John 4:15](#); [5:5](#)). This is important because [1 John 5:11-13](#) explains that the only way to have eternal life is through faith in Jesus.

The message of Scripture is that we have rejected God and His will; therefore, we are eternally, spiritually dead. Jesus, the eternal God, became a human, lived a sinless life, and died to bear the guilt of sin for those who have faith in Him. Whoever believes in Jesus and is filled with the Holy Spirit is made alive and will have resurrection after death. **Faith in Jesus is the only way to have eternal life.** Those who reject Jesus cannot have eternal life.

Judas is a great example to consider throughout the entire letter of 1 John. As Judas was betraying Him, Jesus said in [John 15:6](#) “6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” Judas was no different than the other disciples in relation to sin. The only distinction was that he did not abide in Jesus - he did not have faith in Jesus. **The sin unto death is rejection of Jesus.**

### Pray for brothers

*According to these verses, for whom should we pray?* [1 John 5:16](#) “16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death ...” **We should pray for fellow believers who sin.**

There are a couple of important implications in this verse. First, **followers of Jesus should not be comfortable with a brother who continues in sin**. Part of being in a church family is submitting to the judgment of the church ([1 Cor 5:12](#)). Specifically, [1 Corinthians 5:1-12](#) teaches that we should judge sin in the church and hold each other accountable to repentance and holiness. The goal of accountability in the church is repentance, not discipline ([2 Cor 2:5-11](#)). Calling out sin in the church should come from love ([2 Cor 2:8](#)) and humility ([Matt 7:1-5](#)).

Second, **followers of Jesus should pray for one another's spiritual struggles**. [James 5:13-15](#) teaches that we should pray for one another's physical needs. But the point here in [1 John 5:16](#) is that we should also pray for spiritual needs.

### Not for false teachers

*Who should we **not** pray for?* [1 John 5:16](#) "... There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that." **We should not pray for false teachers.**

To clarify, I do not think this means that we should not pray that a false teacher would repent and come to faith in Jesus. Paul is a great example of a self-proclaimed opponent of Christ who repented and believed in Jesus.

I think the point here is that we should not pray for false teachers like we pray for fellow Christians. That is, we should not view false teachers as Christians or treat them as such. **Example:** Before I knew anything about the LDS church, I met a couple of LDS missionaries on a college campus who were telling people about Jesus. In my ignorance, I encouraged them to keep up their work. A friend thankfully explained to me the false teaching of Mormonism and helped me see that these men were not leading people to God; they were leading people away from God.

It may seem odd to read that we should not pray for certain people. We read the same thing in Jeremiah. [Jeremiah 7:16](#) "16 "As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you." [Jeremiah 11:14](#) "14 "Therefore do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble." [Jeremiah 14:11-12](#) "11 The Lord said to me: "Do not pray for the welfare of this people. 12 Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence.'" The book of Jeremiah helps us understand [1 John 5:16-17](#). Like 1 John, Jeremiah is addressing false prophets who have led Israel away from God. When God instructed Jeremiah to refrain from praying for people; He specifically said this in relation to judgment. That is, God did not instruct Jeremiah to refrain from praying for people to come to faith. He instructed Jeremiah to refrain from praying that false prophets and those who followed them would be spared from judgment.

## Summary

*How do we as a church family live out our faith in a world that rejects Jesus?* [1 John 5:16-17](#) says that we should pray for one another, especially in relation to sin. We should pray for God's mercy and for repentance. But this passage clarifies that we should not pray for God's mercy on those who reject Christ.

## God protects us

**Second, we should trust Christ's protection.** [1 John 5:18-19](#) "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."

### Ongoing sin

*Do Christians sin?* [1 John 5:18](#) "18 We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning..." This has been a major topic in this letter. First John distinguishes between our regular struggle with sin and a commitment to rebellion. [1 John 1:8-2:1](#) teaches that Christians still sin, yet encourages us to repent from sin. However, [1 John 3:4-10](#) says that a mark of true faith is repentance and anyone who continues in unrepentant sin is a follower of Satan, not Christ. Genuine faith produces repentance.

### Christ's protection

*What does it mean that Christ (He who was born of God) protects believers?* Consider the context here. The focus of this chapter is our faith in Jesus. [1 John 5:11-13](#) says that those who have faith in Jesus have eternal life. [1 John 5:16-17](#) says that some sin (rejection of Jesus) leads to death (eternal death).

Christ protects us from eternal death. Notice that verse 18 says the evil one (Satan) does not touch him. There are clear examples in Scripture that show that this does not simply mean that Satan cannot harm believers. Satan took everything Job had and harmed him personally. Verse 18 means that Satan cannot affect our eternal standing with God.

Adam and Eve chose to follow Satan; they submitted to Satan rather than God. Each of us has done the same thing; sin is a submission to Satan and a rejection of God. This is what verse 19 means when it says "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." In Christ, we are filled with the Holy Spirit, purified of sin, and made righteous through Christ's substitutionary obedience and death ([Titus 3:5](#); [2 Cor 5:21](#)). I trust in Christ's protection from eternal death because I trust in His substitutionary death.

Related to this, Christ protects us from apostasy - rejecting our faith. Faith is a gift from God ([Eph 2:8](#); [1 Cor 12:3](#)). As [1 John 2:19](#) points out, those who turn away from professed faith show that their faith was not genuine (cf. [1 Pet 1:6-7](#)). Our enduring faith is a work of the Holy Spirit.

Compare these verses to [John 17:12-16](#) “12 While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” (1) Christ guarded his disciples (not Judas) so that none of them would be lost. (2) The disciples remained in the world, but would be separate from the world.

### Summary

*How do we as a church family live out our faith in a world that rejects Jesus?* [1 John 5:18-19](#) says that we should trust Christ’s protection. Faith in Jesus does not free us from struggling against sin. But Jesus overcomes sin on our behalf. He protects us by giving us enduring faith and eternal salvation. As Jesus said of His disciples in [John 17:12](#), none of us will be lost. So, **we should trust in Christ’s protection.**

## Jesus is true

**Third, we should faithfully hold on to true teaching about Jesus.** [1 John 5:20-21](#) “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.”

### Knowing God

*How do we come to know God?* [1 John 5:20](#) “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 ...” **We know God through faith in Jesus.** Salvation is not merely being set free from sin and judgment. Salvation is being reconciled into an eternal relationship with Christ. [John 17:3](#) “3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” The only way to know God is through faith in Jesus. [John 14:6](#) “6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

## Jesus is God

*Who is Jesus?* [1 John 5:20](#) "... we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life." 1 John rightly teaches that Jesus is the eternal God. He was born in flesh and was truly human. He came as the Christ, the One who would save God's people from sin and rule over God's eternal kingdom. A rejection of any of these truths about Jesus is a rejection of Jesus, Himself.

Notice that this letter ends with a warning to avoid idols. The letter has not mentioned idols up to this point. I think the reason it mentions idols in this particular context is because the essence of idolatry is the worship of a god made in the image we choose ([Jer 10:1-10](#)). That is, the true God is the Creator. Idols are false gods that we create.

This same thing could be said of the false teaching we read about in 1 John. They denied that Jesus was who He claimed, who God claimed, and who Scripture claimed. Instead, they were creating a god in the image they chose. They were not worshipping the true God. **Genuine faith in Jesus requires believing truth about Him and devoting yourself to Him.**

## Conclusion

### Personal reflection

*How do we as a church family live out our faith in a world that rejects Jesus? [1 John 5:16-21](#) says first that we should pray for one another. We should pray for God's mercy in our sin. *Do you pray for your church family? Do you pray for their holiness and that God would guard them from temptation. Do you pray that they would endure in their faith?**

Second, we should trust in Christ's protection - that in Him we have enduring faith and eternal life. *Do you daily repent of sin? Do you daily rely on Christ's atonement and the indwelling Holy Spirit to shape your life? Do you live as citizen of heaven who does not fit in with the world?*

Third, we should faithfully hold to true teaching about Jesus. *Do you know false teaching when you hear it? Do you spend time in Scripture so you can recognize false teaching? Do you compare the preaching you hear online to Scripture? Do you compare the preaching you hear at Bethlehem to Scripture?*

## Closing Scripture

[1 John 2:18-23](#) “18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. 20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. 21 I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. 22 Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.”