

EPISTLE: 1 JOHN

5



MP3

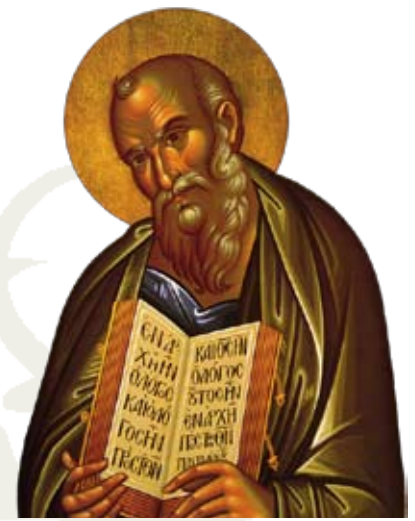
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PRACTICE QUIZ

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The Holy Apostle John begins the last chapter of 1 John by continuing a theme from the previous two chapters: people who love God will follow His commandments and love other Christians (5:1). The two actions are closely related, because we can know we love God's children (i.e., other Christians) by our observance of His commandments (5:2). As the monk Andreas teaches, "Keeping the commandments is both the form and substance of our love for God. Those who obey them are brought close to God by them."

All this means that being a true child of God involves more than simply loving others, and more than simply "obeying the rules"—it is a combination of the two. This task is not burdensome; it is possible because, as believers in the deity of Christ, we have overcome all the potential obstacles the world can throw at us (5:3-5).

The full deity of Christ is important. While some people claim that Jesus' divinity came upon Him at baptism and departed before His Crucifixion and death, Christians know that the Son of God fully experienced both baptism and death; we

know this is true because the Holy Spirit bears witness to its truth (5:6). While the clear Trinitarian reference in verse seven is unfortunately an addition to the text that does not exist in any early biblical manuscripts, the witnesses listed in verse eight are part of the original writing: St. Leo the Great explains that "this means the Spirit of sanctification, the blood of redemption and the water of baptism, which three are one and remain distinct...This is the faith by which the Church lives and moves."

The apostle invites us to think about this: if we believe in the importance of eyewitness testimony, how much more important is the witness of God Himself (5:9)? God the Father testifies that He has given us eternal life in His Son; we can have this eternal life if we believe and follow the Son of God (5:12-13). There is, however, a flip side to this: if we do not believe in Christ, then we are calling God a liar, and we do not have the promise of eternal life (5:10-12).

Because we have this close relationship with God, we can be confident that God hears our prayers and will answer them (5:14-15). Some people interpret this to mean that God will give us *anything* we want, so we need to understand what is really being said. First of all, we must—as the beginning of this chapter makes clear—pursue a life of holiness and communion with God. St. John of Kronstadt puts it like this,

The Christian, approaching God with a prayer to Him, or to His most pure Mother,

or to the angels and saints, in order to insure the success of his prayer, ought to try to resemble as far as possible the Lord Himself, or His most-pure Mother, or the angels and saints. In this lies the secret of drawing near to God, and of His speedily hearing our prayers.

Secondly, as Didymus the Blind says, we must ask God only for what is "pleasing and acceptable to Him." As a key example of this, St. John refers to praying for those Christians we see sinning (but not the "sin leading to death," which Fr. Lawrence Farley says refers to schism) (5:16).

In closing, the apostle again reminds us to keep away from sin and idols—as well as the world, which is under the sway of the wicked one—and instead to remain in Christ and receive eternal life (5:20-21).

LIFE TIP

St. John Climacus explains some of the reasons for which God might deny us the things for which we ask in prayer: "All who ask and do not obtain their requests from God, are denied for one of the following reasons; because they ask at the wrong time, or because they ask unworthily and vaingloriously, or because if they received they would become conceited, or finally because they would become negligent after obtaining their request."

