GOD’S CHILDREN IN THE WORLD

1 John 5:18-20

Key Verse: 5:19

“We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”

We thank God for the assurance of eternal life and the confidence we can have in prayer. Especially, may we deeply believe that our God the Father in heaven wants us to come to him and ask for anything according to his will and he hears us, and so we have what we asked of him. In today’s passage, we have three of the expression, “we know”, three Christian certainties, after two certainties in the previous passage. These three certainties are the certainty of divine protection, the certainty of our belonging and of the world under the evil one and the certainty of understanding. Let’s think of the these one by one.

**First, divine protection (18).** Verse 18 says, “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.” As we have studied, “being born of God” is one important concept in 1 John: in 2:29, “If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of God; in 3:9, “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God”; in 4:7, “…Everyone who loves has been born of God”; in 5:1, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God”; in 5:4, “…everyone born of God overcomes the world” and here in 5:18, “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin.” Those born of God do what is right, do not continue to sin, love, believe that Jesus is the Christ, and overcome the world. Not continuing to sin is stressed. They do not fall into the same pattern of sin habitually. They no longer live on the sinful level, but on the higher level, although they struggle with their sinful nature and flesh constantly. In other words, their life is not lived on a physical level, but spiritual. It means they struggle with God, especially at each crucial moment in life.

Then it says, “the One who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.” The One who was born of God is none other than the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He keeps each of God’s children safe. This is divine protection. There are so many dangers in the life of a Christian, inwardly and outwardly. A Christian’s spiritual surviving in this world is a kind of miracle. Without divine protection, such survival is not possible. Safety is in Him. Jesus mentioned this repeatedly, especially in John’s gospel. He said in John 6:37-39, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.” Jesus also said in John 10:27-29, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” Jesus also said in his high priestly prayer in John 17, in verse 11, “I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name…” in verse 12, “While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me…” and in verse 15, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” And the end of Jude, verse 24, says, “To him who is able to keep you from falling….”

The Psalmist of Psalm 121 confessed, “…he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you…The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore” (Ps 121:3b-8). We are also reminded of Psalm 23, the Psalm of David, “the LORD is my shepherd…Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

Romans 5:10 says, “If, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!” In other words, if He could - if he could do the great work in saving us by his death, he can do the lesser work in keeping us by his ever living to make intercession for us.

In Revelation chapter 5, the twenty elders sang a new song to the Lamb, “You are worthy…because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” Since he purchased us with his blood, we are his. According to Colossians 1:13, “he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” Through God’s rescuing work in his great mercy, we were brought from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of Christ his Son. He will keep his people safe with his power of resurrection and great responsibility. When Afghanistan was handed over to the Taliban, the people’s desperate struggle to get out of the county was too tragic to witness. Some mothers threw their babies to Western solider so that the babies might be taken care of by them. Some babies were thrown in safely while others were caught on the barbed wire fences. When rescuing aircrafts took off, some people held the wheels as their last resort to survive. It was a tragedy itself that the nation could not keep her people safe anymore. We are thankful that we live in this nation. However, we know that people’s safety in any nation is not guaranteed. Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:12, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” We know that the world is becoming more and more hostile to God and his people. More than that, Satan is vigilant to make each of God’s people stumble and fall. However, the Lord will keep us safe in his invisible yet perfectly safe kingdom. In Revelation, we see those who have been martyred because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Yet, such martyrdom happens under the protection of our Lord. He will keep us safe in either way until we enter the kingdom of God. When Paul was in prison, he confessed in 2 Timothy 4:16-18, “At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me…But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength…I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attach and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.”

Verse 18 says continually, “…the evil one cannot harm him.” In other translations “…the evil one does not touch him.” The Greek word of “harm” or “touch” is *haptomai*, which was also used in John 20:17, when Jesus said to Mary, “Do not hold on to me.” The evil one will do his best to depress us and make us unhappy, but he will never get us back into his clutches. He can do many things to us, but he will never hold us again.

This description shows how powerful the divine protection is. Our safety is in him and his kingdom is perfect. The evil one is the second most powerful person and his intellectual power is beyond human with matchless craftiness. Yet, his power is far below that of Christ Jesus our Lord. There is a hymn song, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”, which goes, “Did we our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing; Were not the right Man on our side, The Man of God’s own choosing. Dost ask who that maybe? Christ Jesus it is He; Lord Sabaoth, His name; From age to age the same; And He must win the battle.” The evil one will never get us back; he will never cling to us and embrace us. We are safe in the arms of Jesus, beyond the further reach of Satan. May we rely on him in our journey of life in the battle with the evil one.

**Second, God’s children and the evil world (19).** Verse 19 says, “We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” This verse teaches what is the Christian view of themselves and of the world. Firstly, let’s think about what our view of life in the world is to be based on this verse. It says that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We have thought of this until now. It seems to be a fatalistic or negative view of the world. Yet, we need to see the world correctly, based on the words of God.

There are several views of the world. There is a biological view. There seem to be many who take this view. They say that the world is simply in a process of evolution, part of development, and there is the growing pains that always accompany growth. There are those to whom the world is purely a question of economics, running by an economic force. It is a question of food and an attempt to satisfy the fundamental needs of man—economics. But then there are others who describe the whole world in terms of politics. They say that the real trouble with man is that he is a political animal, and associations in life always need a certain amount of organization. They assure us that as man is more trained politically, he will solve his problems. But still another group says that the whole problem of the world is one of intellect. Such people assure us that if only we gave men and women better knowledge and education, we could solve our personal problems, our national problems, and indeed our international problems. Then the last view is that we might call the moral view. They claim that the problem of life in this world is not biological or economic or political or intellectual; the problem of life in this world is a moral one. Some of them may actually claim to be religious, but we have seen that to have a religious view of the world is not the same thing as having a Christian view.

Now let’s think about the Christian, New Testament view of life in this world. It is spiritual, essentially different even from the moral view. Here it is: “The whole world is under the control of the evil one.” In other words, according to this view the trouble with the world is not that it just lacks certain qualities, it is not simply that it ought to be better than it is. Rather, the life of this world is controlled entirely and absolutely by an evil power, by the one who is described here as the evil one, the devil or Satan. That’s why it is the spiritual view of life in this world. (John 12:31; Ephesians 2:2; 2 Cor 4:4.). If we accept the biblical view of life in this world, it is absolutely necessary to believe that Satan exists. The whole world lies in the power of the evil one. It is lying in his bosom; he is there clasping it, and he is controlling its whole outlook and all its activities and everything that happens in it.

Since man’s fall, the evil one, Satan has been ruling the world. The people of the world are to be saved and this world is to be subject to be judged. God once judged the world by the Flood over the earth and this worldwide judgment looks forward to the final judgment by fire. Apostle Peter said in 2 Peter 3:10-12, “The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare…That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.”

The devil or Satan knows his final doom to be thrown in the lake of fire. Until that time, he exercises his maximizes his power to carry out his agenda, which is to stand against God and thwart his will. Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:4, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ…” The god of this age prompts an individual that one’s self is most important, and in that each one is a god. The evil one works powerfully to hamper each person from coming to Christ. And on top of the individual level, the evil one controls the whole human system. In our time, we see that there is nothing in it, there’s nothing about it that is not under Satan’s control: its economics, its politics, its religion, its education, its entertainment, its athletics. There are elements of the world that we can enjoy because of God’s creation and we can see the image of God and we can see the creative glory of God manifest in the world, but the system that functions within his creation is a system that is completely contaminated. When we think of universities, the most prestigious universities were first established with the study of theology for the purpose of the knowing of God. One clear example was Harvard by John Harvard, an English minister. University of Toronto consisted of several colleges, like Trinity, Wycliffe, St. Michael, Immanuel, Victoria, etc. Now we cannot deny that most intellectual people in prestigious universities became secular, against biblical truth, even denying God’s existence. Some of the most educated men and women have been the most prominent in their hatred of God, in their scoffing at religion, in their ridicule of the supernatural and the miraculous, in their refusal to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and in their antagonism to the Cross and to the blood of Christ shed for man’s sin. Most political leaders, economic and business leaders, military leaders are godless. We hardly find godly such leaders. Apparently, the world is ruled by them ultimately controlled by the invisible evil one, the devil. We see this the trend of the world. According to Jesus, the devil is the father of lies with no truth in him (Jn 8:44). Revelation 12:9 says that the devil leads the whole world astray. John says that the whole world is under the control of the evil. It will be so in each generation to the end of the age.

Verse 19 says, “We know that we are God’s children…” In most other translations, “We know that we are of God.” Jesus said in John 15:18-19, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would have loved you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world…” So Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 2:9, “You are a chosen people…a holy nation, a people belonging to God/God’s special possession.” How important it is to know our belonging! The redeemed people of Christ are not of the world, but of God. We are brought from the kingdom of the world, that is the kingdom of Satan, to the kingdom of God. The price of transferring the kingdom was huge, the life of God’s Son.

When we know the world and who we are, we come to know how to live. Jesus said in Matthew 5:13, 14, “You are the salt of the earth…You are the light of the world.” Apostle Paul said in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” We are controlled by Him and by His Spirit, while those who are of the world are controlled by Satan and are governed by him. The principle that is governing the world is self-centredness, selfishness, and self-seeking; to be of God, therefore, obviously means that we no longer live for self or Satan, but we live for God, and our supreme desire is to please Him. May God grant us the increasing spiritual insight into the life of the world, that we may not only see it and flee from it and fight it, but above all, bring people, one by one, to Christ and his perfect glorious kingdom.

**Third, understanding (20).** Verse 20 says, “We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding.” According to his verse, the purpose of the coming of the Son of God was to give us understanding. Human beings made in the image of God want understanding. We want to understand how the world began. Hebrews 11:3 says, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command.” Especially we want to understand God and the spiritual world. Understanding makes our human life rich and deep. Christian faith can grow through understanding.

One main difference between the people of God and the people of the world is the matter of understanding. Ephesians 4:18 says, “They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God.” 1 Corinthians 2:8 says, “None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” So unbelievers or the people of the world had no understanding. Paul said continually in 1 Corinthians 2:12, “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us” and in verse 14, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Here we see that the matter of understanding is a matter of the Spirit. Isaiah 11:2 says, “The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.” Here is the description of the Spirit of understanding, which is one of the seven descriptions (gifts?) concerning the Spirit. Understanding is possible because of the Spirit of understanding. Apostle Peter testified concerning Jesus in Acts 2:32-33, “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.”

In 5:20, what John says is that the Son of God has come and has done something to our minds. He has not merely come and revealed and displayed the Father to us and told us certain things about Him. He has done something more than that. He has enabled us to understand. “Understanding” means the mind, the depth of the mind, that rational part of our being that enables us to grasp the truth. In other words, the ultimate purpose of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into this world was to send this gift of the Holy Spirit upon His people. There is a tendency for us to forget that. There is a tendency on our part to stop at the life and example and teaching of Jesus Christ, or to stop only at his work upon the cross, as if to say that the whole purpose of the coming of the Son of God into this world was to purchase pardon and forgiveness for us and nothing more. Thank God that we do emphasize that, and it is ever central, and must be; but the work of the Lord Jesus Christ does not end at that point. His work in the resurrection is equally vital for us; His ascension, too, is equally important. He ascended into heaven and presented Himself and His perfect offering; He presented His own blood as an expiration for all sin, and God received Him. Because of what He has done, God has given to Him the gift of the Holy Spirit to give us.

This is what Apostle Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus is the one who gives us the Spirit. This is what John had written in 1 John 2:20, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One…” and in 2:27, “As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—” John also wrote in 3:24, “Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us” and in 4:13, “We know that we live in him and he is in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.” The Son of God has come and has given us understanding. How wonderful it is to understand how the world began and how it will end. God created a perfectly good world. But man sinned and the fall of man took place. Then God in his unfailing love promised to send a Saviour. God called one man Abraham and established a nation through his descendants. He instituted worship and sacrifice system. Then at the right time God sent Jesus the Messiah out of this nation. He died for man’s sins and rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and promised that he would come again. At his return, this world will become the kingdom of Christ. And then there will the eternal kingdom of God, the new Jerusalem, in a new heaven and a new earth. We understand the eternal redemption through the blood of Christ. We understand how God has led us for his salvation and the life of faith led by the Spirit. What a great blessing it is that he has given us understanding through the Spirit! Of course, sometimes there are things we cannot understand and sometimes there are conflicts in our hearts. Then it will be a wonderful opportunity to come to Christ Jesus our Saviour and Lord so that we can have understanding through the Sprit he gives and grow deeper into the understanding of the will of God. We see this at Paul’s prayer for the believers at Colosse in Colossians 1:9, “For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives.” In our new and deeper understanding, we can have joy and praise and new hope in him.

Here John continued in verse 20, “We know also 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—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and is eternal life.” John ends where he began in 1:1-2.

May we live our life of faith with the certainty of the divine protection, the certainty of our identify as God’s children with the biblical view of the world that is under the control of the evil one and the certainty of understanding.