

I JOHN: A STUDY IN SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT
XIII. Discerning True Spiritual Fellowship From Legalism
(1 John 5:1-5)

I. Introduction

- A. 1 John was written to counter heretical views (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 881), so the epistle provides discernment, and is thus “filled with contrasts – light and darkness (1:6-7; 2:8-11); love of world and love of God (2:15-17); children of God and children of the devil (3:4-10); the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist (4:7-12, 16-21).” (Ryrie Study Bible KJV, 1978, “Introduction to the First Letter of John: Contents,” p. 1770)
- B. We view the epistle for much needed spiritual discernment today, and study 1 John 5:1-5 on discerning true spiritual fellowship from legalism for our insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. Discerning True Spiritual Fellowship From Legalism, 1 John 5:1-5.

- A. In 1 John 5:1, John claimed that everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah “has been permanently begotten” (*gegennetai*, third person singular **perfect** passive indicative of *gennao*, “to beget;” U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 823; The Analyt. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 76; Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 154-155) of God, and everyone who loves (God) Who begot, thus being in fellowship with the Lord (cf. 1 John 4:20), loves him who “has been permanently begotten” (*gegennemenon*, accusative singular masculine **perfect** passive participle of *gennao*, Ibid., The U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; Ibid., The Analyt. Grk. Lex.).
- B. This is an arresting statement by John, for it means that one who truly fellowships with the Lord loves every true believer in Christ even if a believer is out of fellowship with God and is living a life of sin! (Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 901)
- C. Actually, this is the true love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not “grievous” KJV (*barus*, Theol. Dict. of the N. T., vol. I, p. 557) that is, they are not “legalistically oppressive; demanding extraordinary achievement” as if one were under the “yoke of the (Mosaic) Law” 1 John 5:3; Ibid.
- D. John thus implies that a believer who is not functioning in true fellowship with God, who may even claim that he loves God but does not love his brother who is a believer but who lives in sin, views keeping the commands of God that includes loving ungodly believers as “grievous” or burdensome. He thus functions in his walk as a legalist, one who relies on self-effort to produce a false godliness and does not trust God for power in living.
- E. Thus, John added the claim that everyone who “has been permanently begotten” (*gegennemenon* again, Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.) of God “is currently overcoming” (*nika*, third person present indicative, Ibid.; Ibid., The Analyt. Grk. Lex.) the world, and this is the victory that “has overcome” (*nikesasa*, aorist singular participle, Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; Ibid., The Analyt. Grk. Lex., p. 278) the world, even our faith, 1 John 5:4. In other words, “a believer is a world-conqueror by means of his faith in Christ. This suggests that such faith is the secret to his continuing victory and, for that reason, obedience to God’s commands need not be burdensome” since he lives a life of faith in God. (cf. Galatians 5:16, 22-23 with 2:20; Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T.)
- F. John then asserted in a rhetorical question, “Who is he who overcomes (*nikon*, present participle, Ibid., The Analyt. Grk. Lex.) the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5) As a believer lives a life of faith in God, he overcomes the world as God equips him to love all true believers, be they in fellowship with the Lord or be they unspiritual! That is great victory over legalism, Galatians 5:16-18.

Lesson: *When a believer truly fellowships with God, he loves the Lord and obeys His command to love everyone who has believed in Christ as Messiah and Son of God, be that other believer godly or be he out of fellowship with God and living in sin. The means by which a believer can love even ungodly believers in victory over legalism is by a life of faith in God that grows out of his initial faith in Christ for salvation, one whereby he relies on the Holy Spirit in his walk for the power to love as God loves in overcoming the world. (Galatians 5:16, 22-23; 2:20)*

Application: *(1) If we fellowship with the Lord, we will love not only godly believers, but also ungodly believers who are out of fellowship with God. (2) If we do not love ungodly believers, may we confess our carnality of legalism and rely on the Holy Spirit for His power to love as the Lord loves even ungodly believers. (3) We must realize that though we are to love even ungodly believers, if we fellowship with God, we still cannot fellowship with the ungodly, for we have no fellowship with those who walk in darkness, 1 John 1:5-7. However, our love should always address the need to sustain the life of even ungodly believers with whom we cannot fellowship. (1 John 3:16-18) (4) If we note a fellow believer is legalistic, that he is in a state of false spirituality, may we realize that he is ungodly and still love him, seeking to sustain his life, while realizing that we have no fellowship with him.*