

## A Confident Faith

1 John 5:13

Today we are beginning a series in the book of 1 John. Over the next few months we will be teaching through this letter paragraph by paragraph. Here at Faith we are committed to expository teaching which basically means that our goal in teaching is to expose the meaning of each passage we teach. We never want you to walk away thinking, “Wow, that sermon was amazing. . . I have no idea where he came up with that message. . . but I thought it was great.” We want you to walk away thinking, “God’s Word is amazing! I see exactly where he got what he said.” We want you to walk away with greater confidence in the clarity of Scripture and greater confidence is seeking God through the Scriptures day by day.

Next week we’ll look at the first four verses of chapter 1, but today I want to set up this entire series by talking about John’s purpose for writing this letter.

***John’s Purpose: That believers might have assurance of eternal life. (1 John 5:13)***

In 1 John 5:13 John tells us his overarching reason for writing this letter:

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

Here John speaks of eternal life. But throughout 1 John he uses a number of expressions to describe those who have eternal life: knowing Jesus Christ (2:3), being in Christ (2:5), being in the light (2:9), knowing God the Father (2:13, 4:7), becoming children of God (3:1-2), being born of God (3:9, 4:7, 5:1), being of the truth (3:19), being from God (4:4, 5:19). Using so many different terms suggests that we can understand our relationship with God from many different angles; it’s just that rich.

Notice that John is writing to “you who believe in the name of the Son of God.” His audience is believers, people who believe in Jesus Christ. John has written this letter so that those who believe in Jesus “may **know** that [they] have eternal life.” By stating it that way, John is acknowledging that it’s possible to believe in Jesus but not have the assurance that you have eternal life. In other words, it’s possible to have faith (and eternal life) and lack assurance.

There are basically four possibilities related to assurance of salvation.

1. Some have eternal life, and they **know** it. They have assurance of salvation.
2. Some have eternal life but **don’t** have assurance of their salvation. I’ve had dear friends who are solid in their faith in Christ and whose lives back up their faith, but they wonder whether or not they will be loved by God eternally. If I’m describing you, please know that 1 John can give you assurance.
3. Some people have a **false assurance** of salvation; they think that they have eternal life, but they actually don’t. Just believing that something is true doesn’t make it true. If a person allows it to do so, 1 John can expose their false assurance and point the way to genuine life in Christ.

4. Finally, some people don't have eternal life and they know that they don't have eternal life. If you are in that category, 1 John will very helpful to you in understanding the message of Jesus and what's at stake in whether or not you believe it.

1 John will help you evaluate and know whether or not you have eternal life.

Why is assurance of salvation so important? Another way to ask the question is, "Why is it important to know that you are welcomed and accepted into God's family?" For the same reason it's important that kids know that they are welcomed and accepted into their earthly, human family. If a kid isn't really sure they're accepted and loved and secure, they will have all sorts of anxiety and confusion; they will live with the fear of rejection. By contrast if they know that they belong, they will be free to grow and thrive without fear.

In the same way, if you don't have assurance of salvation, you live with a fear of impending judgment (see 1 John 4:17-18). You will likely have a performance mentality, always wondering whether or not you measure up, fearful that God will one day be fed up with you and will toss you aside. But if you know that you've been born of God and that you are fully accepted eternally, you have great freedom to grow and serve and thrive. You will have a humble, confident faith. I want that for myself and I want that for every one of you.

When we read through 1 John we see a couple of "tests" repeated over and over that can give us this assurance: a *doctrinal test* and a *moral test*. The doctrinal test deals with what you believe (doctrine simply means teaching); the moral test deals with how you live. If you believe the truth about Jesus and if the way you live reflects that truth, you can know that you have eternal life.

***Doctrinal Test.*** John tells us that those who have eternal life believe the truth about Jesus Christ, specifically that He is the Son of God who came in the flesh to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. John warns his readers about those who were formerly part of the church, the believing community, but have left and are now teaching another message that's in conflict with the gospel. Throughout this letter John takes them back to the simple message that they had been taught from the very beginning (2:24, 3:11).

John is very clear that eternal life is found exclusively in Jesus Christ. In 1 John 5:11-12 John writes:

11 And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.  
12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

This is exactly what Jesus had taught John the night before His crucifixion. In John 14:6 Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me." If we back up a few more verses to 1 John 5:1, John writes this:

1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

Here John connects faith (“[believing] that Jesus is the Christ”) with the new birth (being “born of God”). John stresses that ***those who believe the truth about Jesus experience the miracle of the new birth***. You are no longer the person you were; you have become a “new creature in Christ” (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). Those who believe the truth about Jesus experience something miraculous and real, something that changes the way they live.

The doctrinal test is every bit as important in our day as it was in John’s day. In our day we also have people who were previously part of the believing community but have moved away from what the Scriptures teach about the person of Jesus, the reality of being sinful by nature and by choice, the necessity of being born from above, the existence of heaven and hell, the truth that eternal life is found exclusively in Jesus (see also John 14:6), etc. Like John’s readers we need to hold onto what has been taught from the beginning (i.e., what we find in the Scriptures).

***Moral Test.*** John tells us that if we want to know that we have eternal life, we not only need to look at what we believe; we also need to look at how we behave. That’s the moral test. John is very clear, very direct, and very nuanced. He is clear that our behavior is the ***evidence*** of having eternal life, ***not the basis*** of eternal life. The only basis or ground for eternal life is the death of Jesus on the cross; our behavior doesn’t save us and our behavior doesn’t keep us saved. We’re saved by grace and kept by grace.

But, John writes, those who have been born of God have experienced something so real that it does change their behavior. Those who had left the church taught that there’s no necessary connection between being righteous and acting righteous (see 3:7). But that connection is taught throughout the Scripture. Jesus said that you can know a tree by its fruit; James said that faith without works is dead. And so John establishes in this letter that those who are righteous act righteous.

Significantly, John establishes in chapter 1 that he’s not talking about sinless perfection.

8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

John establishes that genuine believers who have eternal life sin. When they do, they admit it to God (and sometimes to other believers) and experience a fresh cleansing. This is good news! You don’t have to be sinless to have assurance of eternal life. We need to keep this perspective in mind when we read verses such as 1 John 2:3-6 which says:

3 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

John is telling us how we know that we know Jesus (that we have eternal life, that we are born of God): if we keep his commandments, if we walk as He walked. He can write this because when we are born of God we are given a new heart that is now inclined to love Him and obey Him and follow Him. The main area of obedience that John stresses is obedience to the command to love. In 1 John 4:7-8 John writes:

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Our love for one another provides one of the core evidences that we have eternal life. This means, among other things, that if we aren't in relationship with other believers we can't experience this fruit of being born of God. We can't demonstrate the family resemblance by loving others the way God has loved us. But if we are living in community, we will have many opportunities to love each other as an expression of God's love for us. And this will confirm that we have eternal life. Our behavior confirms that we have eternal life.

The moral test also means that our assurance of eternal life can rise and fall with our obedience. If you are a believer in Jesus and some sin takes root in your life, your assurance can be shaken. When that happens - if you are genuinely a believer - you don't give up and you don't abandon your faith. Rather, the Spirit convicts you of your sin and you turn back to God in repentance and faith. You keep seeking Him along with other believers.

As we continue to believe the gospel and as we walk in obedience, John tells us in 4:13 that the Holy Spirit gives us an internal witness that we are indeed children of God. This is consistent with Paul's statement in Romans 8:16 that "the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

Here's my encouragement for you as we work our way through 1 John is to invite God to open your eyes to whatever you need to see concerning assurance of eternal life.

- \* If you believe and have assurance, allow God to deepen that assurance.
- \* If you believe in Jesus and lack assurance, seek Him with all your heart and ask Him to give you that assurance.
- \* If you have false assurance, by definition you don't realize it, right? I would encourage ALL OF US to be open to that possibility so that if needed we might turn to Him in repentance and faith to experience genuine eternal life (and the assurance that goes with it).

- \* If you don't yet believe, we so respect that you are here. You probably took a risk by coming into this building or by joining us online. We hope that these messages will give you a vision for what you can experience if you do believe.

Wherever you are in your faith, I'd also encourage you to read through 1 John once a week (at least) so that his thought processes become second nature to you. The way I think about it, 1 John shouldn't be like a distant cousin that you see every few years but don't really know. 1 John should be like your best friend; you know the words and phrases and logic of 1 John so well that they influence the way you think and feel and act. Honestly, the book of 1 John can be life changing if you come to know that you have eternal life. A humble, confident faith will give you freedom and security in your walk with God.

Another practice that can deepen our faith (and thus increase our assurance) is the Lord's Table. At the Lord's Table we fix our eyes on Jesus. We remember through the bread that His body was broken for us. We remember through the cup that His blood was shed for us.

I like Robert Murray McCheyne's famous statement: ". . . For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ." That practice will deepen our assurance of eternal life. At the Lord's table take a good, long look at Christ. Worship and adore Him. Express your love for Him. Ask Him to show you anything in your life that is incompatible with eternal life.