

February 28, 2016 by Steve Brandon



Assurance of Eternal Life

1 John 5:13

1. Do you believe?

2. Do you know?

I invite you to open your Bibles to 1 John, chapter 5. As you are turning there, I want to read for a quote from Thomas Brooks, a non-conformist English Puritan. He wrote, ...

"It is the very drift and design of the whole Scripture, to bring souls first to an acquaintance with Christ, and then to an acceptance of Christ, and then to build them in a sweet assurance of their actual interest in Christ."

That little quote tells the story of the Bible -- Acquaintance, acceptance, assurance. We are first acquainted with God, who he is and what he does. The early books of the Bible tell us this, Genesis, Exodus, and the law. The history of Israel shows why God sent his son to save. We learn over and over again that the Bible isn't a story of good people doing enough to earn God's favor. Rather, we learn over and over again that the Bible is a story of wicked people who come to find God's grace.

Once acquainted with God, we are then called to accept his son into our lives as our Savior from sin. From Moses to the prophets to Jesus and the apostles, we hear the command, "Repent and believe." Confess your sin. Repent of your sin. Believe in Jesus. Trust in his atoning work on the cross.

After coming to faith, we read the Bible over and over again and see many assurances of our salvation in Christ. We read of God's promises, "I will never leave you or forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5). We read of the power of Christ to keep us, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28). We read of God's faithfulness, "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

And all of these things converge to give us the assurance of our salvation. This is the flow of the Bible. Acquaintance, acceptance, assurance.

And this is the flow of John's writings as well. When he wrote his gospel, he wrote it to tell us about Jesus. Or, you might say that he wrote it to give us an acquaintance with Christ. That's why he told us of the things that Jesus did. That's why he told us of the things that Jesus said.

But the aim of the acquaintance is that it would lead to acceptance. Isn't that what John says in his purpose statement? "... these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). John wrote his gospel that you might be acquainted with Jesus, that you might accept him as the Christ and believe in him.

Now, when we come to 1 John, John is coming into that "assurance" phase. It's not merely knowing about Jesus (acquaintance). Nor is it believing in him (acceptance). But, it's having full assurance that you have eternal life. He writes in 1 John 5:13, ...

1 John 5:13

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.

And this is the one, single verse that we will look at today. It really breaks down into two parts. And outline of this verse might go like this. There is first, the audience, and, second, the assurance.

The audience is found in the first half of the verse. "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God." John wasn't writing this as an evangelistic tract to those who didn't believe, trying to show how Jesus is the way. No. He was writing to those who do believe. He was writing to those in the family of God. He was writing to those in the church. That's the audience.

The assurance is found in the second half of the verse. "...that you may know that you have eternal life." John's purpose in writing is lead you to the assurance of salvation. His purpose is that you may be sure that you are going to spend eternity with the Lord.

There are many things in life about the future that are uncertain. We don't know long we will live on the earth. We don't know how good our health will be. We don't know how long our jobs will last. We don't know the direction that our country will take in the next few years (morally or economically). We don't know who will be elected in November. We don't know who will win tomorrow's game! In fact, there is really nothing guaranteed about tomorrow.

But John tells us that there is something that we can know about the future. We can know for sure if we have eternal life.

1 John 5:13

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.

And when you think about the uncertainties of life, this ought to come as a breath of fresh air. Because, this doesn't promise us life tomorrow or the next day or the next hundred days or hundred years! This promises us the next thousand years. This promises us the next thousand, thousand, thousand years!

And you can know that you have eternal life. Now, as you sit here this morning, I don't know where your heart is on this matter. It may be that you are sitting here and you don't believe. It may be that you are sitting here and you believe, but you don't have assurance of eternal life. My hope and my prayer for you today is that you will leave this place believing in Christ and knowing that you have eternal life in Him.

Now, by way of outline this morning, I have turned the two points of the audience and the assurance into two questions. I have done this in an attempt to apply these truths to our hearts. Here's my first question.

1. Do you believe?

Or, as John put it: Do you believe "in the name of the Son of God"? His name is Jesus.

Do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe that he existed in eternity past with the Father? Do you believe that he came into flesh by the virgin Mary? Do you believe that he lived a sinless life upon this earth? Do you believe that he died upon the cross for your sins? Are you placing your hope and your trust in him? This is what it means to believe.

Let's just work through 1 John and see what it says about Jesus. And after each statement, I want to ask you the simple question: Do you believe? So, let's look back to chapter 1. Look at the first 3 verses.

1 John 1:1-3

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

These verses get at the very humanity of Jesus. John's experience with Jesus was very human. He saw him. He heard him speak. He touched him. He experienced Jesus here on earth, every bit as much as you might experience your closest friend. For, indeed, that's what John was to Jesus. He was his closest friend. In fact, throughout the gospel of John, John never identifies himself by name. Instead, he refers to himself as the "the disciple whom Jesus loved." [\[1\]](#)

And John experienced him as a friend. John experienced him in all of his humanness. John saw Jesus when he was tired from a journey and had to rest at the well, where he encountered the Samaritan woman (John 4). John saw Jesus extend compassion to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). John saw Jesus weep when he saw the sadness of the sisters of Lazarus after he had died (John 11:35). John saw the righteous anger of Jesus when he made a whip of cords and drove out the money-changers from the temple (John 2:15). John saw him make and eat breakfast of bread and fish (John 21:13). John saw him in physical pain on the cross (John 19). John saw him die (John 19). Jesus was human.

1. Do you believe?

Do you believe that Jesus was fully human? There are many times that we can see Jesus as legend of folklore. As someone who never really existed, but has come to life through the printed page. Tom Sawyer isn't real, but we sure do like his wit and his love for adventure. Peter Pan isn't real, but we sure do like his heart to stay young forever. Charlie Brown isn't real, but we sure to like the lessons that he has taught us about life in the real world.

But Jesus Christ is different. He is no legend of folklore. Jesus Christ was a real man who walked the planet. Do you believe? Is this the Jesus that you believe in?

Let's carry on in 1 John. Look down in chapter 1 at verses 7-9.

1 John 1:7-9

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Do you believe that the blood of Jesus cleanses from sin? It's what verse 7 says, ...

1 John 1:7

... the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

It's what verse 9 says, ...

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

As strange as it may sound, the blood of Jesus is a cleansing agent. When John would have the privilege of seeing heaven in a vision, he saw, "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10). And when discussion turned to who exactly these people were, and angel told him that, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:14).

Now, of course, we know that this has symbolism all around it. The literal blood of Jesus could never wash a multitude of robes. Nor could the literal blood of Jesus wash white. But, it's all a picture of the cleansing power of the death of Jesus.

Do you believe? Do you believe in the power of the sacrifice of Jesus? This is what John was getting at in chapter 3, verse 8.

1 John 3:8

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

The devil was the agent that brought sin into the world. And Jesus is the agent to clean up the mess. The mess that sin has brought into the world is immense. And the power of the cross is sufficient to clean up the mess.

Sin has brought death and destruction in the world. But God sent his Son to give life to those who believe. This is what John said in chapter 4, verses 9-10,

1 John 4:9-10

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The work of Jesus upon the cross destroyed the work of the devil. The work of Jesus upon the cross turns God's wrath away from us. The work of Jesus upon the cross gives us life!

Do you believe? Do you believe in the cleansing power of the sacrifice of Jesus? A good way to test if you believe is if you regularly confess your sins. Listen again to the promise of verse 9, ...

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I believe that this means confessing your sins to God. It means confessing your sins to each other. It means humbly admitting the error of your ways.

Confession of sin shows that you aren't trying to be good enough for God to accept you. Confessions shows that you aren't seeking your way to God through your good works. Confession shows that you know that you see your sin. Confession shows that you know that you need a Savior. And Jesus is mighty to save.

Do you believe? Do you believe in the humanness of Jesus? Do you believe in his atoning work on the cross? Do you believe in the sinlessness of Jesus? This follows closely on the heels of the atoning work.

1 John 3:5

You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

Do you believe? Do you believe in the humanness of Jesus? Do you believe in his atoning work on the cross? Do you believe in the sinlessness of Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus is the only way to God? Look over at chapter 2 and verses 23-24.

1 John 2:23-24

No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

Think about this for a moment. If you deny the Son, you do not have the Father. If you confess the Son, you have the Father also. In other words, Jesus is the only way to God! If you try to get to God any other way, you will not get there.

Jesus said it this way. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). I have heard it said that there are many paths to God. And in some way this is true. Each of us come to God from different families and backgrounds and cultures and experiences. But all of those paths go through Jesus.

I remember the story of when R. C. Sproul was relocating Ligonier ministries. He said something like this to his board, "We can relocate our ministry to anyplace, as long as that place is Orlando, Florida." And in a similar vein, you can say, "There are many paths to God, as long as they go through Jesus."

Do you believe this? To believe this is to deny Hinduism. To believe this is to deny Buddhism. To believe this is to deny Islam. To believe this is to deny Judaism (in its current state). To believe this is to deny the New Age or Paganism or secularism. To believe this is to say that neither Hindus or Buddhists or Muslims or Jews or any others who seek salvation apart from Jesus have God, and that they are destined for destruction. This is what it means to believe in Jesus.

Do you believe? Do you believe in the humanness of Jesus? Do you believe in his atoning work on the cross? Do you believe in the sinlessness of Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus is the only way to God? This is what John was getting at in chapter 4, verses 14 and 15.

1 John 4:14-15

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God

And the corollary is just as true. "Whoever does not confess Jesus does not abide in God, nor does God abide in him." This is what John was getting at in chapter 5, verses 11 and 12.

1 John 5:11-12

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

This is what it means to believe in Jesus. If you have the Son, you have life. If you do not have the Son, you do not have life.

Do you believe? Then, be assured that John is writing to you.

1 John 5:13

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's my second question that comes right out of the text:

2. Do you know?

In other words, "Do you know that you have eternal life?" There are those who believe, but aren't assured in their heart that they indeed will have eternal life. John has written his epistle to change that.

Now, it is interesting as I studied the topic of assurance this week that there are several ways to come to the assurance of faith. One is through believing the promises and character of God. God has promised eternal life to those who believe in Jesus. And God's character is such that his words are true and trustworthy.

So, when Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16), we know that it is true. We know the promise of God and we know the character of God, and so we have assurance that what he said is true.

And there are many such promises in the Bible. Our fighter verse this week is but one example. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Or, further on in Romans 8 (verse 32). "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

Jesus gave plenty of promises of eternal life. "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life;" (John 3:36a). "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24). "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out" (John 6:37). "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40).

And further in John, ...

John 10:27-29

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

And you can add to these verses the great promises of the faithfulness of God.

Joshua 21:45

Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

Psalms 91:15-16

When he calls to me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and honor him.
With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation."

Lamentations 3:22-23

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

Philippians 1:6

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:24

He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

2 Thessalonians 3:3

But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

1 John 2:25

And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

And these are but a few of hundreds of texts that put forth the promises of God along side the faithfulness of God.

And here's what happens as we walk with God over the years. You hear these verses. You read these verses. You think about these verses. You think about the promises of God and the character of God.

And you live your life. And you see the faithfulness of God time and time again. And we see the trustworthiness of his word. And we come to embrace more and more of the promises of God. And assurance grows in our hearts.

John Newton said it this way,

Assurance grows by repeated conflict, by our repeated experimental proof of the Lord's power and goodness to save; when we have been brought very low and helped, sorely wounded and healed, cast down and raised again, have given up all hope, and been suddenly snatched from danger, and placed in safety; and when these things have been repeated to us and in us a thousand times over, we begin to learn to trust simply to the word and power of God, beyond and against appearances: and this trust, when habitual and strong, bears the name of assurance; for even assurance has degrees. [\[2\]](#)

If you have walked with God for many years, you can affirm the truthfulness of Newton's words. and it's a good path to assurance.

But this isn't the predominant way that John argues for assurance in 1 John. He doesn't argue by looking at God and his promises and his character to keep those promises. Rather, he argues by calling you to look at your own life and see your character. And as you see God working in your own life, you can have assurance that indeed, you are of God and that indeed you have the promise that God has made to us.

This is the sort of argument that is made elsewhere in the Scripture as well. Peter argues this way in 2 Peter, chapter 1. After talking about various virtues, Peter writes, ...

2 Peter 1:8-11

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In other words, as God works in your life, you will cultivate a life of faith and knowledge and godliness and love. And these are the sorts of things in your life that "confirm your calling and election" (verse 10). And these are the sorts of things in your life that will insure that you will "never fall," but gain "entrance into the eternal kingdom" (verses 10, 11). Paul argues this way in Galatians 5 when he talks about the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-24

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

I love the illustration. It's not your works earning your salvation. It's your salvation working in your life. And as you see God working in you, you have assurance that you have eternal life. One of the songs we sing at Kids Klub goes like this:

Love, joy, peace, and patience too
Grow in those who trust in You
All who put their hope in Christ
Kindness, goodness, faithfulness
Self-control and gentleness
Live in those who have new life [\[3\]](#)

That's how it works. When God saves a soul, he works in the soul to produce fruit. Let's work through 1 John to see how John puts it.

Here are some questions to help you in the process.

1. Do you walk in the light?

1 John 1:6-7

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Walking in the light is a metaphor for righteousness. You aren't trying to walk in the cover of darkness to keep your sin hidden. Instead, you are open about your life. You aren't trying to hide anything, because you are not ashamed of your life. You are walking with God. And when you sin, you freely confess it. That's why verse 9 talks about confession of sins. That's part of walking in the light. It's confessing sin (verse 9).

The Christian life isn't a perfect life. That's the point of verse 10, ...

1 John 1:10

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

But the Christian life is an open life. It's a life that seeks for God and turns from sin.

1 John 2:1

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

2. Do you keep his commandments?

1 John 2:3

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.

Notice how emphatic John is with the word, "know." "... by this we know that we have come to know him, ..." (1 John 2:3). This is how you have assurance. This is how you know that you have eternal life: "... if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3). John explains, ...

1 John 2:4-6

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

The heart here is this: Are you doing what God says. The one who believes will obey. A few weeks ago we looked at how these commandments should be kept.

1 John 5:3

"This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome."

When God saves a soul, he places in that soul a heart for obedience.

Psalm 27:4, 8

One thing have I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord
and to inquire in his temple.

...

You have said, "Seek my face."
My heart says to you,
"Your face, Lord, do I seek."

Is this your heart?

3. Do you love the brothers?

This has been a major theme of John.

1 John 2:9-11

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

1 John 3:10-15

By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

1 John 4:7-8

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

Do you see the evidence of self-sacrificial love for fellow believers? A life that gives. A life that extends. A life that looks to to your own interests, but to the interests of others. As you see that in your life, it can lead to assurance that you have eternal life.

4. Do you strive for righteousness?

1 John 2:29

If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

1 John 3:2-9

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

True believers follow after holiness (2:29; 3:3-4, 6-9). These verses certainly aren't talking about sinless perfection, or even the frequency or duration of sin. The term sin in these verses describes one who lives an immoral, ungodly, unrighteous life as a matter of continual practice, and carries the attitude of hardened hate for God's righteousness.

1. Do you walk in the light?

2. Do you keep his commandments?

3. Do you love the brothers?

4. Do you strive for righteousness?

One way that the Bible never argues for assurance is by references some past experience or some decision that was made. It does not point to the past. Assurance always comes in the present as we trust in his word and as we see him working in our lives now.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 28, 2016 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] John 13:23, 19:26, 21:7 & 21:20

[2] Newton on the Christian Life, 220

[3] "To Be Like Jesus" © 2009 Sovereign Grace Worship (ASCAP)/Sovereign Grace Praise (BMI)