

Christian Confidence

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[0 : 00] And we remember why John has written his letter.

! He tells us, doesn't he, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. And as we looked through the letter, we saw that he gave us these three tests of true Christianity. Obedience to the word, doctrinal truth, that we speak the word and believe it, and the test of love. But we saw, we have seen that you can't really separate these out. These are all intertwined and platted together, but we can see that these three tests run all the way through the epistle of John. And why do we have them? Well, it's, as we've, now we've come across to the passage that includes that verse, it's so that we may know that we have eternal life. There's also, remember, a warning about those who are trying to lead you astray. But we looked at that last week. Yes, so this passage, it's divided in our New International Version into two sections, and I think that's quite a reasonable division. So I'm going to stick to those, but I'm using different titles. I'm going to, first of all, look at what we might say, a sure testimony. What is the sure testimony that we have?

And then, now that I, now that we know that, what do we do about it? What does it mean to us? So, that would be a bit long, so I've called it, Just Do It. So, the Nike slogan, of course.

So, we'll, yeah, we'll look at this passage in, in those two parts. Now, if you do remember, I know it's a while ago now, but if you do remember back when we first started to look into this book, there, we have what's known as a chiasm, a sort of in-out structure that the biblical writers often use. And there's one here at the end as well, although it's not a very strict one, because it, the emphasis changes halfway through. But I put it up on the slide for you, and we find that in these first few verses. He tells us that those who believe are born of God, and those who are born of God display the love of God, in verse two.

[2 : 52] And we recognize them because they obey God's commands. So, we see there the three tests of truth and love and obedience. And then John sort of worked his way out again, but with a different emphasis. We show his love, he tells us, by keeping his commands, and the commands are not burdensome.

Why? Because, of course, they're based in love. And those born of God are those who overcome the world through faith. In verse four, this is the victory. Well, for everyone born of God overcomes the world, this is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. And I think perhaps there he means both faith subjectively, the faith that we have, but also the truth of the faith.

The truth that is revealed. Because he then goes on to say, what is this faith about? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. So, there is a change in emphasis in the second half of this. You can see that the roles of love and obedience are kind of swapped over. And the point here, of course, is that love, obedience and faith, which he's been talking about, are not truly separable. You can't really have one without the other. Anyone requires and leads to the others. And conversely, as he told us in chapter four, verse 20, if one of them is missing, then the others are in fact, though they may appear to be there, are actually false. It says in chapter four, verse 20, anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And earlier on, it says that if you claim to love God, but don't have love, claim to know God, but don't have love, then you're a liar. You can't actually have one of these things without the others. If you do, then in fact, they're a lie.

Taken together, these three, obedience, truth and love, amount to assure testimony. I said at the beginning, when we started to look at this letter, three is the key number in 1 John. Obedience, truth and love. And I think perhaps he did have in mind Deuteronomy 19, 15 to 19, I won't read it again. We read it again at the time. But under Jewish law, there had to be two, but preferably three witnesses to confirm a matter. And if three witnesses, the testimony of three witnesses is sure. But

of course, that's only if their testimony agrees. So then John goes to pick up this idea of the three witnesses. Tells us in verse 7, there are three that testify.

What are they testifying about? Well, we're told first of all, in verse 6, this is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ. We're told that Jesus came by water and blood, and the Spirit testifies, and that there are the three that testify, the Spirit, the water and the blood. Verse 7 and 8. Well, unfortunately, of course, it's not immediately obvious to us what John was getting at here. We have to think a little bit about it. The first thought might be that the water refers to physical birth and the Spirit to new birth. But then what about the blood? And moreover, if you look, you'll see the testimony that John is talking about is the testimony about Jesus. And Jesus had no need of new birth. He was born of the Spirit initially, so he didn't need new birth. So it doesn't seem to be that that's what he's getting at. But if we remember the Spirit descended on Jesus as a dove at his baptism, then that gives us a clue as to what we're talking about. The testimony that John refers to in verse 9 about Jesus being God's son also came at the baptism. I'll read it in a minute, but before we get there, one other point to notice. It is likely that John is at least partly attacking the heresy that we know was around in the later period of John's life, that Jesus only became the Christ at the time when the Spirit descended on him. And moreover, the divine nature left him before his death. The Gnostics argued, the heretics argued that the immortal can't die.

[7 : 46] And so the divine nature must have left Christ before his death. And if we think in those terms, we can make a bit more sense perhaps of what John is actually saying here. And so let me read a couple of passages, just a few verses from Luke's Gospel.

I'm going to read, I'll put them up there, Luke 3 first of all, and then Luke 22. I haven't put the page numbers on, but Luke's Gospel is fairly easy to find if you want to look it up. But I'll read them out to you. So Luke 3 verse 21, it's about John the Baptist and his baptism. And he says this, Luke says this, when all the people were being baptized, and the baptism is by John the Baptist, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, you are my son whom I love.

With you, I am well pleased. And so this suggests that the water refers in fact to Jesus' human baptism. And when he was baptized, he was identified with all the people. That's what it says. All the people were being baptized. Doesn't mean everyone of course, but it means that lots of people came out to find John the Baptist in the desert, and were baptized by him. And at the same time, Jesus came out and identified himself with the people, and was himself baptized as a human being, as it were, by John. But what happened at that time was the Holy Spirit came to him, and bodily form as a dove, and the voice came from heaven, you are my son whom I love. With you I am well pleased.

And then what about the blood? Well, the blood must surely refer to Jesus' death. And so in Luke chapter 22, verse 20, one of the well-known descriptions of the Last Supper, we read the following, in the same way, after the supper, Jesus took the cup, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. So the blood is the blood of the covenant. The death seals the covenant, as the death of a lamb, sealed the covenant, as it were, at the Passover. The death of the firstborn.

The Son of God, but also the Son of Man. And so what John's saying here, I think, is that far from being a contradiction, as the heretics claim, these three are in agreement. Jesus was both the Son of Man and the Son of God, and that was what the Holy Spirit testified to when he said he was pleased with what Christ was doing.

[10 : 45] In fact, they all point to the redeeming work of Christ. You can't divide the work of Christ out, saying this bit was his human contribution, as it were, and this bit was his divine contribution.

They all are in agreement, pointing to the sacrifice on the cross. And so the water is the water of baptism, when he's identified with his people, which is what I'd suggest. Anyway, we can't be absolutely certain.

But the water was the water of baptism. The testimony of the Spirit was particularly the testimony that came at that time. And the blood is the blood of the new covenant that Jesus gave.

And these three are not separated. They are all in agreement. They all testify that Jesus is the Christ, and that he came to give his life for his people. And then John goes on to expand this a bit, doesn't he?

In verse 9, he says, This is the testimony of God in the voice from heaven. He said it was God's testimony. And human testimony is important, as John points out here.

[11 : 53] We accept man's testimony. And of course, we do need the human testimony. It was the human testimony that reported this voice. Presumably John the Baptist heard it.

The Gospel writers wrote it down, whoever they got it from, perhaps from John the Baptist or from somebody else. But certainly the Gospel writers wrote it down from us, so we know what God said. And so we do need that human testimony. But the word itself, we are told, comes from God through the Holy Spirit. It's God who testifies that the human Jesus is the divine Son of God.

And furthermore, just notice what God actually said. You are my Son, whom I love. Again, we find the truth about the Son is inextricably tied in with God's love that flows into the world through Jesus Christ.

And of course, he also said, With whom I am well pleased. In other words, the obedience of Christ shows the way we should refer to God, we should obey what God wants us to do.

[13 : 04] You can't separate out the water, the blood and the Spirit. And you can't separate out the obedience and the truth and the love that comes from God.

Now, none of us here were actually present at Jesus' baptism. I think I can safely say that. Actually, it's likely that few, if any, of John's original readers were either.

They were probably people who had heard the testimony secondhand from preachers, perhaps from Paul or from other apostles or other preachers of the word. But if we accept that testimony, and if we make it our own, and as it says in verse 10, if we take it into our hearts, anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart.

And the Spirit testifies to us that this is God's Son. If we take the Spirit into our hearts, then the testimony comes to us.

But conversely, if we reject that testimony, John warns us that we're not just accusing him of lying. I mean, that may not matter too much, but we're accusing God of lying.

[14 : 33] And that is never a good idea. And just in case you haven't grasped the point, he spells it out again in verses 11 and 12. This is the testimony.

God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

God's testimony is this. Life is in the Son, and the Son is life. And the heretics were right on one point, and that is that the immortal cannot die.

God's life is eternal life. So death claimed the human Jesus, as it claims all of us, all humans. But because he had God's life within him, he couldn't hang on to its prey.

And so Jesus was resurrected. And John's telling us that he who has the Son shares in that eternal life, verse 12, and that is an immortal life that cannot be destroyed by death.

[15 : 42] So John has more or less finished his argument now, and says, okay, now that you know that, what are you going to do about it?

What should we do? It was rather like that Nike slogan, just do it. Of course, if you're going to be an athlete, you don't just do it in one sense.

You have to prepare, and train, and think about, needs to be done, and think about the race that you're going to take part in. But still, there does arrive a time, doesn't there, when you've got to pull all that out of your mind, and stop thinking about it, and leave the training, and you've got to hit the running track, and do it.

And that's what John is telling us to do now. He's telling us to put these things into practice. And this is where we come to that verse, 1 John 5, 13, which, as I said, is really the theme of the whole letter.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life. So now that I know that, what do I do about it?

[16 : 54] How do I put this knowledge into practice? And so what does John say? Well, he gives us here actually a series of related thoughts. They sort of run one into another, as we'll see as we just go through them and look at them one at a time.

So the first thing he tells us is that we can approach God with confidence, because we know that he hears. He tells us that in verses 14 and 15.

This is the confidence we have in approaching God, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of him.

We know that God looks on us with favour if we trust in the Son, and so we can approach him with confidence, and that he gives us what we ask. Now, of course, there is an important qualification here.

Notice that we ask according to his will in verse 14. He says that. That if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

[18 : 04] And that's perhaps why John needs to reassure us that God answers, because we may not always be clear what God's will is, and if that's the case, we might be confused by his answer.

And yet John is assuring us that he does answer, and that we have an answer to our prayer, even if it wasn't always quite the answer we expected. I don't know.

I mean, this is speculation, but maybe John had prayed, perhaps, that the heretics will be silenced in some way. Perhaps he was hoping that as they set out and left, they will be set upon in their travels, or shipwrecked, or something on the way.

There is actually a story that's told about John, and I don't think we find this in the scripture, but there is a story that's told about the apostle John, that he once fled from a public bathhouse when the heretic Soenthus came into the bathhouse, and the reason he gave it was fleeing from the bathhouse, was that in case God should bring the roof down on the head of the heretic in judgment. As far as we know, that didn't happen, but that wasn't God's will, and perhaps if God had done that, that would have silenced the devil only briefly, because we read earlier there are many antichrists that have gone out into the world, and just silencing one of them wouldn't have made all that much difference.

[19 : 27] But John perhaps does receive an answer to his prayer, and the answer that he receives is that he should be given the divine insight to refute their arguments, which is what he's been doing in this epistle, this letter.

So sometimes, God doesn't answer in the way we expect, expect, perhaps because we're not confident, or we're not sure, or we're misled even as to what God's will is, and yet, we know that he does answer our prayers, and he gives us the right answer, even if we ask the wrong question sometimes, which I think is perhaps the way to look at it.

But we do have confidence, we approach God with confidence, because we know that he hears, and gives us the answer that we really need. And that leads John on to his next point.

What are we going to pray for? Well, he's told us earlier that he's writing so that we should not sin, but if we do, we have an advocate with God. And now John picks this thought up again.

Much of this last chapter refers back to things that he said earlier in the letter. And John picks up that thought again. Suppose we find a brother or sister who is caught in some sin.

[20 : 47] What are we going to do about it? Well, of course, there are various things that we might and probably should do. But particularly here, what he says we should do, because he's thinking about praying, is that we should pray to God, and that God will give the errant brother life.

That's what he tells us to do, isn't it? But still, the qualification still applies. There is a sin, he says, that leads to death. And he actually says, quite remarkably, we shouldn't pray about that.

That's a strange thing to say perhaps, and I'm not sure I know quite what he means there, but he's at least saying that there is a sin. Perhaps he's saying that it's really no use praying for these heretics, because they've rejected, totally rejected the word of God.

Well, what is that sin that leads to death? Perhaps you ought to at least think of that, to make some idea what it is. I mean, I think the Catholics talk about mortal and venial sins, and it all gets rather complicated.

I don't think it is complicated at all, actually. I think it's clear what that sin is. That sin is to call God a liar. And Jesus himself said exactly the same thing.

[22 : 00] If we look in Matthew chapter 12, verses 31 and 32, he tells us this, so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

to speak against the human Jesus, the Son of Man, that might be forgivable, but it might, because it might result in repentance, like that thief on the cross.

We know from the Gospels that at first the thief on the cross joined his compatriot in jeering at Jesus, but at some point, we don't know exactly why or how, but at some point he had a change of heart, and even in those last few moments of his life, he repented and said to Jesus, remember me

when you come into your kingdom.

So, to speak against human things might be forgiven, but to call God a liar, and not to listen to the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and not to believe, as Jesus said in another place, to believe the one he has sent, then that is a mistake that's eternally fatal.

[23 : 29] He will not be forgiven, as Jesus says, in this age or in the age to come. And then that prompts John, as he thinks about what he's written, to, it prompts him to some thoughts about sin itself, and we find this in verse 17.

sin. What is sin? Well, all wrongdoing is sin, doing things against the will of God is sin, and there is a sin that doesn't lead to death.

We all sin, don't we? We all do things, he's already said that, he says if we claim that we do not sin, then we are liars, because we do. But, there is a difference, because the world is under the control of the devil, he says in verse 19, the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

But even though the children of God do sin, they're not caught in that ongoing trap. We know that we are children of God, so even though the children of God do sin, they're not caught in the trap, and so the devil can't get his claws into them, and can't use that sin to drag them down into death. So all wrongdoing is sin, and we ought not to do it, and John is writing so that we don't do it, and yet he says that if we are God's children, that sin won't lead to death, but the Holy Spirit will enable us to turn aside.

[25 : 08] It says anyone born of God does not continue to sin, we will fight against sin, and we will, by the power of the Holy Spirit, put to death the deeds of the flesh, instead of it putting us to death.

And then John goes on to talk about, he's been talking about knowing all the way through, and he talks about, here about three types of knowing, say three is always the key number in 1 John, and he talks in verse 20 about three types of knowing.

Now unfortunately our English translations actually only give us two words, but there are actually three, three Greek words here in verse 20, and there are different types of knowledge, and the first know is that the Son of Man has come, and the Greek word there is eido, and that means to discover something by examining or inspecting the evidence and knowing it is a fact.

James reminds us, doesn't he, that even the demons know that there is one God, and they tremble at that knowledge. But then John says, but the Son gives us understanding, dianoia, and that means our minds come to appreciate the significance of this fact, and then the result is a different kind of knowledge, genosko, that's a personal, intimate knowledge.

I don't know whether this helps you or not, but here's a possible illustration of these three types. You might look out the window or look on, see on the radio, here on the radio or something, that you find it's raining.

[27 : 00] That's a brute factor, as I think Schaefer used to call them. You observe that it's raining, and at first you might think that's not a very pleasant fact, but then you think, well hang on a minute, I need that rain for my garden, I don't have to go out and water.

We need that rain for our crops, we need that rain for our own drinking water and for our animals. And then we begin to understand that rain at first sight seems like a rather bad thing, perhaps is actually, as we understand it, a very good thing.

And we understand why God sends rain, as he says, on the just and the unjust. And then perhaps we could do a Gene Kelly, and we could go out and dance and sing in the rain.

And then we'd know that rain intimately, wouldn't we, as Gene Kelly does in that famous scene in the film, singing in the rain. Holds his umbrella upside down and catches the rain because he was rejoicing in it.

And that's what that word genosko means here. This is, knowledge is intimate and experiential. In fact, in the Jewish idiom, it's a, it's an euphemism, used as a euphemism for sexual love.

[28 : 16] That's why the old translations say people like so-and-so knew his wife. It's, this is a Greek word of course, but it's a translation of the Hebrew word that, to know in that sense.

It means to know intimately, as a husband and wife know each other. And more generally, it can refer to a knowledge of a person. We know a fact, but through understanding we come to know a person.

And we have those three types of knowledge in this verse. We start by knowing the fact that the Son of God has come. This is verse 20. But when the Son of God has come, he gives us understanding.

Because we understand why he's come, the significance of the fact. And we come to understand the point of why he came. And what do we do with that understanding?

We come to know intimately him who is true. And we are in him who is true, even in his Son, Jesus Christ. So I'm not quite sure whether when John says him who is true, he means the Father or the Son here, but I think really he means both.

[29 : 30] And we find we are in an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. And it's that third type of knowledge that John wants us to have when he says, I want you to know that you have eternal life.

It's we want to have that intimate kind of knowledge of God's life which transforms all that we do.

We can know that it's raining and that might have very little effect on us whatsoever.

But if we understand the rain and we go out and dance and sing in it, then we'll have that intimate knowledge of the rain. And God wants us to have that intimate knowledge of the life that is found in Jesus Christ.

because he says he is the true God and eternal life, not just the finite life that we have as humans and that the heretics wanted to say that's all we have.

But we have the true life, the eternal life of God. And then, rather strangely, at the end, we have this final exhortation, don't we, in the last verse.

[30 : 36] If you, dear children, keep yourselves some idols. Strange ending, really, isn't it? After all this talk of sophisticated heresies and philosophical arguments, all this complicated case that he's presented to us and why we need to come to know the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, intimately, he sort of boils it down to this one command, the last thing he wants to say in his letter.

Keep yourselves some idols. Why should we do that? Because we're children, we're dear children of God. And perhaps he's not just talking about literal idols here.

I might include that. What is an idol? An idol is a false god. Something we put in the place of God. And he's telling us to guard ourselves against idolatry.

Don't put something else in the place of God, whether it's some mystical human teaching, whether it's some wisdom, whether it's something that we seek in this life, the riches of this life or whatever it is.

He's saying, don't put anything in the place of God. Dear children, if you are God's children, keep yourself from idols. He's told us the devil can't get a grip on us.

[31 : 57] But part of the way that happens, of course, is that we keep ourselves from idols. Notice that's what he says. He could have said, the Holy Spirit will keep you from idols. He has, in fact, said more or less that earlier on.

But here he says, keep yourselves from idols. Part of the way the Holy Spirit works is that we have to keep a guard on ourselves, keep a guard on our hearts and our minds and our spirits to keep ourselves from idols.

And if we don't do that, we might find that we are on the broad road which leads to death. That we need to keep, make sure that we are children of God that we have his life within us by, it's always good to examine ourselves.

Are we holding to the truth? Are we being obedient to the commands that God gives? And are we particularly being obedient to that first command that we love God with all our hearts and we love one another?

So, let me leave you with the same phrase that John does here. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols and then we'll have confidence in the Son of God.

[33 : 09] So, let's sing before we close. Let's sing hymn number 17. Let's sing a song of God. Let's sing Let's sing a song of God. Let's sing a song of God.

Let's sing a song of God. Let's sing a song of God.