

1 John 5

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[0 : 00] what has already been said. It is worth rereading. Verse 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.

Arguably one of the most profound theses one will ever hear, let alone make. One commentator has translated this way, I have written so that you may be sure that you possess eternal life. The letter is not made to those who are considering belief, who are curious about belief, nor made to those who are antagonists of the faith, but it is given to those who already believe. This is not an apologetic treatise. Rather, it is intended to be one that's assuring, reaffirming for those who believe.

And so this morning, if you count yourself as one of those who believe, these words are to be assuring words. They are intended to be grounds for Christian certainty.

[1 : 17] Christian assurance, or asserting the certainty of possessing eternal life is an accusation directed frequently at Protestants. Some will say, isn't it presumptuous to assert certainty?

It's a little bit arrogant, don't you think, to assert that you are confident and assured of eternal life. Yet this is what the Scriptures here claim, that you may know with confidence that you have eternal life.

It is likely the argument of those in the church at this time, those causing division, deceiving others. They were those who, the letter has alluded to, have broken away from the faith.

And they're likely deceiving the church from being able to stand confidently before God. This accusation often comes from our peers, because it distinguishes those who belong and those who are being saved from those who are not.

This doctrine of assurance is actually disputed by the Roman Catholic Church, who don't have a formal doctrine of assurance, in part because it's inherently prideful.

[2 : 31] Of the greatest harm, however, it's probably the devil himself, who is constantly whispering in your ear, of our unworthiness, our lack of qualification, causing us to stand on shaky ground.

The devil both screams and whispers our condemnation. And it is to this that John writes, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

It matters immensely, doesn't it? If you've experienced any romantic affection in your life to any degree, you'll know this to be the case. The most unsettling relationship is the one that's undefined. The one that lacks clarity, lacks standing, lacks confidence. In college, there was a term for a conversation you were to have with someone you were pursuing or considering romantically.

It was given an acronym. I don't know if it continues to this day, but it was, it's called DTR. Is that? Okay, so some. Get it? And it stood for defining or determining the relationship.

[3 : 48] It was code for the conversation that you were to have with someone you were romantically interested with that would clear the waters, that would make clear one's intentions, that would give solid footing and quality and direction for the relationship.

People would ask, have you had the DTR? If this applies to the romantic life, it surely applies to our relationship with God.

I recently sat with a student in tears, calling into question this very point that is being addressed. The student's inner life was in turmoil, upheaval, and unrest.

I just don't know anymore. I've been duped. This is all a farce. Perhaps I've been socially conditioned to believe.

I'm unsure of its truthfulness. And perhaps this morning, your condition is similar to what the student acknowledged.

[4 : 57] How can you be certain that what you believe is true? How can I know that I have eternal life? Surety is the aim of the writer.

Confidence is what results. Confidence has been a sub-theme throughout this epistle, and it runs through the letter. John wants the readers to be assured in the faith so that they would have confidence, according to chapter 2, verse 28, that they would not shrink back in shame.

John wants his readers to be assured in the faith so that they would approach the day of judgment with great confidence, knowing their standing and their acquittal, according to chapter 3.

However, John doesn't want assurance to only be this far-off, in-the-future thing. John wants us to be able to exercise confidence now.

And it's exemplified in prayer. Assurance allows us in faith both to exercise confidence for the future and demonstrate confidence in the present. The confidence is demonstrated in prayer.

[6 : 07] Prayers which are human requests, according to 14 and 15. We are to be a petitioning people. We are people who ask of God.

Notice there is no constraint, for we are to ask for whatever. though it is qualified with the phrase, according to His will. If you, like me, started to sinfully think, well, I could ask for anything, usually my mind goes to things that fulfill my pleasure or my comfort.

We naturally run for things that are lavish and luxurious, but not so here. He asks us and challenges us to pray according to His will and what does it mean?

That's the million dollar question. What does it mean to pray according to His will? How am I supposed to know the will of God? Though He has not disclosed the entirety of His will, He has disclosed it partially.

Has He not? rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will.

[7 : 28] For this is God's will, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor.

1 Thessalonians 4.3 For this is God's will, that by doing good, that you should silence the ignorance of foolish people.

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. 1 Peter 2. At a minimum, those are three things we know we should be petitioning for, knowing that God will answer them.

John has told us that our prayers are heard and in turn answered, and naturally he goes on to actually guide our prayers. He directs them and he tells us the object of our prayers.

And surprisingly, it is not yourself. It is not your own needs, your own suffering, your own pain, or your own hardship.

[8 : 38] He doesn't instruct us to pray for ourselves. Shockingly, or actually not that much at all, he instructs us to pray, not for ourselves, but for others.

On the one hand, it may be surprising, but on the other hand, it shouldn't be surprising at all. If you've been following us for the unfolding of this letter, we have heard the assertion that if you love God, you love your brother.

Love is not love undefined. He has already stated that because God loves us, we ought to love one another. He has not left love undefined.

Rather, it is a sacrificial action imitating the given life of Jesus. Love is an offering of material goods to a brother in need, according to chapter 3, verse 17.

And here, though love is not expressed explicitly, surely one of the greatest demonstrations of love is interceding on behalf of one another.

[9 : 43] We are not only a petitioning people, we are an interceding people. We are those who ought to be praying for one another, praying especially for those stumbling, stumbling, being lured away by the attractiveness of sin.

It requires sinners, that we confess sin to one another in order to be prayed for. James reminds us, therefore we are to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another so that we may be healed.

What is surprising about this passage is the first order, the first weapon that is to be used for the retaining of a brother that is falling is not counseling, is not confiscation, is not confrontation, it is the buckling of our knees on behalf of another.

I'm not saying counseling, confrontation, and confiscation aren't needed, but of all the things that John could have recommended, he said, buckle your knees and pray, and God will impart life.

I can only wonder if one day in eternity we will discover that our eternal preservation emerged from the desperate pleas and intercession of our loved ones.

[11 : 20] I know my parents' prayers are what have sustained me. I know because growing up in my household, I would wake up early in the morning, beginning in junior high, and I would hear the muttering of my parents in the bedroom.

They weren't arguing, they weren't talking, they were pleading. The Lord would spare their four children and save them. And to that I am eternally, and I will be eternally grateful.

Do not cease in praying for one another, for in doing so, God grants life. There is much written about verses 16b and 17.

What is the sin that leads to death? And why does John seemingly discourage prayer for those engaged in such a sin? In short, I've read lots of books on this.

In short, there are many views, but what I sense, it's a pervading adamant attitude of the deceivers in 1 John.

[12 : 31] It's the denial of the Son of God, the accomplishing work. It's the blatant rejection of God's saving work in Christ. It's the denial of His humanity.

It's probably the denial of His divinity. It's the denial of the gospel. There are alternative views, and if this intrigues you, I'll happily pass them along.

Just shoot me an email. But with the remainder of our time, I want to spend expounding on Christian certainty. To put it in a question form, how can I be assured that I am a Christian and know that I have eternal life?

Three things. Three things. First, there is a different way of acting. We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning.

In other words, the things that you once took pleasure in are no longer pleasurable. That which used to never bother you, now all of a sudden bothers you. The attributes that mark the life of unbelief are suddenly transformed.

[13 : 34] Sometimes immediately, sometimes gradually, sometimes suddenly. Regardless of the pace of transformation, it is evident that one's love of sin becomes a hatred.

One's former love of sin becomes a hatred towards sin. John is not saying sinlessness is what is required. Rather, the Christian no longer persists in sin. That which was once habitual and enslaving is now broken and severed because there is a new power at work, namely, the power of the Son of God in protecting the children of God from the enemy of God, the evil one, the latter half of 18.

This does not mean that sin's presence is completely removed. But it does mean that both sin's penalty has been paid for and sin's power has been broken. The theological term for this is sanctification.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism says, it is the work of God's free grace whereby we are renewed after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die into sin and live unto righteousness.

J.I. Packer adds, the concept is not of sin being totally eradicated, for that saying too much, nor is it merely counteracted for that saying too little.

[14 : 58] But it is a divinely wrought character, changing and freeing us from sinful habits and forming us with Christ-like affections, dispositions, and virtues.

In other words, one of the markers of Christian certainty is there is a transforming work taking place in the life of the believer. It's evident by the declension of sin and the increase of son likeness.

Secondly, so there's a different way of acting. Secondly, there's a different way of thinking. Verse 18, we know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

It's a staggering assertion. You may think that the world is neutral territory. It's being battled over with the forces of evil and good, God and the devil.

But here in 1 John, it's depicted entirely different, stating that the entire world actually lies in the power of the devil. The world is not impartial.

[16 : 12] It is not neutral. It is in the power of the evil one. It is enemy territory. It's actually quite astounding to think of that.

And though John writes, we are from God, sourced of God, originating from Him, but we find ourselves in a world that is foreign. As you sit and reflect on your earthly experience, it is disjointed, it is unsettling, it is restless, because the truth of the matter is you're an alien.

You don't belong here. You've been born of God and sent into a world that's ruled by the devil. You're from Krypton, inhabiting earth, earth, if that helps you. But better put, you're born of heaven and temporarily sent to earth. One cannot help but recall the words of John's gospel, the opening chapter, that Jesus was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not know Him. The world came to His own, yet the world did not receive Him. Jesus Himself was an alien. [17:39] Those born of God, children of God, experienced the world the same manner Jesus did. It has significance in how we ought to conduct ourselves.

This has significance in how we ought to think about our days, our experiences, interpret current events. Because we are not, our spiritual attire is not passivity, casual indifference, a nonchalant attitude as we enter each day.

However, our thinking, our worldview, our outlook has been transformed. We realize what Paul has asserted, that we wrestle not against flesh or blood, but we wrestle against the rulers, the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

We dwell in a world that rests comfortably in the hands of the evil one. But we're not cynics. We're not cynical. Because we like Jesus.

Are sent into the world that's not our own, to bear witness to an unbelieving people, in order that they may become children of God as well. You recall Jesus' prayer to his Father, as you have sent me, so I send you to the disciples.

[19:03] Therefore, you and I are commissioned. This is not, we are not to express abandonment or live a life with withdrawal.

Rather, our lives ought to resemble more of a rescue mission. We are people on mission, stewarding and heralding the gospel.

we act differently. We think differently. And lastly, thirdly, finally, there is a different way of understanding.

The truth of the gospel is brought by divine disclosure. You see in verse 20, and we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding.

It is because the Son has already entered the world that we have an accurate view of what is true. This is not to say that apart from Christ, we cannot know facts. It is not to say we cannot make discoveries.

[20:04] It is not to say we cannot exercise our faculties scientifically. Rather, it is to say, without God's generous disclosure, we could not grasp the believer's identity in Christ.

We would not be able to grasp Jesus' identity as the Christ. And according to the verse, he is the true God and eternal life.

See, John presumably writing this letter was likely with Jesus. Do you remember the saying when the disciples enter into Caesarea Philippi? And Jesus begins to pull the disciples.

He says, so who do people say that I am? Well, some say John the Baptist, who was already dead. Others say Elijah, some say Jeremiah, some say one of the prophets.

And Jesus turns and looks at the disciples, but who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter answered, you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

[21:12] And you remember Jesus' follow-up statement? Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not shown this to you or revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

It's an illustration of what needs to happen in the life of the believer. Jesus is stating that his true identity as the Son of God is not a result of human acquisition, but one of divine revelation.

Jesus is stating that his true identity as the Son of God is not a result, understanding his true identity as the Son of God is not a result of human acquisition, but one of divine revelation.

We may strive for understanding and competence, but our understanding of God comes from the fact that it's knowledge that is given by him, from him. This became true during my undergraduate studies, though I was electrical engineering major, I had, I think, like a few electives, maybe four electives I could take.

And one of the electives I took was a course titled New Testament Christianity. I signed up with great enthusiasm. After the first week of class, I was so intrigued by both the content and the professor, I eagerly scheduled office hours with her.

[22 : 45] During this time, I expressed to her how my faith was growing, how it was being nurtured, how it was being bolstered, and I felt revitalized. Though many people had taken the class and not experienced the same, I felt revitalized as a Christian.

The conversation proceeded where the professor affirmed the Christian faith only to qualify it with, but I don't believe Jesus is the only way.

all of a sudden, I realized we were not talking about the same thing. And that is not to say she was not well learned or well trained.

She was. She probably knows the Bible far better than I will. But it has been the big difference is for me that the Lord has opened my eyes and given me an understanding that is salvific.

This is not to discredit what she does, but it is to affirm that authentic Christianity is marked by a different understanding.

[24 : 09] understanding. It's an understanding that is given, is birthed in the heart. It is a description that the Methodist evangelist John Wesley described as the strange warming of his heart, though he had been preaching the gospel for many years before that.

This understanding enables us to enter into fellowship with God himself, according to the first chapter. The ending of the epistle seems abrupt. John uses a word that he has not used up to this point, idols.

He is likely using it to contrast his threefold usage of the word true. It's a pastoral warning. It's his final words. I've told you what is true, namely, him who is true, that we are in him who is true, and in his son, Jesus Christ, he is the true God in eternal life, and all of a sudden, he hangs out there before warned of what is false.

keep yourself from idols. Calvin said, every one of us from his mother's womb is an expert in inventing idols.

idols. What they are to do, is any conception of him, of Jesus, that is invariance of his self-revelation, is an idol.

[25 : 33] John is saying, since you have received the truth, have nothing to do with counterfeits, fakes, beware of imitations, and refuse all substitutes. Three things for Christian certainty.

we are those who act differently. We are those who think differently.

And we are those who understand differently. Namely, understand Jesus differently. GRE, MCAT, SAT, ACT.

They lead to anxiety, because they are testing of our intellectual capacity. How we score may determine job prospects, admissions to particular schools.

We labor over them intensely because they bear great significance in life. But as we come to the end of 1 John, there's a test that's not administered by another.

[26 : 40] Rather, it's one that's self-administered by yourself. these are Christian certainties. These are the tests. Are you acting differently from the world?

Are you thinking differently about the world? Are you understanding Jesus differently than the world?

all three questions? If you're able to affirm all three, take heart. Because you can be certain and confident of eternal life.

Let us pray. Father, our texts, Father, we come to you. And Lord, I know over time our affection for you waxes and wanes.

As the hymnist has put it, we are prone to wander. Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God we love. And we are always wondering, can it be true?

[28 : 06] Can it be that good? And so, Father, I pray that you would forge in us a confidence that we are able to come to you with great confidence.

That we would not shrink back in shame. that we would be able to stand before you upright, chin up, in the day of judgment.

Because your word has declared that we have in your son a propitiation for all of our sins. That your word has declared that if we confess our sins, you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

That your word has declared that if we are born of you, we are able to live rightly, to think rightly, and to understand your son rightly.

And so make those all a reality in our lives. Oh, dear God, please. We ask these things for Jesus' sake.

[29 : 19] Amen. God