

# The Christian's Assurance as to Eternal Life

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let's just bow our heads and pray. Our blessed God, we seek your face again. We hear your word. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. It is good for us to draw near to you.

And we remember how the psalmist said that after he had tripped and fallen and was nearly clean gone.

Because he was envious at those who went in their own way. And we thank you that you brought him to repentance. To realize that the difficulties in providence were heaven sent.

And that you had your eye upon him and your hand too. And so he learned to see things from a heavenly perspective.

[ 1 : 05 ] And to say it is good for me to draw near to God. I will put my trust in the Lord God. And may it be, O Lord, that you will grace us in such a way that we will find that we are indeed trusting in you, the living God.

We know that we dare not trust our sweetest frame. But wholly lean on Jesus' name. You have brought us to see that he alone is the solid rock.

And that all other ground is sinking sand. And we just pray, O Lord, as we wait upon you here. That you would make us still in your presence.

There are many storms that beat upon us in life. We are tempest-tossed as it were. We are beset by difficulties and conflicts within our own soul and with doubts and fears too.

But we thank you, O Lord, that you call us to look away beyond ourselves, out with ourselves, to the author and finisher of our faith, Christ Jesus the Lord.

[ 2 : 25 ] And to remember that in the days of his flesh, he went a road that we will never have to go. And he went that road for all who will receive him and rest upon him.

And may it be that we are of that number. For we know that he went that road. The road of suffering and shame.

The road of forsakenness. Of horror beyond all that we can lift our minds to imagine. So that he was there, found in his deepest darkness, crying out in a sense of total abandonment.

My God, my God, why? Have you forsaken me? We bless you, O Lord, that if we lay hold upon him and rest upon him, we will never know that forsakenness.

The forsakenness of the lost, of the impenitent, of those whose sins remain upon them and the guilt and shame that's theirs.

[ 3 : 39 ] O Lord, thank you in a wonderful way, a way beyond which we can really fathom. You laid our iniquities upon him.

And you laid damnation upon him. That we might never know its bitterness and endless woe. Help us then as we wait upon you.

Remember the friends who can't be with us, who are unwell, that they may have some portion from your word today where they are. Remember those who are hospitalized, who are failing in their own mortal frame.

May it be, O Lord, that the work of the Spirit may go on in them, that they may catch glimpses of the glory of Christ and of that land of which we've been singing.

Truly, the portion of your people is wonderful beyond what we can even imagine. And above all things, you are the portion of your people.

[ 4 : 51 ] Lord, we pray today for those who have been cast into distress by the floods of recent days. And others in more distant places, devastated by storm and tempest and earthquake too.

O Lord, may it be that in their darkness you would shine upon them. And give them to know what it is to call upon the name of the Lord and to know the joy of having an answer in peace from you.

We come to you, O Lord, confessing our sin and shortcoming. We are found out in many ways by the plague of our own hearts.

And we pray that you would blot out our transgressions through the finished work of Christ. And give us to know the joy of your salvation.

O Lord, our God, thank you for all your help in the weeks of this month. It's been busier than ever.

[ 6 : 03 ] And we pray that you will strengthen us now and give us something of a rest and refreshment. We thank you for what was brought to us by Robert MacLeod on Friday evening.

And we pray that the word spoken may be blessed by you. And may it be, O Lord, that as we journey on, we will see more and more of the surpassing excellence of Christ Jesus the Lord. And count all things but loss for the most excellent knowledge of him, in whom alone is found life eternal.

We ask all in his name. Amen. Well now let's turn to 1st John.

And we'll continue in our study. 1st John chapter 5. And we may just read at verse 9.

[ 7 : 12 ] 1st John chapter 5 and at verse 9. 1st John chapter 5.

1st John chapter 5.

of the Son of God. Our attention will focus today on verse 13. where we read again these things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God and the purpose is that you may know that you have eternal life and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God and I want to title this the Christian's assurance as to eternal life the Christian's assurance as to eternal life now this is not intended to be a lecture on assurance it's not intended to be a comprehensive treatment of the doctrine of Christian assurance it is simply an exposition of this verse in the context but clearly in the verse the subject is Christian assurance as to eternal life and what John does here is he speaks of the certainty that the Christian may have that through faith in Christ he really has eternal life indeed John goes further and he says that you may know that you have eternal life and he distinguishes here between believing and knowing there's a connection between them and we look at that connection but there is a distinction made between believing and knowing that we have eternal life we may believe a thing and not know for certainty but if we know if we know then we know we know it this is this is it you can illustrate that simply from the ordinary things of life take for example if a gift is given to us then we know the gift is ours when we receive it we're thinking about somebody's birthday recently and the gifts came in a plenty well the person who received them knew these gifts had come her way she knew it why did she know it because it was there the proof of it was there that which was gifted was certified in the giving and you see it too of course in a slightly different angle on it if a legacy is passed down to us then we know it when the official documentation comes when the letter comes signed and sealed this is yours it's passed to you it's confirmed if it's a simple gift bequeath the same is true when the official documentation comes you know you have it that's the point you know it it's confirmed it's assured to you and the gift of eternal life is given is given by God and it's given in his unique way through his son Jesus Christ and clearly the fact of having received this gift is something we ought to know about we're at risk you see by not taking note of the confirmation information of offending God you might say he's saying to those who have the gift you're not paying attention to what I've documented the proof of it it's something says John we ought to know about and therefore we need to pay attention to the proof of it given by God and John closely connects believing on the son of God and knowing that we have eternal life I want this to think for a wee while about three things first of all belief in Christ which is really will be revision some of it anyway from what we've looked at already in the passage secondly the believer's knowledge in Christ and thirdly the believer's difficulty with assurance or with the certainty of that knowledge first of all then the believer in Christ he says here these things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God now whatever reference this could have to the outside world its principal references to those who to use an old way of putting it to those who profess the true religion the religion of Jesus and we profess that religion here today more or less all of us do we're not

[ 13 : 52 ] Buddhists we're not Muslims we're not secularists or humanists we profess the true religion to use the Westminster way of putting it and to us he says these things I have written to you to you who believe in the name of the Son of God and there's a sense in which today all of us here believe in the name of the Son of God up to a point and therefore this has something to say to us all let's consider then the believer in Christ and what we discover from John is that the believer in Christ is tremendously privileged in that he has come by the sovereign work of God spirit to believe

on the Lord Jesus Christ he can say in his own measure of faith

I know that we need not look for another he the Son of God Jesus is the only Redeemer now in our previous studies we've seen that entering into the fellowship of God Father Son and Holy Spirit becomes reality because of God's sovereign work in us when his spirit works creates a new life in us we saw that back in chapter two those who are born of God those who abide in God by the spirit whom he has given us and so on and one of the things that we become aware of is our sinnership we've often heard about it we can go back and back and remember when we learned the catechism definition and so on but when the spirit of

God awakens us we become aware of the reality of being a sinner in God's sight of heading for eternal judgment of not having anything to bargain with so as to escape judgment we realize the exceeding sinfulness of sin but at the same time we see the love of God the eternal love of God in sending sin to meet us where we are to meet our need here we're on basics but they're so important we come back to them when we are tossed to and fro by doubts and fears we come back to basics to deal with his own wrath against us by laying that wrath upon his sin how do

I the sinner escape the judgment due to me oh I read the word I hear the word the blood of Jesus Christ the once and unrepeatable death of Jesus Christ effects the forgiveness of sin and I hear it said in the same epistle in 1st John 2 from verse 1 for anyone who sins we have an advocate with the father we have one who helps us who deals with us in our need and we have sought to show in this study that such faith that receives Jesus as the one who alone can meet our need as sinners in the hand of an angry God we see that that faith is not the faith of devils we were looking at that just a week or so ago two weeks ago it's not the faith of devils we saw that the devils have their doctrine they even have true doctrine but it affects no sanctifying influence whatsoever and we saw that the faith that receives

Jesus Christ is not simply the faith of the devils not at all we saw how they accept his full deity they accept his full manhood they accept that he will judge them everlastingly they know him and are terrified of him no it's not that faith we saw that it's not even the faith that is natural faith that recognizes in creation God at work that recognizes that this is not the product of mere chance even the gigantic bang that caused it all to be with no influence from God whatsoever not at all but that God works no it's not that natural faith that's prepared to say there is a God a supreme being there is one behind all this it's not that faith either it's not the faith that's forced upon us by the evidence of creation design and creation all around

[ 20 : 09 ] I see therefore there's a creator it's not even that faith it is the faith that is the gift of God of the work of the spirit the faith that is the gift of grace God in his miracle working power working in us enabling us to see our need of Christ and embracing Christ and I say again we do well to come back to basics when we think about the believer in Christ we should travel the road often because when we are confronted by our own sin and shortcoming all we need to be reassured of the believer's belief by the grace of God in Christ Christ and when we do that as those to quote

Peter who are born of an incorruptible seed of the living and abiding word of God we see the privilege of being appointed to eternal life of being brought into the fellowship of the Son of God let's consider as we proceed the reality of the believer the believer's faith in Christ its source its sustaining power through the spirit working in us the second thing we want to look at here is what we've mentioned already the believer's knowledge in Christ now notice what I say the believer's knowledge in Christ we could have said the believer's knowledge of Christ but the believer's knowledge of

Christ is in a sense on a sliding scale and it's subjective we might almost say at one level anyway it depends on the books you've read you see if you're an avid reader of theology of Christian biography and so on then your thinking on Christ will be shaped by what you've read it will be influenced now watch what I'm saying here I'm not saying we shouldn't read Christian biography and theology and good sermons of course we should read them but this is not about the believer's knowledge of Christ it's the believer's knowledge in Christ it is that which derives from a spiritual living union with Christ see what I'm saying it's that which derives from the work of

God and the soul of man it's not left to speculations the believer's knowledge in Christ is dependent upon the spirit of God using the word of God in us that's why you know and I say this to so many of you of a island connection that's why you know in the old days back you don't need to go past the 19th century when the elders couldn't necessarily write and they put their mark when they were ordained to the office of elder they just didn't have the education but you read of theologians talking

about their spiritual intelligence was mega so they couldn't read a page it was mega they hung upon the word of

God they absorbed it in every way they were taught of God the sermons were living things for them and they grew on these because they were in Christ and they had the work of the Spirit using the word and there's a reminder in this you see that that on the negative side that the human mind and indeed the highly intelligent educated human mind can deduce a great deal about Christ and write a great deal about Christ about his identity and his ministry but that doesn't amount to what John is talking about here the believer's knowledge in Christ that stuff about him that stuff about him that education has produced and ability and that at its best it's wholly inadequate it's not the stuff of saving knowledge it's not the stuff of knowledge in

[ 25 : 44 ] Christ through the spirit in the word and what we're saying is we cannot have eternal life through this means nor can we have that connection with Christ and be taught of his spirit 28 years down the line in the ministry I've come across many a believer and often believers in churches where the ministry is not evangelical maybe a very educated ministry and where there are Christian believers under that kind of ministry their story is the same they're always wishing for something else a bit more they're always anticipating that it's going to come now it's going to come in the sermon here they've listened and then at the end of the sermon they're left disappointed

I've heard that over and over and over again and the reason for that is because a believing soul will not I mean a Christian believer born of the spirit will not get from an unconverted ministry stuff or shall I say knowledge in Christ it's impossible because the man himself needs to be in Christ if he's not in Christ he's not going to give anything of within Christness about it and John is emphasizing here the importance of as being in Christ to have the knowledge that is in Christ knowledge now let me just take you back by way of revision for a few moments to the sort of things we looked at when we were looking at the witness of the spirit to

Christ we took some of the fundamentals of his incarnation we considered remember his virgin conception and subsequent birth we saw how the eternal son of the eternal father became in time what he was not eternally he became man he emptied himself by becoming man and we saw that was a fundamental a non negotiable thought of the spirit in Christ knowledge we saw something about his his sufferings and death how at one minute with god is secured for us by his death and so on his continuing advocacy at the right hand and so on because of his glorious resurrection and ascension we looked at the fundamentals of the faith from an in

Christ ness knowledge the certainty that comes in this way and we saw how that with all that there still needed to be spiritual fellowship in the Holy Spirit that keeps us going on that develops us on in our relationship to the Lord that's why we can withstand the sweep that's even in the church the sweep for sensationalism get them whipped up and you'll get results no the work is done by the Spirit in the Word little by little bringing us on it's not the dramatic the sensational the claims that are that are sensational that essential true knowledge that in

Christ knowledge comes through the Holy Spirit working in us enabling us to grow on as he applies the Word and the apostles repeat among themselves in scripture that we grow in grace and in the knowledge and revelation of the Son of God and that happens through the Spirit of God the believer's knowledge in Christ and I think we just need to ask ourselves of the awareness of God's Spirit teaching us whether through this means he's at work in us I don't say that he will be working in each of us equally that's not the way of it but it's important to detect that he's working we might want to be seen or we might want to see ourselves really coming on apace but it's not like that

[ 31 : 23 ] God the Spirit of God works how and when he chooses and to the degree of advancement he chooses that's why sometimes and I remember this from my own early Christian experience that's why sometimes you have folk in the church who are mature believers and somebody is brought in wonderfully saved in Christ and they come on in leaps and bounds and you're almost a wee bit resentful of the way it's happening why is God doing this why is this one coming on like that the answer is God knows the Spirit does his work but the important thing for us is to know that God would have us know that we have eternal life in his sin that we have progress through the

Spirit in the Word in this knowledge experience knowledge of the Son of God he wants us to know for sure our last point our time is hastening on the last point is the Christian believers difficulties with assurance we know means we are certain that's what we have been saying from the outset that's what we were saying when we talked about the birthday gift being handed over you know you

received that from me that's what we're talking about by the legacy you know it when the documentation comes through you have it there's certainty and Christian assurance is about certainty from God if we would but listen to him and receive what he's giving us the gift arrives the legacy is confirmed whichever way you take it we benefit we receive we accept what is given but when it comes to certainty as to our standing before God doubtless there are many in the church particularly in our own tradition where that certainty is lacking the result of this uncertainty is that many remain adherents and some become members but are plagued with doubts and fears about themselves why is this the case well the answer is not simple but let me ask another question before we come back to that why is this the case why are so many still adherents why are some members but worry about whether they ever should have become members let me ask another question first why do some

Christians never doubt their spiritual state well some say because they've had the baptism of the spirit that's another subject for another time but we don't agree with their view most commonly some people who profess faith in Christ and never doubt their spiritual state never doubt it because they've got an over winning sense of their own importance they think they've arrived they think that they're something else they never doubt they never look in to consider they have such a self-love that keeps them from really examining the basis of their faith they never question the roots and they never look for the fruits they're in and that's it but let's return to this question why do so many among us remain adherents and others wonder if they did the right thing professing to return to those plagued or oppressed by doubts who are filled with a real sense of personal unworthiness for fellowship with the living God let's consider such even such at times rest upon the word of God they believe it they believe in the saving work of Christ and they dare to hope that they've got an interest in him and he has an interest in them they see him as their only foundation for acceptance of God and yet they're not settled they don't know they have eternal life they believe the great doctrines as we've indicated them in brief a moment ago but they see so little evidence of real belief in Christ in their own lives they cannot recognize that their concern for others is of God they cannot recognize that their yearning to pray for the lost and to actually pray for them and do something for them is of the grace of God one has known people like that they wept over folk who were going heedless on the broad road and yet they couldn't see that it was of God's grace that they cared that they prayed that they contributed to the cause of the gospel they cared because of the grace of God working in them they never seriously asked why I give to all those causes that will do people good they never thought to say I don't just do this because it makes me feel good or I'm equal to somebody else they never dared answer I do it because I love God who first loved me they never pushed that far well it's time you did friend look at your whole concern for people is it a concern born out of the love of God God so loved me he gave this enables me to give

[ 38 : 40 ] I'm not given a stingy way but generously no no I don't blow a trumpet about it but I do it because God has touched my life such who doubt and are plagued by doubts about their spiritual faith fear to say that it's because of the love of God in Christ to me and we need to think about that we need to take it to ourselves souls that forget the words of Christ yes they forget the words of Christ Jesus didn't say a tree is known by its roots he said a tree is known by its fruit and I think that too often in our tradition we spend too much time digging at the roots to see if the root of the matter is in us instead of looking more attentively at the fruit we're almost maybe afraid to look for fruit but you see the way to know whether the roots are healthy in Christ is to look at the life where the fruit will be found you see what I'm saying how do we know that our roots are in

Christ by looking outwardly at the fruit in our lives where our real interest lies and if we do more of that we'd realize there's more going on in us than ever we dared allow we need to be aware those of us who are plagued with doubts about our faith we need to be aware of a constant introspection of a morbid introspection beware lest we turn this introspection in such a way that all we do is dig and dig and dig at the roots within us or shall I say digging digging looking for roots and all we do is we go deeper and deeper into the hidden recesses of our hearts and actually what we find there is pretty ugly stuff no we're to we're to beware this we dig and dig and spend our useful thinking time just digging looking for roots my dear friends we have to look at what we are on the outside look at where our interests lie and why they lie in that way and even if we discover our interests are not Christward then we're actually in business because the moment we realise they're not really Christward it's time to seek them in other words we're not left in a state of doubt and perplexity

nowhere to look at the obvious love for Christ that's fruit by the way we're to look at the obvious love for Christ's people and people in general that's fruit we're to look at our concern for our fellow sinner and that because simply because we have come to know the Lord who loved us first and put a love for people in our hearts that's fruit we're to see what he's put there to see what he's made us freely by his grace and how he has given us a concern for people a real spiritual concern oh I hear you saying to me the fruit doesn't match but surely the important thing is this that the fruit that's there is born by roots that are in Christ the good fruit the peaceable fruit of righteousness James calls it the fruit of a life hidden in Christ with God and my dear friends as we leave the subject the time has beaten us as we leave the subject let us consider how the Lord works in us and how he makes us fruitful by loving us and putting his living out hearts in order to live with I love the Lord who first loved me who sent his son to Calvary to die upon the tree for me a wretch like me and seeing what he has done and seeing how he has lived wonderfully has given me a love for others and I know that I have passed from death to life firstly because I love the brethren don't keep digging looking for the roots look at the fruit that he has put there and be glad Amen