

The Christian's Assurance – 1 John 2:12-14

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[0:00] Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus. Many of you I don't know, but I know your brothers and sisters. I look forward to knowing you more. I pray that the Lord bless our time and the word tonight.

I have been assigned a text tonight. And that text is 1 John chapter 2, verses 12 through 14. And I'd like to read it. And from that we'll have a study of the topic of assurance and maturity.

And I said to my wife on the way over, I've assigned topics before. And usually when I do, the person that I've assigned it to doesn't quite do what I wanted them or thought for them to do.

And I said, boy, I hope that I do what I want to do. And then when he mentioned that I'm going to speak in Christ, I said, uh-oh. So we will be fine.

We're going to talk about assurance and maturity, and that is in Christ. So, 1 John chapter 2, verses 12 through 14. Now this is the word of God.

[1:04] John says, So again, this is our passage for consideration tonight.

I'm working with the main idea tonight that Christ and his finished work is the setting and the soil of Christian maturity.

I don't know how many of you are gardeners, whether it be for flowers or vegetables. I'd consider myself a novice gardener.

But I do know that rich and dark and loamy and well-tilled and fertilized soil is necessary if you're going to have a healthy, vibrant garden of whether flowers or vegetables.

And so in that setting, good things grow. And I'd like us tonight to have as our main idea that Christ and his finished work is that setting and is that soil for Christian maturity.

[2:49] We're going to come back to 1 John chapter 2, and we'll spend a good amount of time thinking in this paragraph of the letter. But I want to start off more broadly with the letter of 1 John.

And you'll notice that 1 John is written after, but it's written in connection with the Gospel of John. So you have the Gospel, and then you have the first letter of John.

And in the ending of John chapter 20, after John recorded all those signs that Jesus did, and just before he says that if we had recorded all these things, even the whole world wouldn't be able to hold all of the record.

But as John wrote to the people that would read the Gospel in verse 31, these things, John 20, 31, have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

So here with the Gospel of John, this is written for people to become Christians. The letter of John, 1 John, is written to those who then became Christians.

[4:09] So it's after the fact. And in 1 John, the way he ends the letter, in chapter 5, verse 13, says, So the Gospel was written so that people would become believers in Christ.

1 John is written to those who became believers in Christ. The Gospel was written for the conversion of sinners. 1 John is written for the confirmation of believers.

So conversion to Christ, that's the Gospel, and then conformity to Christ, that's the letter. So these two, you should think of them as bosom buddies.

These are kindred spirits in the Bible. You don't want to read just the Gospel of John. And we rightly do that for people that we want to become Christians. But when they become Christians, the book that they need is 1 John.

Now that they've come to Christ, they need to know who they are in Christ and how to live for Jesus Christ. So that's a general point. A second one is, is that 1 John, therefore, is about knowing God.

[5:32] It's about knowing God as Father in Jesus Christ. If you look at 1 John chapter 2, it's going to, as throughout the rest of the letter, deal with two aspects of knowing God.

There's a principled knowledge that we know that. And it gets to doctrines. It gets to facts. It gets to points about the Gospel itself.

So there's a principled knowledge. But there's also a personal knowledge that we must know Jesus Christ as a living and breathing and enduring Savior in his humanity as well as in his deity.

And in 1 John chapter 2, he says, By this we know that we have come to know him if we keep his commandments. The one who says, I have come to know him and does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

But whoever keeps his word in him, the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in him. And so in just this little specimen here, we've seen to know God as Father and to know that certain things about a Christian profession.

[6:52] So you read 1 John, and it's to know God and to know the doctrine of the Gospel.

Whatever we know in terms of principles of living the Christian faith and life, it all has to do with knowing the very person of Jesus Christ.

We never want to sever those two things. If somebody is all about living a principled knowledge of the Christian faith, but they do not know the person of Jesus Christ, they do not have a true Gospel faith in life.

And if someone professes to know the very person of Jesus Christ, well, they need to live a principled life. They have to live according to the faith that they profess.

So that's another wider general comment. The first is the relation of the Gospel to the letter. And now here it is about knowing God as he is revealed in the letter.

Taking a step a little further into the letter, again, this letter is written for the assurance of Christians. And what John does in 1 John is he gives three tests so that you can examine yourself to know if you're a Christian.

[8:06] And these are tests that if you examine yourself and you pass, then you should be assured that you are, in fact, a Christian. Now, those three tests, you can think of it by maybe the mnemonic device of Dr. M.

D-R-M. The D stands for the doctrinal test. The doctrinal test is basically, do I properly believe Jesus Christ?

That's the doctrinal test. Do I properly believe in Jesus Christ? The R is the relational test. And that relational test is, do I sincerely love other Christians?

Do I sincerely love other believers? The third one is the moral test. And that moral test is, do I conscientiously obey God's commandments?

So with Dr. M., the doctrinal, the relational, and the moral test, you might think of these, as you read 1 John, as a spiral that's going through the letter.

[9:15] And he'll consider one test for several verses, and then he'll spin around, and then it's the next test. And as he goes further, it's the third test.

And these just spiral themselves around in 1 John. You might think of it as a tightening of the screw into the wall. And the more we become fastened with these tests, the more we can be assured of whether or whether or not we are a true Christian.

So Dr. M. is another way that we might get used to 1 John. You'll see that all of these tests, just two more passages here, they're all summarized in 1 John 3 and in verse 23 and 24.

It says, So there are the commandments.

Which test is that? That's the moral test. And there's love one another. Which test is that? The relational test.

[10:30] And that we believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ. Which test is that? The doctrinal. So those three tests, they're summarized right there. It's also in chapter 5, verses 1 and 2.

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. There's the doctrinal test. And whoever loves the Father loves the child born of him. That's the relational test.

By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and observe his commandments. That's the moral test. So, getting used to 3 John with those three tests, passing those, conscientiously you ought to be assured that you are a Christian.

Now you say there are many things about doctrine I don't know. And maybe I'm in error at points. I fall daily in the relational test. I don't love my brother or my sister, my father or my mother as I should.

The moral test. There are times we disobey the commandments of God. But if this is conscientiously and sincerely, your heart, your mind, and your life, God knowing weak children and having provided his son, is given in the letter of 1 John a basis for Christian assurance.

[11:49] So that's the wider backdrop to 1 John and the contents. I'd like us now again to focus on chapter 2 and verse 12 through 14.

There are several features about this that I'd have us look at as we consider again Christ and his finished work as the setting and the soil of Christian maturity.

First off, we look at the structure. Maybe you've read this passage before, as I have, and you notice that there's something cyclical about it. There's repetition.

In fact, there are what I call two cycles here. And you get the repetition of I am writing and I have written. You see I am writing, which is in the present tense, which seems to be the epistle, once again, the letter.

And then you have I have written. Totally different tense. It's like a past tense. It may very well be that he's referring to the gospel. So we have that aspect of a cycle going.

[12:52] We also have reference to the children, the fathers, and the young men or the youngers. So the structure has something nice and tidy for us to see.

John has worked something out important here. And he wants us to take note of these that he's well put in place for a reason. So there's the structure.

There's also the versification of it. And I don't know what Bible version you're using. Anybody here have the New Revised Standard Version? Okay.

Anybody have a Catholic version? Okay. So you probably are all using good Protestant versions of the Bible. And there's a little bit of a divide here between those two camps as to how verse 14 begins.

And in, I guess, our Bibles that we're using, it begins with fathers. Which, if I were putting the versification in the Bible, I might have put it at verse, put verse 13 to start with, I have written to you children.

[14:02] Because that follows the children, the fathers, and the youngers. It's just a visual thing. But it does help the eye to keep the versification neat and tidy with the structure.

But whoever did the versification, he did what he did. And we're stuck with a little carryover into verse 14. But the order here should interest us about verses 12 through 14.

The purpose of the order is not to show chronology in terms of age. The purpose here is to show maturity rather than the chronology.

So if you're taking notes, maturity rather than chronology. And I say that because this term, children, that you'll find there at verse 12 and in the last part of verse 13, two different words for children.

Both of them, in the way John writes his letter, refers to all believers. Now when we would hear children in the letter, what would we think of?

[15:11] We'd think of young people. Real young people. Because he mentions you younger men. So maybe we'd think children in the age of over here in the corner of the room.

Or younger, maybe a little bit older. But John uses the term of children for all believers. You and I are children. We may be in our 70s or 80s.

We may be down to our 30s or 20s. But we're all children. And John speaks that way throughout the letter. If you notice chapter 2, verse 1.

My little children. Same word. My little children. He does it again at verse 28 of chapter 2. And he says, And now, little children, abide in him.

That's one word, children. And he uses it this way in the letter. But he uses another term for children. And he uses it in the same way. In fact, it's the same word at John 2, verse 18, where he says, Children, it is the last hour.

[16:16] This is the same word that Jesus used when he came to visit his disciples up in Galilee. And I tend to think that he was maybe rubbing it in with a little bit of humor.

That children, you haven't caught any fish, have you? So it's a term for all disciples in Jesus Christ. Grown adults, children of a heavenly father.

So the order here is that he's starting with children. He goes then to speak in light of what we've seen later in the epistle. That children, their, in other words, believers' sins, are forgiven them.

That's what he's talked about back in chapter 1, verse 7. We have fellowship with one another. The blood of his son Jesus cleanses us from all sins.

If we confess our sins, verse 9, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So these children are those who are believers.

[17 : 18] They are those who have their sins forgiven them. So then the order. He is by this order of children, fathers, youngers, getting at maturity and not chronology because he's dealing with all believers' children and then maybe the most mature, which would be fathers, and then maybe those that are less mature as the younger men or the youngers.

If he wanted to speak in terms of strict chronology about age, he would have done what? He'd do maybe children and then younger men and then fathers.

Or maybe he would have done fathers, younger men, and then children. But John has written under the inspiration of the Spirit, children, all believers, and then fathers and youngers.

So what he seems to be teaching us here is all believers as the children of God in terms of more and less mature. But all of these know God and have their sins forgiven.

Augustine, maybe some of you would say Augustine, Augustine says, quote, not difference in age but difference in degree and even length of existence in Christian life.

[18 : 44] But even amidst a chronological view of it, if we did think of it in terms of age, we would think that the confidence is even strengthened further.

Because if we do think of it as younger children, well, these would be those who are new in the Christian life. These are those who, like children, are weaker. They may fall.

They may get hurt. They may be vulnerable to danger. They may be those who make many mistakes time and again who are trying to learn. But John reminds them in verse 12 and 13, I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

Again, verse 13, I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. Which if we were to think of it as young children, young children are delighted when they make mistakes.

That their father still loves them and that their sins are forgiven them. So it's a very tender thing, even starting with children, to consider that. But going on in that view, if we were to take a chronological view, young men would be a novice stage.

[19 : 56] And so here, after some development, there's some capability that's been reached, some maturity, but it still needs to be tested. Young men often are still getting their place in life.

And so they need tests to make them stronger. It's good for a man, Ecclesiastes says, that he bare the yoke in his youth. So if we were to think of young men, then therefore these statements about them are good for them.

I'm writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. And again, because you are strong, verse 14, and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one.

So you are strong, you've overcome, but since you're midlife and still younger, there's more to go in that. And if we were to still take this chronological view that fathers then being the experienced age, a place of seasoned maturity, they've weathered hard instances.

Well, older folk in the Lord need to be brought back to things that they've known all their lives. They need to be reminded of things that they were taught even in their youth to know that these things are their foundation.

[21 : 15] And so therefore, in verse 13, as he writes to the fathers, you know him who has been from the beginning. And again, verse 14, the same thing.

You know him who has been from the beginning. If we were to take a chronological view, we're reminded here that even fathers have need of repeating things.

They not only get to the point in life where they may repeat things, whether they're questions or stories. The Lord seems to bring down to the level of these fathers repetition in things they already know.

But I think that the implication here is that all believers then have all gospel privileges all the same. That's really what John is meaning to convey to you.

Whatever stage in life you are, you all have the same benefits and privileges in Jesus Christ. What is true about the believer and what is each already having in Christ is perfect?

[22 : 23] And I say that word perfect because that's the verb tense that John is getting at as he writes. It may not be apparent to you in the English, but reading this text in the Greek, John is very particular in using the perfect tense.

The perfect tense is something that happens and the effects remain. It is and it remains that very way.

So taking that tense, you look at verse 12 and you see that your sins are forgiven you. When someone's sins are forgiven by the Lord Jesus Christ, they are always forgiven.

And they are evermore forgiven after that. And so John doesn't want to use certainly the future tense on that. And he doesn't want to use just the present tense.

He doesn't want to just use a past tense. He uses the perfect tense. So your sins are forgiven you and that is just the way it is and it will always be for you.

[23:34] Children. The same thing in verse 13 where you know, it says, him who has been from the beginning.

He says that to the fathers. He says to the young men, you have overcome the evil one. And once again, children, you know the father.

These things too are in the perfect tense. This is the way it is. You know God. You will always know God. If it is as a father that you've known him from the beginning, you will continue to know him.

So unchanged realities in the Christian faith and life. That's what God brings to his people through the gospel. In verse 14, once again, fathers, you know him who has been from the beginning.

You have overcome the evil one, he says to the young men. So these things are abiding realities. This is the emphasis that John has in the passage.

[24:38] So then getting to some applications here. Remember, John is writing to strengthen your assurance. So therefore, as we've seen, he repeats things.

You know the father. Young men, you are strong. You've overcome the evil one. He's reinforcing your assurance. You ought to be assured because it's bound up in God's action in the gospel and through faith in Jesus Christ.

He even rephrases statements like to the children at verse 12. I'm writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

And then he rephrases it to the children in verse 13. I have written to you, children, because you know the father. Which is easier to say, I guess, that your sins are forgiven you or you know the father.

They're both the same thing. And so John, for strengthening assurance, repeats phrases, rephrases phrases, and reinforces those phrases.

[25:47] Another application is to be assured that you already have the knowledge of God and the forgiveness of sins. Again, that knowledge.

It's principled and it's personal. And why is it that? It's because God has revealed it to us in his son. Faith will lay hold of that and faith being the bond that the spirit makes with us with Jesus Christ, it's better than Elmer's glue.

It's better than gorilla glue. This is the Lord Jesus glue of the Holy Spirit as the bond between God the Father and his children.

And so therefore, the assurance is bound up in that. These sins are forgiven and you do know God as your heavenly father. Now this again, that perfect tense.

I was just looking over genealogical and ancestral stuff from my Aunt Jean. Aunt Jean is in the nursing home and she's deteriorating little by little.

[26:54] Aunt Jean just gave me all the pictures of the family going back many, many years. Aunt Jean was always the one at the Christmas parties that had the Polaroid camera and she'd take the picture and I remember as a youngster being enamored with the fact that the picture came right out.

This is the perfect tense illustration for me is that a picture is taken and there it is and it's there.

And it was taken once but it remains. And so what John here has written in this paragraph is the Polaroid picture for you to see and take with you.

It's perfect and it's tense. And so therefore, we should have assurance and confidence in these things. Remember how the gospel speaks that your sins are forgiven you.

You have been forgiven. In the preaching ministry of the gospel, whosoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven. Remember with the man let down into the, through the roof before Jesus.

[28:03] and Jesus says, your sins are forgiven you. Or that woman who came behind Jesus and her tears on his feet and wiping his feet with her hair, Simon was told that her sins are forgiven her.

The scripture teaches with this very tense, this Polaroid tense, such that Jesus with all those statements basically took the snapshot and gave them their picture that their sins have been

I wonder how it would have been then for that man who was let down on the mat through the roof to go walking home. What was it like then for that woman who having doused our Lord's feet with her tears to know that her sins are forgiven her?

Another application is that if your sins are forgiven you, then you live accordingly. If you're reconciled to God, then you're a peacemaker. If your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And here is the whole mystery, the experiential part of the Christian life is that we are living out of who we are in Jesus Christ.

He says this, let us be clear about this. It is absolutely essential to living the Christian life because while you are unhappy or disturbed about this question of forgiveness of sins, you cannot be going forward.

[30:34] I say once more with John that there is no point appealing to people to go forward until they are clear about the past. And so, if your past has been dealt with by the once-for-all work of Christ at the cross, you have a great way going forward.

So, in the Christian life our great strength and our victory in Christ is looking back at the cross where Jesus dealt with our sins and that solid ground of acceptance with God our Heavenly Father. That is what moves the current and us to our destination in the future to come. Likewise, you look back to Christ and His finished work and that is how you go on maturing.

[32:07] So, our rowboat has taken us back to the garden to our initial proposition that Jesus Christ is the setting and the soil for Christian maturity.

And so, with these things that John has written, he's putting your attention to your union with Jesus Christ that you go on maturing and that with assurance. So, 1 John 2, verses 12-14.

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