

**“Blessed Assurance”
(An Exposition of 1 John 5:13)¹**

Introduction

We have referred to our sermon text a number of times throughout our study in the book of 1 John, and with good reason. For here in v.13 John gives us *a brief summary of his main purpose* in writing *everything* that he has written in this epistle. He writes:

“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.*” (Italics added)

Why did he write this letter and everything in it? So that we who believe in Jesus Christ might *know* that we have eternal life. Simply put, John wants us to have *assurance of our salvation*.

There is a difference between *having* eternal life and *knowing* that you have eternal life. You can *have* eternal life *without being sure* that you have it. Back in v.11-12 John tells us about *having* eternal life:

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

The testimony and promise of God Himself is that He has given us eternal life. It is the free gift of His grace, as Paul also tells us in Ephesians 2:8-9, it is **'by grace we have been saved through faith. And this is not our own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.'**

But where is this gift of eternal life to be found? *In the Son of God*. As John says in v.12, **“Whoever has the Son has life.”** And *in the Son of God alone*, as John goes on to say in the latter part of v.12 - **“whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”** That is the testimony of God Himself in His gospel.

Indeed that is *the main purpose of the Gospel of John* – it was written so that we might believe on Jesus Christ unto salvation. In John 20:30–31 John sums up the purpose of his Gospel account for us:

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; *but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*”

Did you know that the Gospels are *not* extensive biographies of Jesus? They are true historical accounts to be sure, but they are *not* exhaustive accounts – that is *not* their purpose. No, they are very selective, and they are selective because they focus on the main things – the person and work of Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of God's elect, the Savior of sinners.

As John tells us there in v.30, there are **“many”** things (even many of Christ's miraculous signs!) that were *not* written down for us in his Gospel. But what *is* written there was written with the express purpose **'that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name.'** The Gospel (or *evangel*) of John is *evangelistic in nature* – It is written so that we might believe.

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

You could say that in a sense the Gospel of John is *written for unbelievers* first and foremost, although it is certainly written for the edification of believers as well. But the book of 1 John on the other hand, while it is certainly useful in many ways for presenting the truth of the gospel of Christ to unbelievers, is expressly *written to believers*, for our edification and assurance.

John Stott writes:

“The Gospel was written for unbelievers, that they might read the testimony of God to his Son, believe in him to whom the testimony pointed, and thus receive life through faith. This letter, on the other hand, was written for believers. John’s desire for them is not that they may believe and receive, but that having believed, they may know that they have received, and therefore continue to *have (present), eternal life.*”²

The Gospel of John was written so that we may believe in Christ and *have* eternal life in Him; the first epistle of John was written so that all those who have eternal life in Christ might *know and be assured* that we have eternal life in Christ – *that we might have assurance of our salvation.*

This morning we are going to briefly look at three (3) things from our text. **First**, we are going to see *the relationship between Scripture and assurance* – that the Word of God is the sure foundation, not only of our salvation, but also of all true assurance as well. **Second**, we will look at *the relationship between faith and assurance* – that *faith in Christ* is the primary basis for assurance. And **third**, we will see *the Christian's duty of seeking and attaining assurance* – that because it is clearly God's will that we know if we have eternal life, it is our duty as Christians to seek to attain and maintain the assurance of our salvation.

The Necessity of Scripture

The *first* thing that we see in our text is *the necessity of Scripture* – the foundational relationship between the Word of God and our assurance of salvation. This is something that we might be inclined to miss unless we slow down a bit and carefully work our way through the text. Look again at v.13. There John says, “***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.***” (Italics added)

As we have seen a number of times throughout our study of this book, John's very purpose in writing this letter was so that those who believe in the name of the Son of God might know that we have eternal life. So far so good, right?

But John is writing these things as an Apostle of Jesus Christ, isn't he? And so by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he was writing *Scripture*. How does that work? While we cannot let that great topic take up all of our time this morning, a brief look at what the Bible tells us about it may prove edifying. In 2 Peter 1:20–21 the Apostle Peter tells us:

“[K]nowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men³ spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

² *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p.184.

³ Or “holy men of God spake . . .” (KJV)

So the Scriptures are *not* just the works of fallible men. They are the product of men speaking (or writing) “**from God**” - as the heralds or mouthpieces of God. They spoke and wrote in such a way as to be able to say, “Thus sayeth the Lord.”

What was the process of this inspiration by which the Apostles and prophets spoke and wrote the Word of God? Peter says that men did so “**as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**” It is as if they are in a ship being “**carried along**” by the wind in their sails, so that what they said or wrote was exactly what God would have them say or write! God used men to write the Scriptures.

Not only that, but later in that same epistle Peter writes:

“And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, *just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.*” (2 Peter 3:15–16, italics added)

The Apostle Peter clearly regarded the letters of Paul to be Scripture – to be the Word of God! And no doubt Paul regarded Peter's writings the same way.

And so when Peter tells us that he wrote these things *so that we who believe in the name of the Son of God might know that we have eternal life* (v.13), he is telling us that *the Word of God is the foundation, not just of our salvation, but also of our assurance as well.*

Many of our problems and difficulties in these things (as in *most* things in the Christian life) start *here*, when we do not take the Scriptures as our starting point, and as the authoritative first and last word on the things of the Christian faith and life.

When it comes to having a right and comforting sense of the assurance of our salvation, things always tend to go sideways when we do not look to the Scriptures (such as 1 John) in order to determine the true basis for that assurance.

Our feelings, which come and go, and which seemingly change with every wind that blows, are not a right judge or standard by which we can base our assurance. You may have heard the phrase, “Facts don't care about your feelings.” There is some truth to that even in the Christian life, isn't there? Even our *feelings* must always be submitted to Scripture. Let *Scripture*, not your feelings, be your guide.

False teaching is sure to lead us astray in these things. That is half the reason that this very letter was necessary in the first place, isn't it? John spends a great deal of time in this letter refuting the errors and heresies of the false teachers who were harming the purity and peace of the church in John's day. It was those very (Gnostic or otherwise) heresies that undermined the assurance of genuine believers.

John MacArthur Jr. sums this up well when he writes:

“We're to be assured of our salvation first and foremost because Scripture *promises* eternal life to those who believe in Christ (John 20:31). God's Word and the guarantee of life to believers is thus the foundation of all assurance.”⁴

4 John MacArthur Jr., *Saved without a Doubt*, MacArthur Study Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), p.11.

Where do we find the truth of Jesus Christ? *In the Scriptures alone*. Where do we find the gospel of our salvation? *In the Scriptures alone*. Where do we find all of the great and precious promises of God to all believers? *In the Scriptures alone*. Where do we find the revealed will of God for our lives? *In the Scriptures alone*. And where do we find the foundation of our assurance of salvation? Same place – in the Scriptures alone!

Faith & Assurance

That leads us to our *second* point – *the relationship between faith and assurance*. And that relationship is simply this - *faith in Christ* is the *primary* basis (even if *not* the *only* basis) for assurance. This point follows closely upon the previous one, for we must take our assurance from the Scriptures, and that on the basis of faith.

True assurance is for believers only. John tells us that he wrote these things regarding assurance **“to you who believe in the name of the Son of God.”** (v.13) As we have gone through this book together we have seen John presenting us with three (3) tests, so to speak, of our having been truly born of God. Those tests are summarized as *love, obedience, and truth*.

Simply put, those who truly believe and have been born again will evidence that fact by their love for the brethren; by their obedience to the commandments of God; and by their belief in and holding to the truth of Christ as the Son of God.

But saving faith in Christ is and must always be the root or foundation of those things. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9), and so the first place that we must look to if we are to have a strong sense of assurance is Christ Himself.

And so if you want a *syllogism* of sorts for whether or not you should have assurance (i.e. whether or not you can *know that you have eternal life*), start where John starts – do you **“believe in the name of the Son of God”**? If you are trusting in Jesus Christ – the Son of God - alone for salvation, then you have eternal life and can know without a doubt that you have eternal life.

John says as much in the previous two verses, doesn't he? In v.11-12 (which we looked at last Lord's day), John tells us:

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

Do *you* have the Son? How do you have the Son? *By faith* – by believing in the name of the Son of God (v.13). So if you have the Son of God by faith, then *you* have the gift of eternal life. Plain and simple.

None of this invalidates the three tests that John gives us throughout this letter; it simply keeps them in their proper place. We are not saved by our obedience or by our love for the brethren, nor are we saved by our holding to the truth, as important as those things are.

No, those things are *evidence* of our being born of God and of having the Son of God. They are the *evidences* of true saving faith in Christ. Those things are subordinate to our faith in Christ and are the evidence of it, rather than the foundation or proper ground of our assurance.

The Duty of Assurance

Last but not least, John teaches us here, not just the possibility and blessings of assurance, but in a sense *the duty of assurance* as well. What I mean by that is simply this - because it is clearly God's will that we *know* if we have eternal life, it is incumbent upon us to seek to attain and maintain the assurance of our salvation.

It is *not* humility for a Christian to go through life in a constant state of doubt. And it is *not* pride or presumption on the part of a believer to seek to attain assurance when God has clearly told us that it is His will for us to have it - quite the opposite! John Stott writes:

“His emphasis is important because it is common today to dismiss any claim to assurance of salvation as presumptuous, and to affirm that no certainty is possible on this side of death. But certainty and humility do not exclude one another. If God’s revealed purpose is not only that we should hear, believe and live, but also that we should know, presumptuousness lies in doubting his word, not in trusting it.”⁵

Elsewhere in Scripture we are told **“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”** (2 Corinthians 13:5) And the Apostle Peter writes: **“Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to ⁶confirm your calling and election”** (2 Peter 1:10)

Just as we are to **“Strive for [or *pursue*] peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”** (Hebrews 12:14), even so we should not rest content without assurance, but should strive after it.

Make it your aim to **“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”** (2 Peter 3:18) Seek to grow in the faith by spending time in God's Word, so that your mind is renewed day by day. *Diligently attend the means of grace in the public worship of the church* – the Word, sacraments, and prayer, and the fellowship of the saints.

In doing this, you will grow in grace, strengthen your assurance of salvation, and the joy of the Lord shall be your strength in walking with and serving the Lord Jesus Christ. And all to His glory. - Amen

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Or **“make your calling and election sure”** (KJV).