

Assurance of Salvation, Pt 2: Knowing We Know Him (1 Jn 2)

At the Shepherd's Conference this past year Dr. John MacArthur spoke of false believers in the church, and how this is nothing new, as there was a false believer among the 12 disciples name Judas. In that message he shared some people his own life who seemed to be saved but later turned away from it and how to understand that. He shared of others another time...I want to share as you turn to 1 John

'When I was a high-school student, I had a very close friend. In fact, in my days in high school, he was closer to me than any other friend that I had... spent a lot of time together ... as deeply as two high-school students could ever do it, we discussed theology ... [MacArthur says] I can remember in my mind very vividly an occasion when we went out as high-school seniors because we felt the compulsion in our hearts to do some witnessing ... down in Los Angeles. And we decided that since everybody else down there got their soapbox and preached, we'd get ours. And we were full of holy zeal ... and went down there and we began to evangelize ...

We separated when we went to college. Two years later I happened, on an occasion, to run into him, I think it was some kind of a school reunion...and he informed me that he in the intervening two years had become an atheist. And I want you to know that I was absolutely shattered. Not only was I shattered personally, but I really didn't have a sophisticated enough theology to know what to do with him. I didn't have a category to put him into. But to this very day, that young friend of mine has a very vivid face in my mind and I have been unable to set him aside. And it has plagued my heart that through all those years he possessed a dead faith ...

I remember when I went to seminary, I had another friend, a very close friend. This young man had everything going for him. He was an exceptional young man in every way ... I thought, "Boy, what success he'll know in the ministry. If I can ever...if I can ever come up to his shoe tops, it will be a remarkable thing." Very, very gifted, all the finest background, family, education, everything ... studying for the ministry and getting excellent grades. And we had so much fellowship together and we had a lot of fun together ... your lives really got knit together...16 to 19 units a semester and all of us working in church ministry at the same time and some of us courting our wives-to-be and it was a wonderful and busy time.

And then after we graduated and looked ahead to all the hopeful things in life, and began to go our separate ways, we had a little group of about five of us and God has so singularly blessed... 4...are being used in really marvelous ways in the service of God.

But, not this young man. In fact, he rejected completely the faith. I was told that there was introduced into his home a Buddhist altar. And as I thought back on that, I don't understand that. At that time I couldn't understand it ... but I experienced that and it was painful.

You see, I am not like a traveling evangelist. I don't blow into town, unload my gospel message, count the hands and leave. I have to stay. And I see who drops through the cracks...I'm not into numbers... statistics. Because if you stay long enough, you're going to find out usually where there's living faith and where there's dead ...

I remember a man in our church very active, a teacher in our church. We decided to meet for prayer every Tuesday morning at six o'clock and we met for a year and we prayed, the two of us ... At the end of which time he walked away from everything. I remember chasing him down in the night, going in to a home other than his own home where from which he had left his wife and family. And awaking him in the middle of the night [to fulfill Matt. 18, and another elder] was with me that time, and saying, "What in the world are you doing turning your back on everything that we have taught and known and shared and prayed for through a year?"

... [another man] called me on the phone one Sunday. He said, "You've got to help me." I said, "I can't believe it's you." He said, "It's me." I said, "Where you been?" He said, "I'm a drunken bum." I said, "I can't believe it." Because you see, this young man had been a pastor, a pastor of a church. He had been [a good] student in seminary, tremendous promise, great mind but he had become a drunken bum, left his wife, left his church, left his kids, drank himself into oblivion over a period of about three years and became a hobo, destitute. But he said, "I've got to have some help."

I said, "You show up Sunday and I'll help you." So he came to church that Sunday, I couldn't believe it when I saw him. He showed all the scars and all the marks of broken bottles over his face...some of you met him. His name is Mitch. And he said, "I don't have anywhere to go." He had everything he owned in the world on his backpack. And he said, "I don't have anywhere to go." I said, "Come to our house and you can live with us."

So, Patricia is always gracious, welcomed him into our home with our little family and we took him in...every time I found a bottle, I took him in the bathroom while I poured it down the drain. And we tried and he came along and he began to share and we employed him at the church and he began to give his testimony. And he started to preach at the mission and he said, "I'm back where God wants me and I'm repentant and all the years are past..."

And then it started all over again. And he told me it was over. He was leaving. He was going back to drink ... he knew the truth. He could have stood in this pulpit and preached a sermon you never would have forgotten ... tremendous power as a preacher, great gifts. But he left to go back to his bottle and to go back to a woman that he wanted to live with who was in the occult. Believed all the right things, dead faith ... absolutely dead.

...my life has been dotted with a long history of those kinds of people and I want to at least have the honesty to admit that there are many, many more ... like that who give an initial acquiescence to the facts of the gospel ... may carry on a masquerade for a while but when you really look closely there's nothing there. And these... and others like them ... have given me a strong passion for this matter ... people who were so intimately involved in my life and I didn't even discern as I ought to have discerned in all cases.

So, you see, I'm not into the "hit" and "count heads" evangelism, okay?...I'm not into how many hands were raised, how many cards were signed kind of stuff. I can't just accept that on the surface because I have to live with the heartbreaking reality ...¹

How are we to understand this? When people seem to be saved and seem to have an interest for awhile but then walk away from it all and for years and years there's no fruit of love for Christ or church, are we to think of our family members or friends as "backsliders" or "not walking with the Lord, but I know they're saved because I was there when it happened and I saw the tears and heard him say the right words"? Some teachers like Zane Hodges would say those people MacArthur talked about are still saved as long as they were sincere when they said the prayer, even if they deny the faith and mock and ridicule the faith now, Hodges says they're still saved!² That's a heretical version of "free grace/non-Lordship theology," that I would call "once sinner's prayer prayed, always saved." Not everyone would say it that way, but many believe some form of it.

Another error out there would be Arminian theology, which says people can be once saved but not always saved, true believers can lose their salvation. Both wrestle with how we're to think of people who seemed to be a part of us in the church for awhile, but then went out from us and never returned, how are we to think of them?

1 John 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

This is the apostle John writing, the one who leaned on Jesus at the table when Judas went out from the upper room. Nobody had suspected Judas was anything other than truly "*of us* 12 disciples," but his going out from them, never to return, his betrayal of Christ who he once professed faith for those 3 years, I think he's one John is thinking of when he writes that people like Judas go out so it can be shown that not all are really "of us." Not everyone in a church is really "of us" the truly saved, and those who walk away from it all, show that they were never truly saved. We're not to conclude Judas was saved or that he lost his salvation, but that he never was saved.

John writes that this shows us that not all among us are truly *of us*. From a distance, sheep and goats look the same in the same field. From a distance, wheat and tares look the same in the same field. But God sees them and will one day divide them on judgment day, and in some cases, that division becomes evident before that day.

Not all of them go out, or stop coming to church, or say they deny the faith with their lips (some just with their lives or on the inside), but those who do openly become apostate (turning away from the faith community) are to remind us that not all among us are *of us*.

This is so important, young people, parents, everybody present. If we assume everyone in this church or youth group is saved, we are denying statistics and the Scriptures. Jesus said there are "*many*" who '*say "Lord, Lord"*' (in other words, repeatedly say it) who He will say to on judgment day "I never knew you" (Matthew 7). Not "*I used to know you* but now I don't...no, I *never* knew you." They were *not once saved* but Christ lost them ... they were *never* saved.

Statistics support what Jesus said, that there are many who grew up in Christian homes, but who then *go out from us* once they become adults. They leave the church once they leave home. 1 John 2:19 says when people abandon the church, that shows they were never truly of it, for if they had been of the church, then they would have remained with the church, but their going away, never to return, showed they were 'already gone.' Some have looked at the data in more depth and developed curriculum and creation / apologetics resources that go deeper for children and youth SS. Others look at the same problem and say the solution is cancel children's SS or youth programs and the key is the family, never to be divided. Still others say the problem isn't curriculum and the solution isn't to cancel programs, the key is make church cool to keep the youth.

Some would see the key is homeschooling; if we keep kids away from public school, that will keep them at church when they leave home. But a Barna study found that while 91% of homeschooling families identify themselves as Christian, *only 50% attend church*. The statistics of homeschooled children who deny the faith once they leave home is also alarming, and what's worse, half of homeschooling *parents* believe salvation can be earned by good works.³ This is not just a problem with youth, it's a problem with parents! I'm not just concerned with the kids, I'm concerned with the adults!

We don't need to reinvent church, or reject 2,000+ years of church ministry to children and come up with a new family movement or methodology.⁴ We should reevaluate and reform the means we use by the Scriptures always, but most of all we need to reintroduce churches to the message of the full gospel, young and old. I don't need to react to disillusioned 30-year-olds and make an emergent church anymore than redesigning church for departing college age people. We must restore all of the gospel to all people of all ages. We need parents saved and engaged in giving their kids the gospel

My goal isn't keeping unsaved people in church longer than age 18, I want *unsaved youth to be confronted by the gospel and to get saved*, because if they truly become *of us*, v. 19 says they'll remain (and I want the same for people much older than 18 as well). Billy Graham's organization I've heard has admitted a good sized percent of those who walk the aisle at crusades don't keep walking the faith

One school of thought blames it on lack of follow-up by churches or poor discipleship by others. I would suggest they're not *disciples* in many cases, and it's why they don't remain, just like v. 19 says. That's why we need to make the gospel clearer and talk about what repentance is and also what regeneration is (what new spiritual life looks like and what its results are, that's why 1 John was written).

[SBC studies suggest half of their adult members are unregenerate]⁵ Statistically speaking, some of you are already gone. God knows it, and I suspect some of you know it. If so, I pray God convicts you and converts you by grace for pretenders who become repenters. Some of you may not know you're not saved. If you have a false assurance or are a false believer, like Judas, I pray God reveals to you if you are not yet "of us," and that tonight He saves you. Some may be saved, but not know it, and you lack assurance tonight, or may later. 1 Jn 5:13: *'I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know you have eternal life.'*

1st test in chapter 2: Do you trust and obey?

First off, do you trust Jesus? Not *have you trusted* Jesus...*do you?* Signing your name in a Gideon NT doesn't mean your name is in the Lamb's book of life. The test of salvation is not what you did in the distant past, it's what God is doing in your life now. You can't know you have eternal life if you don't no longer trust Jesus. 5:13 says those who can know they have eternal life '*believe*' (continual tense in Greek). Zane Hodges' theology is so wrong-you can't deny Christ and still be saved, v. 22-23 says that's what antichrists do! It is antichrists in v. 18-19 who claim Christ but later deny and depart
[think Judas, v. 18 "*many antichrists*"]

The first 2 verses of 1 Jn 2 begin with truths believers trust about Jesus: He is our advocate (v. 1) and atonement/propitiation (v. 2). But true faith is not only intellectual, v. 3 says in the NIV "*We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.*" Other translations 'keep'=to observe attentively, perform vigilantly
[Jn 14:15 '*If you love me you will obey...*']

If we truly love Jesus we'll obey and if we truly trust we'll obey. It doesn't earn grace, it's evidence of grace. We know we know Jesus if we trust *and obey*, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus. 1 John 1:4 says he writes this letter so our joy can be complete/full.

Do you trust and obey, not perfection, but is the direction of your life a pattern of obedience? When you sin, do you confess it (1:9)? When you don't obey, is the Holy Spirit within you convicting you to be unhappy in it and repent, as we studied last time? That's a test of assurance from chapter 1. For chapter 2, let's start with trusting (2:1-2) and then obeying (2:3-6). Saving faith is first trusting Jesus, not just intellectually but volitionally, our will, and even our works

We all sin (as 1:8, 10 says) and chapter 2 begins saying that we're not to sin as a pattern of life, but if and when we do sin, 1 John 2:1 says we have an Advocate or an Intercessor (as the footnote of my translation says) or another version says "*we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*"

Jesus stands before the throne of God above as a defense attorney, interceding for me, pleading His blood for me, 'my perfect spotless righteousness.' I trust Jesus Christ, the Righteous One as my only hope. I don't trust my righteousness or obedience, even though I need to live righteously and obediently, and I will as He transforms me. But my standing with God is never based on me, it's always and only the One standing before the throne of God above *for me*.

The song says He 'ever lives and pleads for me...For God the just is satisfied to look on Him [Jesus] and pardon me.' That's what v. 2 means by "propitiation." That word means Jesus fully satisfied the justice and wrath of God by His sacrifice on my behalf, appeasing and turning away His wrath when I turned from sin to trust Him.

Does v. 2 mean everyone who ever lived has God's wrath satisfied and turned away? No, the same writer John wrote in the gospel of John, 3:36 '*whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, whoever does not obey the Son ... the wrath of God remains on him*' (ESV).

Propitiation means satisfying, removing wrath, but the same author makes clear those who don't obey or believe don't have it removed. Arminians see 1 John 2:2 as a proof text for unlimited redemption, but redemption is limited by definition to the redeemed and so is the word propitiation by its definition as an actual removal of sin (I have a study on limited redemption I can give after if you want).

But for whoever believes in the Son, John 1:29 says He's *the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*, to those who *behold* Him in faith. Unbelievers don't have their sins taken away, but His sacrifice is sufficient for all in the world who will believe in Jesus. There is no limit to its sufficiency, but its intent is for the redeemed

Not for our sins only, John says, and some think he's contrasting the idea later called gnosticism that there is an elite few, or others say, because John's ministry was to Jews, that he's making clear it's not just for our nation, but for all nations, all God's children around the whole world. The same author John said this in John 11:51-52 (if you want to jot down to read later, NIV) "*he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not for that nation only but also for the scattered children of God to bring them together...*'

Same phrases in the original language by the same original author: for us (the Jewish nation), and not for us only, but also for a whole *world of God's children, believers of all nations*. Gal 2:9 says John ministered to the Jews while Paul ministered to Gentiles, but John makes clear Christ's propitiation was not for Jews only, but also for Gentiles. His redemption is proclaimed to the world, but not all are redeemed, not all have their sins removed like propitiation means. But God turns away His wrath from all who turn from their sins and trust Jesus as Lord, not just in name only, who trust *and obey*. We trust Jesus as our advocate and atonement (v. 1-2) and we obey

³ *By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.* ⁴ *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;* ⁵ *but whoever keeps His word [i.e., doesn't just say but he also obeys], in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:* ⁶ *the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.*

A book *Saved Without a Doubt* explains: 'If you desire to obey the Word out of gratitude for all Christ has done for you, and if you see that desire producing an overall pattern of obedience, you have passed an important test indicating the presence of saving faith.'⁶

2nd test: Have you stopped loving the world?

I won't hit every verse, just the ones on tests of assurance in 1 Jn 2. Verses 7-11 talk about how those who love the family of Christ are in the light (salvation), not darkness. v. 15 is very black and white: ¹⁵ *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. **If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.***

Those who love the world don't have the Father's love inside them. But wait, doesn't Father God **so love "the world that He gave His only Son..."** (John 3:16)? Why would the same writer say we're not to love the world, and that if we do, it proves God's love isn't in us? Why would v. 10 say we should love our brother in the world but v. 15 says don't love the world? Is v. 15 saying don't love *people in the world*? Didn't Jesus say "*love your enemies*" and that shows we share God's nature of love in common grace to all (Matt. 5:43-45)?

What's the #1 rule of Bible study? (context) The #2 rule? (context). If we keep reading how does the context explain "world" in v. 15? ¹⁶ *For all that is in the world, **the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.*** ¹⁷ *The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

Do you love and live the world's values or love and live the will of God? *World* in this context means the sinful system and categories of sin (lust of the flesh and eyes and pride), those are not from God the Father, but from the system of evil John here calls "the world." We are to love the world's *sinner*s (the only kind of people there are) but we're not to love the world system of sin, its lusts and pride. Do love sinners but hate the system that ensnares them in sin

There is a kind of love that God hates, when we love the world, its desires, and live for the world. Demas, like Judas, defected from the faith, and Paul explained why in 2 Tim. 4:10: "*Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me...*" Being in love with this present world was behind his deserting Paul (1 John 2:19 ala v. 15)

Jesus also talked about people who are with the believers and hear the same word with them but never bear fruit, in His parable of the sower, Matt 13:22 "*this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful ...*" (ESV). Jesus compared worldliness, "the cares of the world," to thorns that choke out the word's effect.

The word *love* in 1 Jn 2:15 is *agape*, highest love, a love that puts highest devotion toward what it loves above all else. It's love that gives for what it loves, and sacrifices for it. Unbelievers love the world with this highest love and dedication, it is above all else in their heart and mind, and they will give and sacrifice to be worldly. It is a love of the will, a daily choice and commitment. John says don't love the world, committing to it in your daily choices, don't desire its passing desires (v. 16), love and live God's will (v. 17).

Rick Kress explains this well: "True Christians *do not* habitually and persistently love the world ... the verb "loves" is present tense, indicating an ongoing/habitual loving of the world. Love for God is not in the man who is consistently devoted to the world, or to the things in the world, no matter what he may claim ... A man whose life is characterized by a steady devotion to the *God-hating world system* shows that he has no real love for God the Father. Love for God and love for the world and its things are "mutually exclusive"⁷

Go back a few pages to James 4 where we read a similar statement. James 2 also talks about those who profess faith but don't possess it, who say they have faith, but there's no fruit to show life, it's just a dead faith that cannot save, just like demons believe truths about God, but they don't love God or live for God's will. In James 4:4, he calls professing believers spiritual adulterers, because they say they love the Lord in a covenant relationship, but they really love the world, and share the love of intimate friendship with the world:

Jas 4:4: *You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God ...*

Is there hope for these enemies of God who are too friendly with or in love with the world, its lusts and pride? There is in v. 6, PTL! ... **He gives a greater grace.** Therefore it says, "**GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**" ⁷ **Submit** therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ **Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded** [i.e., repent inside and out]... ¹⁰ **Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord**

...
If you admit tonight you love the world with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, that the desire of your flesh and eyes and pride is worldliness, not godliness, James says you're an enemy of God. But there is grace greater than your sin if you humbly repent of it! God is opposed to the boastful pride of life in you, but He gives grace to the humble who seek cleansing and purification in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone. For God so loved sinners *who so loved the world* that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever (even a natural enemy of God, a sinner like you or me), *whosoever believes in Jesus* shall not perish but have eternal life!

To believe in Him is to believe who He claimed to be: Lord, Ruler, Master, King. And if we really believe that, we will submit to Him, as v. 7 says, and begin to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil. When our new heart is still drawn to the world, we fight it, because though we're "*in the world,*" believers are no longer "*of the world.*"

3rd test: Are you continuing in the family of faith?

Back in 1 John 2, v. 19 says some went out from the family of faith but there are others who the gospel continues in, remains, abides...

1 Jn 2:24 *As for you, let that **abide** [remain] in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.* ²⁵ *This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.*

True believers who continue in the faith, those who the gospel is continually dwelling in or living in them, they have the promise of eternal life that starts now. It says if the gospel message abides in us, we abide with the Father and the Son, even *in them*. We dwell with and in them as family, as someone dwells or lives in a home: ²⁸ *Now, little children, **abide in Him**, so that when He appears, **we may have confidence** and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.* ²⁹ *If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.*

Children continue in the family and take on the family likeness. If we are "born of Him," spiritually born into this family, we will manifest the nature of our father the more that we grow. "Little children" is not a term for those who've arrived, they need to grow a lot, but even with little children you can see growth and likeness to their father. If you are growing, even baby steps, but want to be like your Father, if you're continuing in His family the church and becoming like your Father, if you love and look forward to being with your church family, if you especially long to see your brother Jesus coming again, as v. 28 says, you can have confidence in Him

Even "little children" in the faith (v. 12) have their sins forgiven, it says in v. 12. The Father says at the end of v. 13 "all my children know me." And if we're His children, we'll keep growing, as many believe v. 13-14 speak of stages of spiritual growth in the family:

¹⁴ *I have written to you, fathers [older in faith], because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men [no longer "little children"], because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.*

Some of you are little children in v. 12, you need to go from boys to men. Your sins may be forgiven, like v. 12 says, but you need to grow up and be strong young men, who the word of God lives in so that you overcome the evil one. How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to God's Word, by it living in him. We don't need 20-30 year-old guys mastering video games, God's looking for a few good men who will be mastered by His Word, overcoming the lusts of the world, the flesh, the devil, the evil one. You young people can be a strong force for God if you're strong in the Word of Christ that dwells in your richly, strong in Scriptures.

And we need fathers in the faith, older believers to be teaching us younger believers, those who have known from the beginning the truths of the gospel that they have lived in a long time. And little children, if you're young or new in the faith, if you pass the tests (you seek to trust and obey and to stop loving the world, and you continue in the family of faith) be encouraged when you sin, v. 2 says you have an Advocate. Be assured, v. 12 says, your sins are forgiven. These things are written so we who believe in Jesus can know we are in Him (5:13) and so we can be happy in Him (1:4).

¹ John MacArthur, "Dead Faith, Part 1" (GTY message 90-7, Feb. 16, 1986).

² <http://thecripplegate.com/can-you-be-a-christian-and-not-love-jesus/>

³ <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/57-home-school-families-have-different-backgrounds-than-commonly-assumed>

⁴ For the history of separate classes and ministries to children from Bible times through the Reformation, long before the modern "Sunday School" movement, see <http://media.sermonaudio.com/mediapdf/416131336162.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=20883>

⁶ John MacArthur, Jr., *Saved Without a Doubt*, MacArthur Study Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 72-73.

⁷ Eric Kress, *Notes on the Study and Exposition of 1 John*, p. 56-57.