

That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life

Grounds of Assurance

1 John 4:13-21

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Scripture

In his book titled *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, Tim Keller writes:

Many years ago, in my first pastorate, I met with a teenage girl in our congregation. She was about sixteen at the time, and she was discouraged and becoming depressed. I tried to encourage her, but there was a revelatory moment when she said, “Yes, I know Jesus loves me, he saved me, he’s going to take me to heaven – but what good is it when no boy at school will even look at me?”

She said she “knew” all these truths about being a Christian, but they were of no comfort to her. The attention (or the lack of it) of a cute boy at school was far more consoling, energizing, and foundational for her joy and self-worth than the love of Christ. Of course this was a perfectly normal response for a teenage girl. Nevertheless it was revealing of how our hearts work. [Jonathan] Edwards would say that she had the opinion that Jesus loved her, but she didn’t really know it. Christ’s love was an abstract concept while the love of these others was real to her heart.¹

Do you have assurance of God’s love for you? The Apostle John insists that God wants us to know that we are his and that we can have assurance that our Christian experience is real.

Let’s read about grounds of assurance in 1 John 4:13-21:

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in

¹ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Viking, 2015), 163.

us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:13-21)

Introduction

John states three times in the paragraph we just read that “we abide in [God] and he in us” (verses 13, 15, 16). People today scoff at such a statement. After all, they insist, we live in the age of reason and science. How in the world can anyone prove the statement that John made?

Yet, John insists that we can be sure that we abide in God and he in us.

Lesson

First John 4:13-21 gives us five pieces of evidences by which we may be sure that we abide in God and he in us.

Let’s use the following outline:

That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life

1. We Have Been Given the Holy Spirit (4:13)
2. We Have the Apostolic Testimony (4:14)
3. We Have Confessed that Jesus Is the Son of God (4:15)
4. We Have Confidence in God's Love for Us (4:16-19)
5. We Have Love for Our Brothers (4:20-21)

I. We Have Been Given the Holy Spirit (4:13)

First, we have been given the Holy Spirit.

In 1 John 3:24, John wrote, "Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us." His point is that it is "by the Spirit" that we know that "he abides in us." Now John adds the thought that we abide in him, as he writes in 1 John 4:13, **"By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."** So John teaches his beloved flock that the Holy Spirit abides in us and that we abide in the Holy Spirit. Both truths are important and emphasized throughout John's letter.

I wonder if we are fully aware of this glorious truth. The Holy Spirit abides in me and I abide in the Holy Spirit. I am a new creation in Christ, and I have the Third Person of the Trinity abiding in me. He is the one who enables me to live a life that is pleasing to the Father. He is the one who empowers me to say "No!" to sin. He is the one who enables me to love my brothers and sisters in Christ. He is the one who strengthens me to serve unbelievers who are lost apart from the saving grace that is found only in Jesus. He is the one who assures me that I am a Christian.

II. We Have the Apostolic Testimony (4:14)

Second, we have the apostolic testimony.

John writes in verse 14, **“And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.”** At the beginning of his letter, John appealed to what “we have seen” and also to “testify,” as he wrote in 1 John 1:2, that “the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.” What was seen and testified is that God has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, **“to be the Savior of the world.”** Interestingly, only here (and in John 4:42) is Jesus said to be the **“Savior of the world.”** The word for **“Savior”** covers all aspects of Jesus’ work for sinners. He is a great Savior.

Acts 4:12 states, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Jesus is the only Savior of sinners. There is no other Savior. Allah cannot save sinners. Buddha cannot save sinners. Good deeds cannot save sinners. Only Jesus saves sinners. We must come to Jesus to be saved on his terms or not at all. This is the testimony of the apostles. Our assurance of salvation is grounded in the apostolic testimony.

III. We Have Confessed That Jesus Is the Son of God (4:15)

Third, we have confessed that Jesus is the Son of God.

John writes in verse 15, **“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”** Confessing Jesus to be the Son of God in John’s day was a big deal. People living in the Roman Empire had to confess that

Caesar was Lord. So, to confess that someone other than Caesar was Lord involved a major commitment. This happened, of course, when a person was born again by the Spirit of God and became a new creation in Christ. There was then a mutual indwelling of God in the believer and the believer in God. Believers were empowered to make a full-throated confession of their new allegiance to Jesus. Some suffered for making this new confession. But their suffering paled in comparison to the glory that awaited them.

The Apostle Paul made a similar statement about confessing Jesus in his letter to the Romans. He wrote in Romans 10:9-10, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” A person may think that all that is required for salvation is saying a few words. It is something like saying the pledge of allegiance to the United States. But what Paul and John are saying is that to confess Jesus is the equivalent of giving up one’s life. Another way of looking at it is that to confess Jesus is to switch allegiance from Satan to God. Confessing Jesus as the Son of God is a radical, life-transforming commitment and assures us that we abide in God and he in us.

IV. We Have Confidence in God’s Love for Us (4:16-19)

Fourth, we have confidence in God’s love for us.

John writes in verse 16, **“So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”** Regenerated believers know experientially and savingly the love of God for them. It is not mere head knowledge. It is

a love that comforts, supports, encourages, and sustains believers. John notes that **“God is love.”** The Biblical writers never say that “love is God.” One of God’s attributes is love and he demonstrates his love in the lives of his adopted children.

Once again, John calls believers to demonstrate the reality of their profession of faith by the love that God has for us. Believers have a deep sense of God’s love for us. This is the testimony of people who come to saving faith as adults. They recognize that they were not in a right relationship with God. They may even recognize that they were at enmity with God. Then, when they were regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit, they have a deep sense of God’s love for them. They are like children knowing the love of their parents for them. Notice how children play on the playground. Their parents are milling around and chatting with each other. Then, one of the children gets hurt. He immediately cries out and looks for his parent for comfort and support. Believers are a little like that in this world. We go about our business but when we experience pain, we cry out and look to our loving Heavenly Father to comfort us with his love.

John writes in verse 17, **“By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.”** A believer’s love is **“perfected with us”** as believers abide in God and he abides in believers. This is how believers face **“the day of judgment”** with confidence. We are children of the Father and Jesus is our model. The world did not welcome Jesus when he first came and the world now does not welcome Jesus’ brothers and sisters. But on the day of judgment, the Judge will understand all things and correct all wrongs.

The worldwide pandemic of COVID-19 has exposed the great fear that so many people have about death. In one sense,

it is understandable because the risks are significantly increased and after almost 18 months of warnings, lockdowns, and so on, most people probably know someone who has died with COVID-19. The **“day of judgment”** of which John speaks is a future day when there is a great judgment. However, there is a reckoning on the day of death. Every person will stand before his or her Creator and will have to give an account for his or her life. Only those who know the love of God savingly may stand with confidence on that day.

John writes in verse 18, **“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.”** The love of which John is speaking may refer to God’s love for us, or the mutual love between God and believers, or the love of believers for others and God. John’s stress may be on the latter for he goes on to say in verses 19-20, **“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”** The word John uses for **“fear”** refers to an emotion experienced in anticipation of some specific pain or danger. Love and fear are mutually exclusive because love is other-centered and fear is self-centered. One evidence of new life in Jesus is loving fellow believers. There is a desire to serve others. There is a commitment to do what is best for them. This love for others casts out fear of punishment on the day of judgment.

When I was a boy, my brother and I got into a fight. My mother heard us and came in and stopped us. She told us to go to our rooms. She also told us that our Dad was going to punish us when he got home. Those few hours waiting for our Dad to get home were filled with fear. We were fearful because we

anticipated the punishment that was due to come to us. Now, most days were not like that. Most days, my brother and I played well together. We loved each other well. And we looked forward to the time when Dad would get home for dinner. For the Christian, we know that our sins have been fully paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus. We know the love of God personally and experientially. We are also enabled to love fellow believers. And so, for the Christian, love casts out fear.

John writes in verse 19, **“We love because he first loved us.”** This is one of the greatest verses in the Bible. God set his love on those whom he elected to be part of his family. He did not set his love on them because he saw something worth loving in them. Rather, he set his love on them because it is his nature to love. God is love and he seeks persons to love. It is from this love that believers are enabled to love at all.

It was God’s love for believers that motivated the great missionary enterprise of the nineteenth century. Believers experienced the love of God, and hundreds of them left the comforts of their homes to take the good news of God’s love to people in foreign countries. God’s love for them enabled them to love others enough to tell them about Jesus. God may still call some of us today to go to a foreign land to share his love with unbelievers there. However, for most of us, we are able to share God’s love in simple ways right where we live. We can serve on a ministry team in our church. We can invite people into our homes for coffee or a meal. We can share the good news of the gospel with others.

V. We Have Love for Our Brothers (4:20-21)

And fifth, we have love for our brothers.

John writes in verses 20-21, **“If anyone says, ‘I love**

God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

One piece of evidence by which we may be sure that we abide in God and he in us is that we have love for our brothers. John forcefully makes his point that a claim to love God must be seen in love for one's brother. John does not clarify whether the **"brother"** is a fellow believer or a fellow human being. Likely, he means that the **"brother"** is any other person and not only a fellow believer.

Jesus was once asked, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" Jesus' answer was, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:36-40). John summarizes Jesus' teaching on love for God and love for neighbor. I demonstrate my love for God by forsaking all my sins and obeying all his commandments. And I demonstrate my love for my brother by seeking his forgiveness when I wrong him and doing all I can for his good. And when I do this I am assured that I abide in God and he in me.

Conclusion

Queen Victoria (1819-1901) once attended a service in St. Paul's Cathedral and listened to a sermon that interested her greatly. Afterwards she asked her chaplain, "Can one be absolutely sure in this life of eternal safety?" His answer was that he knew no way that one could be absolutely sure.

This incident was published in the *Court News* and came to the notice of a minister named John Townsend. After reading of Queen Victoria's question and the answer she received, he prayed and then sent the following note to the queen:

To Her Gracious Majesty, our beloved Queen Victoria, from one of her most humble subjects: With trembling hands, but heart-filled love, and because I know that we can be absolutely sure now for our eternal life in the home that Jesus went to prepare, may I ask Your Most Gracious Majesty to read the following passages of Scripture: John 3:16; Romans 10:9–10. I sign myself, your servant for Jesus' sake, John Townsend

John Townsend was not alone in praying about his letter to the queen. He took others into his confidence, and they offered up prayer to God in Her Majesty's behalf.

About two weeks later he received the following letter:

To John Townsend: I have carefully and prayerfully read the portions of Scripture referred to. I believe in the finished work of Christ for me, and trust by God's grace to meet you in that home of which he said, "I go to prepare a place for you." (Signed) Victoria Guelph

After Queen Victoria's discovery of Christian assurance, she used to carry a small booklet to give away. Its title was *Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment*. This is what she found in Christ.²

I pray that you too may be assured that you abide in God and he in you. Amen.

² See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2002/august/13791.html>.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can
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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
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