

“How Can I Know I’m Saved?”

1 John 5:11-13

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(Lord’s Day Service, Sunday, July 16, 2017)

1 John 5:11-13

11 And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 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.

Introduction

This post-modern millennial generation has a lot of strengths. They are sensitive towards individuals and are not judgmental towards people, which pictures the justification of Jesus Christ and how He forgives us again and again. These days, people are more comfortable expressing themselves and being who they are because society is so accepting. This has affected how people identify themselves, particularly through gender. Gender identity has become very subjective. Even if someone’s gender expression is different than his/her physically assigned gender, our culture accepts and embraces them.

But as we look into the Bible, if you are a child of God, God determines our identity. In fact, we don’t know who we are until He tells us who we are because God created us. There is a purpose to everything He has created, and He uses us to picture His worth and beauty to the world. If you are a child of God, it’s God who determines your identity, and God tells us who we are through the Bible. According to the Bible, gender is objective, not subjective, and is determined by physical birth. God ordained you to be male or female through your DNA. We cannot define ourselves by what the world says but by what the Word of God says. However, gender is only a small part of our identity: our main identity is that we are children of God in Jesus Christ.

To know who we are, we need to study the Bible, and I believe 1 John is about that. It teaches us how we can know that we are children of God. For those of you who are saved, you need to have the assurance of salvation – you need to know that you are a child of God. And for those of you who know that, you need to understand how to explain it through the Word of God so you can counsel and help other people know if they are born again or not.

Let’s review the books in the Bible written by John and the purpose of each of them:

John – How can I be saved? [Birth]

1 John – How can I know that I am saved? [Identity]

2 John – How can I grow in my walk? [Growth]

3 John – How can I faithfully serve? [Faithfulness]

Revelation – How can I be faithful until the end? [Perseverance]

I believe that as John was writing these books, he was thinking about the progression of a child of God growing up.

*John 20:31 – 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.*

The Book of John was written so that you can be saved.

*1 John 5:13 – 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.*

John wrote 1 John to believers so we could know that we are children of God. By reading it, we can know that we are saved.

I. We can have eternal life through Jesus [11-12]

A. God’s story: God gave us eternal life [11]

Only God can give us eternal life. When it says God gave this to us, the “us” is referring to all of the believers in Jesus Christ. We deserved eternal condemnation and suffering, but He gave us eternal life.

B. Jesus’ story: This life is in his Son [11]

The eternal life that God the Father gave to us is in the Son, Jesus. The second person of the trinity, Jesus Christ, while remaining as God, became a man. He lived a perfect life to die for imperfect people and died the death that we deserved. And if we put our faith in Him, we can have eternal life. Why? I don’t know! But that is the law that God has ordained. Somehow, the objective fact of Jesus Christ is received into the subjective heart of faith, and spiritual life is conceived. It’s life **like** the Son that we have – we become like Jesus. It’s life **for** the Son that we ought to live – we live our lives for Jesus Christ.

C. Man’s story: Life and death [12]

There are only two kinds of people: you either have Jesus or you don’t have Jesus. We have a choice in this life. Our lives are short, but they’re important because they determine where we will be for all of eternity. For believers, our lives are important because they determine how much of Jesus we can have and receive. There are consequences after this life, and you need to receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord so your sins can be forgiven. You either have eternal life or death, which is determined by whether you have the Son or don’t have the Son. Death does not mean the end of existence, but it means eternally existing in the wrath of God.

D. Our story: And this is the testimony [11]

There’s **the** story that God so loved the world and sent His son, but **our** story is, “Okay, Jesus, come into my heart.” **Our** story becomes part of **the** story. Together, we picture Jesus. What is a testimony? A testimony is not a tale but a truthful reality. The objectivity of Jesus Christ dying on the cross 2,000 years ago is experienced

subjectively, and it becomes the testimony of our hearts as we profess and proclaim Jesus.

II. We can know that we have eternal life [13]

While evangelizing, my generation used to ask the question, “If you were to die right now, do you know where you would be headed?” For us, it’s more of an identity issue, and we ask, “Are you a child of God?”

A. What are some hindrances to knowing that I have eternal life?

1. Ignorance

If I were to ask, “Do you know you are a child of God?”, some people would respond, “I think so?” because they don’t really know how to determine that.

2. Doubts

Sometimes there are doctrinal doubts, and people think, “If I doubt, am I still a Christian?” Other times there are circumstantial doubts, and people think there is a lack of evidence of God’s presence in their lives. When hardships happen, they question if God is real and whether or not they are Christian. We have to understand that in this life, we are not there yet because we are in between the promise and the Promised Land. There will be confusion, but that does not necessarily mean you should doubt your identity in being a child of God.

3. Sins

Some people struggle because they think to themselves, “If I’m a Christian, how can I continue to sin like this?”, and are discouraged by the frequency of failure in their lives. There is a lack of evidence of change. We need to understand through 1 John that even Christians sin, and that’s part of Christian life. Just because you sin, does not mean you are not saved.

4. Feelings

Some people think, “If I’m really saved, I would love God, but I don’t have passion like I used to. Maybe that wasn’t real.” They either feel a lack of love for God or a lack of love from God. You have to understand that we were born with sin nature, but after becoming Christian, we now have a spiritual nature. So sometimes when your sin nature is not fed, you experience a lack of emotion, and even though in your spiritual nature, there is a desire to love and serve God, you believe your lack of feelings is representative of all that you have. Sometimes you don’t have the emotions, but you still have a small desire to live for God. It may not be the predominant emotion, but it will be the prevailing emotion.

Don’t rely on your feelings. Feelings are responders, not the identity, of your heart. When you get what you want, you have positive feelings, and

when you don't get what you want, you have negative feelings. Emotions are never a safeguard to what we believe of the state of our salvation. We need to draw our assurance of salvation from faith in the facts of the Scripture, not from our feelings.

B. How can I know that I have eternal life?

Eternal life means that you have the life of God in you, so the characteristic of someone who has eternal life is that they have the character of God in them.

1. God is holy and God is love

The Book of 1 John talks about two pillar attributes of God: His holiness and His love. All the other verses coil around these two pillars.

*1 John 1:5 – This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and **in him is no darkness at all.***

The first part of 1 John is relating to that, and when you go to the second half, it's all mixed. John is circular in his writing, and it's not clearly logical, so he mixes in these two attributes.

*1 John 4:16 – 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.*

Towards, the latter part, He talks about how God is love.

2. We are God's children through Jesus Christ

*1 John 3:1 – See what kind of love the Father has given to us, **that we should be called children of God**; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*

The love that God has for the Son is the love that He has for us, and we are children of God because we are in Jesus Christ.

*1 John 3:9 – No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, **for God's seed abides in him**; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.*

There is sin nature, but God's seed remains in Him. The Word of God comes in, the Holy Spirit uses it, and now you're born with a Spirit's nature. The Greek word for seed in this passage is "sperma" – the seed of God. We become offspring, children of God in Jesus Christ.

3. As God's children, we will become like the Father God who is holy and loving

Before, we only had the DNA of Adam in us, but because the seed of God came into our hearts, we now have the spiritual DNA of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we will be holy and loving just like Jesus.

***1 John 1:9** – If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

As Christians, we still sin, but we want to be holy like God our Father. Our spiritual nature propels us to confess our sins and repent so that we will be holy.

***1 John 4:16** – 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.*

God is holy, God is love, and if we are His children, we will have the propensity in our hearts to be holy and loving, and that will show in our lifestyle. That's how we know that we are saved.

All throughout history, people have been wrestling with the same question: What is the mark of real, saving faith? During a period called The Great Awakening (1725-1750), an incredible revival happened in America. However, after many years, those who claimed to have been converted showed no evidence of life change. Many came to Christ, but then the emotions died down, and the culture remained. People came to church and did things without heart or emotion -- they subjected themselves to cultural Christianity. Some were Christian and some probably weren't – they didn't show signs of change in their lives. People doubted whether there was actual fruit during The Great Awakening. To respond to critics of The Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards wrote his famous book called A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections.

Edwards wrote, *“The principle evidence of life is motion; so the principle evidence of saving grace is holy motion.”* Holy motion, meaning a life change that comes from a change of heart. You can tell that someone is spiritually alive by their movement towards the things of God and their spiritual fruit, just as Jesus says a tree is known by its fruit. Apostle Paul makes it clear in Romans 7 that every believer struggles with his own nature. Why? Because the Holy Spirit has given birth to a spiritual nature in you, and there are battles in your heart.

Edwards continues, *“The supreme proof of a true conversion is holy affections, zeal for holy things, longings after God...”* Notice that he's not talking about just emotion but affections and desires. Though there may be predominant feelings, there is a longing after God and a desire for purity that prevails. To summarize, if you're saved, there is an inner affection that results in outward actions – they must be together. There cannot be just outward action, but there must be inner affections – only you can

tell this. A subjective explosion takes place in your heart that results in objective motion.

John is essentially saying the same thing. You have the desire to be holy and loving, which is your Spirit's nature. Though you sin, you fight. As you struggle throughout your life, you will change because of the inner desire, propensity, and power that you have inside of you. That's what you must look at – not just your sins, not just what's on the outside, but what's inside coming through your outside actions.

III. Questions and suggestions

A. Why is it important to know that you are saved – Warning and Necessity

The warning is this: you can be sincerely wrong.

Matthew 7:21 – “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Just because you profess and say that you are a Christian, does not mean that that's reality. Profession does not guarantee life change. An inner desire is only proven through outward action. After times of revival, emotions die down, and often, it becomes cultural Christianity, and legalism takes place. When the fire dies down, only the fume remains. You could be sincerely wrong. That's why we need to talk about this.

1 John 5:13 – 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.

That's why John devotes an entire book to the assurance of salvation.

When siblings fight, sometimes the older one will tease the younger one by saying that they're not truly part of the family and that they were picked up from under a bridge. Can you imagine what it would be like if every time something happened, a child doubted his/her relationship with the family and asked, “Is this because I'm not your real child?” Can you imagine the insecurity you would experience, especially after sinning, if you did not know you were a child of God? It is absolutely foundational knowing that you know you are a child of God. It is a springboard for your growth.

Martin Lloyd Jones wrote a book called Spiritual Depression. And he says, “*Deliverance from spiritual depression begins with an understanding of justification, not sanctification, as one might suspect.*” In order for you to continue fighting and growing even after you sin, it's not about your sanctification, but it's about making sure you know that you're justified. You need to know that you're saved no matter what happens and that God forgives you and God loves you. Understanding justification is absolutely important.

Here is the great exchange: He took our wickedness and gave us His righteousness! To get rid of “spiritual depression” you must say farewell to your past! No matter how dark the stains may be, they have all been blotted out! It is finished! Never look back on your sins again! They will only “depress” you! If you focus on “your sinfulness,” you will only conclude that “you are not good enough!” And whether you believe it or not, nobody is good enough! The issue is not our goodness...the issue is God's goodness. It is only when we truly trust Christ that true happiness and joy are possible for us. Deliverance is not found in making resolutions to live a better life, fasting, grieving or praying...Repeatedly tell yourself, “I rest my faith on Christ alone, who died for my transgressions to atone.” (Martin Lloyd Jones, Spiritual Depression)

This is the foundation, this is the beginning. If we don't have it, we're going to be so discouraged to a point where we will not grow.

B. Can I lose my salvation?

No, you cannot lose your salvation once you're saved. Salvation means a nature is born and that nature will never die because it's the nature of Jesus Christ. No one can kill that nature. Once you're alive, you can never lose it.

Romans 8:35-39 – Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 1-4 talks about our justification, and chapters 5-8 are implications of this foundation of justification and how we need to grow. Even through struggles of sin, as mentioned in Romans 7, there is Romans 8. You have a Spirit's nature, and you will grow because God loves you, and you will become like Jesus Christ. No, you cannot lose your salvation.

C. What about those who fall away?

Hebrews 6:4-6 – For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

You might be thinking to yourself, doesn't this passage contradict Romans 8? However, Hebrews and Romans 8 are talking about two different kinds of people. Romans 8 is talking about people who are truly saved, but Hebrews 6 is talking about

people who were very close but not really saved. People can come to church, participate in cultural Christianity, and be legalists, but in their hearts, not be saved. Just as it says in Matthew 7, people can profess Christ, and one day, Jesus might say that He never knew them.

An appropriate example of this is Judas. Judas was one of the twelve disciples and was with Jesus for three and a half years. He had the empowerment to perform miracles and heard Jesus's teachings, but I believe he was never saved. Let's compare him to Peter, who denied Jesus. When you look at the snapshot of their sins, you might say that they were both unbelievers. But Judas proves that he was never a believer because he does not repent. However, as we follow Peter, he always comes back to the Lord, and slowly through ups and downs, he becomes a leader of the first century church.

People who have fallen away were either never believers or if they are believers, they are on their way back. Once you have salvation, you can never lose it. If people fall away, they're either Hebrews 6 people or Romans 8 people. They'll come back, just like Peter.

D. How can I know that someone else is saved?

We can't really tell that someone else is saved based on what they say or what they do.

Matthew 7:21-23 – “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

Someone can really look like a Christian, but they may not be. We can speculate, but we can never know 100%. I believe there will be a lot of surprises in heaven, like the thief on the cross. It was only during a private conversation with Jesus Christ that he became a Christian. There also might be sad surprises. As far as other people, we can never tell 100%, and that's what this passage is saying. Only you can know, and 1 John is written so that you can self-evaluate instead of judging other people.

E. How can I grow in the assurance of my salvation?

I'll read part of an e-mail I got from someone to receive counseling. This is being shared with permission:

“Pastor Min, I met up with you a couple years ago because I was struggling with homosexual desires. My desires have been getting worse. I have really lost hope in fighting now. I feel like it is a hopeless battle. I feel like I'll never overcome. I've been questioning my salvation. If it was ever real.”

This passage will not only address our assurance of salvation but also our addiction to sin. It will help us not only in overcoming our addictions but also in our spiritual growth.

1. Even if you are a true believer, you will sin

1 John 1:8 – If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Often, we look at people's sin and ask, "Is he saved? Is he Christian?" You can't really know if one is saved just by seeing their bad. According to 1 John, you know by seeing their good. Is there anything good inside of their hearts, even in the midst of their sinful patterns?

2. If you are a true believer, you will see that you still have sin

1 John 1:8 – If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

We should be able to see our own sins – every believer should. There are no sinless Christians: only blind sinners or self-aware sinners. I was talking to this man who was in his seventies and was a Christian for his entire life, and he said that he never knew he was a sinner until he learned heart motives, and he believes he became a Christian at that time. If you are a true believer, you'll be able to see your sin.

3. The sign of a true believer is that he will repent of his sins

1 John 1:9 – If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

"If" means we have a choice. We need to constantly see our sin and therefore see our nature and fight it. You're not fighting a million sins, you're fighting one heart. When you sin, the essence of this sin is reflected in all facets of your life, even in good things, so you have to be able to see it.

"Confess" means agree. We need to agree to the Word of God. The Word of God states what is holy and what is right, and as He teaches us how to live, we see the discrepancy between ourselves and what the Word of God says. As the Word of God comes into our hearts, we pray and confess our sins so that we can be forgiven. Our sins are specific and constant, just as the word "confess" is in present tense. Throughout your life, this is a habitual thing that we have to do. A lot of people think that confessing our sins is a negative thing, but it's not because God always loves us. Repentance is not begging for His smile but receiving His tears that cleanse us. He tells us to repent because He's looking for any excuse to stuff His grace into us.

So ask yourself this question: Am I struggling against sin in my life? If you aren't, then you might need to check your heart. It's not only when you sin that you have to check your heart, but it's when you're not sinning and when you're not repenting that you also need to check your heart. You're never **not** sinning because there's always a motive for self-glorification in your heart. There are so many good-looking sins, so check your heart if you cannot see them. Only people who are spiritually alive struggle against sin. People who are spiritually dead don't struggle against sin because they have no life force in them that counters their kingship of self. You have to take your eyes off of your feelings and failures and instead, focus on Christ, the cross, and His Word.

4. If you are a true believer, you can be forgiven again and again and again, because of Jesus

The blood of Jesus Christ will never run out, and the power of the blood of Jesus Christ is greater than your sins.

*1 John 1:9 – If we confess our sins, **he is faithful and just** to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

God is just because He died for us. It would be unjust for God not to forgive us. God is faithful because He will continuously forgive us. It's not about, "Am I clean? Am I not?" It's not about "I", but it's about "He." He is faithful and just. Don't look at your sin – think about Jesus Christ.

5. If you are a true believer, you will grow as you keep repenting and fighting your sins

1 John 1:9 – If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

In the midst of confessing your sins, He will cleanse and purify us. Repentance is the process that God uses to help us to grow not only to be justified but to be glorified. This passage is not only for our assurance of salvation but for overcoming our addiction and for our growth.

1 John 3:9 – No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.

The goal of life is not just overcoming sin but loving Christ. In the midst of sinning, you can still grow. You may or may not overcome your addictions in this life. You certainly will not overcome your sinful nature until you die or until Christ returns, but that's okay because you're growing in Jesus Christ. It's not about getting away from the world but about conquering the

world with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and He does it not with perfect people but with forgiven sinners, just like us.

Conclusion

Nowhere in 1 John does it say that a child of God does not have an appetite for sin. Periodically, he may fall into sin, but a child of God has a hatred for sin that helps him to fight before sinning. But when he falls, there is a hatred for the distance between himself and God after sinning, so he repents. This hatred for sin is always greater than the love that he has for his sin, so he cannot help but to constantly confess his sins, and fight it with God's grace. He is forgiven again and again and again. In the midst of that messy struggle and bloody battle, he emerges as a humble saint and a growing child of God.

Blessed children of God, keep on fighting. Christian life is a messy struggle and bloody battle, but we're going to be humble saints and growing children of God to be the community, God is building a nation in us and through us.