

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part six
 Sunday, February 7th, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2074
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HOW TO HAVE ASSURANCE

1 John 2:3-6 - "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. [4] Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, [5] but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: [6] whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."

John couldn't make his subject any clearer than he does in these four verses. He's talking about **assurance**. And the two key phrases are in **verses 3 and 5** - "***This is how we know that we have come to know him....***"(3), and "***By this we may be sure that we are in him....***"(5).

That's what John is talking about. He doesn't just want them to be in Christ and have fellowship with God. That's great, but not quite enough. He wants these Christians to have the joy of **certainty**. He wants them to **know** that they know Christ.

We need to hear what John has to say. Coming to Christ is certainly coming to a God bigger than the best of our mental comprehension. There is great, beautiful mystery in knowing God. But that's not the part John is talking about here. John wants these Christians to **know** some things for sure. God is mystery, but not **all** mystery. And John wants to help these Christians to be possessed by a firm, unshakable confidence about what they have experienced in Jesus Christ, God the Son.

To see where John is taking us we need to **back up** before we go forward. He's already made some things very clear. Words alone don't produce conversion and words alone don't verify a walk with God. It takes more than **talk** to know God truly:

1 John 1:6 - "If we **say** we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."

1 John 2:4 - "Whoever **says** "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him...."

The tragedy of this kind of **verbal** Christianity is not only that it doesn't work. It's that you **feel the**

phoniness of it in your own heart. It drains your soul of energy because there's nothing more difficult than trying to convince yourself you're in the light when your own heart argues that you're not. You feel like you're trying to pass a three dollar bill before the throne room of heaven. It makes you timid, weak, and tired.

So it's not that John isn't loving in his words. He *is* loving. He's **confronting**, but he's ultimately, genuinely **loving**. He wants to call these people into **certainty**, and **joy**, and **authenticity**. He wants to draw them deeply into a walk with God that *is* genuine and *feels* genuine.

1) **I WANT TO START BY EXAMINING WHAT I THINK IS A FALSE UNDERSTANDING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON THE DOCTRINE OF ASSURANCE OF FAITH**

Romans 8:15-16 - "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" [16] The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...."

This is perhaps the classic New Testament passage on the subject of assurance. Certainly it's the most frequently quoted. The verse is commonly applied to the subject of assurance in a way something like this:

Let's say I've been really struggling in my Christian walk. Perhaps I have been giving in to some secret sin, harboring some unloving attitude, or possibly I'm just worn out with some ongoing battle (emotional or physical). At any rate, I feel far from God. Then the Holy Spirit comes and whispers to my heart, "***Don't worry Don, you are still my child. I still love you. You don't have to worry about slipping out of my hand.***"

In scores of churches this is taught to be the role of God's Spirit **bearing witness with my Spirit**. He simply soothes me and tells me I'm still on good terms as one of God's children.

Now, I don't in any way question the doctrine of the Holy Spirit "**bearing witness with my spirit**" about my adoptive sonship with my heavenly Father. The Bible teaches the Holy Spirit **does** this and I **believe** that with all my heart.

What I think gets confused at times, and what I want to look at today, is **how** the Holy Spirit

bears witness with my spirit. How does He *intend* to do that work? What should I be looking for Him to do? And perhaps most importantly, What is *my* role in this process? After all, Paul makes it clear there are *two* spirits involved - *His* Spirit and *my* spirit(16).

This subject is not just about theology. It's relevant and extremely practical. Bad theology doesn't just mix up *heads*. It destroys *lives*. I think there are confused people waiting to hear a voice in their minds but who never get what they're looking for. So they live with all sorts of condemnation and even mistakenly assume they aren't saved.

But that's not the only problem. There's another. And it's one I've encountered over and over speaking with people over the years. I've come to see that there are people who are sure they *do* hear a voice telling them all is well. But they have no business feeling all is well because they aren't living for the Lord.

For all these reasons I want to look at Paul's famous words in Romans chapter eight *before* we look at John's words in 1 John chapter 2. And I want you to see that they both teach exactly the same thing on the subject of assurance.

2) WHAT DOES PAUL ACTUALLY TEACH ABOUT ASSURANCE?

Let's go back to Paul's words in Romans chapter 8, but let's look at a few more verses in the surrounding context as well

Romans 8:10-16 - "But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. [11] If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. [12] So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. [13] For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. [14] For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. [15] For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" [16] The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...."

A) PAUL GOES TO GREAT LENGTHS TO OUTLINE THIS PROCESS OF LIVING IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

It comes, he says, as I yield to the Spirit. Paul says I live in Christ as the Spirit helps me to fulfill my *“debt”* to live for the Spirit - **“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh”(12)**. And secondly, Paul says I live in Christ as I **“put to death the deeds of the body”** - **“...if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live”(13b)**.

B) THEN PAUL USES THAT VERY FAMOUS PHRASE ALMOST EVERYONE KNOWS, EVEN IF THEY CAN'T TELL YOU WHERE IT'S FOUND IN THE BIBLE

Paul says the Holy Spirit **“...*bears witness with our spirit*”** that we are, in fact, children of God (16).

Now, the question that's important at this point is very simple and obvious. What does a **witness** do? What happens when a person testifies on behalf of someone else? And we all know what a witness does. The job of a witness is to **put forth evidence**. He saw something happen. He heard something said. And he speaks out what he knows to back up a case - either for the **defense** or the **prosecution**.

C) PAUL SEEMS TO RECOGNIZE THAT IN ALL OF OUR LIVES THERE WILL BE DAYS AND TIMES WHEN WE FEEL MORE SAVED THAN WE DO AT OTHER TIMES

And Paul also knows my feelings aren't always a reliable guide in gauging my sanctification. My relationship with Father God through Jesus Christ, God the Son, is too precious to be up in the air of my emotions and passing whims. Something solid is needed for a foundation.

So where will I turn for assurance? What happens when those times of emotional uncertainty and fatigue come? Specifically, ***what does the Holy Spirit do for me during those low times?***

Paul says He talks to my mind. He speaks to my spirit (small “s”). **But what does He say?** Paul says He **marshals evidence**. He reveals things. He shows my own mind the areas where there has been a **marked progress in yielding to the Spirit**. He helps me remember all the areas where I’ve learned to renounce and forsake those things He’s led me to forsake.

In other words, the Holy Spirit points out the **changes the new nature has made in my behavior**. This, of course, leads to the last point under this important process:

D) THE HOLY SPIRIT IS STILL ALWAYS THE *HOLY SPIRIT*

That means His witness only deals in **truth**. He always points to **growth in purity**. He **“bears witness with my spirit,”** but He won't **lie** on my behalf. He won't fake evidence that doesn't exist. In other words, assurance given by the Spirit is directly tied to my obedience to the will and Word of the Lord. If I'm not **acting** saved, the Holy Spirit can't make me **feel** saved.

Let me restate it as simply and clearly as I can. This is a basic point in understanding New Testament Christianity. **Salvation** is always by pure grace. It is always free and undeserved, though **not** unconditional. It is given on the basis of repentance and obedience. But there's more. While **salvation** is by grace, **assurance** is always by **works**. It flows out of my **obedience to the Lord**.

If you don't believe me, check it out for yourself:

1 John 2:3 - “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.”

1 John 2:5-6 - “....whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: [6] whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”

1 John 3:14 - "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death."

1 John 3:18-20 - "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. [19] By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; [20] for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything."

There are no exceptions here. In every verse we just read (and many more we didn't) John isn't talking about salvation directly. What he's talking about directly isn't being **saved**, but **knowing** we're saved. And it's always - in every single case - tied to our **works of obedience**.

Now let's wrap this up with one more point from our passage in 1 John:

3) **WHAT DOES JOHN TEACH ABOUT LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE WITH FULL ASSURANCE IN OUR HEARTS?**

A) **JOHN DESCRIBES THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AS "KNOWING HIM"**

"And by this we know that **we have come to know him**, if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3).

He doesn't say we have come to know **about** Him, but have come to know **Him**. This is not **dry knowledge**. It's not just the **static accumulation of facts**. It's not spending time in **frigid speculations** about Jesus. To know Him means my heart and mind and will - what the puritans used to call the **affections** of my life - are constantly drawn unto Jesus as **my** Lord.

In all the Scriptures, to **know God** always means a loving obedience and devotion. This is true even in the Old Testament:

Hosea 4:1-2 - "Hear the word of the Lord, O children of Israel, for the Lord has a

controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and *no knowledge of God in the land*; [2] there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.”

These are very telling verses. How could the writer say these people didn't know God? They had the commandments. They had the temple. They had the ark of the covenant and all of the regulations of purity and sacrifice. God spoke to them regularly through the prophets. How could anyone say they didn't know God?

They didn't know God because they were cursing, lying, and stealing. They were sexually impure. They were mean and cruel to each other. So the writer has no problem saying, ***"Whatever you people know, you don't know God!"*** That's exactly what John says in these verses.

B) JOHN DESCRIBES THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AS A LIFE LIVED "IN HIM"

"...but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him"(1 John 2:5).

Now John takes it a step further. We ***know*** Him. We are ***in*** Him. This is John's way of ***explaining*** the kind of knowledge Christians have of God through Christ. And we know it's a very important concept to John because John recorded this idea from Jesus Himself much earlier:

John 15:4-8 - "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. [5] I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. [6] If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. [7] If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. [8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

The point is really a simple one. ***I am to be in Christ the same way a branch is in the vine.*** And we all know how a vine works. Whatever flows up the vine flows into the branches. The life of the vine manifests itself in the fruit on the branch. You can't have one kind of life in the vine and another in the branch. As Jesus pointed out more than once, you can't gather grapes from a fig tree. Vine and branch share only ***one*** life. It is impossible for it to be otherwise.

John's epistle labors to apply this one principle. John says this is so basic - so universally true - that if anyone says he's in Christ then he ***must*** - he absolutely ***must*** - walk as Jesus walked. It's not just a matter of how he ***should*** walk. John's not offering ***advice*** or a ***recommendation***. It's a ***must*** issue. It can't possibly be otherwise.

The Christian life isn't just a series of propositions I hold as being true about Jesus. It's His life working out as fruit ***on the branches of my thoughts, words, loves, attitudes, web sites, movies, friends, week-ends, temperament, actions, and my reactions.***

Paul picks yet another picture to illustrate the same truth:

2 Corinthians 3:18 - "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

I still remember, as a small kid, the very first time I saw "Doctor Jeckel and Mr Hyde" on an old black and white movie. It just about scared me to death seeing Jeckel turn into Hyde - staring into the mirror - watching the fangs growing - the facial hair and eyebrows. It was an incredible sight for four boys just before bed with milk and cookies and a gullible old baby-sitter.

Paul describes the same process in total ***reverse*** as I look into the glorious face of my Lord. His glory rubs off on my life. I start to ***resemble*** Him. The life of the vine flows into the branch. This is the test of any spiritual practice that's designed to bring me closer to my Lord, be it worship, prayer, missionary service, seminars, retreats, devotions, or

church services.

How can I know for sure if I'm meeting God? I'll know for sure when I encounter that same old temptation later on in the week, or face that brother I used to resent, or am called upon to start tithing, or pay that debt to my creditors. ***If I've met the Lord at all in church, I will act differently!*** If I don't act differently, then the church doesn't need my kind of experience with Jesus.

If all of this sounds stern and legalistic, you've forgotten John's heart. He's pumping for ***confidence and assurance*** in our walk with God. This is the ***best way*** to live life. John doesn't want us missing out. Make sure the ***pathway of the Word*** and the ***inner witness of the Spirit*** both line up together. Any other approach hollows out the faith. Stay in the Word and yield to the Spirit. Give the Spirit something to witness to when the Devil brings his accusations against your soul. Build a life of ***inward Spiritual evidence***. Because that's where the joy is.