

Family Series 2023 #2:
That You May Know
1 John 5:10-13

Introduction

God delights to have the children come to Him to worship Him (Mark 10:13-16, Ps. 8:2). Children who grow up in a church like ours have an immense privilege of feeding weekly on Word and sacrament, enjoying the fellowship of the saints, learning to sing joyfully and confess their sins, etc. They hear the gospel preached regularly, and they hear it taught and see it lived out by their parents and other families. Along with this privilege come particular temptations, and two potent ones are that of presumption and that of doubt. Both of these things have to do with the question of assurance of salvation.

Presumption and Doubt

Speaking particularly to the kids living still living at home, it is never too early to take your faith seriously (Prov. 8:17). Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Do you turn to Him in repentance from your sins, the ways in which you disobey what God has said? Or, do you think that because you come to church, that is what makes you a Christian, that you will be spared from the wrath of God simply by coming here and being good sometimes? To think that this is why you are saved is the sin of presumption.

On the other hand, you might sometimes find yourself worried that you are not saved. You might ask, "What if I am not saved?" But "what if" statements like this are only doubts. The only real response is, "What if you are?" Instead, a reasonable question to ask is, "How do I know that I am saved? Can I have certainty about that?" The Scripture indicates that, yes, you can. But the certainty ultimately does not come from looking deep into yourself. Certainty about your salvation comes from looking at the Savior. This sort of certainty is what is meant by assurance of salvation.

That You May Know

In our text, John says that he writes to those who believe so that they would know that they have eternal life. In other words, the things that John wrote can be used as helps or evidences to give believers confidence regarding their salvation. The first thing to note is that John says that he who believes in the Son has the Son and therefore has eternal life. Someone does not believe in Jesus, trust in Jesus, lay hold of Jesus and not have eternal life. This is fundamentally because Jesus says that His sheep hear His voice and know Him, and He does not lose them (John 10:4, 27-30). And John says that this is God's testimony to us, and by understanding this we might *know* that we have eternal life. So, John argues that we can have certainty about our salvation simply by believing in Jesus. This begs a question, though. Why then do some lack assurance?

There are a number of things that cause a lack of assurance. It can be simply because you are not actually saved. It is possible to be in the (visible/historical) church, to have been in the church all your life, and be deceiving yourself and others about your faith (again, the sin of presumption). However, while these people do not have assurance, they also tend to not be troubled by it. Another cause is that you are living in sin (1 John 1:6-7, 2:3). If you are

not living like a Christian (including confessing your sins), then it is only natural that you might wonder if you really are a Christian. A third cause could be a misunderstanding of justification (God's legal declaration that we are right with Him – e.g., Rom. 4:20-5:2) and sanctification (the work of God growing us more into the image of Christ – e.g., 1 Thess. 4:3). It is possible for a Christian to think that because he is justified, he does not need to grow in sanctification. But then, when he realizes he still sins, he questions whether or not he is saved, forgetting that there is still a war in him (Gal. 5:17). The antidote to all of these causes for a lack of assurance at root is simply turning or returning to Christ, trusting in the work that He accomplished through His life, death, burial, and resurrection.

Evidences for Assurance

Scripture says you can know you have eternal life; but still, *how* do we know? Having addressed some causes for a lack of assurance, there are also a number of evidences that Scripture gives us which can encourage assurance. Here are five of them. First, John says that we know that we know God if we keep His commandments (1 John 2:3). One of the evidences that we love Christ is that we do what He says (John 10:15). This does not mean that we never sin. Rather, we desire on the one hand to serve the Lord, and when on the other we fail to do so or give in to sinful desires, we confess those sins. This is related to a second evidence, which is the work of the Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit is given to those Christ died for as a guarantee of their inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14), and the Spirit working in us bears fruit (Gal. 5:22-23). A third is that, when you sin, you experience the displeasure and the chastening of the Lord. God disciplines the children He loves (Heb. 12:7). A fourth is that the message of the gospel makes sense to you. The Word rings true. You know that you are a sinner, that you need a Savior, and that Jesus died on the cross for those sins (1 Cor. 1:18, 23-24, 2:14). And that message, while perhaps overwhelming, is the aroma of life to you (2 Cor. 2:15-16). Lastly (and this one does not come from Scripture as directly), if a child, or anyone, is asking this question, that itself is good evidence that God is at work in that child. Someone in whom the Spirit is not at work would not be concerned whether he has the Spirit, the guarantee of his inheritance.

Conclusion

The heart is deceitful (Jer. 17:9). It is true that a person can deceive themselves even with regard to their assurance. In the end, though, we must remember that we are not saved because we are sure about it. We are not saved by having assurance. We are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ. Whether you realize you have been presumptuous about the grace given to you or whether you fall into the temptation to wrongly doubt, the answer is to turn and look to Jesus, because He is the author and the finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:1-2). The best thing for a Christian's sense of insecurity is the security of Christ. If you want assurance, seek Christ all the more.