

How To Be Sure Of Salvation

1 John 5:9-13

Pastor John Miller

I want to read our passage, 1 John 5, beginning in verse 9.

John said, “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.” There is the witness of men—and we often receive what men say—and there is the witness or testimony of God, which is far more reliable and greater than the witness of men.

John goes on to say, “...for this is the witness of God, which He has testified of His Son.” God the Father, in His Word, is testifying and witnessing to us of His Son. “He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in Himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”

The question that we need to ask and seek to answer is, “Can a person know that they have eternal life?” Can an individual be confident and sure that they have eternal life? Some insist that they can never know but only hope that they will one day go to heaven. They think that it is somehow wrong to have this kind of assurance or to think there is something special about you to know that you’re going to go to heaven when you die. Others say that to claim you are saved is the epitome of pride and presumption.

But I believe the Bible is very clear; we’ve just read it: “that you may know that you have eternal life.” In verse 13, John says, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know...”—notice that word—“...that you have eternal life.” God wants us to know that we have eternal life.

This section of John’s epistle is all about the witness of God, the testimony of God, the record of God and our believing what God has said concerning His Son, which brings eternal life and knowing that we have eternal life, because God’s Word is true. So God wants us to have the assurance of eternal life.

And this assurance is not incompatible with humility. You can humbly understand that God saved you by His grace. It’s not that you are proud or self-confident, because that’s not what my faith lies in—in my own goodness or good works. Our faith lies in the person of Christ and in the reliability of God’s Word. So you can be confident that what God has spoken cannot be broken, and that we can trust His Word and know that we have eternal life.

It’s the realization that we have the life of God in our soul. And what is eternal life? Eternal life is not a synonym for heaven. Eternal life results, one day, in our going to heaven, but it’s not

some future thing that someday I know that I'm to get to go to heaven. Eternal life is something that we possess right now, as believers.

I like this definition of eternal life: the life of God in the soul of man. That's one of the best definitions of a Christian I've ever heard. It's a person who has God's life in them. And that is not just a quantity of life—that I'll live forever—but it's a quality of life now; it's a new, spiritual dimension of living. The Bible says that before our salvation, we "were dead in trespasses and sins," but when we were saved, we became believers in Christ and we "have eternal life." We entered into a new dimension, a new sphere, and we possess the life of God in our soul.

Jesus described it in John 17:3, when He was praying His great, high-priestly prayer. He said, in verse 24, "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory." In verse 3, He said, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent." So Jesus described eternal life as knowing God and having the assurance that one day we would be with God in heaven.

The first thing I want to address about assurance is that it is not necessary for salvation, but it is important. You can be saved but not assured. In other words, there are Christians who are on their way to heaven, but they don't know that; they don't realize that. It hasn't dawned on them. They don't have assurance of that.

A lot of times there are things that cause this lack of assurance. I believe, though, that it's important to have this assurance; God wants us to enjoy eternal life in the here and now, but we can't enjoy what we don't know we have.

Have you ever noticed that if you don't know you have something, you can't enjoy it? A story is told of the great newspaper man, William Randolph Hearst. He was also a great art collector. He had massive collections of works of art. There was one piece of art that he wanted, so he sent his servants out to find it. They spent a whole year and great expense traveling around the world to find this one piece of art. When they finally returned, Mr. Hearst asked them, "Did you find the painting I was looking for?"

They said, "Yes."

He asked, "Well, where is it?"

They said, "It's already in your collection. You already own it."

Some don't realize that they've been forgiven, they have eternal life and are on their way to heaven. We can't really enjoy what we don't know we have. So reason number one that assurance is important is that you need to enjoy salvation. You can't enjoy the Lord if you don't know you have the Lord.

Secondly, assurance is an important condition for serving Christ and helping others. How effective can you be in witnessing, ministering, serving or encouraging others if you don't know

you have eternal life? If you're not sure of your salvation, you're not free to go out and be a blessing to serve and minister to others.

Why do people often lack assurance? Often it's as a result of a misconception. Let me mention a few of them. Sometimes people think they must know the day or hour of their conversion. They think they must be able to go back to the year, to the day and to the time. That's wonderful when you can do that. I know people who can actually quote the day, year and the place and all the details of their conversion. But sometimes there are people, who have come to believe and trust in Christ and are born again and know the Lord, yet they can't pinpoint an exact time of their conversion. Many times that causes a lack of assurance.

Secondly, some believe that you must show emotion when you are saved, that you must even cry tears to truly be saved. They are looking for a repentance that brings about great sorrow, remorse and consternation. If you don't cry tears, then maybe you're not really saved.

Others say that you must raise your hand and walk forward at a public invitation. Public invitations are great—and I believe in them, and we do that—but that isn't what saves you. What saves you is your turning to Christ in faith and trusting in Him alone to save you. If you haven't walked down an aisle, gone down at a crusade or responded to an altar call, that doesn't necessarily mean that you aren't a true Christian. This is not a formula for how one enters the kingdom of God.

Some have the misconception that they must perform some religious rite or ritual. They'll say, "I haven't been baptized," or "I haven't taken communion," or "I haven't been confirmed" or "I haven't gone through catechism." They think that because they haven't had any or all of these religious experiences, they haven't been converted.

Others believe that you must speak in tongues to be saved. Some religious groups are actually aberrant and not, I believe, true, orthodox Christians. They claim that if you don't speak in tongues, you haven't really been saved.

Some think that you haven't really been saved if you haven't been baptized in Jesus' name only.

Some believe that they are not really saved, because they have stumbled and fallen into sin. They have committed some sin after they were saved, and they think they lost their salvation, and God won't save them again, so they're not a child of God. That leads to a lack of assurance.

So because of the lack of these experiences, some doubt their salvation and try to get you to doubt yours, but that is a misconception.

But it's possible that others aren't truly saved. I acknowledge that; we don't want to give anyone a false faith or a false hope that you are saved. Sometimes people get caught up in the emotion of church, of the worship, of the fellowship, but they really haven't repented or believed in Jesus Christ, so they truly aren't saved.

Jay Vernon McGee once said, "I believe in the assurance of the believer, and I believe in the nonassurance of the make-believer." I like that. If you aren't really a genuine Christian, then it's right that you don't have assurance.

So we need to determine how to know if we are true believers. In 2 Peter 1:10, Peter says, "Make your call and election sure." We need to be sure that God has called us and saved us by His grace.

Now the third question I want to address is, "How can we have assurance of salvation?" There are three, fundamental Christian assurances that we have salvation that we rest upon. The first is the Word of God the Father. Everything in our faith comes back to the foundation of the Word of God. John says, in verse 9, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." We believe what men say; why can't we believe what God says?

It's getting harder and harder to believe what is said on television, in the news or what the experts say. But we do believe them so often, yet we fail to believe what God says in His Word. Verse 9 says, "The witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God, which He has testified of His Son." God testified in His Word, the Bible, concerning His Son, Jesus Christ. The implication of that statement, in verse 9, is that God has testified in His Word, the Bible. The Bible is God's Word written. And until we come to an assurance that the Bible is the living Word of God, we're not going to have assurance. So we must resolve in our heart that this book is unique; it is God's Word written, because God has testified of His Son, who we trust in for eternal life. Assurance of salvation is based upon believing that the Bible is God's Word written.

Let me give you an example. In Genesis 15:6, which is the foundation for all the teaching on salvation in the Bible, God made Abram a promise. The promise was that Abram was going to have a son. Abram and Sarah were past the age of childbearing; they were old and couldn't have children, but God made them this promise. So basically Abram was facing the issue of either believing God or doubting God's promise. In verse 6, the Bible says that Abram "believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." So based on Abram's faith, God gave to him righteousness.

This is the basis for salvation throughout the Scriptures: Abram believed God. God spoke, Abram believed Him and God gave to him, as a free gift—it's called "imputation"—righteousness. The whole book of Galatians is about this very fact; that Abram believed God, so God imputed to him righteousness. So this is what our salvation is based upon.

In the New Testament, it's as simple as taking John 3:16. I often give this Scripture to new believers: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten..."—or "unique"—"... Son, that whoever believes in Him..."—here's the promise—"...should not perish but have..."—present possession—"...everlasting life."

So the question is, "Do you believe God?" Do you believe that God loved you and gave His Son

for you? When Jesus died on the Cross, He took your sin and bore your penalty so that He could impute to you His righteousness. So the condition is that we “believe in Him.”

What does it mean to “believe in Him”? It means to trust in Him, to rely upon Him and to cling to Him. It means to put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. So God makes a promise, and we believe.

I was thinking of the great spiritual allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. In the story, Christian, the main character, is on his way from the city of Destruction to the Celestial City. It's a picture of the Christian life. On his journey to heaven, the Celestial City, he travels with his friend, Hopeful. On the way, they were taken captive by Giant Despair. They are locked in the dungeon of his castle, called Doubting Castle. They languished there for days. They were filled with despair and doubt. Finally Christian realized he had been foolish, so he said to Hopeful, “I have in my pocket a key,” which he pulled out, and said, “The key is the promises of God.”

So Hopeful said, “Well, try it in the door.”

Christian went over, put it in the lock, turned the key and the door swung open. They went running out. When they came to the castle gate, Christian put it in that lock, turned the key and the door swung open. They went running out and went back on the path to the Celestial City.

Many times we are caught by despair, and we find ourselves in Doubting Castle. We don't really believe the promises of God. So resolve in your own heart that this is the issue: Will I believe what God says? If I trust in, rely on, cling to and put my faith in Jesus Christ, will I believe the promises of God? That's what we must rest on today.

The second foundation for assurance of salvation that we rest upon is the work of God the Son. So we move from the Word of God the Father to the work of God the Son. Verses 11-12 of our text say, “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life.” So God has recorded in His Word that He has given to us eternal life. Notice what He says: “And this life is in His Son.” So He is the object of our faith. He says, “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” So we move from the Word of God to the work of God, through His Son on the Cross.

Charles Ryrie said, “The worth of the salvation of the believer depends upon the worth of the Savior, the Son of God.” Your faith is only as good as the object it's placed in. So first it's placed in believing God's Word, and then it's placed in trusting God's Son.

Let me break down some of the aspects about the Son that we must believe. Number one, we must have faith in and believe who Jesus is—His person, the person of God the Son. The Bible tells us that there is one God, but He is in three persons—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. God the Father sent God the Son; He came from heaven voluntarily and willingly to earth. So Jesus came into this world through the womb of the Virgin Mary. Jesus was divine, yet He took on sinless humanity. So what we believe about Jesus is that He was fully God and fully man, in one person; He was the God-man. Jesus was God in flesh.

The second thing we believe about Jesus is that He died on the Cross—His propitiation, faith in what Jesus did. So we have faith in His person and faith in His propitiating, finished work upon the Cross. Jesus uttered His last words on the Cross of “It is finished. Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit.” Jesus died on the Cross to satisfy the demands of a holy, righteous God. He died on the Cross not only for sinners; He died on the Cross for the Father. God the Father is righteous and holy, and His law had been broken. There needed to be a penalty for it to be satisfied, or it needed to be propitiated or paid. So Jesus paid our penalty on the Cross. We must believe that.

Thirdly, we must believe in His prayer, John 17:24. I already made reference to it. The Bible says, “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me.” In verse 5, He said, “...with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

Fourthly, we must believe in His promises. John 14:3 is the blessed promise. It says, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

So we are looking to believe in His person, His propitiation on the Cross, His prayer that we would be with Him in heaven and His promise that He would prepare a place and come again to receive us. This is why believers sing:

“My hope is built on nothing less

Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame,

But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.”

“On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;

All other ground is sinking sand.”

“When all around my soul gives way,

He then is all my hope and stay.”

So we trust in Christ and we trust in Him alone.

So ask yourself, “Am I believing His Word and the promises in His Word? Am I believing in the person and work of Jesus Christ on my behalf; that He died for my sins?”

The third foundation for assurance of salvation is the witness of God the Holy Spirit. So the Word of God the Father, the work of God the Son and the witness of God the Holy Spirit is what

our foundation is on. Our assurance is trinitarian; it is based on God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. They are all working on our behalf. Verse 10 of our text says, "He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself." At the moment of your conversion, you became the dwelling place, the temple of the Holy Spirit. That is foundational. When you believed God's Word, trusted in God the Son, God the Holy Spirit came inside you to take up residence; that's the life of God in the soul of man.

There are several things that the Holy Spirit does: He convicts you, He regenerates you, He indwells you. The Holy Spirit, number one, is called "the seal of our salvation." That speaks of ownership. You, my beloved, were sealed with the Holy Spirit the moment you were saved. This is true of all believers. There is so much taught in the New Testament that it is true of all believers. It's true no matter what their experience might be, no matter how aware they are of it, even if they didn't know it. When you get saved, you don't say, "Wow! I just got sealed! That's awesome!" No. We've all been sealed, but you don't feel it. You don't say, "Whoa! I just got the sealing of the Holy Ghost!" It's something that happens to you automatically. You don't ask to be sealed. You may not understand what it means, but it's the idea that God seals you because you are His, He owns you and you are a child of God.

Number two, the Holy Spirit is the earnest of our salvation, which speaks of inheritance. So we're sealed—He owns us, and He is the earnest or down payment of our salvation. We are His inheritance. It's like earnest money or a down payment on a house. It's saying that you're serious about buying this house. God gives you the Spirit as a down payment.

Then the third aspect of His work is the witness or confidence of salvation. This is what brings us to our text, verse 10. It says, "He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself." It's like, "Can I get a witness?" Yes, amen. God speaks to us by the Spirit, deep in our spirit, in our hearts. The witness of the Spirit is both internal and external.

First, it's the internal witness, in Romans 8:15-16. Paul said, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." So we weren't born to fear, we weren't born to doubt, we weren't born to lack assurance; we were born to believe and to trust and have assurance. The Spirit comes into our hearts, and we cry, "Abba, Father." And the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. So the witness of the Spirit is internal.

But there is a danger of trusting your emotions and trusting your feelings. The Bible says, "The just..."—or "the saved" or "the believer"—"...shall live by faith." We don't live by sight. We don't live by feeling. We don't live by our emotions. It's wonderful when we can see God working, and it's wonderful when we can feel God working, but we don't always see it or feel it. Never doubt in the dark what God has spoken in the light. We go back to His Word. It is wonderful when He gives us the emotions, but our feelings aren't the only rule of thumb to know we are saved.

I remember as a young Christian, I had some friends who had just gotten saved. We were growing in the Lord together. We had never experienced a trial, but then we all went through a trial together. We were baby believers. We thought it was a test. We were blown away that God would actually test us or try us. We said, "I don't feel saved anymore. Do you feel saved?"

"No; I don't feel saved. I lost the joy of the Lord."

We thought we may not have what we thought we had for the rest of our Christian experience. So we learned that we had to walk by faith, trust Him, rely upon His Word and stand on His Word.

So the Holy Spirit does speak to our hearts, and I think this inner witness could be defined as a confident conviction that I am His child. This confident conviction grows stronger over the years. It's based on the Word of God the Father, on my trusting in God the Son and on the inner witness of God the Holy Spirit.

There is also an external witness that I am a child of God. It's called the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." If you are truly converted, there will be some evidence of this fruit in and through your life. You can't claim to be a Christian if you've never had any transformation, nothing has ever changed. The fruit of the Spirit will manifest to different degrees; some people bear a lot of fruit rapidly, while some Christians bear very little fruit slowly.

Have you noticed that fruit takes time to ripen? I get so impatient with bananas that are green, waiting for them to ripen. I get so impatient with fruit that hasn't ripened. I love plums, but if they aren't ripe, I get impatient waiting for them to ripen.

God wants our lives to grow and ripen. Sometimes we get impatient with ourselves and with other believers, but we need to realize that it is a process.

But there has to be some change in our character and conduct. The outward witness that I am a child of God is that there is a change in my character and my conduct. Sometimes people say, "The things I used to love, I now hate, and the things I used to hate..."—going to church, reading the Bible—"...I now love." So our lives will be changed.

In John 15, Jesus gave His teaching on Him being the vine and we are the branches. He said in verse 5, "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit." So there has to be at least some fruit, then maybe a little more fruit and Lord willing, as we yield to Him in faith and obedience, there will be "much fruit." It is a life-long process that begins the moment we are saved.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ..."—that's salvation—"...he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." You have a new position, a new life, a new character, a new conduct and you have a new home in heaven.

So true children of God have birthmarks. In 1 John 3:9-10, it says that if you are truly God's child, you will practice righteousness. In 1 John 4:7, it says that you will love others. If you've been born of God, one of the indications is that you have a love in your heart for other people. Then in 1 John 5:4, 18, it says that you will overcome the world. It says, "Whatever is born of God overcomes the world...and the wicked one does not touch him," attack him or destroy him.

Christians can and do sin, and sin grieves the Holy Spirit. But I am absolutely convinced, from my study of God's Word, that once the Holy Spirit comes in and seals you, you are sealed "to the day of redemption." You cannot grieve Him away. You can quench Him, lie to Him, grieve Him but not so He leaves you. Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

So the issue becomes your fellowship, not your Sonship or whether or not you are still a child of God. The issue becomes whether or not I am in fellowship with God. When we do sin, as believers, what we need to do is to take 1 John 1:9 to heart. It says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That's the Christian's bar of soap. When we sin and need restoration of fellowship—not of salvation—then we need to confess our sins.

What does it mean to confess? It means to agree with God that I have sinned, and God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and "cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Now, again, we come back to God's Word; will you believe that and accept that?

People talk about forgiving themselves. It's not so much about forgiving yourself as it is about believing God's Word and believing God's promises. God says that He has forgiven us.

It's interesting that in John 13, one of my favorite examples or illustrations of this, Jesus was in the upper room with His disciples, and he began to wash their feet. He took off His robe, got a basin of water, girded Himself with a towel and went to each of His disciples to wash their feet. When He came to Peter, Peter said, "You shall never wash my feet!"

Then Jesus said to Peter, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Jesus told Peter that if He did not wash Peter's feet, Peter had no part, no fellowship, no "koinonia," no communion with Him.

When Peter heard those words, he said, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" He was asking for a whole bath. He basically said, "Lord, let's go for it!"

Then Jesus made this statement to Peter: "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." The bath is a picture of our regeneration, and the foot washing is a picture of our confession and cleansing so we can be reunited in fellowship. If you've had a bath—if you've been born again—by "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit," when you sin—when you think an evil thought, do an evil deed, stumble or fall or have a bad attitude of the heart—if you confess you sin, God washes your feet, so to speak.

What happens when a believer sins is that he grieves the Holy Spirit; you don't sense His presence. You're not experiencing the sunshine or warmth of His love and His grace. So we need to turn from our sin and confess it, then God forgives our sin and restores our fellowship by washing our feet.

So if you've had a bath, you don't need another one; you can only get born again once. You can't get born again, again; there is only one point in time when you are regenerated, sealed and indwelt. You need to be confident of that. But if you stumble and fall, God will forgive you and restore you by the washing of your feet.

So, in conclusion, I believe that it is the rightful heritage of every believer to be absolutely certain that eternal life is their present possession. I believe that every Christian has the right to have absolute assurance of their salvation.

Paul said, "For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day." Paul also said, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." Paul had a desire to depart and to be with Christ. Was that because Paul was an Apostle? Was that because Paul was a good person? No. It was because Paul believed God's Word, He trusted in God's Son and he had the inner witness of God's Holy Spirit.

You can have the same.