

RCC in the Word
Week of December 31
1 John 1

Have you ever doubted your salvation? Do you wonder if you are truly saved? Do you know that you know that you know Christ has redeemed you? Do you ever believe the condemning lies of Satan whispering to your heart, "If you were really saved, you would pray more, you would have more faith, you would not commit that sin?"

When it comes to salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, forgiveness of sins, justification, reconciliation to God, adoption into the family of God, baptism by the Holy Spirit and the promise of sanctification and glorification, there is nothing more precious than being certain that you possess all the benefits of salvation. But as our Confession of Faith states, "Assurance is not an automatic and inevitable experience. A true believer may wait long and fight with many difficulties before he becomes a partaker of it [assurance] (LBC, 18.3)."

As a wise, compassionate father, the Apostle John writes this letter to the church, to his spiritual children. With deep pastoral concern, John composes this letter to assure the children of God that they are believing the truth about Jesus and that they have eternal life in Christ. The purpose of John's letter is found in 5.13: *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may KNOW you have eternal life.*

To strengthen the believer's assurance of salvation, John begins his letter by extolling the Savior. In verses 1-3, John declares three fundamental truths about Jesus. First, John declares that Jesus is the eternal God. He begins with *"that which was from the beginning."* The phrase "that which" refers to all things related to Christ. John could have said, "Jesus, who was from the beginning." But by using "that which," he makes it clear that everything about Jesus – his nature, his character, his role in creation and redemption, his glory, his submission to the Father, his kingdom, his rule, his authority, his fellowship with the Father and the Spirit, his covenant of redemption with the Father to die for the elect – everything about Jesus has always been. The pre-existence of Jesus is John's way of declaring that Jesus is fully God.

Next, John declares that Jesus is the life-giving word, *"the word of life"* (v1). In language that echoes the prologue to his gospel - *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In him was life* (John 1.1, 4) – John reminds us that Jesus is the source and giver of eternal life, spiritual life. As Jesus says in John 11.25, *"I am the resurrection and the life."*

Jesus is not only the fully God, life-giving Word, he is also fully man. In verses 1-3, John piles up sensory words to demonstrate that he and the apostles had a close relationship, a personal experience with Jesus. We (John and the apostles) heard him. We saw him with our eyes – indicating a direct personal acquaintance with Jesus. We looked upon him grasping who he truly was. We touched him with our hands. By using the senses to describe his relationship with Jesus, John establishes his authority to write about Jesus; he knew Jesus personally. But more than that, John establishes the fact that Jesus was a true man. How could John hear and see and touch God? *The life was made manifest* (v2). That which was from the beginning came to earth. *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us* (John 1.14).

As John writes to bolster the assurance of Christians, he begins with a laser-sharp focus on the truth of who Jesus is. Nothing can strengthen our Christian confidence more than a firm and growing and deepening and abiding belief in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Let me encourage you to spend time this year getting to know Jesus better. Read the gospels. Read theological works describing the person and work of Jesus. A good place to start is our church's confession of faith which contains rich, deep, assurance strengthening truths about Jesus. Study these truths. Learn these truths. Hold fast to these truths. Become so familiar with the truths about Jesus that they follow you like your shadow!

There are many people who know facts about Jesus, but they have not been transformed by the truth of Jesus. In verses 5-7, John tells us that those who believe in the life-giving Word will live in such a way that reflects the holy character of God. *God is light and in him is no darkness at all* (v5). John Calvin writes, "There is nothing about God but what is bright, pure and unalloyed." God is pure, holy, perfect, morally excellent. He is perfect goodness and beauty, absolute holiness. He is without any moral defect. And those who love him and believe in him must "*walk in the light as he is in the light*" (v7). The trajectory of a genuine believer's life is holiness. The habitual pattern of their life is characterized by a relentless pursuit of righteousness. Like the child who seeks to emulate their hero, the true believer seeks to imitate the holiness of their God. Those who know God and give evidence of saving faith through an obedient life have the incredible promise of fellowship with God's people and the assurance that Christ has cleansed them from all sin (v7).

Of course, we all know that none of us can obey God perfectly. John is aware of this. Anyone who claims absolute moral perfection is nothing more than a liar who really does not understand the gospel at all (v8, 10). However, true believers, striving to live a holy life that imitates the pure light of God, own up to their personal sin and depravity. They are not afraid to say, "I blew it." With an assurance that comes from knowing Christ, they confess their sin and receive the forgiveness and cleansing mercy of God (v9). As the people of God, let us strive to reflect the light of God in our conduct as we pursue righteousness and practice repentance being assured that in the fully God, fully man, life-giving Word we have received salvation and all the spiritual blessings of God.

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