

Eternal Life . . . Guaranteed

Without a Doubt, Part 5

1 John 5:12-13

A licensed psychologist and author reflected some time ago about what some research psychologists have determined through a series of surveys and tests. They found there are at least 3 situations where most people do not act like themselves. In fact, they put on a fake air of confidence, even though they are actually unsure and somewhat tentative in these 3 contexts.

First, they found that people try to look more confident when they enter the lobby of an expensive hotel. In other words, the last thing they want to do is look and act like they don't belong.

Secondly, the average person tends to put on an air of certainty when they enter an automobile showroom – they try to at least act like they can afford to buy what they're looking at . . . so they act more confidently than they feel.

Thirdly, the average person puts on airs when they enter a church sanctuary. In other words, they act like everything is in order. In fact, this psychologist author made the interesting point that people are evidently attempting to fake out the Almighty and everybody else around them.ⁱ

The truth is, the uncertainty and insecurity of the human race extends further and deeper than showrooms and hotels and sanctuaries.

Another clinical psychologist, currently on the faculty at Harvard University, wrote an article I came across some time ago and stuck in my file folder. He wrote that we are, in general, smiling less and worrying more than ever before; happiness is down and sadness is up and depression is on the rise. He suggested that the real problem is not financial – not having enough money, but something else – in a word – uncertainty.

People don't know what's going to happen – will they have a job next week; what's ahead in the future for me? He ended his article by writing – and I quote – “An uncertain future leaves us stranded in an unhappy present with nothing to do but wait . . . and it isn't a matter of insufficient funds. It's a matter of insufficient certainty.”ⁱⁱ

Now I've quoted from two secular psychologists, the latter I happen to know is an unbelieving evolutionist.

But I quoted them to make you aware that you don't have to be a believer to know that the average person out there lives with the dread of uncertainty about their future.

And I also quoted unbelievers to highlight the greater tragedy here – at the same time our world is openly admitting to the devastating effects of living with uncertainty – the church is effectively removing the certainty of the gospel because it is offensive.

One of the most popular television pastors in America, Joel Osteen, some time ago on a live television interview answered question after question about who gets to go to heaven and is Jesus Christ the only way to heaven – by repeatedly answering, “I don't know . . . I don't know . . . I really don't know.”

He later posted an open letter apologizing for waffling in front of millions of viewers, but has gone on since in a number of interviews to continue muddying the clear waters of the gospel and spreading a layer of fog over what God has so distinctly revealed.

Frank Schaeffer, the son of Francis Schaeffer, reversed his father's clear teaching on the nature of truth by saying – and I quote – “Certainty is the enemy of the truth.”

He simply echoes Nietzsche who wrote, “Convictions are a more dangerous enemy of truth than lies.”ⁱⁱⁱ

And he would go on to postulate that any kind of certainty about God was nothing less than pride and presumption.

The truth is, to reject the record of scripture where God informs us of things we can be certain is actually presumptuous.

Pride and presumption is not in believing, but in denying.

The issue of certainty is as old as mankind.

The very first temptation in **Genesis 3** involved doubting the certainty of God's clear command. Satan asked, “Has God said? I mean, did He really communicate the truth?”

When Adam and Eve ate of that fruit, it was the very first time the truth of God's word was denied.

And with that fall – and the corruption of the human race to follow – what has entered into the heart of every human being is this ensuing, eroding, discouraging, despairing, frustrating, sense of uncertainty.

But instead of admitting it – the majority of mankind simply puts on airs; acts with confidence.

Bestowing degrees of knowledge and accolades of ingenuity upon themselves; building religious systems and layering steps of spiritual merit to assure themselves – mankind is actually in a quiet frenzy to silence his troubled thoughts and doubts; his feelings of self-worth; his sense of purposelessness . . . in a word – uncertainty.

Who am I? Why am I really here? And for goodness sake, where am I going?

In his book, John Lennox explains the inability of reason alone; science alone; to answer the most basic questions that people are really uncertain about – no matter how smart or confident they act or how popular or trendy they sound.

He creates this perfect scenario where Aunt Matilda has made a beautiful, luscious three-layered cake. And we decide to take it along to be analyzed by a group of the world's top scientists, nutritionists, biochemists, etc. The nutrition scientists finish their examination and are able to tell us the number of calories in the cake and each specific nutritional element and effect upon the human body; the biochemists are able to determine the structure of proteins, fats, etc. in the cake; the physicists are able to analyze the cake in terms of fundamental particles; the mathematicians are able to determine the behavior of those particles with sets of elegant equations.

We are able to have a description of how the cake was made and how it's various ingredients relate to one another and how the cake will affect others; but suppose you ask the assembled group of experts one final question – Why was that cake made by Aunt Matilda. What is the purpose of the cake's existence? Why was it made?

The only person in the room smiling would be Aunt Matilda because she alone knows its purpose. And listen, it isn't an insult on any scientific discipline to be unable to answer the question "why" – for they simply cannot.

In fact, the only way we will ever get an answer is if Aunt Matilda reveals it to us. [She has to tell us, it's a birthday cake – and it's to celebrate the birthday of her niece].

Listen, without her disclosing the answer to us, no amount of scientific analysis will ever be able to enlighten us.^{iv}

Why do you exist? You can analyze the chemicals in my body, but you cannot tell me my purpose in being alive. Why does this planet – this universe exist?

We can photograph it and explore it and measure it and analyze it, but we cannot answer "why".

But the Creator happens to be an Author who revealed His purpose in writing – that He might be followed, worshipped and enjoyed.

He has revealed the certainty of creation:

- the certainty of sin
- the certainty of redemption
- the certainty of a coming kingdom
- the certainty of heaven and hell
- the certainty of His eternal fellowship with those who believe

Since He has let us in on the answer through His word of these certainties, it is not presumption to believe it . . . it is presumption to deny it.

One of the glorious things you discover about God's revelation is that it leads you – not to uncertainty . . . not to confusion . . . but to certainty.

John the Apostle comes near the end of his letter and he reveals his purpose statement for why this letter was written – and guess what – it has to do with certainty.

Now we're not talking about certainty regarding tomorrow – we're talking about certainty regarding the ultimate tomorrow – your future, and mine, beyond the grave.

Listen, there are a lot of things about tomorrow that I'm uncertain; in fact, I'm more certain about a billion years from now than I am about two days from now.

And that's because God hasn't revealed in His word what's going to happen to me 48 hours from now – because He wants me to trust Him and walk with Him and believe by faith in His care and providence.

But He has told us where we'll be forever – so that my heart and yours will not be filled with doubt and fear and uncertainty.

John the Apostle now pens one of the most well known verses in all the Bible – some call it the mini-gospel – the gospel in one verse.

1 John 5:13, These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Is that great or what?!

That's not presumption. That's not pride. That's an answer from God the Spirit through John the servant.

That's no more proud than saying $2 + 2 = 4$.
You are simply declaring the truth.
Now let's break it down.

1. *These things I have written to you* - this is the foundation for our assurance.

John is one of the few New Testament writers who give us their purpose statement.

In the Gospel by John he writes in **chapter 20 and verse 31**, *these events have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

In other words, all these miracles and events of Jesus Christ's life were recorded by John so that the reader would come to the end of the Gospel narrative and believe in Jesus as the true Messiah, the Son of God.

And now here in First John, he informs us that he's written all these things so that we'll be able to know for certain that we have eternal life through Jesus, the Son of God.

To put it another way, the Gospel of John was written so that would know how to be saved; the First Letter of John was written so that we would know we are saved.^v

When John opened his letter, he wrote in chapter 1 and verse 4, **"These things we write"** – and he uses present tense – in other words, *I am currently writing these things to you.*

But now here in **chapter 5** he uses the aorist tense – I have written to you – John is now looking back on the truths he's delivered . . . the task he has [nearly] completed.^{vi}

He might very well be referring to everything he's written so far, which would include the Gospel of John.

And the reason I'm making a point about this is the fact that our assurance of salvation is built upon the foundation of not simply one verse – or one chapter – or even one Book.

The foundation of our faith rests upon the revelation of God's word.

And let me go a step farther. Since John is writing to believers about assurance of salvation – he implies that believers will have times of doubt and struggle about the assurance of their salvation, otherwise why would John so stress – over and over

again – that these are the truths we can know for certain.

In our Sunday evening Chapel Hour – which I would like to invite you to return for at 6:00 pm – I am introducing key life verses from the lives of historical figures who impacted our world for Jesus Christ.

So far we've covered, Amy Carmichael, A.W. Tozer, Susanna Wesley and Oswald Chambers.

Tonight I want to introduce to you a man who entered a time of such great suffering and uncertainty following the death of his wife and daughter that he wrote in his journal, "I believe in God but I cannot find Him."

Why do believers doubt their salvation?

- a. For starters, because doubt has more to do with emotion than doctrine. Which is why John develops our assurance of salvation on the foundation of objective revelation.

Life simply changes the way we feel from one day to the next.

And even for the believer, there are a number of things that can affect our emotions – and thus our sense of assurance.

- b. Suffering could be another reason for doubting. Often the crucible brings a believer to wonder if God has abandoned him – if God really did love him after all.
- c. Unconfessed sin is also something that devastates the believer, not only spiritually but emotionally. David the Psalmist, writes, Restore to me the joy of Your salvation (Psalm 51:12); you might as well interpret that as "restore to me the assurance of salvation" simply because without assurance there is no joy in it.

Emotional ebbs and flows, suffering, unconfessed sin – or even repeated sin can strip away that sense of assurance.

- d. An undisciplined life can also rob you of your assurance – listen, if your assurance of salvation and the confidence that comes from that is closely associated with – even built upon – this Book, then that would mean the closer you are to living in obedience to these things that have been written, the more you will sense your assurance of salvation; and the further away you live from the principles and commands of this Book, you can expect your assurance to dissolve proportionately to your disobedience or lack of discipline.

- e. False teachers can be added to the list of things that can cause a believer to doubt. Even here in his letter, John is attacking the false teaching of the Gnostics – they were telling the believer that eternal life could only be gained by superior knowledge.^{vii}

And who feels smart enough to get into heaven?

So John makes clear here that your salvation isn't gained or even kept by some kind of secret, superior knowledge, but by simple faith in the Son of God.

Paul wrote to Titus how rebellious teachers were upsetting entire families within the church by *teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain (Titus 1:11)*

- f. Another reason for doubting to creep in is cultural influences that chip away at the confident faith of the believer.

Which is one of the purposes of the assembly – to teach and rehearse the gospel so that with our true teachers of the word we can, like Paul, *know in whom we have believed and become persuaded that He is able to keep that which we've committed to Him (2 Timothy 1:12)*

- g. Lastly, there is the enemy propaganda of the fallen spirit world – and the influence of that enemy upon our minds and hearts – collaborating with our fallen flesh to destroy the citadel of our assurance.

And so Paul exhorts the Corinthian believers to mentally *destroy every speculation and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)*

In other words, wage war in your mind with the truth, against every thought that enters which attempts to destroy the knowledge of God – and with that the certainty of your salvation.

We have to repeatedly come back to and surrender to and rededicate ourselves to these things which have been written.

And the more we do that, the greater our assurance.

The foundation of our faith then, is these things that have been written.

2. *Secondly, John writes These things I have written to you – who? to you who believe in the name of the Son of God.*

He's writing to Christians. And he's further clarifying not just the foundation of our assurance, but here, the formula for our assurance.

And the formula is this – Faith in Jesus Christ = eternal life.

He spelled it out over and over again in his letter. Look up one verse at *verse 12. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.*

He's talking about eternal life. The definite article with the word life – zoe (ζοε) indicates a reference to the ultimate life – eternal life.

Life *God gave us through His son (verse 11).*

I love the way it comes out in English – You get the Son . . . you get the life.

One author illustrated it this way; he said, "If I put my pen inside my Bible and then said to you, "I'm going to give you my Bible and everything in it." That would mean when you take His Bible, you get the pen inside automatically.^{viii}

Listen, when you get Jesus – and you get eternal life automatically – guaranteed.

- Jesus Christ not only opens the door to salvation, *He claims to be the door (John 10:9);*
- Jesus not only promises bread, He says, *"I am the bread of life" (John 6:35)*
- Jesus not only shows us the way to the Father, He claims to *be the way (John 14:6)*

Accept that Bible and in it is a free pen.

Accept Jesus Christ and in Him is the free gift of everlasting life.

This life, John writes, is in His Son.

In other words, this life is not in just knowing things about His Son, but it is found in His Son.

You know you can read all about a bank's financial statements and you might conclude that the bank is safe – but that's only believing the facts about the bank. You place your faith in that bank when you deposit all your money *in* that bank.^{ix}

Eternal life John describes here isn't found by believing what the Bible says *about* Jesus – it's found when you invest everything *in* Jesus Christ.

John assumes his readers have done just that – and he wants them to rehearse in the face of possible doubts the:

- foundation of your assurance,

- the formula for your assurance

And now John speaks to the fearlessness of your assurance

3. Notice, these things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God – now notice – that you may know that you have eternal life

This is the absolute fearlessness of our assurance Benjamin Franklin famously wrote in 1789, “Nothing is certain but death and taxes.”^x

John the Apostle would disagree.

He would effectively write, there is nothing more certain than eternal life.

John has repeatedly informed his readers that we can absolutely **know** – 39 times in this brief letter . . . 8 times alone in these closing comments.

The verb John chooses here in **verse 13** is *oida* – the verb “to know” which refers to a settled conviction of the soul.^{xi}

It is knowledge gained, not through experience, but through Divine revelation.

In other words, we can know that we have eternal life, not on the basis of our feelings, which come and go, or some special experience that may vary from Christian to Christian – in fact, all those things will wear thin over time.

John is reinforcing again – even in the choice of his verb – that **we can know**, because of what God says – we can know fearlessly, because of what has been written.

And what is it we can be fearless about? Did you notice – **that you may know that you have eternal life**.

You can be certain about where you’ll be a billion years from now.

The great longing of the human heart is to live forever and the great uncertainty of the human race is where that life will be.

God created us with the sense of **eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11)**

Every human heart has written into its innermost consciousness the truth that we were engineered for eternity.^{xii}

In fact, did you notice that John says that **you may know that you have** – already – **eternal life**.

He uses the present tense – **you have** – **at this present time – eternal life**.

You’re not waiting to get it, you already have it.

And because it is a gift from God, it will last as long as God lasts . . . and that is forever.

John writes, this is the foundation of your assurance – what **has been written**; This is the formula for your assurance – **believing in the Son of God** who came to die so that your sins and mine could be forever forgiven. The hymn writer writes about Christ:

*Justice and power are held in your hand
But you stooped to shoulder the shame of man*

*Mighty yet merciful, how could it be
The high king of heaven extends grace to me
My sins were many, my merits were none
But You are the might yet merciful One.^{xiii}*

This is your foundation. This is your formula And this is the fearlessness of your assurance – you can dare to speak with such certainty – **you know that you have eternal life!**

Let me share with you some of what I shared just a few days ago at the memorial service of our dear friend and fellow staff member, Dennis Ferrell.

Dennis and his wife Sandra had become surrogate grandparents in a way to our children. Years ago, when our church was meeting in the school house, they asked if they could keep our kids each week so that Marsha and I could go out.

They asked, “Can we keep your four children every Thursday night?”

I said, “Sure . . . you can keep them all week!”

They were an answer to prayer and we often remarked how grateful we were that Dennis and Sandra had helped us raise our children.

I remember being in Dennis’ hospital room more than a year ago . . . standing there with his wife Sandra, hearing the update from the doctors and nurses that there was nothing more they could do . . . his death was only hours away.

Sandra and I stood in the room and talked about different elements of the funeral service that would take place soon. He was unconscious and had been for some time; before leaving, I leaned over and kissed him on the forehead and told him goodbye.

But that night – instead of dying – the nurses watched him miraculously revive. To everyone’s shock, Dennis would be eating food in a few hours and released shortly thereafter.

We nicknamed him Lazarus.

What was amazing to find out about his recovery was that the nurses told Sandra they heard him singing. They came into his room and there he lay, unconscious, yet singing the Hallelujah Chorus.

That's not exactly easy to sing.

There he lay singing . . . and then he revived.

A couple of weeks ago, Dennis came to the end of ongoing physical battles. Marsha, Seth and Candace went by their home to spend some time with this sweet family – singing, talking, crying. Charity was sick, but recorded a video I took over the next night when I was able to slip by with Benjamin – the last of our kids – to say farewell.

I walked into his room where he was slipping in and out of consciousness. I leaned over the bed and said, Dennis its Stephen and Benjamin . . . he opened his eyes, unable to clearly talk – I said, “We just wanted to come over and we wanted to tell you that we love you.” He said, “I know.”

I said, “Dennis, it looks like you're going to beat me to heaven after all. And I just want to remind you that because you have believed in Christ – as your Lord and Savior – He's ready and waiting to welcome you home.” His mouth moved again – Terri was standing there by the door – and he said the last words I'll hear him say on earth, “I know.”

I was in Pennsylvania the next week preaching to the student body of a Christian college and seminary when the news came that Dennis had passed away.

The thought struck me there in my hotel room . . . a year or so ago, when we thought he was going to die – he was singing, The Hallelujah Chorus.

This time, he was hearing the Hallelujah Chorus – the lyrics are taken from that scene in heaven where the hosts of heaven and all the redeemed are singing around the throne of the Lamb – ***And He shall reign for ever and ever, Amen.***

How wonderful for his family – for his church – for reputation of Christ – that these would be among his last words – because the word of God was his foundation; and faith in Jesus Christ was his formula and now – lying on his death bed – he was fearless in his assurance.

Dennis, you're going to heaven . . . “I know!”

What about you? What's the foundation for your assurance? What's the formula for your salvation?

Will it make you certain in life and fearless in the face of death?

You can be! ***These things, John says, I have written to you, who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.***

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/20/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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- ii Daniel Gilbert, *What You Don't Know Makes You Nervous*, www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2010/november/6110110.html
- iii Janie B. Cheaney, *Certain about Uncertainty*, World Magazine, October 3, 1013, p. 20
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- vi D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John* (BJU Press, 1991), p. 252
- vii Robert Lightner, *The Epistles of John, & Jude* (AMG Publishers, 2003), p. 76
- viii Jerry Vines, *Exploring 1, 2, 3 John* (Loizeaux Brothers, 1989), p. 193
- ix Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Epistles of John* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), p. 135
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- xi Hobbs, p. 134
- xii John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of John* (Kregel, 2003), p. 173
- xiii Camp Kirkland, *Mighty Yet Merciful*