

Knowing you are saved

1/12/19 dkm

Read: Romans 8:1-17, 1John 2:1-17

Text: 1John 2:12-14

Psalms: 8, 43, 27:7-14,134

The apostle John does not hold back when it comes to condemning false teachers in the church. It seems he or his 'little children' were encountering men who claimed to be perfect, men saying 'we have not sinned' (1:10). He called such people liars. If these people were Gnostics, they were focussing on 'special knowledge' and disregarding sins of the flesh or the body. In this context he sets out four tests which can be applied to such people, or to anyone who claims to know the Lord. Again, he describes as liars any who say, 'I know Him', while disregarding the holy commandments (2:4). If anyone hates a fellow believer they also fail the test of being saved, of abiding in Christ and walking in the light.

You might have felt somewhat intimidated hearing these tests and applying them to your own life- although you are back here again this week! You might have been discouraged as you examined your own life. You might have started doubting you own salvation. Some years ago I was told that no one preaches on the topic of doubt in the life of a believer. Is this because no one has doubts about their faith, or is it they think it is wrong to have doubts? We all have doubts at times; we all question our faith in Jesus Christ. But we must not live in a state of doubt. Doubt is destructive: 'Let him ask in faith with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind' (James 1:6).

John wants us to be joyful believers not doubters (1:4). If you are a doubter, then listen to what the apostle John teaches us today. If you have no doubts, go back and listen to what John has written thus far in this chapter, and then listen to what he has to say here in verses 12-14. John Stott writes of these verses, 'His [John's] purpose in writing is as much to confirm the right assurance of the genuine Christian, as to rob the counterfeit of his false assurance'.

Verses 12-14 stand out in our Bible because they are in poetry rather than prose. We find a series of six sentences, each beginning with 'I write' or 'I have written'; we do not know why he changes tense in this way, but it makes little apparent difference. We have a staccato effect, and the repetition adds emphasis to the assurances he gives. Who are the three groups of people John refers to, each being addressed twice? The first is 'little children', the second 'fathers', and the third 'young men'; note that 'little children' is a different Greek word the second time. Are these different groups in the church based on physical age, or groups based on spiritual maturity? Many opt for the second explanation. But John has just spoken of the whole church as 'little children' (2:1), so only the second two groups are thought to refer to different stages of spiritual maturity. However, attempts to align the assurances given with each grouping make for strained exegesis. You will note that both assurances given to fathers are the same; 'You have known Him who is from the beginning' (2:13, 14). Are fathers no longer concerned with sins forgiven? Who is the 'Him' referred to in this assurance anyway - another point on which scholars differ!

Leon Morris says it is best to regard the divisions as a stylish device adding emphasis because, 'all the qualities John mentions ought to be found in all believers'. He quotes the liberal scholar, C.H. Dodd who wrote, 'All Christians are (by grace, not nature) children of innocence and dependence on the heavenly Father, young men in strength and fathers in experience'. For this reason we will deal with the assurances given, rather than do what most preachers do and deal with each group separately. The assurances given by John are: sins forgiven, saving knowledge of Christ, secure in knowing the Father, strong in the Lord and through his word, and victory over Satan.

1. Sins forgiven

Our two-year-old grandsons have learnt to say, 'I need it' all the time. After some years their words might change but the intent of the heart may remain the same- 'I need it'. What is your greatest need? Have you heard the saying, 'Man's greatest need is to know what is his greatest need!' Our greatest need is salvation, salvation from death. We must know that death comes to us because of sin. We must know that sin cuts us off from knowing God. Our greatest need is forgiveness of sin, and that is exactly what we hear preached in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In opening the Scriptures to his disciples, Jesus himself spoke of his own death and resurrection saying that, 'repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name' (Luke 24:47). Whenever and wherever the apostles preached, they preached repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38, 3:19, 10:43, and 13:38).

If our sins are forgiven, as they are when we confess our sins and believe in Jesus Christ (1:7, 9), we are saved from death, having received new life in Christ. We have crossed from death to life (John 5:24). We are declared not guilty and justified in the eyes of God. Justification or salvation is a judicial act of God. It is not a process. It is not something you earn through good works. If you think your good works are contributing towards your salvation you will have lots of doubts. You will die not knowing if you are going to heaven or hell. John tells us our sins are forgiven, fully and finally forgiven, 'for His name's sake' or in the name of Jesus Christ (2:12).

Jesus is the 'propitiation for our sins'; he took the punishment that was ours, the wrath of God upon our sin (2:2). Jesus is our 'Advocate with the Father' (2:1). He pleads on our behalf on the basis of his own sacrifice, his own blood, and his plea is accepted by the Father. This is what we mean when we say, 'for his name's sake' or 'in his name' (2:12, John 20:31). 'There is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). Only the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse you from your sin, and only by believing in him can you avail of this cleansing. Moreover, it is the

Lord himself who quickens your dead heart, giving you faith to believe (Eph 2:5).

Forgiveness of sin in the name of Jesus Christ is a fundamental truth of the gospel. This truth is most appropriate to 'little children' or new believers but is certainly not to be forgotten as we mature in the faith. Stott's comment that the 'first flush of ecstasy in receiving forgiveness and fellowship with the Father was an experience long ago' for the 'fathers' is concerning. Such ecstasy or joy should be with us no matter how mature we are in the faith (cf. 1:4, John 15:11). In any case, we have concluded that the term 'little children' includes all believers (cf. 2:1).

2. Saving knowledge of Christ

What does it mean to know Christ? What is a saving knowledge of Christ? John writes to 'fathers' saying, 'You have known Him who is from the beginning' (2:13, 14). Knowing Christ means knowing he died on the cross bearing your sins, as well as knowing he lives in your heart through the Spirit given to all believers (Rom 8:16). John writes, 'You have known Him' in the perfect tense, meaning a completed action which continues into the present. You have known the eternal Son of God, the Son who was with God in the beginning (1:1). Some commentators say that John is referring to the Father who is from the beginning but the context points to the Son, to Jesus Christ our Lord.

John is most insistent that Jesus, as the Son of God, is co-eternal, as well as co-equal, with the Father. 'He was in the beginning with God' and 'the word was God' (John 1:1, 2). Believing otherwise is believing a lie (2:23). Whoever claims to be in fellowship with God but denies the divinity or the humanity of Jesus is a liar (2:22). John preached this truth about Jesus because it is what he saw and heard in Jesus. The Jews would not accept the divinity of Jesus, but Jesus said, 'All should honour the Son just as they honour the Father' (John 5:23) and, 'I and my Father are one' (John 10:30).

3. Secure in knowing the Father

Those who say that 'Him who is from the beginning' is God the Father rather than the Son must see the assurance, 'because you have known the Father' as essentially the same assurance (2:13a, c), even though one is spoken to 'fathers' and the other to 'children' - this is of no consequence if we understand that John is referring to all believers. I am calling this assurance the security of knowing God the Father.

No matter how old or how mature you are as a believer you are always a child of God. You have been adopted into the family of God, standing beside his only begotten Son, Jesus. This is a familial rather than forensic or judicial picture. In our sin we were enemies of God, but also orphans - apart from having the devil as our father (John 8:44). In Christ we were brought near to God (Eph 2:13). God became our Father. In the Spirit of adoption we cry out, 'Abba, Father' (Rom 8:15). Jesus tells us to pray to 'our Father in heaven' (Mat 6:9). Children pray this prayer, as do young men and fathers. Every believer will know God as their Father.

Knowing we are adopted into the family of God is wonderfully reassuring for us as believers. Many orphans, abandoned, or neglected children, are placed into foster care. Most of them receive lots of love and good things but they can be removed from their foster home at any time. They never feel secure because they have no security as children in a foster home. If they are legally adopted however, they have absolute security in their adopted home. They know that no one can come and take them away. Do you have the assurance of an adopted child when it comes to being a child of God? Have you 'known the Father' in this way? John says you can and indeed you must if you call yourself a believer. You must know Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord. You must know God as your Father in heaven. It is all by grace through faith. All the assurance we need we

have in knowing the almighty, everlasting God as our Saviour and our Father.

4. Strong in the Lord

The children are given assurance based on the forgiveness of sin and knowing the Father. The fathers are given assurance based on knowing Jesus Christ. The young men are given more words of assurance than either the children or the fathers, possibly because they are the last to be assured; and there may be some anticipation for what follows. This assurance is seen by some as being appropriate to the flush of youthful vigour in new believers. This youthful vigour, however, may come at any physical age, depending on when you believe. Moreover, it is vigour we seek to maintain; there is no retirement age for believers!

Young men are strong, not because of youth, physical prowess, or anything in themselves. They are strong because, 'The word of God abides in you' (2:14). Our NKJV indicates 'word' to be the written word of God rather than the living Word. Even so, the written word does not abide in the heart without the living Word first abiding in the heart. God's written word will not abide in our heart if we do not believe in Jesus (John 5:38). When we love Jesus, we will love the Bible. When we have Jesus abiding in our heart and know the word of God, we are strong, and indeed, invincible. We can stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph 6:11); we can resist the devil and he will flee from us (James 4:7). It is not physical strength, not academic strength, not worldly wisdom, but spiritual strength and knowledge of God we must have to engage Satan (2Cor 10:3-5). We will all be attacked by Satan from the day we are born again until the day we die.

5. Victory over Satan

Young men are twice told by way of assurance, 'You have overcome the wicked one' (2:13, 14). Unlike many Christians, John was not oblivious to the existence and activity of the devil. Jesus was

tempted by the devil or Satan in the wilderness. Jesus told his disciples to pray, 'Deliver us from the evil one' (Mat 6:13). Jesus' death and resurrection marked his victory over sin and death, and over Satan. Jesus the Messiah crushed Satan under his feet, and will soon crush him under your feet (Gen 3:15, Rom 16:20).

In the victory of Jesus, we have victory over sin, over death, over the evil one, and over the world. Jesus said, 'Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world' (John 16:33). John writes in the perfect tense telling us we have overcome the wicked one. The war is real, but the victory is certain. We are engaged in a spiritual battle but are assured of the outcome if we abide in the living Word and treasure the written word of God in our hearts each and every day.