

How Can I Know?

Lesson 1: Can a Christian Know He Is Saved? -- 1 John 5:13

There is a question that many sincere believers carry quietly for years, almost too tender to say out loud. They sing the songs and say the prayers and sit in the pew, and underneath it all a small voice keeps asking, "But am I really saved? If I died tonight, do I actually know where I would stand?" Some have carried that question so long it has become a kind of background hum, a low anxiety they assume every honest Christian must simply live with. They would never say so, but in their hearts they have made peace with uncertainty, as though doubt were a mark of humility and confidence were a mark of pride.

Into that very ache the apostle John writes one of the most freeing sentences in all of Scripture. Near the end of his first letter he stops and tells us plainly why he wrote the whole thing: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Read that again slowly. Not that you may hope. Not that you may guess, or feel pretty good about your chances. That you may know. John, the old apostle who had leaned against Jesus at the supper and watched Him die and met Him risen, sat down and wrote an entire letter for one great purpose: so that ordinary believers could live with settled, grounded assurance instead of nagging fear.

This is where our study begins, and it shapes everything that follows. Over these eleven lessons we are going to walk through John's letter the way he wrote it, and we will find that he does not hand out assurance cheaply or carelessly. He gives us tests, real evidence, honest mirrors to look into. But he gives them for a reason. He is not trying to drive sensitive souls deeper into doubt. He is trying to do the opposite. He wants the genuine believer to be able to look at his own life and at God's sure promises and finally exhale, and say, "Yes. I know."

So before we examine a single test, let us settle the question John settles first. Assurance is not arrogance. It is not the careless presumption that says, "I prayed a prayer once, so nothing I do now can matter." Nor is it the anxious doubt that can never quite believe God meant what He said. Real assurance walks a narrow road between those two ditches. It rests its full weight on the promises of God, received in an obedient and trusting faith, and confirmed by a life that is genuinely walking toward the light. That kind of knowing is not pride. It is the birthright of every faithful child of God. Read these words from John, and let him teach you that you were meant to know.

Group Discussion: John says he wrote his letter "that you may know that you have eternal life" (v. 13). In your experience, do most Christians live with that kind of settled assurance, or with a quiet uncertainty about where they stand with God? Why do you think genuine believers so often struggle to feel sure of their salvation?

Personal Reflection: Be honest with yourself for a moment. If someone asked you right now whether you know you have eternal life, what would you say, and what would your answer rest on? Is your confidence anchored in a feeling, in your own effort, or in the promises of God received in faith and obedience?

Read 1 John 5:13

Study Questions

1. John tells us plainly why he wrote this letter: “that you may know that you have eternal life” (v. 13). What does this stated purpose reveal about whether God intends His people to live in assurance or in uncertainty?
2. Think honestly about your own walk with God. Do you tend to live with quiet confidence in your salvation, or with a low, ongoing anxiety about it? Name what your sense of security (or insecurity) has actually been resting on.
3. John addresses his letter to those “who believe in the name of the Son of God” (v. 13). In light of the rest of John’s teaching, what kind of believing does he have in mind here, and how is it different from mere mental agreement?
4. Where does doubt about your standing with God tend to creep in most often? Name a specific situation, season, or recurring thought that most easily shakes your confidence before Him.
5. John says that those who believe “have eternal life,” speaking of it as a present possession. What does it mean that eternal life is something the believer already has now, and not only a reward waiting in the future?

6. If eternal life is something you can possess now, are you actually living in it, or merely waiting for it? What is one way your daily life would look different this week if you truly lived as someone who already has the life of God in you?
7. Across this letter John points to evidence that accompanies genuine faith, such as obedience to God's commands and love for fellow believers. Why does John give us such tests, and how do they actually strengthen rather than threaten true assurance?
8. When your feelings tell you one thing about your standing with God and His promises tell you another, which do you tend to believe? Describe a recent time the two were in conflict, and how you responded.
9. Some teach that a person can never truly know he is saved, while others teach that once a person is saved he is eternally secure no matter how he lives. How does Scripture chart a different course, and on what does a faithful Christian's real assurance actually rest?
10. Look back across this opening lesson on assurance. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses, and the single truth from 1 John 5:13 that you most need to carry into the coming week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 20:30–31, why John wrote his Gospel, that you may believe; 1 John 5:11–12, the testimony that God has given us eternal life in His Son; Acts 2:38–39, the promise of forgiveness received in repentance and baptism; Romans 8:14–17, the Spirit bearing witness that we are children of God; 2 Peter 1:10–11, making your calling and election sure through a faithful life.