

What We Know

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] 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.

And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him.

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will give him life. To those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death.

I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him and the evil one does not touch him.

We know that we are from God and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true and we are in Him who is true, in His Son, Jesus Christ.

[1 : 21] He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. This is God's holy and authoritative word.

Heavenly Father, we pray that you will address us from your word as you always do. That you would empower the preaching of your word by the Spirit of God.

That these truths that we are to live by might be impressed deeply upon us. And that they might assure us that we belong to God, His family.

That it might shape the way we think, the way we feel, and the way we live. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

One issue that comes up consistently in pastoral counseling is assurance of salvation.

[2 : 28] Christians, for one reason or another, feel unsure that they are truly saved and born again in Christ. Sometimes they feel insecure because other Christians around them seem much more faith-filled or joyful or obedient.

Sometimes they feel that they don't know enough scripture. Sometimes they are riddled with doubt because of others who are challenging or questioning their beliefs.

But God doesn't want us to be unassured or insecure regarding our eternal life in Christ. And in this passage, John reminds us that as those who believe in the Son of God, we can be assured of our eternal life in Him.

And this is actually the purpose of this entire letter. John says in verse 13, 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.

That's the purpose statement for this entire letter. That you may know that you have eternal life. We find a very similar purpose statement in John's gospel.

[3 : 39] In John 20, 31. These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

So John wrote his gospel so that we might believe and have eternal life. And John wrote 1 John, his letter, so that we who believe might know that we have eternal life.

The purpose of the gospel was to persuade us. And the purpose of the letter is to reassure us. And in the rest of this passage, using a series of statements that begin with the phrase, we know, he repeats that four times in verses 15, 18, 19 to 20.

We know, we know, we know. John tells us several things that we may be assured of. And the first is, we know God hears us in verses 14 to 17.

And then we know God protects us in verse 18. We know that we belong to God in verse 19. And we know that the Son of God has come in verses 20 to 21. So let's first look at what we know.

[4 : 47] I mean, that we know God hears us in verses 14 to 17. It says in verse 14 and 15, And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. He's speaking here of the confidence and boldness that we have toward God or in his presence.

An illustration from an earthly king's court might be helpful here for understanding what John is getting at. In the book of Esther, when King Ahasuerus, at the incitation of evil Haman, decrees that the Jews be annihilated, Mordecai, a faithful man of God, asks Queen Esther, who is a young cousin of his that he raised up like his own adopted daughter, who has now become queen, he asks Esther to intervene on behalf of God's people, the Jews.

But Esther, even though she is the treasured queen of the king, she expresses her hesitation, her fear in Esther chapter 4 verse 11.

She says, All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live.

[6 : 27] But as for me, I have not been called to come into the king these 30 days. But Mordecai implores her and Esther finally concedes.

And as she does that, she says this in chapter 4 verse 16 of Esther, Go gather all the Jews to be found in Susa and hold a fast on my behalf. And do not eat or drink for three days, night or day.

I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish. Thankfully, when Esther goes into the king's presence, the king does extend the golden scepter to her, shows favor to her.

But note Esther's fear and reluctance. Even though she is the beloved queen, she must come to terms with her possible death sentence before approaching the king without his summons.

It's hard for us to understand because we live in an egalitarian society with unprecedented freedoms. That is the United States of America. And we live in a country where authority figures are widely distrusted and frequently reviled or derided.

[7 : 40] And so we have no idea what it's like to approach the throne room of a king. The king is not a chummy buddy that you can text or call or visit whenever you wish.

You only come to the king when he summons you. And yet, it says in verse 14, that we may have confidence toward him, before God.

We may be frank with him. We may be bold in his presence. Why is that? Because as verse 13 says, we believe in the name of the Son of God and have eternal life.

Because we have been born again into his family through faith in Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus, we would have zero confidence to approach the king.

We are sinners. We're rebels guilty of high treason. We were God's enemies. But as we sang this morning, Before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea.

[8 : 50] A great high priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me. My name is graven on his hand. My name is written on his heart. I know that while in heaven he stands, no tongue can bid me thence depart.

No tongue can bid me thence depart, because Jesus intercedes for us at the right hand of God. Because Jesus interposed his own blood by dying on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

That means it's now our birthright to be in the presence of the king. It's really fascinating and delightful to observe children, especially shy children, when they are in the comfort of their own homes.

They may not speak a single word out in the public, but in their own home, when they're with their own parents, they are loud, they're bold, they're confident, they're insistent.

And why is that? Because that's their father's house. Because that is their birthright. And so it is for every single Christian, being in the presence of God, being in the throne room of God, that is our birthright.

[10 : 12] So we are not ashamed. We are not insecure. We are not hesitant. Instead, we are bold, direct, and confident. That's the exalted privilege we have.

That's what John's speaking of. Earlier in chapter 3, verses 21 to 23, John spoke also of our confidence before God, and that we are assured that we belong to God, and that if we are assured in that way, that whatever we ask, we would receive from Him.

He's repeating the same idea here in verses 14 to 15, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him.

This is the key to answer prayer. If you want your prayers answered, this is the key. If you ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

It's the same principle that Jesus taught us in Matthew 6, 9 to 13. He told us to pray this way. Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.

[11 : 22] Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That's the purpose of prayer, that God's kingdom might come, that His will might be done. And if our prayers conform to the will of God, then our prayers will, without fail, be answered.

But if we pray for self-serving purposes, then our prayers will not be answered. James chapter 4 verse 3 tells us as much. He says, You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions.

There are people who teach Christians to, quote, name it and claim it. They contend that if you name what you want and claim it in faith, that it will be yours.

And that all unanswered prayers are simply evidence of a lack of faith. But that's a profoundly unbiblical idea. Prayer of faith is not simply asking for something you want, regardless of what God's will is, and believing that you will receive it when you don't have any basis for that faith.

That's not what prayer of faith is. John Owen describes it this way, quote, We are to pray for what God hath promised. Our requests are to be regulated by His promises and commands, which are of the same extent.

[12 : 43] Faith draws near with the promises and so finds relief. If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

How do we know that we are praying according to His will? God has revealed His will to us in His word. So then when we pray the commands and promises of Scripture, we can rest assured that God hears us and will answer us.

We know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him. This is something we know. We can be assured of it. There's a helpful resource that another pastor in our denomination who actually pastors in Toronto named Tim Kerr wrote.

He wrote a book called Take Words With You. It's basically a compilation and organization of all the promises of Scripture that we can pray. And there's a free PDF link that I posted on our chat group that you can access on Tim Chow's website.

And after giving us this general assurance about prayer, John applies this to a specific instance that he wants us to pray for in verses 16 to 17.

[13 : 57] This is something that we should pray for and that God will answer. It says, If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will give him life to those who commit sins that do not lead to death.

There is sin that leads to death. I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. Sin that does not lead to death that John is speaking of here is sin that does not end finally in death.

It's similar to what Jesus says in John chapter 11 verse 4 regarding his friend Lazarus who was deathly ill. He said of him when he was sick, This illness does not lead to death.

Well, it turns out that Lazarus did die, but Jesus then raised him from the dead so that his illness did not finally end in death. But there Jesus was speaking of physical death.

Here he's speaking of eternal death because death is contrasted with life, which in this letter invariably refers to eternal life. And so here's a curious thing.

[15 : 06] According to Romans chapter 6 verse 23, the wages of sin is death. All sin leads to death apart from the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

So then what does John mean in verses 16 to 17 that all wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. This is sin for which forgiveness has already been secured by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

In chapter 1 verse 9, John said, If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The word unrighteousness is the same word.

It's a translation, different translation of the same word that is rendered here as wrongdoing. It's the sins that we confess that we have that security of forgiveness for because of the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

And so when we see a fellow Christian committing a sin not leading to death, we're to pray to God for him or her. And if we do, God promises that he will give that brother or sister who is sinning life.

[16 : 14] Even though John in several places in this letter describes eternal life as something that Christians already possess in Jesus Christ, he also describes it, for example, in chapter 2 verse 25 as something that comes to full fruition later.

There's an already but not yet reality. We already have this in our possession but it's consummated, comes to full fruition in the future. And that's what he's promising, that God is promising here when we pray for a brother or sister committing a sin not leading to death, God will give them that eternal life in the future.

And that means our intercessory prayer that is an integral part of the work that God does in the lives of our brothers and sisters. As James chapter 5 verse 20 puts it, whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

That's the power of our prayer on behalf of our sinning brothers and sisters. We can be confident that when we ask God for this that he will hear us and we can know that we have the request that we have asked of him.

If you're a beginner in bowling like me, you can use bowling bumpers. You guys have seen those? They're basically guardrails that block the gutters so that the ball can't go into the gutter.

[17 : 47] It just bounces back and forth from the bumpers and it makes sure that it always, the ball always gets to the end of the lane and to hit the pins like it's designed to. And such is the effect of our prayers on behalf of our wayward brothers and sisters.

God has ordained that by our prayers for one another that we would be preserved unto eternal life. God has ordained that we stand guard between fellow believers and eternal death.

Our prayer is a matter of life and death. Are you praying for one another? This is the case for sin that does not lead to death.

There is, however, sin that leads to death. And John says, I do not say that one should pray for that. The sin unto death for, there is a sin unto death for which prayer is no avail.

Throughout this letter, John has been addressing the doubt and discourse sown among the believers that he is writing to by those who had denied Christ and seceded from the church, separated from the church.

[19 : 06] And it's most likely that sin of the secessionists, those who denied Christ and separated themselves from the church, that John has in mind here because he described them this way in 1 John 2, verse 22, who is the liar, but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ.

This is the Antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. They were once considered Christians, part of the church, the fellowship of believers, but they denied Christ and left the church.

And so chapter 1, verse 19 said, they went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us, but they went out that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

This is the sin that leads to death. It's similar to the sin of apostasy described in Hebrews, chapter 6, verses 4 to 6. Those who reject Jesus Christ after having experienced the Holy Spirit in some measure cannot be restored to repentance.

They cannot repent. They do not repent. Hence, there is no forgiveness. So John says, I do not say that one should pray for that.

[20 : 22] The first assurance of verses 14 to 17 is that we know God hears us. And then in verse 18, John gives us the second assurance that we know God protects us.

But he who was born of God, he says, we know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him and the evil one does not touch him.

John's point isn't that a true Christian never struggles with besetting sins or habitual sins.

His point is that a Christian does not sin in a general sense. When you observe the life of someone who is truly converted, someone who has been born of God, what is characteristic of that person, what defines that person, is going to be faith and obedience, not sin.

This is why John said in chapter 3, verse 10, by this it is evident who are children of God and who are the children of devil. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

[21 : 50] A person's righteousness or obedience to God can serve as evidence of a person's genuine conversion because everyone who is truly born of God has died to sin and lives to Christ.

As 2 Corinthians 5, 17 says, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. A true Christian has made a decisive break with sin so that he no longer sins.

Not in an absolute sense, but in a general sense. What characterizes him, what defines him, is no longer unrighteousness, but righteousness.

This is because he who was born of God protects him and the evil one does not touch him. Notice the repetition of the phrase born of God here. In the first instance, it refers to every Christian.

Every Christian is born of God. But in the second instance, it refers to Christ. Everyone who has been born of God does not sin, but he who was born of God protects him.

[22 : 59] That's referring to Jesus. The original begotten one, the son of God, protects the children of God, those who are born of God by faith. This shows that there is a spiritual warfare being waged right now for our eternal souls.

But for those who belong to God through faith in Jesus, they are safe because the son of God, the original begotten son, he protects us and keeps us from the evil one.

The evil one is a reference to the devil and the evil one, he says, does not touch us. Continuing this theme, John assures us of another Christian verity in verse 19.

We know that we are from God and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. In several places of his gospel, John describes the devil as the ruler of this world.

Even though the devil can only act under God's ultimate sovereignty, Satan does exercise a kind of rule here in this sinful world.

[24 : 04] And so it says that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. But in contrast, we are from God. We are no longer under the dominion of the devil.

This is because it's similar reality that Paul speaks of in Colossians. Chapter 2, verses 13 to 15. And you who are dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him, in Jesus.

Because we had all sinned against God, there was a record of sin, a debt that stood up, stood against us with its legal demands. And because we deserved punishment, Satan, whose name means the accuser, had a claim on us, had an argument to make, had a case to make for our condemnation.

But because Jesus died for our sins and paid for the punishment that we should have deserved, we deserved. And having defeated sin and death, Jesus was raised victoriously and ascended to rule far above that of the rulers of the power of this world.

[25 : 28] Jesus silenced the accuser. He erased every claim he had on us. He put his seal, God's seal on us, declaring that we now belong to him. That's who we are, brothers and sisters.

We are not of this world, whether we are from God. So then are we, we should ask ourselves, are we living worldly lives or godly lives?

Are we characterized by the things that God values or the things that the world values? Is your mindset on things that are above compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, love, or is your mindset on things that are below?

Sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, idolatry. We know that we belong to God and so we should live like it.

And lastly, John assures us in verses 20 to 21 that we know that the Son of God has come. He says in verse 20, and we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true and we are in Him who is true in His Son, Jesus Christ.

[26 : 48] He is the true God and eternal life. Jesus Christ, God's one and only Son, took on human flesh and came to earth.

He lived a life of perfect obedience and died an atoning sacrifice to cleanse us from our sins and then He was raised to give us new life and by doing this, He gave us understanding so that we may know Him who is true.

He's talking about God the Father. We are in Him who is true in His Son, Jesus Christ. The one who is true is the one whose Son is Jesus Christ.

the language of being in Him refers to the spiritual mutual indwelling. When we abide in Jesus through faith, we abide in God His Father.

Jesus Christ then is the only way to abide in God, to know the one who is true. Some people claim that we can all come to know God in our own ways.

[27 : 52] the various philosophies and religions in the world offer alternate ways of knowing God. But the Word of God teaches us that there is only one way.

We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true and we are in Him who is true in His Son, Jesus Christ.

We cannot know God the Father without knowing God the Son. Then John adds that He is the true God in eternal life.

It's a bit ambiguous what the referring of the pronoun He is here could be God the Father, He could be God the Father, it could be Jesus.

But since the nearest antecedent is Jesus Christ and since in several places of this letter John has already called Jesus the Word of Life and Eternal Life, it seems likely that John is referring here to Jesus.

[28 : 53] And if that's the case, John begins and ends his letter with this startling Christological statement about the identity of Jesus. He began in chapter 1 verses 1 to 2 by saying that which was from the beginning which we have heard, the one, the God who was from the beginning, the Word of Life, he said that that eternal life is Jesus.

And then he concludes his letter also by reaffirming who Jesus is. He is the true God and eternal life. John ends his gospel, begins and ends his gospel similarly.

He says in the beginning of John chapter 1, in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And he says that no one has ever seen God but the only God who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

And then he concludes his gospel similarly in John chapter 20 verse 28 through the lips of Thomas declaring Jesus is my Lord and my God. This is a shocking statement because remember that Judaism is a strictly monotheistic religion.

And every faithful Jew recited Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 4 to 5 every single day once in the morning, once in the evening that the Lord our God the Lord is one.

[30 : 08] This speaks not only to the uniqueness of God that there is no one like him, there is only one God but also to the unity of God that he is undivided, has no division within himself.

And because there is only one God, God's people were called to undivided allegiance to him. And yet John, a faithful Jew, the beloved disciple who was with Jesus in the flesh during his earthly ministry, seemingly without any hesitation, affirms that God the Father is the true God and that his Son Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life.

It's because the only God, the Father, unmistakably revealed Jesus to us and because of the reality of Christ's life, death, and resurrection which undeniably proved that Jesus is the Son of God that John, like the other New Testament writers, make such an unprecedented statement.

the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father and yet both persons along with the Holy Spirit are one triune God.

The only way, therefore, to get to know God the Father is through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. And that's why to deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came in the flesh, to deny that he is the one who imparts eternal life is tantamount to idolatry.

[31 : 39] That's the logic of verse 21. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. One cannot rightly believe in God the Father without being in his Son, Jesus Christ.

affirming a vague, shapeless idea of a supreme being is not sufficient for salvation. We must be assured of this, that we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true.

If you think about it, if we were assured in this truth as John wants us to be, don't you think we would have greater boldness and urgency in our witness to our neighbors about Jesus?

Do we really believe that Jesus is the only way, the truth, and the life? That no one comes to the Father except through him? Do we really believe that all worship, all religion that deviate from this truth is idolatry?

Do we really believe that we possess the only hope for eternal life? and if people are so frantically trying to develop a vaccine to lessen the chance of physical death from this pandemic, should we not urgently share the only cure for certain eternal death?

[33 : 08] Brothers and sisters, we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding. These are the Christian verities, the truth that we can live by.

And John's approach to reassuring his wavering congregation is really insightful because he doesn't ground our assurance in our up and down emotions, but in the unchanging theological and ethical truths of Scripture.

He doesn't ground our assurance in our subjective experience of God, but in the objective reality of God revealed in His Son, Jesus Christ. In one of the many letters he wrote during his lifetime, C.S. Lewis also reminds us of the same truth.

Quote, The presence of God is not the same as the sense of the presence of God. The latter may be due to the imagination. The former may be attended with no sensible consolation.

The act which engenders a child ought to be and usually is attended by pleasure. But it is not the pleasure that produces the child. Where there is pleasure, there may be sterility.

[34 : 23] Where there is no pleasure, the act might be fertile. And in the spiritual marriage of God and the soul, it is the same. It is the actual presence, not the sensation of the presence, of the Holy Spirit which begets Christ in us.

the sense of the presence is a super added gift for which we give thanks when it comes. You might feel like worshipping, you might not feel like worshipping God this morning.

Maybe you haven't showered or you didn't have a chance to make coffee or you feel groggy. maybe you feel crummy from staying home all week and having wasted countless hours on trivial pursuits.

Maybe you feel harried from wrangling your children all day long who have been stir crazy. Maybe you feel like a bad Christian because of your prayerless days and because your Bible is collecting dust.

Maybe you don't feel passionate enough, you feel insecure, you don't feel loving enough, you don't feel joyful enough. But if you are ever looking inward toward yourself, you will always be insecure.

[35 : 37] You will always be up and down. You must fix your gaze on Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and focus on what we know.

We know God hears us. This is our birthright. When we confess our sins, He forgives us. When we pray for our sinning brothers and sisters, He brings them back and restores them to this path of eternal life.

We know God protects us. He keeps us from sin. He will not let the evil one touch us, it says. He will not stand to let the evil one chain us to his slavish dominion again.

We know that we belong to God. No matter how you feel, we belong to Him. We are not of this world. This is not our country. When we feel like aliens and foreigners here in this world, when we feel marginalized or even persecuted, we hold on to our hope and longing for our fatherland, for our homeland, because we know we belong to God.

We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding. We know that we have salvation in Jesus' name. We know that we have come to know the true God, regardless of what your friends say, regardless of what the pundits say, regardless of how you feel, we know this is the truth.

[37 : 02] That's how we live as Christians. And it's when we live by what we rightly know, that the right feelings flow from us, the right actions follow from us.

So, brothers and sisters, that's my prayer for you this morning. Be assured this morning of what you know in Jesus Christ. Amen.