

# A Lifestyle of Assurance

## 1 John 4:13-18

### INTRODUCTION:

How important is your personal assurance of salvation? As you search the Scriptures you will find that you cannot live a life of gratitude to God without it, you cannot worship aright without it, you will not be eager to obey and put off sinning without it. (It requires assurance to love, and to serve with right motives.)

Because of these reasons – Scripture makes Christian assurance a duty – 2 Peter 1:(9) 10. (EX. Recent call from a Fresno pastor – a teaching circulating, “A person cannot know for sure he is saved until judgment day.”)

Where true faith exists, it will long for assurance just as much as you long to know where you stand with your best friend. Scripture is not stingy in extending solid promises of assurance to those who are truly born again. See 1 John 5:11, 12.

This is certainly then an important question – how may we know for sure that we “have the Son?”

In many quarters of Christianity one might hear in answer to this question, “Just trust your decision that you made and do not doubt it. Write your decision date on a card and put it in a safe deposit box.” But the more I search Scripture, the more convinced I am that this advice is a little bare of biblical support (and somewhat one-dimensional).

Evidence for assurance of salvation in Scripture is far more “3-D” and comprehensive. In some ways, assurance is like *happiness*, pursue it directly, and it tends to evade you. Like happiness, assurance is also the byproduct of something. Assurance is the *byproduct* of a life lived unto God. We’re to pursue assurance God’s way. (EX. In New England, a 6 hour prayer marathon to get assurance.)

1 John 4:13-18 gives provides an encouragement for Christians to have assurance. We are to desire it – but *by the means* God has appointed.

That helps explain the title of this morning’s message. We are to live a lifestyle of assurance BECAUSE God’s grace promises it to us if we will live by grace.

The benefits of assurance, or confidence before God, are truly valuable. Assurance is the best preparation for service in the body of Christ, and it’s the best preparation for glory.

John the apostle boils down this grace living (assurance lifestyle) into three areas. Assurance, boldness, and confidence will fill our hearts if we continue to:

- *Believe* the Gospel
- *Abide* in Christ
- *Love* the Brethren

In the first half of 1 John 4, the Apostle has laid out a two-fold test to determine whether or not a person is a true believer: **Believe**, and **love**. The genuine believer always has faith in the Apostolic Gospel, and he loves the brethren. The false teachers, whom John is exposing, fail the test on both counts. They do not hold to the biblical Gospel (*as Gnostics they hold to a distorted view of Christ's incarnation*) and they do not love the brotherhood.

To love with God's love (of His nature) is only possible if God's Spirit resides in you. Those *born of the Spirit* are made capable by the Spirit of supernatural love, and by the Spirit, they are ensured of experiencing God's love.

God is the Source of love. He showers His people with His love and He expects us to express His love to others. (Communing with Him fits us for the expression of His love.)

God's love is demonstrated in sending Christ to be the **propitiation** for our sins. As *sin bearer*, Christ averted God's wrath from us to Himself. He bore the penalty for our sin in His own Person.

God's love is self-sacrificial – it is given to those who are lying under divine wrath; it is extended to those who are polluted, unlovely, morally deformed, unclean, repulsive, unattractive. Wonder of wonders, God is not repelled, His love is drawn out to them in their helpless, rebellious condition.

Have you seen yourself as among that number of the unworthy (deserving only of God's judgment)? And yet you found to your amazement that God did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for you. If so, then God has set you apart to manifest His love.

Now we cannot comprehend this sort of love UNLESS we first receive it. Only then are we able to transmit and express it to others. We must first be made (by God's Spirit) objects of this exotic manner of love – *feeling it experimentally* – before we will be able to love others in the same way.

While still in your sin and deformity, God's love was drawn out to you. He **lavished** his love upon you – making you an object of His mercy and compassion. Only those who have tasted this redeeming love are capable of passing it on to others (we love, ONLY because He first loved us).

In order to love supernaturally, we have to love our brother as God sees and loves us. That means you love them on the account of God having loved you – seeing you as polluted and perishing. To identify our love with God's love, we must be able to have deep compassion on the evil-doer and earnestly long for his salvation. That is only possible if we ourselves know we were former enemies of God who have been reconciled solely by the blood of Christ.

Throughout his epistle, as well as in chapter 4, John repeatedly brings us to this conclusion: ***There is no safe way to prove we are born of God BUT to love God and the brethren.***

**Christians are encouraged to have assurance because God's love and grace provide its source and foundation (vv. 13-18). (It's the best preparation for service and for glory.) Our two-point outline:**

**I. The Basis of Assurance.**

**II. The Benefits of Assurance.**

**A. The Basis for Christian Assurance (vv. 13-16).**

**1.) The ministry of the Holy Spirit is the source of assurance (v. 13)**

By the grace gift of God's Spirit we come to know God's love for us. By the Spirit, God sheds abroad His love in our hearts (Rom 5:5).

John brings *faith* and *knowledge* together here – the result of the Spirit's testimony in our minds and hearts (inspiring faith) is an experimental knowledge of God's love for us (see v. 16 – faith and knowledge together).

The Spirit gives us certainty regarding the Gospel – that what is promised to believers in the Gospel is indeed our personal possession (1 Cor 2:12). In the written pages of Scripture the Gospel is *propositional* truth (yet a dead letter to the unbeliever), but to the man or woman made new, regenerated by God's Spirit, the love of God in the Gospel is literally transplanted into your heart.

Believing the Gospel is a matter of *revelation* according to Matthew 11:27 – the Son must be “revealed” to the sinner so that the truth of the Gospel becomes a moving power within. The man convinced of sin, discovers in the Gospel that he is an object of God's love – trembling, he takes hold of God's love (and continually does so). From then on, he becomes a conscious *storekeeper* if you will of God's love.

Once he has become a grateful *receiver of God's love* (actively embracing it), he is now a glad *transmitter of God's love*. He's not content to keep God's love to himself, but actively looks to love others.

“We cannot truly love the brethren with a sincere heart unless the Spirit puts forth His power” (Calvin). In this way (by loving the brethren), God also testifies that He indwells us – it is proof that we have God abiding in us. When God's love is expressed through us to others (by the Spirit's power), it deepens our confidence that we are possessed by God's love and belong to Him as His beloved children.

(This section of 1 John provides reassurance to the genuine Christian who likely sees his failures in the area of love. This chapter refocuses our attention on Christ's work on our behalf, on God the source of all true love, and on the Spirit's enablement, and testimony of God's love for His own.)

But in regard to assurance, the Spirit does more than bear witness to mutual abiding. He also inspires faith in the Gospel message.

## 2.) The Apostles' Gospel confessed is the source of assurance (vv. 14-15).

The Holy Spirit uses the Apostolic testimony to produce ongoing faith in the Person and work of Christ. (Assurance has its subjective side, but the Spirit of God utilizes the Gospel of grace as the object of your faith to *stabilize* you and *assure* you.)

The Spirit working in us enables us to see afresh Christ's death as God's act for our salvation. We "see" or "behold" in our fellowship and communion with Him the presence of His love.

C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross-centered Life*, and the books by Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace* (and others) stress the necessity of preaching the Gospel to ourselves every day. When we take Christ as our righteousness and right-standing before God each day, we are communing with God at the "Mercy Seat" of Christ.

By fresh acts of daily faith, we reason our way through the Gospel – "God is completely pacified on my behalf because of Christ's death for me. Therefore He receives me into favor. By my Savior's sacrifice, He has taken away the enmity – only reconciliation remains. My guilt has been absolved in Christ. This is the basis of my acceptance."

"I know that God's love and holiness require righteousness. I have fled to Christ where righteousness is found. Christ is my qualification to be freely loved by God! Christ is my eligibility for ongoing favor and acceptance from God. Christ literally is my holy status before God."

"In sending His Son to be the propitiation for my sins that I might live, God has effectively (in my case) removed every obstacle to a love relationship with Himself."

***The Word of Grace in the hands of the Spirit is the source of our knowledge that we abide in God.*** [To *abide* is to remain in the sphere of, it is to hold fast, to remain steadfast. The Apostle John uses the word *abide* to refer to the closest possible relationship. It alludes to the believer's mystical relationship with Christ of union with Him of inner unity and fellowship. "***Abide***" in the context of union with Christ does not mean ***holding a position***, but rather, ***allowing oneself to be held*** (pictured in John 15 as the vine and the branch.) Abiding in Christ is a statement of Christ's ownership of us right down to the depths of our being – Colin Brown, *Dict. of N.T. Theol.*]

Mutual abiding is the mystery of the Gospel spoken of in Colossians 1:27 -- ***you in Christ and Christ in you***. Abiding is union with Christ lived out – It's a lifestyle in which you willingly order your life as one possessed by His love.

By the Spirit's indwelling ministry we have learned and grown in our knowledge that we abide in God. This passage is reminiscent of the pattern for assurance found in other portions of the N.T. (such as Romans 8). 1.) There is Spirit enabled on-going ***faith in the Gospel***. 2.) There is the ***testimony of a changed life*** (able to love the brethren). 3.) There is the ***witness of the Spirit***.

Abiding is our response to God's offer. He offers Himself to be enjoyed by us in His Son. As Piper often says, [abiding to the glory of God] ***is taking delight in all that God is towards us in Christ***.

*Therefore, we can safely say from our text that it is by habitual abiding and dwelling in God that we give evidence that He dwells in us.* In practical terms, it is the individual who communes with God in Bible study and prayer who will be the instrument through which God will demonstrate His divine love. (Through *abiding*, we experience an ongoing knowledge of God's love in our spirits. We can only pass on what we ourselves are receiving in our spirits. In that sense, *abiding* is a prerequisite for loving the brethren.)

Now, there is a necessary relationship between abiding in Christ and loving the brethren: 1.) By the new birth and the indwelling of the Spirit we gain the knowledge of God's love. 2.) As we walk in the Spirit, we rely on His love, we abide in Him and learn that God's nature is love. 3.) We discover that to live in God (abide) means to love the brethren.

This brings us to our third basis for assurance:

### **3. Our active love, which stems from faith in God, is the source of assurance (v. 16).**

In this one verse, John touches upon all three sources of assurance: the *Gospel* of God's love in Christ, the *Spirit's testimony* giving us the knowledge of God's love to us, and the Spirit-enabled *love* of the brethren.

We know ourselves to be a child of God's grace, BECAUSE, by the Spirit and the Word, God sets His own Son before us daily that we might reckon our adoption as sons.

*By faith God dwells in us, where God abides, there is love,* hence it follows that love is a function of faith.

As sons of God we now have a *faculty* of loving – it's a love that goes forth to people as they are attractive to God, not us. In other words, we fall back on God's love. If we love, it's only because *"We have known and believed the love which God has for us."* It's faith alone that works by love (Gal 5:6).

*APPLICATION:* In our communing with God we *consent* to be loved by God on Gospel terms. We lay our hearts open to a full frank acceptance of the love that first loved you – consent to it – THEN from that love will spring up love in you that will make your communion with God without fear and your love of the saints a joy.

We don't work up this love. Our love to God and the brethren is *reflexive* – it is the Spirit engendered response to receiving His love – the love embodied in the Son whom He sent to be the propitiation for our sins.

We've seen the three pillars that form the basis of our assurance:

1.) Ongoing faith in the Gospel. 2.) Abiding in Christ. 3.) Love of the brethren. (In each case, it is God's Spirit who in grace enables us believe, abide, and love.) Now let's consider the benefits of assurance.

## **B. The Benefits of Assurance (vv. 17-18).**

### **1. Confidence in the Day of Judgment is a great benefit of assurance (v. 17).**

The Apostle John seeks to instill confidence in the heart of the believer. Abiding produces confidence, boldness, and openness toward God. Believers who live in close communion with the Lord are free from the fear of punishment.

Without this confidence, there is always a degree of misery. The person who fears is not experiencing God's love in his or her spirit. Unbelief leaves the person disturbed. Nothing is more agitating than being harassed by the disquiet of the soul. (Even one sin bouncing around in the conscience can steal our joy and peace.)

***Only the knowledge of God's love can bring calmness and peace to the soul.***

When God's love is known by faith, peace is given to our conscience.

So how do we apprehend the kind of perfect love that dispels fear? Fear is dispelled when we learn to flee to God in Christ as a habit. We need to learn proficiency in faith. Present boldness comes from experimental knowledge of our shared relationship with God – that's a precious byproduct of abiding in Christ.

So, assurance not only instills confidence in view of the coming day of judgment, assurance also frees us from fear.

## **2. Freedom from fear is a great benefit of assurance (v. 18).**

Love and fear are incompatible. In verse 18 the Apostle highlights the excellence of assurance by describing its contrary, or opposite effect, namely fear.

By nature we all have a certain dread of God; we prefer estrangement from Him. Thoughts of His judgment bring to mind the concepts of *shame, humiliation, condemnation, guilt, exposure, terror*. (Because of our sin, we do not wish to draw near.)

The fear of punishment brings a certain anticipated torment. Conscience "holds court," and we get a little taste of just how much we fear judgment. If my conscience does this to me now, what would God's anger do to me?

This is why it's so important for the believer to live a life of assurance. Without assurance, we will not be prepared to greet the Lord in confidence (1 John 2:28). We won't be ready. And, without confidence, we are unable to express God's love to others.

By contrast, the believer who abides manifests a mature, or "perfected love." He has made the Gospel the "food" of his meditation. Therefore he understands that Christ's death answered the claims of divine justice against him. He is free to be a channel of God's love to the brethren.

He rejoices that Christ's propitiation has removed every obstacle to a love relationship with God. For Christ's death has secured ***our not being under condemnation***. Thus, when you are ***perfected in love***, you have boldness before God because you KNOW that the wages of your sin was reckoned to the Son of God. As a result, love has a free course. There is no more judicial reckoning.

Coming to this mature conviction involves abiding as a matter of practice.

Your conscience itself resists your consent to be loved freely by God. As John MacArthur has pointed out in his book on the conscience. Your conscience is “wired” for strict justice. It only understands law and punishment. It’s not interested in mercy.

*APPLICATION:* No wonder we need to feed on the Gospel. When we do meditate on the substitutionary work of Christ, our consciences see by faith that divine justice has been executed against our sins. Brethren, if we only knew how willing the Spirit was to show us the blood of the Lamb as our only argument for divine favor.

Only then will our consciences lie down and be still and allow us to consent to God’s free love. Apart from ongoing faith in the Gospel of grace, our consciences tell us that we are *disqualified* for God’s amazing love, AND that we must make ourselves *eligible* for His love.

What does God intend for you? Isn’t clear from our text that God does not begrudge you the precious blessing of assurance, and confidence before Him?

He doesn’t intend that your little boat bob about on a pitching sea of fear, uncertainty, and doubt.

God desires your comfort! His nature is love. But it is not comfort by way of presumption – confidence does not come by way of blind assumption, and easy believism. The way of comfort is marked out for us in 1 John 4.

We reach boldness by way of an unforgettable insight and reality – namely that the pains of hell in all their intensity and terror were born by the crucified Christ. The burning wrath of God crushed the Son of God. And now, because of His cross, we who are saved understand that we have been snatched from the fire like twigs already ablaze.

We reach confidence by a lifestyle. It’s the lifestyle described in 1 John 4. It is a life direction of abiding in our glorious Savior whose atonement has made us vessels of mercy. (How many are too busy to make abiding their priority?)

**CONCLUSION:** We’ve seen that God’s way of assurance and boldness is by *faith* in the Gospel, by the *witness* of the Spirit, and by God’s *love* passing through us to others. When our lifestyle is characterized by abiding in the Father’s love, we will be without fear.

We’ve seen that to live in God is to live in love. God desires to bring His love in you to maturity. The perfection (or completeness) of maturing love produces the experience of present confidence as well as confidence in the Day of Judgment.

How does this confidence begin? First we experience the Father’s love for us. We find it to be powerful, life-changing. Once we have it, we are forever removed from dread. (Our trust and love are directly proportional to our lack of fear.) As we abide, we experience the holiness of God’s love and our desire for obedience increases.

May God motivate you even more to pursue the lifestyle of assurance enjoined in 1 John 4.

