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## The ASSURANCE of Our SALVATION Part 13

### *Safe in His Eternal King- dom*

#### *The Lord's Own Prayer*

**John 17:1-5 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup> "Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You,

<sup>2</sup> even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life."

<sup>3</sup> "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

<sup>4</sup> "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You

have given Me to do."

<sup>5</sup> "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."

Perhaps it is as well, at this point, to remind ourselves of the fact that when our blessed Lord and Savior offered this prayer to His Father, He did so audibly. It was a prayer addressed to God, but it was meant to be overheard by the disciples. And the whole character of the prayer, not only in this first section, which we have been considering, but the entire prayer as recorded in the whole chapter, drives us to the same conclusion—that our Lord had one great object in thus praying this prayer audibly, and that was that these disciples and followers of His might know for certain the security of their position.

The whole tenor of the prayer is that our Lord Jesus is handing over these disciples to God the Father, and praying to Him to look after them, as it were, and He does so audibly in order that they might know that. But in so doing, He enters into certain details, and it is as we look at these details, as we have been doing, that we really grasp all the great and high doctrine, and come to the conclusion that our position is safe and secure.

In other words, we have been engaged in an analysis of these verses, in order that we all might really find ourselves experiencing what **Augustus Toplady** expresses in his well-known hymn, that position in which a man is confident and assured, certain that nothing can ever separate him from the love of God:

**“Things future, nor things that are now,  
Nor all things below or above,  
Can make Him His purpose forego,  
Or sever my soul from His love.”**

That is the great doctrine that is announced here in these verses—the security of the believer. Our Lord was coming to the end of His earthly life. He was leaving the world and going back to God to share that eternal glory in all its fullness, and our Lord’s great concern was that these followers of His—and through them all who would believe because of their preaching and all Christians in all ages everywhere—should know for certain the security of their position. And we find it, as a result, one of the greatest themes in all the New Testament epistles.

In a sense, that is why every one of these epistles was written, in order that all Christians might *know*, and the writers exhort them to live a certain type of life because of this. Christians are not exhorted to do certain things in order that they ultimately might arrive in heaven. Rather, they are told to live this kind of life because they are destined for it, and it is because of this that sin is so unthinkable, and so incompatible.

**John** summarizes that in his first epistle when he says, **“And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself...” (1 John 3:3 NASB)**, so the great thing is to know that we have this hope.

You find it again, for example, in **Hebrews 6**, where the author exhorts the Hebrew Christians to continue to give diligence to good works, **“...to the full assurance of hope until the end.” (Hebrew 6:11 NASB)**—it is the same thought.

He wants them to know that they have an anchor within the veil, **“Where,”** he says, **“...has entered as a forerunner for us...” (Hebrews 6:20 NASB).**

**Hebrews 6:20 (NASB)**

<sup>20</sup> **“Where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”**

That is the way to live the Christian life. The Christian was never meant to go through this world haltingly and uncertainly, wondering whether he is a Christian, hoping that sometime or other before death something may suddenly happen to him. No, he should start in this position and he should walk steadfastly and assuredly in the direction of his eter-

nal hope. That, I say, is the purpose of this great prayer and it comes out especially in the great and high doctrine we have looked at together in these first **five verses**. Indeed, it has been our object and endeavor, as we have been considering them, to bring out that aspect of the truth, in order that we all might enjoy **“...to the full assurance of hope until the end.” (Hebrew 6:11 NASB)**.

Now we have been doing it in a detailed manner, and what I want to do here is to try to sum it all up and to take one of those synoptic views of the whole, so that we may see ourselves as we are in God’s great plan and purpose.

We have outlined that as it is taught here, and we have seen certain things about it. We have seen that it is not something contingent or fortuitous, it is something that has been planned, and the names of God’s people have been written in the Lamb’s book of life from before the foundation of the world. That is the starting point and we have looked at it as it is unfolded and as it has been enacted and brought to pass in this world.

In other words, our salvation is dependent upon God’s eternal purpose, carried out in history, so that we are not saved by ideas or by theories, but by certain things that have been done and enacted once and for ever. Our salvation must always be thought of in those terms and categories. It belongs to history and it is as definitely historical as the fact that Julius Caesar invaded Britain in 55 BC. It is all dependent on certain events, things that have actually taken place. So, having gone into these things in detail, I want now to gather up the grounds for our belief in the security of the Christian believer, and to put it in the form of a number of principles.

First, we are told that the Christian is one who has been chosen by God and has been given by God to His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: **“Even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life” (John 17:2 NASB)**.

Now that is a vital statement. I wonder whether you have ever noticed that our Lord repeats it seven times in this one chapter. I do not want you to become interested merely statistically—that is not the point—but I do want you to see the importance of this statement. There it is in the second verse: **“that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life” (John 17:2 NASB)**.

Then in **verse 6**, he says, **“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world...” (John 17:6 NASB)**, and again **“...they were**

**Yours and You gave them to Me...**—so he says it twice in that [sixth verse](#).

[John 17:6 \(NASB\)](#)

**“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.”**

Then we find it again in the [ninth verse](#): **“I ask on their behalf”—notice this—“I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours.”**

[John 17:9 \(NASB\)](#)

**“I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours.”**

He does not pray for the world, he prays only for those who belong to God and whom God has given to him—there is the great division. Then we find it in [verse 11](#): **“I am”** he says, **no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are”** ([John 17:11 NASB](#)).

It is the same reference. And again, in the [next verse](#): **“While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled”** ([John 17:12 NASB](#)).

And finally, we are given it for the last time in [verse 24](#): **“Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world”** ([John 17:24 NASB](#)).

Now the plain teaching of these scriptures is obviously that **God the Father** has given a certain people to **God the Son**, and the Son has come into this world specifically to give eternal life to those people and to nobody else.

‘Ah,’ you say, ‘but I do not understand that sort of doctrine!’

But I am simply explaining to you the statement of the Scriptures. If there is any other conceivable explanation of these statements I shall be interested to hear what it is. This is not my theory, or that of any other man. Our Lord says it seven times in this

one chapter, and it is a statement you find repeatedly running through the Scriptures, namely that God His Father has given Him, as it were, a mass of people, that He should give eternal life **“that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life”** ([John 17:2 NASB](#)).

So that the business of the Son is to give eternal life to each one of those people. That is what our Lord Himself says in this great high priestly prayer under the very shadow of the cross.

But when I say something like this, people immediately begin to ask questions. They say, **‘I do not understand the love of God that can do this for some and not for others.’**

My dear friends, I do not understand it, neither does anybody else understand it. Our business is to come to Scripture and to believe it. I do not pretend to understand the eternal mind of God and how it works. I am not meant to do that. This is the trouble with the philosophers. They say that they do not understand how God can do this or that, they want to explain the mind of the Almighty God with their pigmy minds and it cannot be done. And that is why the philosophers find it so difficult to become Christians.

All I know is that the blessed Son of God, standing in this world, says, **‘I pray not for the world’**; He prays only for those whom God has given Him. He does not even say that He has chosen them, He says that God the Father has chosen them and given Him these people. And as I understand this doctrine, it is that when the Son came from heaven, He came with a great commission from the Father. It was that He should do certain things in this world in order that He could give eternal life to those people whom God had set apart unto Himself and whom He had given to the Son as His inheritance.

If you trace that doctrine through the Scriptures, you will find it in the Old Testament quite as plainly as in the New; you will find it everywhere. Your salvation and mine was something that was known to God, and our names written in the Lamb’s book of life, before the creation of the world. You do not understand it, neither do I, but, thank God, we are not saved by our understanding, but by our acceptance of the truth.

Indeed, it is quite unscriptural for men and women to put their intellectual difficulties before the plain statement of Scripture, and I think we need to reconsider this matter. It is not a bit surprising that we find it difficult to equate certain scriptural statements with our concep-

tion of the love of God. But the apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, says that **“For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21 NASB)**, but the wise, those people who trust to their own understanding are confused — **“to the Greeks (Gentiles) foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:23 NASB)”**.

My dear friends, the way to start considering these matters is just to remind yourself of what you are. Measure your mind, which you have set up as the ultimate court of appeal and authority, how big is it? What do we really understand with our minds? Do we understand ourselves, do we understand life, do we understand the whole mystery and marvel of creation? Do we understand electricity, or something as small as an atom? Of course, we do not!

And yet we put up our little minds against the mind of God. Our minds are too small, their scope is too limited. But that is not the whole truth about us. Not only are our faculties limited to start with, we are, furthermore, sinful creatures. We see nothing straight and everything is influenced by that fact. Our mind is naturally at enmity with God and all our understanding is defective, tarnished and soiled by sin.

That is why the Christian position is that henceforth, from this point forward, I cease to put anything in terms of **‘my mind and my understanding’**. And I come as a little child to the Bible, realizing that it will not be open to me except my mind be enlightened by the Holy Spirit—so I do not trust to my mind.

Faith means that we voluntarily and deliberately open ourselves up to the revelation of the Bible and that when we do not understand things we say, **‘I do not understand, but I am content not to understand. I believe the word of God and I rest myself and my whole position entirely upon it.’** That is the faith position.

The moment that you begin to bring in your mind and natural arguments and say that you cannot see or understand something, you are turning from the revelation and are reverting back to the sinful position of putting your mind up as the supreme court of appeal. In **Romans 8** we are told that **“For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so**

**that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup> and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified”** (**Romans 8:29-30 NASB**)

He has done it; the Christian is already glorified as he is justified in the sight of God, though still on earth. He may be **‘considered as sheep to be slaughtered’** (**verse 36**), but he is glorified.

**Romans 8:36 (NASB)**

<sup>36</sup> **“Just as it is written, “FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.”**

God does not do things in a piecemeal manner, He does everything as a whole, and He knows his people. **‘Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His’** (**2 Timothy 2:19**).

**2 Timothy 2:19 (NASB)**

<sup>19</sup> **“Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.”**

God has known His people from the very beginning, and He has separated them unto Himself. Paul prays for the Ephesians that the eyes of their understanding may be enlightened, that they may know **‘what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints’** (**Ephesians 1:18**). It is the same doctrine; we find it everywhere in the Bible.

**Ephesians 1:18 (NASB)**

<sup>18</sup> **“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”**

So, this is the **first basis and ground of our security and our assurance**. My assurance rests upon the fact that, if I am a Christian at all, I am a Christian because God has chosen me unto salvation and separated me; He has taken me out of it all, and has given me to His Son that the Son might give me eternal life. What a blessed basis on which to live! What an astounding fact! Oh, the “unutterable folly” (old English) sheer stupidity of men and women who try by philosophy to understand the inscrutable, the eternal, and reject such a doctrine!

Some people believe that you can receive eternal life from the blessed Son of God and then lose it, then regain it, and then lose it again, and go on thus uncer-

tainly in this world until you come to die. My friends, it is an insult to God! It is an insult to God's glorious plan of redemption, it is an insult to God's eternal way of doing things — **“Even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life” (John 17:2 NASB)**. What a conception, that God has given me to Christ, that Christ might save me and might give me eternal life.

That is the first ground, but let us come to another. **The second basis of security and assurance**, according to our Lord, is that every hindrance and obstacle to our receiving this gift of eternal life has been removed by the blessed work of the Lord Himself. **“I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do”** (John 17:4 NASB).

Many things have had to be done before I could receive the gift of eternal life. As a natural man I wondered how I could get it. Now we have already considered what it is. You remember that eternal life really means that we are sharers of the life of God and are in communion with Him. Is it not obvious, therefore, that a great many things have to happen before we can come into that condition?

So, thank God, my **second ground for assurance** is that it has all been done. There is nothing that has been left undone. He has dealt with the problem of my guilt, by removing it. He has reconciled me to God, the law of God has been satisfied — **“Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies”** (Romans 8:33 NASB)

I can ask, and without any qualification: ‘Is there anybody anywhere who can bring any charge against me as a child of God?’ There is none, for, **“...God is the one who justifies”** (Romans 8:33 NASB). He himself has done it for, **“Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us”** (Romans 8:34 NASB).

Christian people, *this* is the position we are meant to occupy. Let me quote another hymn of Augustus Toplady:

**“The terrors of law and of God  
With me can have nothing to do.  
My Saviour's obedience and blood,  
Hide all my transgressions from view.”**

That is not boasting for I am not relying upon myself, but upon Him— ‘My Savior's obedience and blood, hide all my transgressions from view’, and unless you can say that, there is something defective about your faith. Far from being boastful, that is the thing that humbles a man, the thing that makes him strive after holiness, because it is true. Or take again that line.

### **Of covenant mercy I sing.**

Now that is what our Lord is saying here. He tells His Father that all which was necessary has been done, the guilt removed, the law satisfied, the Father reconciled, the new nature given, the Holy Spirit given, and the work going on until ultimately this child of God will find himself faultless and blameless without spot or blemish, perfect in the presence of God. Our security is that the work has been done, every hindrance, every obstacle, every barrier has been removed, because Christ has done it all, He said, **“In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you”** (John 14:2 NASB), and He has done what He promised, so that the ultimate outcome is, as Toplady says—

**“More happy but not more secure,  
The glorified spirits in heaven.”**

What a statement to make! According to Augustus Toplady, on the basis of these things, the glorified spirits in heaven are not more secure than we are here on earth, because our security is in Christ. Of course, they are happier than we are, they are in a land where there is no sin, no shame, no sorrow, no sighing; more happy—yes—but they are not more secure.

And I will tell you why this is so. To be a Christian, you see, does not just mean that I believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and have my sins forgiven. It also means that I am in Christ, I am in Him and He is in me. I am a part of Him; I have died with Him; I have risen with Him. He is my life and I am in Him. So, being in Him, I am as secure as those who are with Him in heaven, and it is because He has dealt with every barrier and hindrance and obstacle to our receiving this blessed life.

Then the **third ground and basis of my security and assurance** is the very character and nature of the life itself. I need not expound on this, because we have already spent some time in considering it. But to make this statement complete, I must just refer to it in passing. You remember that the nature of the life is that we really do become **‘partakers of the divine nature’**, that we are born of God, that we are His children and that we are sharers in the life of God Himself. Now I argue that because of that, it is something which cannot come and go. It cannot change. It is something which is stable

and everlasting. It is, indeed, *eternal life*, and we saw as we analyzed it that ‘**eternal**’ implies duration. We are all destined either for eternal life or for a life of condemnation and destruction, and they both go on forever. Eternal life is the life of God, and because of that, it is everlasting, so it is eternal life in that sense.

I find it quite extraordinary that anybody calling himself a Christian can believe that he can receive this gift of the life of God, and then, because of sin, lose it and then accept it again and then lose it once more. You cannot go on being born and dying! No, if you receive the life of God, then God Himself gives you this gift through His Son, and the very quality, the nature and character of the life means that it is imperishable.

Our Lord has already said this in the gospel of John, “**And I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand**” ([John 10:28 NASB](#))—it is impossible. Or again, the apostle Paul says, “**For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,<sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord**” ([Romans 8:38-39 NASB](#)).

Furthermore, this is especially true because He Himself has given us this life. So, we are in this new relationship, we belong to the family of God, we are separated out of the world, we are separated unto God, we are a part of His plan and purpose, and we belong to Him. That is why Paul can say with such confidence that “**For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us**” ([Romans 8:18 NASB](#)). We are saved by hope, hope which is sure and certain, because it is based upon the character, indeed upon the life, of God Himself. Therefore, if we know that we have eternal life, it should encourage us, and strengthen us. It should enable us to know that because God has given us that gift, it is indeed, as God Himself has said, an *eternal* life.

‘Well, then,’ says someone, ‘because I am saved, it means that I can blaspheme and do anything I like.’ But the man who knows that he has eternal life, never reasons like that— “**And every-one who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure**” ([1 John 3:3 NASB](#)).

The man who knows that he has eternal life, and that he is going on to face God in heaven, is the man above everybody else who is going to be striving after holiness. That has always been the case, it is the argument of the Scriptures, and that is how God’s people have argued throughout the centuries.

Did you know that foreign mission work was started originally by people who believed things like this? The greatest motive of the missionary enterprise has always been that they have known that God is the means as well as the end. They have believed that God has called them to propagate the gospel, and because of that they have sacrificed everything, even their lives, and gone and preached. The man who is most ready to sacrifice his life for the gospel is the man who knows that even death cannot separate him from the love of God and that he has the life of God in him. This is why the men who believe these truths have always been the greatest workers in the kingdom of God. It has been their certain knowledge that they are the children of God and possessors of eternal life.

My next basis is one of the most precious of all. We must work out the argument based upon the fact that our Lord has suffered so much and so many things, in order that all this might be possible for us. This is His statement, “**I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do**” ([John 17:4 NASB](#)).

He was referring to His coming from heaven, to the fact that He had laid aside the signs of His glory. He did not clutch at His power or exalt it. Though He was in equality with God, He humbled Himself and decided to live as man. He relied entirely upon God and the gift of the Holy Spirit which He received. He humbled Himself. He endured the contradiction of sinners, and He sweated blood in the Garden of Gethsemane. He staggered beneath the weight of the cruel cross, the nails were hammered into His hands and feet, He suffered intolerable thirst, and He died. He has done all that, so then—this is the argument— “**For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life**” ([Romans 5:10 NASB](#)); “**He who did not spare His Own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?**” ([Romans 8:32 NASB](#)).

This logic is quite inevitable, and I work it out like this: Christ has borne and suffered all that for me in order that He might give me the gift of eternal life. So, in the light of that, is it still feasible to believe that He

should do all that for me and my salvation and then suddenly leave me and let me perish? It is impossible! **“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:10 NASB)**—and saved to the very end— **‘by his life’ (Romans 5:10)**. What a wonderful powerful argument this is! I believe that is why He prayed aloud in the presence of these men, **“I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4 NASB)**.’ I have done all this for them, and if I have done all this for them, I will never leave them to perish or sink now.

We must understand that argument and employ it. The Son of God has done the greatest thing for us and He will never fail us. If He suffered even to the cross, there, glorified in heaven, **“Therefore, He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25 NASB)**. This is the logic, according to the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. **‘He is able also to save forever ...’ (verse 25)**, to the very end. He will never fail, for His blood, His cross, is a guarantee of that. If He had come to do the work while here on earth, how much more will He do it now in heaven, in His glorified state. So, as we use that argument we find it a great and grand basis of security and assurance.

**But the last basis on which I stand**, is the one which He puts in these words: **“Even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life” (John 17:2 NASB)**. It is a literal statement of fact. God the Father has given to the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, power over all flesh, over everything—there is nothing that is not placed under Him. That is Scripture again. You realize what that means. The universe, the cosmos, every star in its orbit, the sun and moon, every power, every atom with its magnetic force and power, all are under His power. Everything in nature and creation, man and all his powers, his devices, his machinations, everything that he is capable of doing, it is all under the power of God, under the power of Christ.

It goes even beyond that. The future is in His hands. There is a picture in Revelation of the book that was sealed up, and we are told that no one was found who was big enough or strong enough to open the book of the course of history, until suddenly there appeared the Lion of Judah. He prevailed because He was strong enough and mighty enough to

open the book. All this simply means that the whole of future history is in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You may be worried about the international situation, you need not be, nor about any earthly force or power, because the whole of history is in His hands. Of course, we do not understand it all. He permits many things that we do not understand, but the fact that He permits it means that it is still in His power. There is nothing out of hand.

I want to go one step further and say that the devil is under His power. The devil is under the control of Christ, because He has absolute power and even the devil is subject to it. Christ has conquered, and what the devil does is under the sufferance of God, for God’s inscrutable reason and purpose. We are so clever with our philosophies that we say, **‘Now why did God do that? Why didn’t He decide to make us perfect? Why is Satan allowed to do this?’** And we go on asking our questions.

But the faith position is that you and I just humble ourselves as little children, and bow to the fact that God has so ordered and ordained it. He has determined the times, but there is a very definite limit to the time. God knows the day on which the Lord Jesus Christ will come back into this world. Men, and nations, and powers, and all that is opposed to God, will be taken by Him and cast into the lake of perdition, and He will give the final proof that all flesh has been subjected to Him and to His almighty power.

But the argument here is that all power has been given to Him over all flesh in order that He might give eternal life. So, Christ has done all that I have described in order to give to me the gift of eternal life. In this life and world, the flesh is within me, and it drags me down. There are lusts and passions and desires in me. There is no such thing as a perfect human being in this world, even though he may be a Christian.

Things are here trying to drag me down and to rob me of eternal life. Against me are the world and the devil, who even tempted the blessed Son of God. How can I stand against all this? There is only one way: He is able to control it all. The guarantee that you and I can arrive in heaven and in glory is that He does control it all and that we are saved in spite of the world and the flesh and the devil. This is because the **‘power that worketh in us’** is the power of God, the power that brought Christ from the dead, and it enables us to go through and beyond it all.

Paul puts it in as extreme a form as this. There are, he says, certain preachers who are building upon a foun-

dation of wood and hay and stubble. And at the end, when the testing comes, all their works will be burnt and destroyed, so that there will be nothing left. It will all be burnt up because it was so shoddy and useless. Yet, he says, they themselves will be saved 'so as by fire' ([1 Corinthians 3:12-15](#)).

**1 Corinthians 3:12-15 (NASB)**

<sup>12</sup> "Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,  
<sup>13</sup> each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

<sup>14</sup> If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.

<sup>15</sup> If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

And what has saved them? It is this power of the Lord over all flesh. He suffers us to be tried and tempted, but He will never suffer us to be lost. No man, nothing, can pluck us out of His hand. He exercises the power, and He will continue to do so, so that neither man, nor history, nor the devil, nor hell, nor anything at all can ever separate us from him.

So, in the words of the hymn we can say—  
"From Him who loves me now so well  
What power my soul can sever?  
Shall life or death, shall earth or hell?  
No, I am His for ever."

*James Grindlay Small*

My dear friend, if you are relying upon your love for Him or upon your grasp or hold of Him, I am sorry for you. I pity you, because my only reliance is upon Him. The gift He gives us is eternal life—it is Himself. So, the end and the consummation of all this is that we must trust, and trust alone, to the faithfulness of Christ. He has done everything for you and He will hold you and save you to the end, and will present you faultless before the presence of God's glory with exceeding joy. Oh, how we should thank Him that He offered this prayer audibly, that we might know where we stand, and know that we are surrounded by His love, and saved eternally, safe in His eternal kingdom.

*Continued in next edition...*



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## 1 John 2 Part 1

We begin the initial introduction of [1 John 2](#) and as we do, it is important to reiterate that much of [1 John](#) is actually a spiritual test for those who **claim** to be a Christian, but in fact are not living as a Christian. Up to this point, John has used the phrase "If we say..." ([1 John 1:6,8,10](#)) as the key to know when he is actually giving the test. Here in [1 John 2](#), he uses the phrase "he who says..." ([1 John 2:4,6,9](#)). In each of these tests, there is not any 'wiggle' room. John makes the issue very simple – saying one thing, but doing something else. He says that is not biblical Christianity no matter what someone may lead you to believe. As long as the test is reasonable, being tested is really a good thing because it allows the individual to know exactly where they stand. The tests that John continues to give are all very reasonable, very rational, and very practical. There is **nothing** in any of John's statements that should cause a true follower of Christ to even be alarmed. If the issues that he addresses disturb our conscience in any way, it is probably because he has hit a spiritual nerve and an area of our life that needed to be dealt with. Normally spiritual discomfort comes when someone who **claims** to be a believer has nothing in their life to actually validate the reality of what it is that they say that they "believe".

One of the most serious problems facing the modern church today is that we see Scripture through our cultural lens, through our particular worldview. We have a kind of spiritual grid that we believe to be both normal and acceptable when it comes to living out the Christian life. Many have been in church all of their life, and so they have developed a concept of what it means to be a Christian through the lens of their experience. Many people have accepted a notion of Christianity that allows them to pick and choose what it is that they may want to obey or not obey. Whatever that is, and certainly it is not biblical, it may reveal that that individual is in grave danger of possibly not even being saved. Obviously they are spiritually deceived. It is actually a re-definition of biblical terms to suit and satisfy someone's personal ideas about God, His Word, and obedience to His Word.

The problem is that most people simply assume that the way that they see something is normal and the way that things really are and really should be. Just as an example, we live in a culture where persecution of Christians in any form is very rare. We have great religious freedoms and we can basically believe whatever we want to believe without fear of reprisal of any kind. Obviously, some of those freedoms are being eroded, but still the major freedoms of religion are functioning in our favor. So, from an American perspective, living without the threat of persecution is normal and what we would consider to be the standard for the Christian life anywhere. For us, that assumption is relatively simple and clear and not something that we even think about. However, if we were to take an assessment of believers in the majority of the rest of the world, we would find that their perspective and their worldview is quite different. Then if we carefully and honestly read the New Testament, it is apparent that we may very well not come to that conclusion either.

Let me give you an example of this. There have been some studies which indicate that nearly 80% of the world's believers who are genuine followers of Christ and vigorously living by the precepts of Scripture are living in persecution and suffering greatly for their faith in Christ. Certainly this is very true in what is called the 10/40 Window. This statistic is not composed of people who simply "claim" to be a Christian, but people who are genuinely following Christ no matter what the cost to them or to their families. The point is that living under persecution for these people is actually normal, and they would find the freedoms that we have to be rather abnormal. So, what we actually believe

to be normal may in reality be very abnormal to the description given in the New Testament for the "normal" Christian life. What the American church has done is to develop a rather casual redefinition of Christianity that makes following Christ easy, convenient, and comfortable. Certainly, though, that is not the thrust of the New Testament – not at all. Just read the book of Acts. In almost every case, people were being put in jail, beaten, persecuted, and even killed for their faith in Christ. That was normal to them. There was nothing unusual or exceptional about persecution to them. They knew that if they came to Christ that it may very well cost them their life. They knew beyond any question that it would certainly cost them something. The more that I personally read the New Testament, the more frightening our cultural re-definition of Christianity becomes to me. It is a re-definition that allows people to be very comfortable and content in their Christian life. It seems that John's goal in this epistle is to make people extremely uncomfortable – and too often in our Christian culture we do not like that approach. We want everyone to say nice pleasant things that make us feel good about our life and where we are spiritually. However, if we were just willing to take the words of Scripture at face value and just let them say what they say, we might be surprised. For instance, [2 Timothy 3:12](#) says the following,

**2Ti 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.**

So, what do we think about that? Where do we fit a verse like that into our Christian mindset? Obviously, that verse does not contain a very American perspective on the normal Christian life. It actually is the opposite, and for us it appears to be extremely abnormal. However, to the New Testament reader at that time, it was well understood and very normal. I cannot find one place in the New Testament where either Jesus or the apostles offered a perspective that tried to either reduce or eliminate suffering and persecution from the Christian life. For them, suffering and persecution was "normal" for anyone who was fully committed to being a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. According to the New Testament, being faithfully obedient to Jesus Christ will always bring persecution. [John 15:20](#) says,

**Jn 15:20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.**

What the average American Christian wants this verse to mean is that only the apostles would be persecuted. Not so. That is not at all what it means. What it means

is that if they persecuted Christ, they will persecute His true disciples and followers. That is exactly what that verse means. Take a verse like [Romans 8:35](#),

Ro 8:35 **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?**

There is not one single word in that last sentence that I can personally identify with – not one word! Why would Paul even use words like this? It was because that was exactly what the believers of his day were experiencing – and it was normal. Let me put all of this in the form of a couple of questions to try and make the point and relate all of this back to [1 John 2](#).

**Question 1:** If we are truly followers of Christ, are we willing to allow both the content and the context of the New Testament to grip and seize both our lives and how we think and perceive the Christian life?

**Question 2:** When we read the Scriptures, are we willing to believe it in the present active tense? I.e., are we willing to allow it to judge us, to scrutinize us, and to challenge us beyond what we currently believe to be normal and Christian?

The point is that very often we just believe what we want to believe about the Christian life and are more than willing to simply turn away from the very hard and difficult realities of much of what the New Testament actually teaches. Whenever someone genuinely opens themselves up to the truths of the New Testament, it can become very dangerous. Jesus said in [Matthew 10:36](#),

Mt 10:36 **and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.'**

Paul wrote this in [2 Corinthians 4:11](#),

2Co 4:11 **For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.**

Do we really believe those kinds of verses? Where do we fit all of that into our comfortable Christian life? There are a lot of popular theologies that want us to believe that the difficult and challenging words of Scripture can actually be avoided. They want us

to believe that we can be comfortable, secure, obedient, and faithful at the same time. At a personal level, I challenge you to find that teaching and that perspective in the New Testament.

Now, [1 John](#) is certainly not a book on suffering, and I do not want to give that impression. The point, though, is that much too often we are not willing to take God at His Word. We are not willing to just let it say what it says and then to believe it without altering it to fit our particular view of life. No wonder John is giving some tests. No wonder he is challenging the Christian status quo of his day and our day as well. It just seems that he cannot let go of this issue of someone saying all of the right things, but not living those words out in their life. He simply cannot let it go! It appears in [1 John 2:1](#) that John is concerned with some believers who seem to think that it is okay to continue to live in sin. He says this,

1Jn 2:1 **My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.**

Because the verb “**may not sin**” is in the subjunctive tense, what that is technically inferring is that these believers appear to have a kind of propensity to some sin in their life (something we have all been guilty of at various times in our life). John wants them to know that when they do fail that Christ is their Advocate with the Father and that their sins are clearly and eternally forgiven. That is a great encouragement that John is offering to each of us as believers, and we need to appreciate the depth of that truth as it applies to our personal lives.

However, in [1 John 2:3](#) John begins this section from v3-11 to give three additional tests in [1 John 2:4, 6, and 9](#). In v3 he tells us that as Christians that we “**know**” something. This is what he says we “**know**”, and do not lose perspective on the simplicity of this truth,

1Jn 2:3 **Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.**

John says that true believers have full assurance that they are one of God’s children and that they actually “**know**” Him on a personal level by the simple fact that they are obedient to His Word. This is the theme of this section in v3-11. There is a test by which we can demonstrate the reality of our relationship to God, and that test is obedience. A believer’s relationship to God can be tested by looking for consistent obedience to His commands. This is not perfection, but rather the direc-

tion of a person's life. If perfection was the issue, then no one would be considered to be saved.

The Biblical concept of knowing God extends well beyond some mere intellectual apprehension and it clearly moves into the area of obedience, compliance, and conformity to His Word. The New Testament simply does not offer any other alternatives – not one, not one time. The New Testament certainly makes allowances for our failures and our sins, but it never offers disobedience as a legitimate option – never! [1 John 2:1](#) that we just read says that if we do sin that **“we have an Advocate”**, or someone to plead our case before the Father. However, that is not some kind of spiritual green light that opens the door to continued disobedience. I know that someone is going to be asking himself or herself “Why is this guy still talking about all of this?” Well, it is because John is still talking about it. John is still giving these tests because it appears that there are many who were confused about the definition of salvation. Nothing has changed. The doctrine of salvation is the most misunderstood doctrine in Scripture.

Someone who claims to be a Christian, but who is knowingly and habitually disobedient to what they clearly know is the will of God can have no assurance of salvation. Popular theologies would lead us to believe differently, but continued and habitual disobedience is a mark of both unbelief and rebellion against God. Now, in our culture that is absolutely one of the most difficult truths to accept – that we cannot live how we want to live and still be saved. It is an American myth for someone to think that they can continually and habitually live in both sin and willful disobedience to God and be saved. [1 John 3](#) will drive that truth into our thinking as much as any other place in all of the New Testament. There is nothing, absolutely nothing in the New Testament or anything that Jesus ever communicated that would even approximate a belief of that nature – nothing, not one single word. [1 John 2:4-5](#) reiterates this when it says,

**1Jn 2:4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. <sup>5</sup> But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.**

How does John say that we can know that we are truly saved? It is **“whoever keeps His Word”**.

Obedience is not the basis of salvation, but it is one of the most significant evidences that genuine salvation has actually occurred in a person's life. John says that assurance of salvation comes directly from obedience. It is a myth, a fairytale, a falsehood, a tragic invention, an illusion, and a figment of someone's vivid imagination for them to think that they are the exception to obedience and walking in the light. So many people are living under the illusion that they are spiritually exempt and have been given some kind of spiritual immunity from obedience. They have become spiritually content with just saying the right things. That is an American illusion, a myth. They believe that they can do what they please, live how they choose to live, always speak their mind, act how they want to act, and live in utter disobedience to the Word of God and still be assured of their salvation. Nothing could be any further from the truth. You see, modern Christianity has made that approach to be “normal”, but when we place it beside the teaching and truth of the New Testament, it is very abnormal and deviant. We have been spiritually conditioned to believe what we want to believe, but not necessarily what the Word of God says, especially when it is in contradiction to how we want to personally live. John is refuting these unfounded beliefs that were prevalent in his day and clearly stating that they were not and are not true. He says the same thing again in [1 John 2:6](#) when he says,

**1Jn 2:6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.**

The biblical evidence that someone is actually abiding in Christ is that they are walking **“just as He walked”**. I.e., their life, their words, and their actions are consistently reflecting Christ. What is it about these kinds of verses that we just seem to avoid? What is it about these simple truths that seem to be pervading the entire American Christian landscape? The answer is simple. The modern church has redefined Christianity and has become comfortable with that redefinition. What is now defined as being biblical is very often clearly unbiblical, but many people are not willing to accept that because it does not fit into their American spiritual grid as to what they think should be normal and biblical.

Without any question, probably the single greatest issue that we have to deal with as believers is really very simple – what is our relationship to Jesus Christ. Everything – past, present, and future – hinges on our relationship to God. The Bible is a book of great principles. For instance, **“In the beginning God created...”** That is a governing principle of all of Scripture. It governs everything. It cannot be avoided or diminished in any way. In the same way, being in a RIGHT relationship

with God and with Christ is a monumental principle in the Word of God. It pervades all of Scripture. All of the Old Testament prophets dealt with people who refused to allow their lives to be governed and controlled by the Word of God. All of the New Testament books are constantly pointing us in the direction of our relationship to God. The Bible is full of details and specifics, but they are all governed by the controlling principles found in the Word of God. Here is what is important to understand: the Word of God will ALWAYS bring us back to this very vital issue of what is my relationship with Jesus Christ. What is my present walk with Jesus Christ like? It is not what was it like 10 or 20 years ago, but what is it like right now, today, this moment?

Let me put this another way. The majority of most people's troubles in life are ultimately due to the fact that they are in a wrong relationship with God. The Bible is full of example after example of people who violated and spurned having a vital and living relationship with God. Obviously, there are bad things that happen to godly people, but if we read the Scriptures properly, that should never be a surprise to a committed follower of Christ. The following is a very short listing of what happens to so many people who are not committed believers, but pseudo believers, false believers, and very self-deceived:

They make a false and meaningless profession of faith in Christ. Because they made a decision, but were never converted, they slowly begin to wander from God. They drift from obeying His Word. They excuse what they know is wrong in His sight. Then they wonder why things are not working out the way they wanted them to work out. They begin to accuse God as being unjust and unfair and then blame Him for their sin and their problems. What they wanted was a spiritual "sugar Daddy".

In reality, the real problem is not God but simply that our lives are not in a right relationship with God. I have so often asked myself a somewhat simple, but confusing question: "Why is Jesus Christ so unattractive to Christians? What has He ever done to deserve our neglect, indifference, and disobedience?" Here is what I have found both scripturally and experientially: When men and women are in a right relationship with God and God is at the very center of their being and existence, no matter what their circumstances are, they will be triumphant in their life. In the Scriptures people suffered indescribable trials and afflictions, adversity in its most extreme forms, yet you cannot see them without see-

ing people who were possessed by a calmness, a poise, and an absolute hopefulness that pervaded everything they were experiencing. Do you want to know why? It was because they were right with God!

I believe that it is my duty and my responsibility to tell you that whatever the circumstances may be, whatever may be awaiting you in the future, whatever life may bring your way, if you are right with God and living an obedient life before both Him and others, what happens to you will not have a devastating effect on your life.

*Continued in next edition...*

#### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup>Ripken, 21.

<sup>2</sup>Ripken, 22.

<sup>3</sup>Ripken, 15.

<sup>4</sup>Bechtle, 371.

<sup>5</sup>Harris, electronic page, "ginosko".

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