

## **Be Sure: Confident Living from 1 John**

That You Have Eternal Life

1 John 5:11-13

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*<sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. <sup>13</sup> I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:11–13).*

I wonder how many of you would be honest enough to admit that there have been times that you've skipped to the end of a book, a movie, or a recorded basketball game to see how it ends. Or maybe you've read a movie review, saw the words "SPOILER ALERT," and you've read the review anyway. Or perhaps in high school, you were reading a classic novel, but you needed the help of CliffsNotes to understand the basic plot line.

Now if you are a Hallmark channel fan (like some people in our home), you never need to do this, because the movies all end the same way. I love walking into the room and saying, "Oh, they are totally going to get married."

Sometimes it's curiosity that draws us to the back of the book. At other times it is a necessity. I'll do this when a book or article is complicated, or if there is a lot of material to digest. Sometimes it helps to understand where a book or article is going.

The text I just read is like the back of a book. It is a clear summary of the message of 1 John. Actually, it could be considered a great summary of the entire Bible. What's more, it serves as a summary of why Easter Sunday / Resurrection Sunday is important.

Today we are beginning a series of messages under the title of "Be Sure." We want to examine the issue of spiritual confidence. We are going to look at how you can be sure . . .

- That you have eternal life (this week)
- That you belong (where is your identity?)
- That your sins are forgiven
- That you don't love the world
- That you don't domesticate sin

These are really important issues. The book of 1 John speaks into them. And these are questions and topics that all of us have to address in one way or another—regardless of where you are in your spiritual journey.

The book of 1 John was written by the Apostle John, a disciple who was probably the closest to Jesus (John 21:20). He also wrote 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> John, the book of Revelation, and the gospel of John—a book that we'll study in September and into 2019.

I've chosen this signature text in 1 John because it answers a question that is relevant to everyone: How do you know that you have eternal life? Or let me put it to you this way, because it is a question that everyone of us must face: "What happens to you after you die?"

This is a critical question. It is a nagging question. Paul Kalanithi, in his Pulitzer-nominated book *When Breath Becomes Air*, says:

"I began to realize that coming in such close contact with my own mortality had changed both nothing and everything. Before my cancer was diagnosed, I knew that someday I would die, but I didn't know when. After the diagnosis, I knew that someday I would die, but I didn't know when. But now I knew it acutely. The problem wasn't really a scientific one. The fact of death is unsettling. Yet there is no other way to live."<sup>1</sup>

Easter is the Sunday where Christians all over the world celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ—the event that addresses the problem of death and the question of what happens next.

Our text helps us by showing us **the truth that people must believe** in order to answer that question. Allow me to unpack this idea from 1 John by looking at each part of that phrase.

## 1) The Truth

1 John 5:11 identifies the basic and fundamental truth at the core of Christianity and the message of the Bible. This verse captures the message that turned the world upside down:

<sup>11</sup> *And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 1 John 5:11 (ESV)*

When John says, "this is the testimony . . ." he means this is the message or the essential truth that we need to hear. The word "testimony" in the original language is the word *marturia*, and I'm sure you hear in it the word "martyr." It is the truth for which many in the early church gave their lives. It is a testimony that is believed to be true—so true that you'd die for it.

Now John loves this distillation of the message of the Bible. In fact, in his gospel account, it sounds like this:

<sup>16</sup> *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).*

<sup>30</sup> *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;*<sup>31</sup> *but 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 (John 20:30–31).*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=when+breath+becomes+air&commit=Search>

Central to this truth is a golden thread of grace and giving that is woven through the Bible. We find that 1 John 5:11 states it very clearly: “God gave us eternal life . . .” This is a deeply hopeful statement that is at the core of Christianity. It means that eternal life is possible—even promised—and it is something that God gives.

Now just pause with me and consider the astounding nature of that statement. The thing that we need, and the answer to the question every one of us will ask, is something that God gives. Eternal life is not earned or bought. It is given. Just let this sink in: God gives eternal life. The most mysterious, unknown, and important reality connected to our humanity comes to us by virtue of something God gives. That’s incredible!

So much so that you might ask, “How is this possible?”

1 John makes it clear that God gives this life “in his Son.” I’ll unpack this further in the third point, but essentially it means that eternal life, while a gift, was made possible because of what Jesus did. The phrase “in his Son” is used all over the Bible to describe the kind of relationship that people have with Jesus Christ. In other words, the gift that God gives was paid for by Jesus.

Every gift is like this. When you receive a gift, it is free to you, but in reality, it wasn’t free. Someone paid for something so that you didn’t have to. That’s how a gift works. The gift comes to you because the cost shows up on someone else’s account.

Eternal life is given because it was paid by Jesus. His death made the payment for sin possible. And His resurrection proved that it worked. In the Bible sin and death are connected. When sin entered the world, so did death. So, the presence of death reminds us that something is wrong with the world. Every funeral and every loss reminds us of this. Here’s how the Apostle Paul said it in Romans 6:

*<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23).*

Do you see the contrast? Sin brings death. Jesus brought eternal life.

This is the central truth of the Bible. And it is the reason why Easter is such an important day. It is the Sunday where Christians celebrate that death has been defeated, sin has been conquered, forgiveness is possible, and Jesus made eternal life possible.

That’s the testimony of the Bible. That is the message about eternal life. And every person has to answer the question “What happens after I die?” Behind the celebration of Easter is a hope that changes everything: God has given eternal life and this life is in His Son.

John writes so that you can be sure about that truth.

## 2) People

The second idea that we find in this text is in verse 12. John identifies that there are two kinds of people in the world and that they are in very different positions. The key is for each of us to know where we are, so ask yourself that question as we walk through this verse.

Here's what verse 12 says:

*<sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life (1 John 5:12).*

This concept is very simple and yet extremely important. There are essentially two kinds of people—those who have life and those who do not. And those who have life have it because they “have” the Son—Jesus Christ.

So, the difference between the two groups of people is their relationship with Jesus. Having the Son means you have life. Not having the Son means you do not have life.

When John uses the word “life,” he means a number of things. John loves the word *life*. He describes Jesus as “the word of life” (1 John 1:1), and he uses the word for eternal life (1:2, 25). In the gospel of John, he uses the word over forty times—“In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

But what does it mean? When John talks about “life,” he means spiritual life, and the form of the word “has” means something that is possessed, at least in part, right now, so it means eternal life in the future. But he's also saying that the hope and power of eternal life has an effect right now.

You see, people who have the Son don't just have spiritual life in the future; they have a kind of spiritual life right now. This is why Easter is such a significant celebration. Christians are rejoicing in three things all connected to the life of Jesus: 1) He's alive and has conquered death, making forgiveness and atonement possible, 2) He's coming back to make all things new, and 3) those who are “in the Son” have hope for the future and for their lives right now.

Why? Because the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is able to change those who believe in Him from the inside-out. Here's how it sounds in Romans 6 -

*“... just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4)*

The effect of this is such that Paul tells believers in Jesus that they should consider themselves dead to sin. In other words, when you have a relationship with Jesus, sin no longer has the same hold on you that it did before.

*<sup>11</sup> So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:11)*

Practically, this has sweeping implications. The believer in Jesus has a life that is different from someone who doesn't have Jesus. It's not that they are perfect. We are still tempted. We still fail. But there is a “life” inside the follower of Jesus that is a foretaste of another world.

Instead of being characterized by such things as sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, and orgies (Gal. 5:19-21), they are filled with the fruit of the Spirit. Qualities such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control mark his or her life (Gal. 5:22-23).

Now that should serve as a warning for some of you. The first list I gave you is an exhausting and painful way to live. And the truth is—you aren't really living. Oh, you are physically alive, but somehow you know that there must be more. There must be a better way. And there certainly is.

The brokenness, the pain, and the self-destruction that you experience is the aroma of a God-less life. But here's the thing—you haven't seen anything yet. The consequences of self-centered living are seen in part in this life. But if you die apart from Christ, you will be eternally separated from God. It is eternal death—not the ceasing of existence, but an eternal life where God gives you up to your worst desires. The brokenness, loneliness, and regret in this life is a warning for what is yet to come.

For those who are followers of Jesus, this little verse is a reminder that the life of Jesus was designed to be something not just in the future, but something that makes its way into our lives right now. Here's how John says it in 1 John 3:15-16.

*<sup>15</sup> Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. <sup>16</sup> By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers (1 John 3:15–16).*

Jesus people have life—eternal life—abiding in them. They have life right now, and they have it in the future. It is a life that transforms every aspect of who they are, how they think, and what they do. Let me ask you, do you have life? Do you “have the Son?”

You see, Christians celebrate the resurrection not only because Jesus rose from the dead. We celebrate because it means He gives us the power for resurrected minds, emotions, and hearts. We celebrate the resurrection power of Jesus and how it affects our lives. He who has the Son has life!

### **3) Must Believe**

This final point helps us answer a very pressing question—“How do people receive eternal life?” We've talked about the truth that eternal life is “in his Son.” And we've learned that there two kinds of people—those who have life and those who don't. But what makes the difference? How do you know?

In verse 13 John not only identifies his purpose for writing, but he also tells us how eternal life is found.

John is writing to believers who are facing false teaching, incorrect doctrine, and their own doubts. The entire book is designed to give them confidence and exhortation to live in a way that fits with what it means to be a true Christian. Those are the issues we'll unpack over the next seven weeks, starting with where you belong or your identity next week.

There are two key words: *believe* and *know*.

Verse 13 says they “believe in the name of the Son of God.” This is to believe in Jesus. To believe is to trust in something and to rely upon it. Another way to think about it is to place one’s confidence in it. This is where the Christian life begins. You believe who Jesus is, that He died for your sins, and that He rose again from the dead. You believe that you need a savior.

*<sup>9</sup> because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved (Rom. 10:9–10).*

You agree with God that you are a sinner and that Jesus can save you. Believing is receiving the gift of grace God is ready to offer you. And how do you know? Because God promises this to us in the Bible. You not only believe in Jesus, but you believe what the Bible says.

But it doesn’t stop there. A person places his or her confidence in Jesus in becoming a Christian, and life is then lived upon that confidence. You hope in Christ for eternal life, and then you hope in Him for the rest of your life. Here’s how Paul said it in Galatians 2:20:

*<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

If you are a Christian, Easter is a really important day. It is a reminder that this day inaugurated your hope for eternal life and that this kind of hope not only changed the future but how you live every single day. Sin doesn’t rule you. The devil can’t stop you. Death is not going to beat you. And Jesus is waiting for you! That’s what Easter is all about. And this day helps you to know what you believe.

And if you are not yet a Christian, this day is one of the clearest Sundays about the basics of Christianity. Here’s what Billy Graham said years ago:

*“The cross tells us that God understands our sin and our suffering, for he took them upon himself in the person of Jesus Christ. From the cross God declares, ‘I love you. I know the heartaches and the sorrows and the pain that you feel. But I love you.’ The story does not end with the cross, for Easter points us beyond the tragedy of the cross to the empty tomb. It tells us that there is hope for eternal life, for Christ has conquered evil and death and hell. Yes, there is hope.”<sup>2</sup>*

I can tell you for sure: the hope of the empty tomb changes everything!

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/inspiring-quotes/40-courageous-quotes-from-billy-graham.html>