

“By This We Know”
December 11, 2011
Text: 1 John 4:11-16

Certainty about the truth is sometimes difficult to find=>

“A man with one watch knows what time it is, but a man with two watches is never quite sure.”

John Wesley=>

“When I was young I was sure of everything; in a few years, having been mistaken a thousand times, I was not half so sure of most things as I was before; at present, I am hardly sure of anything, but what God has revealed to me.”

Of all the things a person might want to be certain about in this life, his relationship with God tops the list.

If things are right between God/him, he can be confident about where he will spend eternity.

He can live his life w/o fear of God’s condemnation because of his sin/guilt.

Life will become meaningful here on earth, as he lives to glorify God.

God will become the shepherd of his soul, giving him strength in life’s crises/trials, comfort in its hardships, peace in its turmoil, help in its challenges, and an expectant hope for the future.

1st John is a book of certainties, & today’s text contains 2 tests by which we can be certain of our relationship w/ God...

* The love test

* The doctrinal test

John will tell us=> *“By this we know that we abide in [God].”*

These 2 tests can assure us of God’s presence in our hearts/lives.

Someone: “I wish I could be certain of my relationship w/ God.”

John: “You can be. Just examine your love for others and what you believe about Jesus Christ.”

* **The Love Test**

In last Sunday’s text, John said that God the Father

manifested His love for us by sending His only-begotten Son, Jesus X, to become the sacrificial propitiation for our sins.

Now he will build on that thought=>

[1 John 4:11]=> *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”*

John is making the point that, based on God’s sacrificial love for us, we are morally obligated to love one another.

As we saw last time, God has set the example of self-sacrificing, selfless love for us, and His doing so has put us in His debt.

His love for us becomes a constraining motive for us to love one another.

He has given us the love—His own love—by which to do that, pouring Himself/His-love into our hearts.

And He has commanded us to love.

John doesn’t say, that because of God’s amazing love for us, we ought to love Him.

Obviously, that's true, but here he's emphasizing that we should love one another, out of our gratitude for His having loved us, with such Self-sacrificing love.

In verse 12, John is going to state the “love test,” but first he points out a wondrous fact=>

Although God is an invisible Spirit whom no one has ever seen, the world sees Him indirectly in our love for one another—because God Himself is love, and He has poured Himself as love, into our hearts.

[Verse 12]=> *“No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.”*

Several Scripture texts teach that God cannot be seen.

But Jesus told Philip=> *“He who has seen Me has seen the Father”* (Jn 14:9).

Jn 1:18 explains=> *“No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God [Jesus X], who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.”*

The 2nd Person of the Godhead took on a human body to explain the Father's nature/character in a way we human's could understand/appreciate/relate-to it.

Heb 1:3 says Jesus is=> *“the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature.”*

But no one has ever seen God “as God,” except Jesus Himself.

John makes this clear in the original language, but it's not as clear in the translation.

Usually, when we read “God” in the NT, it's a translation of the Gk phrase *“ho theos”*—lit. “the God.”

Here in verse 12 “the” is left off, & the Gk reads simply

“*theos*” (God)—meaning=> “God in His essence,”
God as God.

This is the essence of God about which Moses was told=>

“*You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!*” (Ex 33:20).

Even when Isaiah had his vision of standing before God’s throne in heaven, he too was seeing only a representation of God, because “*no man has beheld God at any time*” (Jn 1:18).

Surprisingly, John’s point in our own text is that, God (who is love) is seen in believers’ love for one another, because He abides in us, & His love is perfected in us.

The Son of God made God known while He was on earth, but now that He has ascended, we believers make God known through our loving relationships with one another.

This is reminiscent of Luke’s words in Acts 1:1=>

“*The first account [Luke’s Gospel] I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus **began** to do and teach, / until the day when He was taken up*” (1:1-2).

What Jesus “***began** to do & teach*” the Church (the Body of X) would continue after His ascension into heaven.

In a similar way, the Church (the Body of X) represents

God, as it continues to display His love, to the world.

What an amazing truth that God’s love is perfected in us!

Does that mean God’s love is inherently imperfect w/o us?

No!

It means that as we love one another, God's love w/i us attains a wholeness/completeness on earth, in man, which it wouldn't otherwise attain within this fallen world.

Heavenly love reaches its goal on earth, culminating in Xn relationships that emulate God's own love, in heaven. The believer, fully yielding to the H.S., manifests the fruit of the Spirit—love.

Through man, God's love finds its fulfillment on earth. His image is reflected among His creatures by their love for one another.

This is the Xn receiving God's love, embracing it, and making it his own, so that it achieves its full effect on his soul, and multiplies itself in its relationships with others.

The world sees the unseen God in the love of His people. The verb form John uses means that having been perfected, love remains perfected, & keeps on having its effect among believers.

This is the “love test” for the genuineness of our regeneration.

Our love for one another is proof of God's indwelling presence.

That's what John means by=> *“If we love one another, God abides in us.”*

Love like this testifies to the fact that the H.S. has taken up residence in a believer's heart, and the love

manifested by his life is actually God, loving
in/through him.

Our own assurance of salvation results (in part) from the
love for other Xns, which we see in our own hearts.

When we stop resisting the Spirit's influence within us, we love,
whole-heartedly.

Double-mindedness disappears, & selfless love dominates
our minds, committing us to other people's
wellbeing.

That kind of love so values other believers that it causes us
to consider them more important than ourselves.

It's the same love for which God gave His only begotten
Son, so those who'd believe in Him wouldn't perish,
but would have eternal life.

Agape love can involve affectionate feelings—not mechanically
or heartlessly cranking out kind deeds with emotional
detachment.

But feelings are actually the secondary response of such
love.

Commitment and caring about others, is primary to the true
nature of *agape* love.

God valued/cared so much about the world, that He gave
sacrificially to it.

**In verse 13, John reaffirms that love in a Xn's heart assures
him that he abides in God, and God abides in him=>**

[Verse 13]=> *“By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.”*

Given us what of/from His Spirit? His love.

“By this we know” that God abides in us, because we see His love being manifested/perfected in us.

We know the H.S. is the Cause of that love.

We have received it *“of”* [from, out of] God’s *Spirit.*”

Paul puts it this way in Rom 5:5=> *“The love of God has been **poured out** within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”*

The H.S. is the channel through whom we receive God’s love.

Our surrendering our will to the H.S. has resulted in loving attitudes/actions which assure us that He is at work in our hearts, which in turn assures us that we abide in God, & He in us.

There is a chain of ideas here which are linked together in an orderly sequence=>

- 1) We know that we abide in God and that He abides in us because He has given us His Spirit (verse 13).
- 2) We know that He has given us His Spirit because we detect *agape* love in us (verse 12), love of a nature which we never experienced prior to our becoming saved and the Spirit’s indwelling us.

Now we come to the 2nd test by which we are certain of our relationship with God=>

*** The Doctrinal Test**

Once again, the doctrinal test has to do w/ the nature of X.

Those who are truly born again believe what God has revealed in His Word about Jesus' being God's Son and man's Savior, come to earth in human flesh.

If we are among those who truly believe that, our believing is another assurance that we are truly saved.

[Verse 14]=> *“And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.”*

The Apostles (including John) are primarily the “we” who beheld & bore witness of the Son.

But “we” here also includes the Church as a whole, of which the Apostles were the spiritual foundation stones.

The Spirit whom God has given confirms the Apostles' teachings, in each believer's heart, just as Jesus Himself had promised, saying=> *“When the Helper comes ... He will **bear witness of Me**”* (Jn 15:26).

As Jesus continued to speak to the Apostles, He added=> *“And **you will bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning**”* (Jn 15:27).

Together, the Apostles/Church beheld/witnessed-to the fact that X was God's Son, sent by God, to save the world.

John could testify that he heard the Father Himself say so, at Jesus' baptism, as He spoke from heaven=> *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased”* (Mt 3:17).

John had also beheld Jesus' transfiguration, as our Lord briefly took on the divine glory that had been His in eternity past. John had also gazed in wonder with fixed attention on X as He healed the sick.

He had watched Him turn water into wine, give sight to the blind, raise the dead, calm the sea, and give spiritual life to a thief dying on a cross next to Himself.

These images were indelibly imprinted on John's mind.

Others had seen what John saw & had heard Jesus' voice, filled w/ deep compassion, and saying wonderful things.

But they hadn't seen/believed-in Jesus, as John had.

I Cor 2:14 explains why=> *"A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."*

John & all the other Apostles (except Judas) had watched X with eyes of God-given faith & had heard Him w/ ears of faith, that had been opened up to the Truth by the H.S.

I Cor 2:12=> *"We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know."*

They had heard & seen & realized what it all meant=> That Jesus X was the Son of God, sent to save the world.

And many to whom John would preach/write (including some of us here) would hear/see his testimony w/ faith as well, as the Spirit opens our eyes/ears.

Faith like that is flashed into the soul by the H.S. when a person whose heart is open to God, hears the Truth of God's Word.

The Spirit drives the thought home to his mind that=>

“This is indeed the Son of God, sent to save a world of lost sinners—sent to save me!”

He sees the divine glory of Jesus Christ by faith, and he embraces Him, saying w/i his own heart what the centurion said after seeing Jesus die on the cross=>
“*Truly this was the Son of God*” (Mt 27:54).

John, like that centurion, had no doubt whatsoever that Jesus was/is God's only-begotten Son.

And when he had described these things to the Church, the H.S. convinced them also to lay their doubts aside.

Not only were believers persuaded that Jesus was the Son of God, they were equally certain that God had sent Him to earth as the “*Savior of the world.*”

The Father had commissioned His Son to save not only Jews, but also Gentiles—people from every tribe/tongue/nation=>
To be the Savior of the *whole* world.

X came to save all classes of men, regardless of race, wealth, rank, education, or achievement.

He didn't come to save only the rich, nor did He come only for the poor/downtrodden.

Jesus came to save sinners of every kind, who were trapped
in Satan's evil world-system=>

Big-sinners/little-sinners, secret-sinners/open-sinners,
plain sinners, like us.

He came to save those who were lost to God, lost to
goodness, lost to righteousness, lost to heaven, even
lost to themselves.

Jesus came to be their Savior=>

To make such a propitiation for their sins, that God could
remain just, & yet become the Justifier of those who
believe in His Son for the forgiveness of their sin.

He came to save them from their slavery to sin/Satan.

X Himself said=> He did not come to condemn the world,
but to save it, saving to the uttermost the sinners
trapped in its evil system.

And He is the only Savior this world has, or ever will have.

Ultimately, Jesus will save only God's elect, but that doesn't
conflict one iota with His call to all men to come to Him,
because He's not willing for any to perish.

He calls to all men, saying=> "***Come to Me, all who are
weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest***"
(Mt 11:28).

*"Let the one who is thirsty **come**; let the one who wishes
take the water of life without cost"* (Rev 22:17).

*"The one who **comes** to Me I will certainly not cast out"*
(Jn 6:37).

*“‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the LORD,
‘Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as
white as snow; Though they are red like crimson,
They will be like wool’” (Isa 1:18).*

If you have never come to Jesus for cleansing from your sins through faith in His death for sin, He calls you to come, even now.

Our certainty as Xns rests on our own deep-seated faith that X is indeed the Son of God, & Savior of this world.

We, like the early Church, hear/read the Apostles’ accounts of Jesus’ life/death, and the H.S. within us confirms to our hearts that what they wrote is absolutely true=>

Jesus did die for the sins of people like us.

In Acts 5, Peter said=> *“We [Apostles] are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him” (5:32).*

The dual witness of the Apostles’ words and the Spirit’s subjective confirmation of their truthfulness convinces us too, that Jesus is God’s Son, and the Savior of the world.

That He has saved our souls from sin’s condemnation, if we have believed in Him.

And that He will return someday to save our bodies from death, and save this earth by completely renewing it.

This faith is part of our confidence that God abides in us, because the H.S. is at work w/i us.

It is He who has revealed the truths about Jesus through the Word, & it's He who has enabled us to receive them by faith.

[Verse 15]=> *“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”*

John is again emphasizing the doctrinal test for true Xnity.

He teaches in cycles about the same 3 tests by which we gain assurance of our salvation, adding new insights with each cycle.

Those 3 tests are=> the doctrinal test, the moral test, and the love test.

Just as he has discussed love before, he has also discussed the doctrine of Christ (Christology) before=>

E.g. in 4:2, John wrote=> *“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; / and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God”* (2-3).

John's point is that no one can be born again who doesn't believe

Jesus is exactly who God says He is, in His Word=>

His only-begotten Son, incarnated into human flesh, & sent to earth as a Savior, to save sinners from their sins.

No one has a saving relationship w/ the Father who doesn't confess these truths about Jesus His Son, & no one can truly believe them until the H.S. convinces him of them.

“*Confess*” in verse 15 points to a single, decisive, public confession of faith, in the Jesus of the Bible.

John says, God abides in whoever confesses that, & he abides in God.

In a general sense, this certainly speaks of a close/intimate fellowship between God and the believer.

More specifically, however, “God’s abiding in him” also seems to mean that God is at work in the believer’s heart/life, sanctifying him and empowering him to serve the Lord here on earth.

“His abiding in God” seems to mean that he knows his life is now centered in God, and he belongs to God’s Kingdom—no longer to the corrupt moral order of this world.

Old things have passed away for Xns, & all things are new.

They have become recipients of God’s love, as He has poured it into believers’ hearts, and they are now to live as people-lovers in a world that knows little about real love.

[Verse 16]=> *“And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”*

Love originated in God, & was manifested in X’s coming, but it has come to full fruition/perfection on earth, in us.

The indwelling of the H.S., through whom we received faith and spiritual life, has also become to us a divine Source of love.

So our believing/loving are both evidence that the Spirit is at work w/i us.

But in addition, a Xn comes to believe that, despite his sin, God (who is love) loves him/her, & does so w/ such sacrificial intensity that He sent His own Son to die for him and sinners like him.

So the true believer can be confident of his salvation as he looks at his heart/life, and finds evidence there of faith in God's love for him, a/w/a saving faith in the X of the Bible.

"Know" / *"believe"* are parallel verbs in the original language, because knowing/believing work in tandem w/ each other. At times knowledge precedes faith, while at other times faith must precede knowledge.

We must have knowledge of Apostolic truth before we can believe it, and yet faith opens up the heart, preparing it to receive/believe revealed Truth.

John says of believers=> *"We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us."*

* There are occasions in most Xns' lives when things go really well, we are flourishing, and we sense God's love for us. It may happen this Christmas, as your family is gathered around you, everyone is enjoying everyone else, and together you are all enjoying a sumptuous meal.

You think to yourself, “It doesn’t get any better than this.

“God has been very good to me, & I truly sense His love for me.”

In Job 29, the beleaguered Job mused to himself=>

“Oh that I were as in months gone by, As in the days when God watched over me” (29:2).

Then he described those “good old days” of the past=>

“My steps were bathed in butter, And the rock poured out for me streams of oil!” (Job 29:6).

* We also sense God’s love when we get relief from some hardship.

Maybe we have been sick, and prayed that our Lord would restore us to health, and He has.

The return of our strength causes us to realize what a blessing good health is, and we again become aware that it’s God’s gift of love to us.

Or maybe our business was suffering loss, or we had a boss who seemed to hate us so much, we always spent Fridays expecting a pink slip at the end of the day.

We may have cried out to the Lord as David did, when Saul was chasing him and seeking to put him to death.

Suddenly, something completely unforeseen happened, the problem was resolved, as once again, our Heavenly Father showed us His love.

* There are also those times when God's children experience the Father's love in special moments of communion w/ Him.

Right after I was drafted into the army in 1967, I attended one of the Protestant chaplain's worship services on post, at Fort Ord, California.

I had never been away from home before, the Vietnam War was raging, & I realized I might become a casualty.

I don't remember anything the chaplain said that day, but afterward we sang a familiar old hymn, & through the words of that hymn, God ministered to me, reassuring me of His love/care for me.

At that moment I experienced a certainty and a confidence that His love would take me through whatever the next 2 years of military service might hold.

The darkest times in our lives often result in the sweetest and most-loving communion w/ our Savior/God.

When trouble like a gloomy cloud
Has gathered thick, and thundered loud,
He near my soul has always stood;
His lovingkindness, O how good!

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Text: 1 John 4:11-16

1. **1 John is a book of certainties, and today’s text contains two tests by which we can be [16 certain] of our relationship with God...**

*** The Love Test**

[1 John 4:11]

2. Based on God’s sacrificial love for us, we are [16 morally] obligated to love one another.

[Verse 12]

Jn 14:9; 1:18; Heb 1:3; Ex 33:20

3. God (who is love) is seen in believers’ love for one another because He abides in us, and His [10 love] is perfected in us.

Acts 1:1-2

4. This is the “[10 love] test” for the genuineness of our regeneration.

[Verse 13]

Rom 5:5

5. Our surrendering our will to the Holy Spirit has resulted in loving attitudes and actions which assure us that He is at work in our hearts, which in turn assures us that we [12 abide] in God.

*** The Doctrinal Test**

[Verse 14]

Jn 15:26, 27

6. Together the Apostles and the Church beheld and witnessed to the fact that Christ was God’s [8 Son].

Mt 3:17; 27:54

7. Not only were believers persuaded that Jesus was the Son of God, they were equally certain that God had sent Him to earth as the [14 Savior] of the world.

Mt 11:28; Rev 22:17; Jn 6:38; Isa 1:18

8. If you have never come to Jesus for cleansing from your sins through faith in His death for sin, He [12 calls] you to come.

Acts 5:32

[Verse 15]

9. John teaches in cycles about the three tests by which we gain assurance of our salvation, adding new [18 insights] with each cycle.

1 Jn 4:2-3

[Verse 16]

10. A Christian comes to believe that despite his sin God (who is love) loves him, and does so with [24 sacrificial] intensity.

Job 29:2, 6

11. There are times when God's children experience the Father's love in special moments of [22 communion] with Him.