

Fellowship with God

1 John 1:5-2:6

Every month, most employees and employers in the United States end up sending a pretty big percentage of each person's income to the federal government to pay for Social Security taxes. It ends up being about 12% for each employee. So if a person makes an average of \$50,000 a year for 40 years, they and their employer will send in just about \$250,000 to Social Security. That's a lot of money. Why would we do that?

According to the Social Security Administration, the federal government designed Social Security primarily to pay retired workers a continuing income after retirement. So we pay the tax now to help support today's retired workers with the promise that when we turn 65 (or whatever age it is at that time) we will also receive social security income to help pay for our expenses. And regardless of what you think about Social Security, the idea of getting regular monthly income after retirement is pretty great.

There are a whole bunch of Americans depending on that money at some point in the future. But how do we know that's actually going to happen? It's a wonderful idea, but how do we know we're actually going to receive that money? What assurance can we have?

This morning I want to talk about assurance, but it doesn't have anything to do with social security, it has to do with salvation and eternal life. Can you have assurance that things are good between you and God and that you will go to heaven when you die? If so, where should that assurance come from?

As we go through this Christmas season, we are looking at passages from the book of 1 John to help us focus on Jesus and the wonder of his coming to earth. Last week we saw how when Jesus came it wasn't just about a baby in a manger – he was also the eternal word of life who had been hidden with God but revealed during John's lifetime. He came bringing salvation and eternal life to all who received him and believed in his name. And John wanted to proclaim him to his readers so they could have fellowship with God – so they could have forgiveness, reconciliation, and a right relationship with him. That's what we saw last week.

This week we are going to look at how John wanted them to have the assurance that they were part of that fellowship, which is the same thing as having assurance of salvation. I think he could see some things they were looking for assurance that were wrong and wanted to show them where to look instead.

From what I've been able to gather, it appears John's readers must have been pretty new to Christianity and probably came from a Jewish background. It seems they were thinking some things about their relationships with God that were still tied to Jewish beliefs and weren't lining up with what Jesus taught. So John writes to bring correction in the verses we're going to look at today. What he writes will help us see how we can have assurance of salvation and where that assurance should come from.

Read 1 John 1:5-10.

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

There are a couple things I see in these verses that I think new believers with a Jewish background could have wrongly assumed when it came to assurance of salvation. One is that they would automatically have fellowship with God just because they were Jews. The Jews were the chosen people of God. That's what made them different than all the other people on earth. They were God's people. Thus, it was assumed that they already had fellowship with God. Unless they were overtly sinful or outright rejected God, they thought they were good to go.

The other faulty assumption I see is that Jews could have claimed to be without sin. I don't think Jews normally thought of themselves as sinners. Gentiles were sinners. Jews were righteous. They had the Law and religious traditions and if they followed them, they were without sin. (is what they thought)

So a new Jewish believer would have likely assumed they had fellowship with God and were without sin. But John saw a major problem with those assumptions that needed to be corrected. So he begins by telling them what Jesus taught about God: God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. God is holy and righteous and in him there isn't even a trace of sin or corruption.

That means you can claim to have fellowship with God all you want. You can say you believe in God or that you're a Christian and think that everything's fine, but if you're living in sin, it's not. God and sin don't mix. You're deceiving yourself and you don't know or practice the truth. So rather than making those empty claims, what Jesus calls us to do is to live in the light. Walk in obedience and follow his ways. If you're walking in the light as he is in the light, that means you're actually part of the fellowship with God. That means you're a true follower of Christ and that his blood has cleansed you from your sin. Walking in the light is what gives you assurance of salvation, not just claiming to have fellowship with God while living in sin.

John addresses another faulty assumption in verses 8 and 10. He says that if you claim to be without sin and think "it isn't the Jews or the people in church that are sinners it's everyone out there – the pagans and unbelievers are sinners, but not me." If you think that way, you don't realize the reality of your sinfulness before God. Everyone has sin; no one is righteous. So he says, if you claim to be without sin, you deceive yourself, the truth is not in you, you make God to be a liar and his word is not in you.

Rather than thinking that way, we need to confess our sins. We need to realize that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, including Jews and people that go to church. We need to admit our own sinfulness before God, and if that's where we're at, John says God will be faithful and just to forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

So assurance of salvation or having fellowship with God doesn't come from being a Jew or belonging to a church, or even believing God exists or claiming to be a Christian. It comes from recognizing and confessing our sinfulness and walking in the light as Jesus is in the light. That's how we know his blood has cleansed us and that our sins are forgiven.

John continues into chapter 2, only now he seems to switch from explaining what Jesus' message was to using his own words.

Read 1 John 2:1-6.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. ³ And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴ Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, ⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

So in the second half of these verses John says a lot of the same kinds of things he brought up in chapter 1. The way to know that you have come to know Christ is by keeping his commands. It doesn't do any good to claim to be a Christian if you don't keep his commands. That actually makes you a liar and the truth isn't in you. But if you keep his word, it shows that God's love has been perfected in you through Christ. You can know that you are united with Christ if you walk the same way he walked – live the same way he lived. If you're living in obedience to Christ, you can have assurance of salvation.

But I want us to look more closely at what John writes in the first couple of verses. Assurance of salvation can come from living in obedience to Christ, but the bedrock of assurance doesn't come from us and how we live our lives, it comes from Christ and what he did on the cross and is currently doing for us right now.

John tells his readers that he's writing these things so that they won't continue to sin but will fight it instead. And then look at what he says next: *"But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."*

John realized that as long as we're in this life and inhabit these bodies there are going to be times when we still sin. And when that happens, we need something more than looking at our obedience to give us assurance of salvation. And that's

what he gives us in these verses. When we do sin, we have an advocate with the Father. We have someone who is on our side, standing up for us, interceding for us, and that's Jesus Christ the righteous. None of us has any right to defend ourselves before God because of our sin. But Jesus has that right. He is righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins. That means that he gave his life as a peace offering to satisfy the wrath of God for our sins. He paid the penalty for our sins – all the sins of our past, and even our sins of today. If you or I give in to sin today, that sin won't destroy our fellowship with God or our assurance of salvation because Jesus is our advocate – he's always there for us, always interceding, and that's where ultimate assurance comes from.

So I think John is telling us in these verses that Salvation is not like Social Security. We don't have to worry or wonder if we're actually going to get it. We can know for sure that we have fellowship with God because of Jesus. If we're walking in obedience to him – living in the light as he is in the light – it shows that we are in him and his blood has washed away our sins. And those times when we are weak and we give in to sin and struggle with doubt and guilt, we can still know we have forgiveness because we have an advocate before God – Jesus Christ the righteous.

So as we approach this Christmas season and celebrate the wonder of Jesus coming to us, let's rejoice at the salvation he brings and the assurance we can have in him.