

1 John 4:13-19

Assurance is the name of the game! Over and over again John uses the word 'know' in his first epistle. The reason why is fairly obvious, he wants the sinner to know Christ personally as his Lord and Saviour, that's what it means to be born again; he also wants the believer to know that he knows Christ, that's what is meant by the term 'assurance.' John insists that God wants us to really know that we are his and that our Christian experience is real. He doesn't want to see us floundering in the quicksand of uncertainty. A fundamental truth has been woven into the fabric of this section in chapter four which stretches from verse 7 down to verse 16. It's the delightful message that God is love! This sublime truth is revealed to us copiously in the sacred writings of scripture, it was also manifest on the cross where Christ gave his life as a ransom for many. In other words, God has said something to us; and God has done something for us! All of this is tremendous preparation for yet another stupendous fact: God does something in us! Warren Wiersbe is spot on when he says: 'We are not merely students reading a book, or spectators watching a deeply moving event. We are participants in the great drama of God's love.' I came across a fascinating story the other day which illustrates what John is attempting to do in this section of his first epistle. In order to save money, a college drama class purchased only a few scripts of a play and cut them up into separate parts. The director gave each player his individual part in order and then started to rehearse the production. But nothing went right. It was a flop, it was a failure! After an hour of missed cues and mangled sequences, the entire cast gave up. They had had enough. At that point, the director sat the disheartened actors on the stage and said: 'Look, I'm going to read the entire play to you, so don't any of you say a word.' That's what he did, and when he was finished, one of the actors said to him: 'So that's what it was all about!' You see, when they understood the story line, they were able to fit all their parts

together and have a successful rehearsal. It all made sense! In some ways, that's what verses 12-16 are all about. You read them through and you feel like saying to yourself: 'Ah, that's what it's all about!' You see, in these few verses we discover what God had in mind when he devised his great plan of salvation. And when we see it all coming together beautifully like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, that in itself will reinforce our trust and belief in a great God, it will firm up our assurance, it will strengthen our resolve to walk closely with the Lord this side of heaven. Right at the heart of our assurance lies the conviction with which the previous section ended and which John repeats here in verses 13, 15 and 16, that 'we live in God and he in us.' Now, that is a concept which is difficult to grasp, especially for those of us living as we do in the hi-tech age of the third millennium. We are used to a culture where everything can be tested and tried by our senses, but this is something totally different. We cannot see this God with our own two eyes (you find that in verse 12), the reason why is because he is a spirit (you find that back in John 4:24). As someone has said, 'God is not a collection of sensory data to be discovered and analysed, but an infinite eternal person.' The simple fact is, God is someone who is there to be trusted, he is there to be believed, and I think, that's where faith enters into the frame! The questions we ask ourselves are these: how can we be sure our lives are built on a solid reliable foundation? What are the grounds of assurance which the Christian can embrace in the best of times as well as in the worst of times? Well, between verses 13 and 21, there are five superb pieces of evidence. The first strand of evidence is located in verse 13 where John confirms that we have received the Holy Spirit. He writes: 'We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.' According to John, the gift of the Holy Spirit is an inevitable corollary of our union with Jesus Christ. That means, every child of God has the Spirit of God living within them, we know the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit day after day. The unbeliever knows nothing of his abiding within, the sinner is destitute of any life in

Christ, his life is empty like a vacuum, we find that teaching amplified by Paul in Romans 8:9. I like to think of it like this: God lives in me, that's what John says here in verse 13; Christ lives in me, that's what Paul says in Galatians 2:20; and they both do it in the person of the Holy Spirit. It's as simple, and yet as profound as that! Perhaps the greatest gift of the ascended Christ to his church on planet earth is the Holy Spirit. He is the one who equips us for every role we are asked to fulfil, he is the one who enables us to live for the Lord, he is the one who energises us and empowers us for the task in hand. The thrilling fact is, when we expose our hearts to his operational fullness, then we know his dynamic influence permeating every area of our lives, and this results in the fruit of the Spirit being reproduced in us and through us to others in the church and in the wider community. It is true to say, where the life of God is at work, it sweetens bitterness, it melts hardness, and it multiplies love. All of this affirms the reality of our relationship with Jesus Christ and it is concrete evidence that 'we live in him and he in us.'

The second contributory factor to our assurance detailed by John is found in verse 14 where he says: 'And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.' You see, inextricably linked to the witness of the Holy Spirit is the witness of the apostles. They can be compared to two links which latch on to each other in the chain of our conviction. The one empowered the other, yet both were essential for the mission to be completed! Our Lord himself introduced this concept when conversing with his disciples in the upper room as recorded in John 15:26,27. Jesus said: 'When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me; but you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.' When John speaks about the 'we' in verse 14 it is a clear reference to the apostolic company, as it did at the start of his first epistle. It was their unique privilege and responsibility to witness to what they saw and heard, that was their prime role in a ministry which took them into the regions beyond.

Yes, they saw what he did, they heard what he said, and because of that, our assurance finds root in the soil of their testimony. It's worth noting in passing that John here refers to Jesus as the Saviour of the world. The mandate of the church is to take this message of a full and free salvation to the uttermost ends of the earth, that is our mission. We should thank God today that the gospel of Christ is not a segregated gospel; we have a glorious gospel for all people, regardless of face, place and race. The third big plus in the assurance equation in our lives is found in verse 15 where John draws attention to the fact that we have personally acknowledged Jesus as God's Son. It's a relatively easy verse to understand for John spells it out as simply as he possibly can. He says: 'If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.' It's probably helpful to read this verse alongside John's comments in verse 12 for when you do that, you recognise John's blend of truth and love. The focus of John's teaching this time is on the outward confession of the inner conviction. It's when we go public over what has happened in the confines of our heart. It's when we come out into the open and unashamedly nail our colours to the mast. It's standing up and being counted for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a clear-cut testimony to our personal belief in the Lord of history, the Lord of the incarnation, the Lord of our salvation. The term 'acknowledge' means more than mental assent to what Jesus has done in the past, it means more than an intellectual acceptance of a series of facts etched on the granite of history, it's more than signing a decision card at the end of an evangelistic meeting, it's more than raising your hand when an impassioned appeal is made for people to follow Jesus! At the risk of sounding technical, our saving faith depends on a doctrinal confession concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ; we may not fully appreciate the implications of that step when we take it, but the whole of our experience of God actually depends on it. The proof that we have the real thing is when our lives reflect his glory and when our attitudes and actions correspond to his word. I was

intrigued to discover that there are three different witnesses mentioned in these verses. First of all, we have the witness of the believer that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that's verse 15; second, we have the witness in the believer by the Holy Spirit, that's verse 13; and third, we have the witness through the believer that God is love and that he sent his son to die for the world. In some ways, this is not unlike a threefold cord which cannot be broken. You see, the world will not believe that God loves sinners until they see his love at work in the lives of the people of God. The moving story is told of the Salvation Army worker who found a derelict woman squatting alone on the street, she invited her to come into the chapel for help, but the woman refused to move. The worker assured her, 'We love you and want to help you. God loves you. Jesus died for you.' But the woman did not budge, she stayed where she was. As if on divine impulse, the Army worker leaned over and kissed the bedraggled woman on the cheek, taking her into her arms. The dear woman began to sob, and like a little child was led into the chapel, where she ultimately trusted Christ as her Lord and Saviour. Later on she confided in the lady worker: 'You told me that God loved me, but it wasn't until you showed me that God loved me that I wanted to be saved.' My friend, therein lies the secret of missionary endeavour and every form of evangelistic outreach. How true it is, actions speak louder than words.

Three down, two to go! We have already examined three grounds for assurance as indicated by John in chapter 4 of his epistle. Number one, we have the Holy Spirit, that's in verse 13; number two, we have the apostolic testimony, that's in verse 14; number three, we have personally acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God, that's in verse 15. Number four is found in verses 16-19 where John reminds us that we have confidence in the love of God. For example, we read in verse 16, 'And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.' The basic thought encapsulated in this verse is that we

are constantly enveloped in the love of God. We live our lives in the orbit of God's unfailing love, and so long as we stay close to his heart and remain sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we will always feel the warmth of its vibes reaching out to us. It's a pulsating vibrant relationship of intimacy with the Almighty. Again, you can see what John is attempting to do, he is at pains to underline the twin towers of security which we have as the children of God, we are in him, and he is in us. I think that's where Pauline theology as so often outlined in his upbeat letter to the Ephesians, and Johannine theology as we have it expounded here, complement one another beautifully. The wonderful fact is that his love is such that we can depend upon it fully, we need have no quibbles about his love, it is a changeless love, and that means we should have no niggling qualms about relying on it. We can stand foursquare on it, we can stake our lives on it, for his love is a love that never fails. And when all is said and done, it can be no other way, for God himself is love. That surely means, in the good times when everything in the garden is rosy, we know his love filling our hearts; it also means in the bad times when our dreams are shattered and our castles have tumbled and our faith is stretched to the limit, that we still can experience his love flooding our lives. Sometimes in his providence he leads us through deep waters and into dark valleys so that we might learn to rely on his love more completely or to trust him more fully. He uses every changing season of our lives to mould us into the kind of people he wants us to be, a people moving in the sphere of his love. When we move into verse 17 we find it echoes the theme which John touched on earlier at the end of verse 12. Let me read it to you and you will see what I mean: 'In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.' He looks forward into the future, he is anticipating tomorrow in the ripening purpose of God. He is thinking of the day when we will stand before the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ, it's what is often referred to as the 'Bema' as outlined by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:10 and 1

Corinthians 3. You also find it mentioned in Romans 14:12 where Paul sees it as a day of accountability for the people of God. John's aspiration is that when we stand before him we can do so with a high level of confidence, he doesn't want us to be overwhelmed with regret because of the lifestyle we have chosen to live, he doesn't want us to be red faced with embarrassment because of our neglect to serve him this side of heaven. He doesn't want us to stand there with our head buried in our hands and the words of the gospel song ringing in our ears: 'I'll wish I had given him more!' That's the last thing John wants for us. The secret to our passing the examination on that final day is for us to be like him down here on planet earth, and the more we are like Jesus, the greater our confidence will be. Basically, we want to hear him say to each of us, 'my child, well done.' He will only say that if we have done well! In verse 18 John introduces a new dimension to his thinking, he talks about fear, and what he says about it is most interesting. We read: 'There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.' I think you will agree with me when I say that fear and love are mutually exclusive. If we are scared stiff that God is going to punish us, we cannot yet be aware of the fulness of his love in our hearts. There are so many of God's people today who are enmeshed in a web of fear, they live their lives on a treadmill for one reason or another. It's fear that often drives them on, and sadly for some, it drives them over the edge. John implies that when we have his love in control of our lives, we have absolutely nothing to fear, we have nothing to worry about. God isn't waiting for us at the end of the road with a big stick in his hand ready to beat us up. Far from it, he longs that we might have total trust in His Son, the Lord Jesus, he came to deal with fear in our hearts and minds, he came to eradicate it, he came to expel it once and for all! Punishment is not on God's agenda for the believer, that was effectively dealt with on the cross of Calvary. It will never be handed down a second time! That is passed, that is consigned to the annals of history. We face

the future with our hand in His, we face tomorrow with our confidence grounded in the character of God, we look ahead and keenly anticipate all that God has for us and we can do that with a measure of hope because we know he is for us and he is with us. The simple truth is, his is a love that will never let us down and his is a love that will never let us go! In that sense, John and Jeremiah are both on the same wavelength. The final thought is found in verse 19 where John says, 'We love because he first loved us.' The main reason why we show compassion to others is because we have known his incredible compassion in our hearts, the reason why we minister with a tender touch to others in their need is because we have known a similar touch from the Lord, the reason why we love others as they are is because we continue to enjoy and experience his love on a daily basis! That's where genuine love wins the day!