

# **That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life**

**That We May Know**

*1 John 5:13-17*

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## That We May Know

### Scripture

The Apostle John corrects false teaching by setting down three tests by which one may evaluate whether one has a saving relationship with God. The tests are moral, social, and doctrinal, also known as tests of obedience, love, and belief. John has repeated and restated these three tests throughout his letter.

As John comes to the end of his First Letter, he wants to instill certainty in his readers about the assurance of their salvation. So, he takes up the theme of what it is that we know in 1 John 5:13-21. John uses the word “know” (*oidamen*) seven times in these nine verses. These are not ideas or suggestions for John’s readers to think about. No. These are bold, dogmatic assertions that are beyond dispute and they summarize the truths he has already written about in his letter.

Let’s read about what we may know in 1 John 5:13-17:

**<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. <sup>14</sup>And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. <sup>15</sup>And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.**

**<sup>16</sup>If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life – to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. <sup>17</sup>All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. (1 John 5:13-17)**

## Introduction

In 2009, Daniel Gilbert, a psychology professor at Harvard, drew from the *Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index* and stated that the Index showed “that Americans are smiling less and worrying more than they were a year ago, that happiness is down and sadness is up, that we are getting less sleep and smoking more cigarettes, that depression is on the rise.”

He stated that the real problem is not financial – not having enough money, but something else: *Uncertainty*. People don’t know what’s going to happen. Will I have a job next week? What’s ahead in the future for me?

Professor Gilbert pointed to a Dutch experiment where some subjects were told they would be intensely shocked 20 times. The researchers told a second group that they would receive three strong shocks and 17 mild ones, but they wouldn’t know when the intense shocks would come. The results? Subjects in the second group sweated more and experienced faster heart rates. Uncertainty caused their discomfort: they didn’t know when the strong shocks would come next.

Another study showed that colostomy patients who knew that their colostomies would be permanent were happier six months after their procedures than those who were told there might be a chance of reversing their colostomies. Once again, uncertainty caused the unhappiness.

Professor Gilbert summarized, “An uncertain future leaves us stranded in an unhappy present with nothing to do but wait.... Our national gloom is real enough, but it isn’t a matter of insufficient funds. It’s a matter of insufficient certainty.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2010/november/6110110.html>.

## That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life

We live in a time of significant and growing uncertainty. We also live in a time of cultural and moral relativism. The *New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, Third Edition, defines “relativism” as “the doctrine that no ideas or beliefs are universally true but that all are, instead, ‘relative’ – that is, their validity depends on the circumstances in which they are applied.”<sup>2</sup> We have people insisting that there is “your truth” and there is “my truth.” All of this just adds to the massive confusion in our culture.

In John’s day, there were false teachers insisting that one had to be enlightened with special knowledge to know God. John cuts through that theological gobbledygook with a surgeon’s knife and instead teaches with dogmatic certainty that there are a number of truths that can be known in order to have a relationship with God.

### Lesson

First John 5:13-17 shows us what we know as Christians. Let’s use the following outline:

1. We Know That We Have Eternal Life (5:13)
2. We Know That God Answers Prayer (5:14-17)

#### I. We Know That We Have Eternal Life (5:13)

The first truth we know as Christians is that we have eternal life.

John wrote his Gospel to help unbelievers become believers, as he said in John 20:30-31, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/relativism>.

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

John wrote his Letters to those who are already believers to assure them of their salvation, as he said in 1 John 5:13, **“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.”** This verse summarizes the purpose of the First Letter of John.

He wrote this letter to correct the false teaching that has been causing believers such confusion. Here, John clearly states that faith in Jesus saves. No special revelation is needed. No spiritual enlightenment is necessary. Trusting in the finished work of Jesus saves sinners.

When I am talking with a Christian who is struggling with assurance of salvation, I turn to 1 John 5:13. I will ask the doubting Christian to read the verse. Then I will go over the verse phrase by phrase to help the Christian understand that it is by faith alone in Jesus alone that one is saved. A person does not receive salvation because of obedience to God’s law. Nor does a person lose salvation because of a struggle with sin. When God causes a person to be born again by his Holy Spirit, that person is enabled to believe in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. That person is adopted into the family of God. That new believer will repent of all sins and seek to follow hard after Jesus. Yes, there may still be occasional lapses into sin but the general direction of that person’s life is new obedience.

Do you know for sure that you have eternal life? Do you really trust God to protect you? Do you believe God will bring you safely to heaven? Does your faith work in everyday life?

I read a story about a little girl named Cindy and her mother who spent the day shopping at a mall. Cindy’s attention jumped from one exciting thing to another. All day long, Cindy and her mother held hands and enjoyed being together. Cindy

knew she was in good hands, so she never questioned her mother's leading as they shopped.

When the day of shopping came to an end, the young child and her mother left the mall to walk to the parking lot. Suddenly, Cindy stopped and stared at the sea of cars, cars of every type and color as far as the eye could see. "Mommy, what will we do? How will we ever find our car?"

With swift assurance, her mother lovingly replied, "Cindy, you trusted me to take care of you this far. Don't you believe I can get you safely home?"

Cindy thought for a moment, then said with a peaceful smile, "I don't understand how, but I believe you, Mommy."<sup>3</sup>

Do you believe in the name of the Son of God? Do you know that you have eternal life? If you believe in Jesus, he will bring you safely to glory. He will not leave you stranded in this world.

So, the first truth we know as Christians is that we have eternal life.

## II. We Know That God Answers Prayer (5:14-16a, 17)

And the second truth we know as Christians is that God answers prayer.

John writes in verses 14-15, "**And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.**" John now talks about confidence in prayer. Because the believer knows God and is an

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<sup>3</sup> Leadership Ministries Worldwide, *Practical Illustrations: 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude* (Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 2003), 14.

adopted child of God, he is able to talk with God in prayer. He may ask God **“anything”** knowing that God **“hears us.”** God of course hears everything, and so John is referring to God answering us.

John, however, qualifies his statement by saying that for our prayer to be answered, it must be **“according to his will.”** Commenting on this verse, Leon Morris writes, “Elsewhere we learn that prayer must be in faith (Mark 11:24), in the name of Jesus (John 14:14), offered by those who abide in Christ (John 15:7), who have forgiven those who offend them (Mark 11:25); it must be accompanied by obedience (1 John 3:22), and it must not be for the gratification of one’s passions (James 4:3). All this is involved in praying according to the will of God.”<sup>4</sup>

How do we know what is **“according to his will”**? There are two aspects to the will of God. There is God’s *secret* will. I don’t know what that is. Where should I live? Who should I marry? What job should I do? None of that is revealed to me in the pages of Scripture.

However, the surest way to learn God’s will is to learn what is God’s *revealed* will. God’s revealed will is in the pages of Scripture. There he has revealed everything that is **“according to his will.”** I will never falter by praying what is in accordance with Scripture. That is why praying Scripture is so helpful to us in our prayers.

Question 178 of *The Westminster Larger Catechism* asks, “What is prayer?” And the answer given is, “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God (Psalm 62:8), in the name of Christ (John 16:23), by the help of his Spirit (Romans 8:26); with confession of our sins (Psalm 32:5–6, Daniel 9:4), and

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<sup>4</sup> Leon L. Morris, “1 John,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1409.

thankful acknowledgment of his mercies (Philippians 4:6).” It is helpful to keep in mind that God does not merely answer every request of mine. But God does hear and answer prayer that is according to his will.

Then John writes in verses 16a and 17, **“If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life – to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.”** John writes about sin leading to death and sin not leading to death. He does not define each kind of sin. Presumably, **sin not leading to death** is any sin for which forgiveness is sought from God and granted by God.

The good news of the gospel is that even the most hardened and rebellious of sinners are softened by the grace of God and become believers. That is why we should always pray for the salvation of sinners, no matter how resistant they may seem to the gospel. I recall reading the biography of George Muller (1805-1898), the director of an orphanage in England in which he eventually cared for over 10,000 orphans. After Muller’s conversion, he prayed for five friends to become Christians. If I recall correctly, two became Christians relatively quickly, a third after two years of prayer, and the fourth friend about ten years later. The fifth friend never became a Christian during Muller’s lifetime but did so shortly after Muller’s death. Muller had prayed for him for fifty-two years! May that encourage each one of us to know that God answers prayer.

But there is a prayer that God does not answer. John writes in verse 16b, **“There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.”** Some commentators suggest that John’s original readers probably knew exactly what



John was writing about. That is why he did not state what is **sin that leads to death**. It seems to me that in the context of John's letters, he has in mind those who have come into the congregation of believers and tried to teach false doctrine about God and how to have a relationship with him. **Sin that leads to death** may not be a specific act of sin but rather a state of rebellion against God and resistance to the truth of the gospel.

Resistance to the truth of the gospel grows each time one hears it and resists it. Rebellion against God grows each time one hears about God's offer of forgiveness and refuses to accept God's terms.

When I was a university student, I attended St. James Church in Cape Town. The pastor, the Rev. Frank Retief, was a gifted preacher and evangelist. St. James had a morning service and evening service each Sunday. The morning service was for believers to worship God and grow in their walk with him. The evening service was for unbelievers to hear the gospel. I remember Frank pleading with unbelievers to repent of their sin and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And he would often say that each time a person said "No" to Jesus made it easier to say so the next time. He said that because he knew that hearts harden over time and it becomes easier each time to refuse the offer of God's forgiveness.

Does that mean that we should not pray for people who continue to refuse the gospel? No. I don't think so. Frankly, I don't know whose sin will lead them to death. Therefore, I pray for the salvation of people I know even if they consistently refuse the offer of God's forgiveness. I suppose I am encouraged to keep praying because of the example of George Muller.

So, the first truth we know as Christians is that we have eternal life. And the second truth is that God answers prayer.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the topic of certainty in 1 John 5:13-17, let us be sure that we believe in the name of the Son of God.

Dr. Rosalind Picard, founder and director of the Affective Research Group at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), was once convinced that she didn't need God or religion. So, she declared herself an atheist and dismissed believers as uneducated. But as an educated person she figured at least she should read the Bible. Picard said, "When I first opened the Bible, I expected to find phony miracles...and assorted gobbledygook. To my surprise, the Book of Proverbs was full of wisdom. I had to pause while reading and *think*."

She read through the entire Bible twice. She said, "I felt this strange sense of being spoken to. Part of me was increasingly eager to spend time with the God of the Bible, but an irritated voice inside me insisted I would be happy again once I moved on."

In college, another student invited her to his church. The pastor got her attention when he asked, "Who is Lord of your life?" She said:

I was intrigued: I was the captain of my ship, but was it possible that God would actually be willing to lead me? After praying, "Jesus Christ, I ask you to be Lord of my life," my world changed dramatically, as if a flat, black-and-white existence suddenly turned full-color and three-dimensional. But I lost nothing of my urge to seek new knowledge. In fact, I felt emboldened to ask even tougher questions about how the world works.

Today, I work closely with people whose lives are filled

with medical struggles. I do not have adequate answers to explain all their suffering. But I know there is a God of unfathomable greatness and love who freely enters into relationship with all who confess their sins and call upon his name.

I once thought I was too smart to believe in God. Now I know I was an arrogant fool who snubbed the greatest Mind in the cosmos – the Author of all science, mathematics, art, and everything else there is to know. Today I walk...with joy, alongside the most amazing Companion anyone could ask for, filled with desire to keep learning and exploring.<sup>5</sup>

Do you believe in the name of the Son of God? If you do, then you may be sure that you know that you have eternal life and that God answers prayer.

But, if you do not believe in the name of the Son of God, then you have no certainty at all about the things I have presented today. I urge you to repent of your sin and to believe in the name of the Son of God today. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/april/rosalind-picard-mit-professor-meets-author-knowledge.html>.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
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