

1 John 4 – Part K

1 John 4:12-16 – Part B

¹Jn 4:12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. ¹³ By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

In this passage we have seen that the biblical evidence of the love of God being “**perfected**” in a believer is twofold: (1) obedience to God, and (2) love for other believers. Please remember that the word “**perfected**” is in the perfect tense which is considered to be the most important New Testament Greek tense because of its “continuing” impact on the individual. What John has done all the way through this letter is to constantly keep defining the true nature of salvation, and ultimately of the gospel itself, and it is no different in this passage. Stated in a different way, if the gospel is not properly communicated, then in essence it has no saving power for the individual who hears it. Certainly within the cultural context of modern Christianity, there is a salient and significant propensity to simply water down the gospel. It is no surprise that many individuals seem to constantly struggle with the issue of assurance – something that John is specifically addressing in this letter. That is why John uses the word “**know**” or a form of that word so often in this letter – 40 times. The reason that people so often seem to struggle with assurance is because they have never been properly taught what genuine salvation really is. Someone just tells them to “accept” Christ or “receive” Christ or just say this prayer.

In this one passage alone, notice the number of times that John is speaking specifically about genuine salvation. In v12 he says that “**God abides in us**”. Think of the word “**abides**” this way – God is **permanently** living in the believer. In v13 he says that “**we know that we abide in him**” and that God “**has given us of his Spirit**”. No one can have the Spirit of God unless they are a believer. In v14 he says that “**we have seen and testify**” about Christ that he truly is the “**Savior of the world**”. In v15 he says that if anyone truly “**confesses that Jesus is the Son of God**” that “**God abides in him**”. Then lastly in v16, John says that “**he who abides in love abides in God and God in him**”. I.e., if someone is truly a believer, then there will always be **biblical evidence** of that in their life. So there are at least 6 specific references to someone having salvation, or as John states it - God abides in them and they abide in God. Please do not miss the point once again that John is clearly making statement after statement after statement to authenticate whether or not someone does or does not have genuine salvation. He remains relentless in that effort.

The problem is that the church has **misdefined** the nature of biblical faith as presented in the New Testament. Unfortunately, there are many people who confess that Jesus Christ is a genuine historical figure and they may go so far as to say that they believe in Him. Then the church, in order to keep those individuals in their congregation, actually affirm for the individual that they are saved even though very often there is very little to no evidence of that in their life. Listen very carefully. When someone is truly saved, what it means is that they come into a very personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This is not just some meaningless overture of good intentions. This is not just saying the right words about Christ.

This is when someone truly entrusts their life to Christ as the creator God who is sovereign over all things. Without being the final judge and jury on this issue, it seems more than apparent that this issue of entrusting one's life to Christ is severely missing in much modern evangelism. This idea that God has a wonderful plan for your life and all you have to do is raise your hand and sign a card is a very dangerous approach to evangelism, with the final result being that of misleading people with a misdefinition of the gospel.

Within the seeker sensitive movement of the modern evangelical church, there is almost zero emphasis on personal repentance. In fact, when someone does call on someone to repent of their sins, often times they are deemed as being overly demanding, judgmental, insensitive, and even hypocritical. The modern church has developed a very ambiguous, nebulous, weak, and fragile presentation of the gospel. The gospel has been so watered down that almost everyone believes themselves to be saved, yet nothing could be any further from the truth. In many churches in various denominations, people who made some kind of so-called profession of faith are seen as eternally secure even though their life, their habits, and their lifestyles completely deny the faith that they claim to have. People are resting on the fact that at some point in the past they "received" Christ, even though nothing in their life reflects that they received anything. It almost appears that many churches are actually afraid to confront individuals who are living in known and open sin. That is the worst thing that the church can do for those people – to not lovingly and biblically confront them in their sin. Genuine salvation, the kind that God gives to an individual, is always accompanied by biblical evidences that validate their salvation. It almost seems somewhat silly to even have to identify that truth.

What is known as the historic Protestant position on this issue can be summarized in a very simple sentence – "men are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is never alone". What the second part of that sentence means is that there are biblical evidences that always accompany genuine saving faith in a person's life.¹ It would be utterly meaningless to claim to have a salvation that never made a difference in a person's life. When someone is truly born again, everything changes. Their conduct changes, their speech changes, their goals change, their habits change, their lifestyle changes, their interest change, their priorities change - everything changes everytime. Yet the church seems to be satisfied with the definition of salvation that requires virtually no change whatsoever, and certainly no kind of ongoing change to authenticate the reality of the individual's salvation experience. In this passage John is very clear that when someone is saved that they not only have a deep and abiding love for God, but they also have a deep and abiding love for other believers. Notice how blunt John is in [1 John 4:20](#) when he says,

^{1Jn 4:20} If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

Such a strong statement like that seems to actually antagonize some people simply because there are genuine believers in their life that they do not really like, and certainly do not love. Please appreciate that if that is the case in someone's life that their very unbiblical behavior does not trump the Word of God. In fact, in [1 John 4:21](#), John says the issue of loving other believers is a commandment.

^{1Jn 4:21} And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also.

If in someone's life there is no outward righteousness and holiness, why would the church as God's institution responsible for both teaching and upholding the truth find a way to casually dismiss such an obvious biblical misunderstanding and so lead someone into a false assurance? In [Ephesians 4:20-24](#), Paul gave this admonishment,

Eph 4:20 But you have not so learned Christ, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: ²² that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, ²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

[Titus 2:11-12](#) says,

Tit 2:11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

Paul says in that passage that the salvation that God has given carries with it the grace of God to do exactly what Paul is advocating. Personal works are not the basis of justification, but they are clearly the evidence that justification has actually taken place in a person's life. Theologically it could be stated that if there is no evidence of meaningful sanctification (growth), then there has been no justification (salvation). That would be the theologian's way of simply saying that true salvation must be accompanied by the development of godly attributes in a believer's life. If someone claims to be saved, if they claim to be a follower of Christ, and if they claim to know God, then certainly there must be some genuine proof and validation of that in their life. How could anything less be expected? Why would any kind of biblical institution teach otherwise? When someone is truly saved there will be genuine evidence of repentance and there will be an ongoing display of godly attributes being developed within their life.

The issue for the church is one of defining what true conversion really is. In biblical conversion there has to be major changes that take place in the person's life. There has to be. Salvation turns a person's life completely upside down. They go from living in darkness to now living in light. They go from death to life. They go from believing a lie to believing the truth. They exchange hate for love. They forsake the world for following Christ. This is a radical change, and there must be genuine evidence in a person's life to validate salvation.² The unfortunate problem is that most churches are satisfied with simple decisions, and in the process they do not get genuine conversions.

Now, why spend so much time talking about genuine salvation when John is clearly talking about love for other believers and what it means to abide in God? It is so that the believer can have genuine assurance. Assurance is a byproduct of a believer who not only knows the truth, but they also abide in that truth. Just think for a moment of all of the people who will stand before God who have casually and even glibly professed Christ and were told by some ill taught and misinformed individual that they were saved because they made a "decision". They may even have signed a decision card. However, for years, maybe even decades, they have shown no biblical evidence in their life, yet someone gave them a false assurance that they were saved because of a one-time "decision" that had no impact on their life. It does not matter what kind of decision someone has made in the past. What matters is that their life

authenticates that that decision was genuine and legitimate. Many churches probably have as many lost people in them as they have saved people.

Now, this is not a message to get people to think that they are lost – not at all. This is a message to help discerning believers be able to recognize the difference between a real salvation and a pseudo-salvation. People who have a pseudo-salvation are generally members of churches. That is where they exist and where they thrive. John has clearly stated in this passage and throughout this letter that the attributes of not continuing to live in sin as a habit of life, of living in obedience to the Word of God, and loving other Christians is God's clear evidence of biblical salvation in a person's life. If someone can honestly say that sin is not the habit of their life, that they are obedient to the word of God, and that they truly love other believers, then they should accept God's assurance of their salvation. Please appreciate that this is a message with very serious implications, and therefore it should not be weakened and stripped of its truth simply to accommodate someone's inappropriate behavior. Every true believer should be able to look at their life and validate that they love other believers and that they are experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit in their life. They should be able to validate that they have truly entrusted their life to Christ, and that they have genuinely and sincerely confessed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. They should be able to confess at this very moment that they are abiding in Christ. This should be the testimony of everyone who has been born again, and the church should never dilute this in any way.

What often happens in the communication process with someone who is not truly saved is that someone tells them that what they are going to lose by not living for Christ are rewards. Because they are not saved, just losing a few rewards and still being able to live as they please seems like a good trade-off. Unfortunately, it is not rewards that they will lose, but their soul. Someone has convinced them that in heaven that everyone will be happy, fully satisfied, and have everything that they need for eternity - so why not just enjoy sin now? It would be biblically appropriate to communicate to individuals who are not really following Christ that if there has been no consistent change in their life and their previous lifestyle, then they simply have never been saved. The worst thing that someone can have is a purely intellectual agreement regarding biblical truth. The scenario is easy to identify. People grow up in church and become very familiar with biblical teaching. They are acquainted with biblical truth because they have been accustomed on a regular basis to going to church. In fact, they are somewhat conversant and knowledgeable of biblical information. Here is their problem. They have a familiarity with the truth, and unfortunately they have substituted their familiarity with the truth for actual salvation. The tragedy is that the church has actually fostered that position because the church is very familiar with those individuals and therefore often times gives them false assurance because they have a knowledge of the truth. [2 Corinthians 13:5](#) gives a very simple command,

^{2Co 13:5} Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you are disqualified.

John in this epistle has reinforced these issues to his readers. Notice how very straightforward John is in [1 John 2:3-4](#),

^{1Jn 2:3} Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

If a person does not keep the commandments of God and integrate the truth of God into their life, John says that individual does not have the truth in them and does not know God. John is not playing games with people's souls just to keep them in a church so they can help pay off the mortgage on the new facilities they have built. For John, all of these exhortations are eternally significant because they provide evidence of that which is true and of that which is false regarding genuine salvation. John has said the same thing in [1 John 3:6](#),

1Jn 3:6 Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.

The individual who continues to live in sin as a way of life has neither seen God nor known God. Make no mistake about this and about John's teaching in this letter. There is no wiggle room here for individuals who can never seem to get their act together spiritually. This is where a person's understanding of biblical truth must be in alignment with the Scriptures. It is the difference between eternal life and eternal death.

ENDNOTES

¹ Grudem, 27-28.

² Grudem, 54.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Grudem, Wayne. *Free Grace Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2016.