

## 1 John 4 – Part L

### 1 John 4:12-14

**<sup>1</sup>Jn 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. <sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.**

In studying through [1 John 4:12-16](#), it should be readily apparent that John is vitally concerned that his readers understand what clearly identifies individuals as being genuine believers. We live in a world where it is very easy to misrepresent information and to actually falsify someone's identity. Identity theft has become a very large concern in America. Recently we had 18 fraudulent charges against our credit card account. In a similar way, this has been a major part of John's concerns throughout this letter – what we might call a kind of identity forgery within the church. In [Matthew 7](#), Jesus clearly identified that there will be many individuals who will not be allowed into His kingdom even though they gave everyone else the clear impression that they were saved.

As studied previously, in v12 John has stated that when a believer truly loves other believers that it is because God abides in their life and His love is being perfected and matured in them. Without overstating what John said in that verse, it appears that His premise is that the more that we love other believers, then the more that we actually come to know God. So, v12 was the first test in this section - do we truly love other believers? Are we willing to be patient with them, to be kind, and to be forbearing toward them? Are we willing to forgive them when they may sin against us in some way? Are we willing to help them when they have particular needs in their life that they cannot meet? These are the kind of questions that we must ask ourselves to help us see where we really are in our Christian life.

In v13, John gives a second test and proof of genuine salvation, and that is whether or not we know that the Holy Spirit is truly a part of our life. This proof is so different from what most individuals think of when they try and define the nature of the Christian life. Normally, it is defined in terms of “do's and don'ts”, or in terms of what someone has to give up in order to be a Christian. Obviously, there are vital things that believers are called on to rid out of their lives once they are saved, but that is not the measure of what it means to be a Christian – that I gave up some sin that was destroying a part of my life. When I was saved, I immediately gave up drinking, smoking, and cursing. However, that is certainly not the way that I would describe my Christian life today. I would not describe it in terms of what I actually gave up, but rather in terms of what God has done in my life. One of the vital things that God does at salvation is to place the person of the Holy Spirit within the believer's life, and His work is that of continually conforming the believer more and more into the image of Christ. He has been doing the same exact thing in your life, and He will continue that work in your life. He is developing His spiritual fruit in your life. His fruits are the godly attributes that are reflective of God Himself. The fact that we may say to someone that we live a moral life simply withers away in comparison to what the Holy Spirit is doing within us. My feeble attempts at morality are virtually worthless in the big picture. Being a Christian means much, much more than living a decent and moral life. The impact of the Christian life is so extensive that it would be a tragedy to limit it to morality or to doing good things or to becoming a better person.<sup>1</sup> If that is our perspective on the nature of the Christian life, then probably we have

completely misunderstood it and because of that misunderstanding have no idea how to even appropriate it into our life.

It is important to appreciate that when someone becomes a Christian that it is much more than them simply believing certain things that they think will make them a Christian. In my mind, that is simply a kind of mental and intellectual approach which is certainly necessary, but not something that properly defines what it means to be a Christian. Notice what John says in v13,

**1Jn 4:13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.**

Here John is very clear that when someone is saved that they know that something vital and crucial has happened in their life. What they know is not theoretical, hypothetical, speculative, or merely academic to them. There is something dynamic that has taken place in their life. They have undergone a life changing event and a deeply spiritual experience that has changed their life forever, and for the first time in their life they know that God is dwelling in them. They know that beyond any shadow of a doubt, and the knowledge of that one thing has completely changed everything about their life. They used to be dead in their sins, but now they are alive to God. [Ephesians 2:1, 5](#) says,

**Eph 2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,**

**Eph 2:5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),**

[Colossians 2:13](#) declares the same,

**Col 2:13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,**

These verses clearly indicate that salvation is moving from death into life. Whereas before the individual was under the wrath of God, now they have a living relationship with both God and Christ. In their heart they now cry out to God with fervency and heartfelt love. [Romans 8:15](#) says it this way,

**Ro 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."**

The word in that verse for “cry out” is the Greek word “*krazo*”. It actually means to scream, to shriek, and to exclaim. It is the same word that was used of the people who shouted out for Christ to be crucified. It is the same word that was used by Christ on the cross at the close of his sufferings when he cried out in agony to the Father. It is a word that means to cry out as an expression of deep feelings.<sup>2</sup> If someone was severely injured and in great pain, this is the word that would be used to describe their cries of anguish and pain. This word would most likely be used to describe the first utterances of someone who entered into Hades without Christ. This is a word of deep emotion and feeling, and it is a great word to describe how the believer now feels about their Father in heaven. They just want to cry out “**Abba, Father**”. They are thrilled with this eternal relationship that they now have with God. Inside of them it is more than they can contain and it is something that is constantly the expression and feeling of their heart. What a great picture of what God does in the heart of someone who has truly been saved.

We all have to ask the question at this point as to whether or not we as an individual have ever known this experience? Approaching it from a different perspective, there are plenty of people who know and believe certain things about God, about Christ, and about the Christian life, but in reality they do not actually know God. The knowledge that produces this kind of outburst from the Christian has been created in them by this life transforming event called salvation when the unbeliever enters into a vital and meaningful relationship with the creator God of eternity. A change has taken place - a real change, a visible change, a very noticeable change, and a conspicuous change. In reality, everything changes. The individual goes from death to life, from the old man to the new man, from all things passing away to all things becoming new. He has been removed from the kingdom of darkness and has been transferred into the kingdom of God's dear Son. That is why all of this is so much more than just an intellectual acceptance of certain biblical information about salvation. There is nothing mechanical or spiritually robotic and emotionless about salvation. It reaches down and touches the deepest part of a person's life and gives them life that they never previously had. [2 Peter 1:4](#) says it this way,

**<sup>2Pe 1:4</sup> by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is in the world through lust*.**

My point in all of this is to help us appreciate that when John says in v13 “**By this we know...**” that there is a foundation for such a statement. What has just been described is the “**this**” of v13. When these kind of events happen in a person's life that bring them into a deep and personal relationship with Christ, they know that they possess His life. If you ask someone if they are saved and they say that they “hope so”, then in all likelihood they have never experienced the life transforming salvation of which we are speaking. Salvation is not a “hope so” event, and there is no place in all of Scripture that would give it such a definition. If someone does not have this kind of knowledge of God in which they cry out “**Abba Father**”, then they should not rest for a moment until they have it and know that they have it.

If I can say it in a different way, we have no justification to be uncertain in such a vital matter as eternal salvation.<sup>3</sup> There is utterly no merit in being spiritually ignorant about something so eternally vital to our life. John's statement in v13 is an absolute statement – “**By this we know...**” The verb “**know**” is in the present tense, indicative mood, and active voice. It is a fact and something that the believer constantly knows and keeps on knowing. In fact, I would go so far to say that the longer they are a Christian, the deeper the knowledge, the deeper the understanding, and the deeper the love for God. There is nothing subjective, missing, or lacking about this knowledge. The knowledge of v13 is vitally present in the heart and life of the believer for one reason – “**because He has given us of His Spirit**”. It is not because we are smart and intelligent. It is not because we have thought through all of it. It is not because of some great spiritual skill that we possess. It is not because we are a good person. In reality, it has nothing to do with us at all. It is all about the fact that the greatest proof possible has been “**given**” to us (v13). The verb “**given**” is in the perfect tense, indicative mood, active voice. The perfect tense means that the Holy Spirit was given in the past and He is having a continuing influence, impact, and reality on our life this very moment. If for some reason God were to remove His Spirit from our life, every single one of us would go back into sin with a vengeance. That is how morally fragile we really are apart from the deep and abiding work of the Holy Spirit.

I am always amazed when someone communicates that they believe it is possible to be a Christian and not know it. How could someone have the eternal God living inside of them and them not know it? If someone is uncertain about this, then in all likelihood they need to re-examine whether or not they are actually saved, or whether or not there is the awful sin of unbelief in their life. This is what John is saying in this verse - **“By this we know...”** There is no hesitation in what John is saying. John’s words are an absolute statement of fact. This is the difference between having the Spirit of God and not having the Spirit of God. This is the difference between spiritual death and eternal life.

Someone is always going to ask the question *“How can I know for sure that I am saved?”* Well, this is John’s answer - you know that the Spirit of God is abiding in you. You are a personal witness to His work and to the spiritual life that He creates within you. Your life should be a living testimony to the fact that God lives within you. This is not a matter of semantics. Just ask yourself some obvious questions like *“Am I truly concerned about my soul and about knowing God and about eternal life? Am I concerned about what the Bible says and about sin in my life? Am I truly concerned about reflecting Christ in my life?”* Well, if you are it is because the Holy Spirit abides in you. That is His work. That is what He does. Every believer should recognize that there is a great spiritual conflict that surrounds them and often times is within them personally. They are aware of the principles of sin that abound not only in the world, but most often in their own heart - and it troubles them greatly. Listen – that is a great thing!! Paul clearly understood this struggle when he declared in [Romans 7:18](#) and [Roman s 7:23-24](#),

**Ro 7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.**

**Ro 7:23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. <sup>24</sup> O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?**

The Christian life is filled with conflicts both within and without, and the person who is truly indwelt by the Holy Spirit knows this. If you have ever felt like what Paul is describing in [Romans 7](#), then certainly it means that the Holy Spirit is in you and that you are saved. This should be a great encouragement to every one of us simply because we know and are fully aware of this conflict. Paul describes the conflict in [Galatians 5:17](#),

**Gal 5:17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.**

The believer always finds himself battling with the flesh and what it lusts after in their life. The conflict never ends, nor will it. In reality, however, it is okay simply because the believer knows that God is working in their life and is there to support, to help, and to infuse them with the spiritual power that they need to overcome sin in their life. The Holy Spirit is there all the time working in what may be considered mysterious ways. The Holy Spirit is leading, guiding, convicting, persuading, and constantly making each of us uncomfortable with those things that may be displeasing to God. All of these are great evidences of His presence in a believer’s life and they should be seen as a great source of both assurance and encouragement to the believer. These are the signs of eternal life at work in a person’s life and their value cannot be diminished in any way.

Here is the point in all of this. The New Testament Christian is someone who knows certain vital truths about their Christian life. They know that the Spirit of God dwells in them. They know that God abides in them. They know that they are abiding in God. There is always a difference between someone who has been saved from their sins and someone who is still lost in their sins. It is utterly impossible for the Holy Spirit to take up residence in a person's life, but His presence not make a difference in that person's life. That is a spiritual impossibility. When God gives someone life, it produces life. When God creates the divine nature in a person, it creates divine attributes in that person.

The third test is given in [1 John 4:14](#) which says,

**1Jn 4:14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.**

The third test is really very simple (v14). Do we truly believe that Jesus Christ is the only means whereby we can be saved? John is testifying to this, but by its very nature it is something that everyone who has been born again truly understands and confesses. Please keep in mind that these three tests are integrally woven together. Christians have these three characteristics in their life – (1) they love other Christians, (2) they know that the Holy Spirit is living in them and working in them, and (3) they know that Jesus Christ is their Savior and that there is no other means by which they can be eternally saved.

So, for each of us we should have great assurance if we can eagerly and readily confess that these three foundational truths of the Christian life are a vital and meaningful part of our life – and they should be and you should be able to say these things. This is how a believer gains assurance – by knowing that these truths have been supernaturally worked into their life. They embrace them and cling to them and love them. They remain overwhelmed that God is their Father and that Christ has died for their sins. They know that the Holy Spirit is changing them into the image of Christ and forming His supernatural fruit within their life. These are life transforming truths that have radically and eternally altered their life and they know it.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 464.

<sup>2</sup> Strong, 1197.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 467.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. *Life in Christ - Studies in 1 John*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2002.

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