

1 John 4 – Part N

1 John 4:16

1Jn 4:16 **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.**

Before addressing [1 John 4:16](#), I want to call our attention to the word “**whoever**” that is used in v15. It is important to see the tremendous weight that John has placed on the word “**whoever**” throughout the letter. “**Whoever**” is a word that makes everything that John is saying very emphatic. It is a word that does not leave room for exceptions or compromises relative to the truths that it is proclaiming. The following is the listing of verses that use this word in [1 John](#) - [1 John 2:5, 2:23, 3:4, 3:6, 3:9, 3:10, 3:15, 3:17, 4:15, 5:1, 5:18](#). What is important to notice in reading through these verses is how they remove the concessions and allowances that are often made for people who clearly fit into the spiritual condition that John is describing. It appears that by deliberately using the word “**whoever**” in each of these very strong doctrinal statements that John is removing any kind of spiritual immunity that someone may believe they have. The word “**whoever**” refers to anyone whose life fits into John’s descriptions - both positive and negative. In reading through each of these verses, notice the bold statements regarding salvation that John makes relative to each statement.

1Jn 2:5 **But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.**

1Jn 2:23 **Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.**

1Jn 3:4 **Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.**

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

1Jn 3:9 **Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.**

1Jn 3:10 **In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor *is* he who does not love his brother.**

1Jn 3:15 **Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.**

1Jn 3:17 **But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?**

1Jn 4:15 **Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.**

1Jn 5:1 **Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.**

1Jn 5:18 **We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.**

Some of the verses give assurance for salvation and some of the verses give no assurance for salvation. So in those cases where an individual’s life does not reflect Christ, then it would be completely

inappropriate for another believer to somehow give that individual the impression that they are saved. False assurance is one of the worst things that can be given to someone, yet many people do this all the time. Just because someone professes Christ as their Savior does not mean that they are actually saved. There has to be some genuine evidence of salvation in their life. All throughout the letter John has been dealing with the issue of assurance. Obviously, it is a very critical issue to him or he would not be talking about it so often. There are many people in churches who would readily confess that Christ died for people's sins. They would even confess that God saves people who believe. There is absolutely no doubt that many people are in agreement with those two strategic biblical facts about salvation. However, the question that has to be asked is a very simple one. The question is "*How do I know that I have truly believed in Christ?*" The issue is always one of an individual's "personal" belief in Christ.¹ People that do not really want to fully commit their life to Christ will confess just enough to give the appearance of salvation, but that kind of pseudo-confession does not save.

So what John has clearly done is to take the issue of assurance one step further by giving various biblical evidences that lets the individual know that they are truly saved or that they are not saved. There are many verses throughout all of the New Testament that do this. They let the individual know with certainty that they have come to know God, that they are born again, and that they have eternal life. There is not one Christian in the world that God does not want to have complete assurance of their salvation. He wants every believer to be so fully assured of their salvation that they never doubt it at any time - even when they may fail miserably or when everything that surrounds them is completely falling apart. The following two classic passages are some of the negative verses in the New Testament that give assurance that someone is **not** saved. [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](#) says,

^{1Co 6:9} Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

[Galatians 5:19-21](#) says,

^{Gal 5:19} Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

What Paul has done in these several verses is provide observable patterns of behavior and conduct that are contrary to the Word of God. These are things that people **habitually practice** in their life, and they are things that indicate that the individual is not saved. It is not that God is being cruel or hateful towards those individuals, but rather He is vividly clarifying visible and discernible attributes that identify unbelievers. If an individual remains in these persistent patterns of behavior, then what they are doing is giving clear evidence to the fact that they have never been truly saved. Hermeneutically and exegetically it would be impossible to come to any other conclusion. [2 Peter 1:5-10](#) gives a very positive way as to how believers can know that they are saved.

2Pe 1:5 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ⁸For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. ¹⁰Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;

Everyone who is truly born again should be able to honestly look at these characteristics and to say that they are growing in each of them. Every believer should be demonstrating faith, virtue, biblical knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, and a love for other Christians in their life. These are biblical attributes that represent the work of sanctification in a believer, and they should be a normal part of every believer's life in contradistinction to the attributes given by Paul in [1 Corinthians](#) and [Galatians](#). The greater the outflow of these characteristics in the believer's life, then the greater will be the assurance. If a believer has a very mixed profession of faith and conduct of life, then there is no legitimate way to provide assurance to that individual.²

Now, someone may be asking at this point as to what all of this has to do with [1 John 4:16](#). Well, it simply provides a reinforcement of what John is actually doing by using the word “**whoever**”. He does not want there to be any question whatsoever relative to an individual's salvation. If a person is truly saved, then knowing that they are will create a greater confidence in God's Word and in God's work in that person's life. It will create a level of spiritual stability that provides a foundation for personal spiritual growth. However, if for whatever reason legitimate biblical assurance is missing in the believer's life, it will become a great stumbling block to their spiritual growth and development. A believer simply cannot make any meaningful spiritual progress if they do not really trust God at the most basic and fundamental level of their life. Genuine biblical assurance is a kind of spiritual grounding rod that protects the believer from condemnation and guilt when they do fail in their life - and every believer will fail at some point in time in their life. Assurance will help keep them from backsliding into deeper sin when that happens.

Notice how John expresses some of this in [1 John 4:16](#).

1Jn 4:16 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.

Every believer needs to be grounded in the simple fact that they know and believe the love that God has for them personally - even when they may fail miserably. There were times when I miserably failed my mother, but she never stopped loving and caring for me personally - and neither will God when we fail in our life. V16 is a wonderful statement of the outworking of God's redemptive love for His children. In v15 the believer has truly and genuinely confessed “**that Jesus is the Son of God**”. They are convinced, fully persuaded, and wholeheartedly committed to the truth that Jesus Christ is who the Bible declares Him to be. Because of that simple fact, it immediately draws the believer into the love that God has for them. John says that this is something that the believer actually knows and has sincerely “**believed**”. This is not just doctrine to the individual, but this is something that they have fully experienced in their life. It is more than just something intellectual and academic to the believer, but

rather it is something that has unmistakably transformed their life. They love the truths concerning salvation, but they also love the fact that they have personally experienced those truths. They clearly understand experientially [Romans 5:8](#) which says,

Ro 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Intellectually and academically they know they were sinful, but somehow it all became personal when they embraced the fact that Christ died for them personally. At that moment they saw exactly how God had demonstrated His love for them, and they were moved in their heart, in their will, in their understanding, and in their emotions. If I can say it this way, there are certain things about God and about the Christian life that can never be known or understood until after salvation. It is like a person's complete and total ignorance of spiritual truth is completely removed in their life at salvation and now they have a great understanding of the very things that seemed so dumb and ridiculous to them. Once I was saved, I was personally staggered at how foolish my life had been. The very thing that I had so grievously rejected now became my very life. It was an experience that changed everything.

All of this is important because it is dealing with a believer's knowledge. What biblical knowledge does is to simply confirm what the individual has believed. If I can say it this way, we get it now. That is exactly what [1 John 4:16](#) is saying. We got it, we know it, and we believe it. We know that God loves us. We know that we are saved. We know that we have eternal life. We got it! The neat part about all of this is that we never get it all. The love of God, the grace of God, the peace of God, and the knowledge of God will forever be enlarging themselves to us. What God provides in salvation is so large and so great that the believer can never exhaust it, but will always be growing in their experience of it and in their knowledge of it. It is inexhaustible, unlimited, infinite, boundless, everlasting, and never ending. The more of it that you experience, the more of it that you want. It is like swimming in the ocean. The ocean is so big that when you get into it you almost feel insignificant.³

[1 John](#) is such a practical letter. It never deals in ambiguities and uncertainties. It always makes the truth very simple to understand. Contextually, what makes [1 John](#) so practically important for the 21st century church is that these believers were headed into some incredibly difficult times. There was a great persecution that would break out on them in just a few years and everything they confessed that they believed was going to be severely and brutally tested. In difficult and trying moments like what these early Christians were about to experience, just confessing biblical facts will not really help. At some point, the person must have experienced the life-changing and life transforming impact of God's salvation in their life. They must come to that place where they truly know and have experienced what it is that they say they believe. That is why just playing at church is utterly worthless. It may give someone a kind of warm, fuzzy feeling of superficial assurance, but the very moment that things begin to disintegrate and fall apart and to challenge the reality of their confession, that is when a mere head knowledge has no value. It will leave the individual helpless and utterly without hope. There is no quick fix at that moment. There is no simple little statement of faith that someone can quote that will carry them through the deep and dark trials they are facing.

You see, John senses that these believers had actually lost a foundational component of the Christian life. They had been drawn away from Christ. They had been drawn away and seduced by false teachers

who secretly injected their false doctrine about Christ into the church. Little did any of them know of the impending persecution that was just around the corner with Domitian that started around 92 or 93AD which was called the “reign of terror”. It was the second great outbreak from Rome against Christians. This is when just a head knowledge of Christ and just playing at Christianity will not be of any value. Believers have to personally and deeply know the love that God has for them in order to be victorious in these moments. In [2 Timothy 1:12](#) Paul declared these encouraging words,

^{2Ti 1:12} **For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.**

There are just some things of which we must be persuaded and convinced because if we are not, we will not have any strength in the day of testing which will surely come. Everything surrounding every believer throughout the world has become very uncertain and tenuous at best. Because of the one simple fact that everything in life is so uncertain, so unsettled, and so unstable, it is critical that every believer understand as deeply as they possibly can “**the love that God has for us**”. No matter what may happen around us or to us, no matter what men may do to erase the work of God in the world and to destroy those who follow Him, God the Father will always be there for the believer. Life for the believer is not uncertain, but eternally sure and secure. [Romans 8:35-39](#) is the most glorious doxology ever written,

^{Ro 8:35} **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* ³⁶ As it is written: *“For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”* ³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

If we as believers know and believe this simple declaration made by God, then nothing else that may happen to us matters. Ultimately, nothing that takes place in our lives can destroy us for we are eternally protected by the love of God. There may be a time when being a Christian will literally cost us our lives, but as we trust in both the love and sovereignty of God we know that we are eternally and lovingly secure in the love of God.

ENDNOTES

¹ Grudem, 85.

² Grudem, 92.

³ Lloyd-Jones, 511.

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