

Authentic Assurance | Reading: 1 John 2:12-14

“The Bible makes it plain, I believe, that people who persistently refuse the command of Jesus’ lordship have no warrant for believing that they are saved. Such people should not be comforted that they are saved simply because there was a time when they “believed” gospel facts or walked an aisle or signed a card or prayed a prayer. In fact, Jesus seems far more eager to explode the assurance of false “professions of faith” than he is to give assurance to people who are intent on living in sin. Where does he ever bolster the “eternal security” of a person unwilling to forsake sin? I am not saying that only perfect people are saved. There are no perfect people on this present earth. We sin every day, & every good work we do is tainted with sinful remnants of corruption. I am saying that a person who goes on wilfully rejecting the commands of Jesus for his life has no warrant for salvation.” – John Piper, Letter to a Friend

This is right in sync with what the apostle John is teaching in this letter. Before John gets to these verses of Authentic Assurance (12-14) he has been careful to clarify terms. Terms like **“sins are forgiven”**, **“you know him”** & **“the word of God abides in you.”** John has already introduced the objective tests for knowing we know him. For example before he gets to; **“I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning”** he has told them what knowing him looks like in solid testable terms when he says; **“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.”** So when John writes; **“I am writing to you fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning”** in verse 13 it is akin to saying THEY ARE keeping his commandments according to verse 3. This is so foundational. These believers John goes on to address here are not the liars of verse 4 & they are not the blind of verse 11 because they are all displaying evidence they truly know Jesus. The evidence we truly know Jesus is not that we walked an aisle twenty years ago but that we are walking in Jesus’ commandments today.

HE WHO SAYS (4-11)

In the previous verses to the ones we’re now focusing on John uses the phrase **“whoever says”** or **“he who says”** three times (4, 6, 9). This is a little bit like in verses 5-10 when he says **“if we say”** three times (6, 8, 10). When he does this John is dealing with the false claims of false prophets. Yet he is primarily writing to authentic Christians so they don’t get fooled by the false claims of false prophets. He is writing to assure them they have the real thing, how they can know for sure they have the real thing & that they don’t need anything beyond the real thing. Yet of course a by-product of this may well be some realise they do not have the real thing. John is dealing with the claims of counterfeit Christians but he doing so for the purpose of assuring authentic Christians they are the real deal. **Let’s read verses 12-14.**

HE WHO KNOWS (12-14)

Note then that John has interacted six times with the claims of the false prophets & now he writes; **“I am writing”** or **“I write”** six times in these three verses. In others words don’t listen to them listen to me, listen to the one who has personally seen, heard a touched the Incarnate Christ.

In these verses John mentions three groups – little children, fathers & young men. By doing this John is not primarily referencing the physical age of those but spiritual stage. John Stott suggests; *“The dear children are those newborn in Christ. The young men are more developed Christians, strong & victorious in spiritual warfare; while the fathers possess the depth & stability of ripe Christian experience.”* This would give a good flavour of what a local church should be: New believers working out their newfound faith, strong young people who have the word of God abiding in them & those who know God deeply through many years of walking with him.

However I tend to lean towards the other suggestion made for explaining these three groups. I think when he says **“little children”** or **“children”** he is writing to the whole believing community just like he is when he uses the very same terminology throughout the letter (2:1, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21). This would include new believers along with the rest of the congregation. Then after addressing the whole congregation I think John goes on to specifically address seasoned believers as **“fathers”** & those who are younger as **“young men”**. In light of this we could divide these verses up under three heading. 1. A word for all Christians. 2. A word for seasoned Christians. 3. A word for young Christians.

1. A Word for All Christians

“I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name’s sake... I write to you, children, because you know the Father.” These things are true of every authentic Christian whether they have been a Christian a day or a century. John begins with one of the most simple & basic truths of Christianity. He says to these believers; **“your sins are forgiven for his names sake”** or as the NIV puts it **“on account of his name.”** This of course points us back to what John has already wrote. He has told us that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (v7). He has told us **“if we confess our sins, he is faithful & just to forgive us our sins & to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** He has told us that Jesus is our advocate because he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Now he tells us **“your sins have already been forgiven on account of his name.”**

The way John says this in Greek underlines that our sins remain forgiven. God is not going to change his mind. This is the forgiveness Christ has secured for us. We don’t have to spend our days anxious about whether or not God accepts us. Our forgiveness with God is not secure because of anything we have done, it is not dependant on how good a week or month we’ve had, it is not dependant on confessing our sins to any other Priest but Christ; it is 100% dependant on what Christ our Great High Priest has done for us & who he is for us today. When John says **“on account of his name”** he cements this, he puts the focus of our trust entirely on the name of Jesus. As Acts 4:12 says; **“there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”** His name alone shelters us from the penalty of our sins, his name alone is the key which unlocks the kingdom of heaven for us, his

name alone secures our justification & adoption, his name alone makes all the promises of God yes & amen for us. The name represents both his person & work, represents all that he is, his character, his work, his offices. To call on his name is to trust in all that he has done, in all that he is, in all that he has commanded, in all that he has promised. If we have truly called on his name then every area of our lives will echo that call!

As well as calling on the name of Jesus there is a cry in the heart of every authentic Christian. John says secondly; **“I write to you children, because you know the Father.”** Every true Christian in an adopted son or daughter of God. Not only has secured our forgiveness he has secured our place in the family of God. John says in 3:1; **“See what kind of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”** Paul words in Galatians 4:6 also come to mind; **“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”** We have a name to call on & a Father to cry to! Our relationship with God is not master with slave, it is Father with son!

These truths are for every Christian, everyday...

2. A Word for Seasoned Christians

All John says regarding these fathers is; **“I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.”** Note how the words describing young men in these verses are more active than the words describing fathers. All John says about these fathers is that they know him who is from the beginning. He says that twice. They know Christ, they know God! All believers know God but these believers have known God over decades. This says to me that seasoned Christians come to the place where it is simply enough to know him. They don't have to be anything special, it is simply enough to know him – this is maturity. Everything else flows from simply knowing him...

They have fought battles the young men have still to fight & experienced things the young men have not yet experienced & so these fathers stand in the congregation as pillars of support for all believers. They are always there, steady in their walk & stable in their character. There are seasons to life & having truly known God through the seasons of life is what made these fathers valuable. It is not being older in itself that makes them valuable, it is their deep knowledge of God & wisdom for Christian living which flows from years of walking faithfully & fruitfully with him.

Even though more seasoned believers may not be able to be as active as they once were their depth of knowledge & experience from years of walking with God brings great stability & depth to the community of faith. They are invaluable. Every fellowship needs seasoned believers who have known God & proved his faithfulness through the up & downs that many years bring. The church needs true fathers – seasoned Christians – whose character & commitment reflect decades of an authentic walk with God.

3. A Word for Young Christians

I stayed away from the word mature regarding fathers & instead used seasoned because I believe the young men John talks about exhibited a level of maturity – they were strong, had the word of God abiding in them & had overcome the evil one. These are signs of spiritual maturity. They had inner strength & showed visible evidence... You do not have to be a seasoned Christian to be a mature Christian, yet a mature Christian will recognise their need for the wisdom of seasoned fathers. It's called humility. You can be a young & mature Christian just like you can be an old & immature Christian. However if you are a young & mature Christian you will have ears to listen & a heart that is open to learn from genuinely seasoned Christian.

These younger Christians were displaying strength, love for truth & the ability to overcome the evil one. These three things are connected: Spiritual strength, the word of God abiding in us & overcoming the evil one. There is no spiritual strength or overcoming Satan without the word of God abiding in us. Therefore the best thing a young Christian can do is get the word of God into them. This is what makes young champions for Christ, the word of God abiding in you.

Daniel Akin writes; *“There is no doubt in my mind that our strength & our ability to defeat the evil one has a twofold source. One in the work of Christ (3:8) & the other is the word of God abiding in us. Satan will accuse us on the one hand & tempt us on the other. The work of Christ answers his first tactic, & the word of God addresses the second. When Satan accuses me of sin, I trust the work of Christ. My debt has been paid, & while Satan can hurl accusations all day long, he has nothing with which he can condemn me (Rom 8:1). Also, when Satan tempts me to sin, I turn to the word of God.”*

This is how Jesus overcame Satan, with the written word of God. Yet, how do we know about the work of Christ? The written word of God tells us all about it. How do we know the commandments & promises of Christ? The written word of God tells us all we need to know. 2 Peter 1:3 says; **“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life & godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory & excellence.”** Where do we find this knowledge & learn of his glory & excellence? The written word of God! There is an undermining of the written word of God in the days we live in; there is even a subtle undermining of it in the church... Yet John is telling us hear the word of God abiding in these young men was directly connected to them being strong & having overcome. The written word of God gives us the reason for why we have ultimately overcome the evil one & it gives us the power to overcome his accusations & temptation in everyday life. Strength within comes from the word of God abiding within.

The milk of God's written word is what makes our spiritual bones strong... Paul writes to a young man called Timothy in 1 Tim 4:6 NASB; **“In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith & of the sound doctrine which**

you have been following” There will be no strength in young Christians or any Christians without the constant nourishment of the word of God. This comes from personal & corporate reading & study & from following healthy teaching & preaching. How do you know the word of God is abiding in someone? It comes out of them through their character & counsel. God’s word is seed & when it truly abides in the heart of a person fruit inevitably comes forth... These young men were showing evidence of Authentic Christianity because the word of God was abiding in them. You want the real thing to grow from your life then get the real thing into to your heart.

So these words give focus to those in all stages of the Christian life. All Christians should rejoice in their sins being forgiven & in knowing the Father. We never grow out of this! Young Christians should focus on getting the word of God into their hearts. Seasoned believers should bring a wisdom & stability which flows from years of growing in relationship with God. Yet at the same time it’s important to note that both the little children & the fathers know God – perhaps indicating the children life starts & completes with knowing God.