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The important question arises, Is it possible to know whether we are actually persevering? Can we know whether salvation is a present reality, rather than a vain assumption? Thank God, Yes! John writes, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Much of the First Epistle of John is concerned with the question of how to know we have eternal life. John presents seven important ways to know that salvation is a present reality:

1. First, as there is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ, there is no valid assurance of salvation possible except as one deliberately trusts in Him. Sincere faith in Jesus Christ is, itself, an evidence of salvation. It is "you who believe on the name of the Son of God" who may "know that you have eternal life" (5:13). John also writes, "Whoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. . . . Whoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ stands begotten of God. . . . Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (4:15; 5:1, 5). It is important to recognize that such confessions as John mentions in the preceding verses are not mere casual mental assents. John's statements must be viewed against the background of his day. Whoever made such confessions in that day must be prepared to suffer persecution—perhaps the loss of family,

friends, livelihood, position in the community, and perhaps even life itself. Men did not lightly persist in such confessions. But according to John, it is only as one earnestly believes on the name of the Son of God that he may have both eternal life, and valid assurance of that life. "Assurance" of eternal life on any other basis is vain presumption.

2. One has assurance that he has eternal life in Christ if he is honoring Christ as the Lord of his life and keeping His word and commandments. "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him" (2:3-5. Cf. 3:24; 5:2, John 8:31, 51; 14:21-24; 15:9-14, Heb. 5:8, 9).

3. One has assurance that he has eternal life in Christ if he is walking after the example of his Saviour. "He who saith that he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked" (2:6; cf. John 8:12; 14:12). No man not endeavoring to follow the example of Jesus and to walk in His steps has warrant for assuming that he is saved. Jesus is the example for all His followers. An example is not necessarily a saviour; and we need more than an example: we need a saviour. But Jesus cannot be the Saviour of men who do not accept Him as their example.

4. One has assurance that he has eternal life in Christ if he loves the Father and His will, rather than the world. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he who perseveres in doing the will of God abides forever" (2:15-17).

5. One has assurance that he has eternal life in Christ if he habitually practices righteousness, rather than sin. "If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that everyone who practices righteousness stands begotten [perfect indicative passive] of him. . . . He who practices sin is of the devil. . . . Whoever stands begotten of God does not practice sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot practice sin, because he stands begotten of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (2:29; 3:8-10).

6. One has assurance that he has eternal life in Christ if he loves the brethren. "We know that we stand passed [perfect indicative] out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. . . . My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him" (3:14, 15, 18, 19. Cf. 2:9-11; 3:23; 4:8, 11, 12, 16, 20-5:1; John 13:34, 35).

7. The seventh means of assurance that one has eternal life in Christ is a consciousness of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. "He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he dwelleth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us. . . . Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. . . . He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself" (3:24; 4:13; 5:10).

A consciousness of the indwelling presence of the Comforter is the most blessed evidence of the possession of eternal life in Christ that one may have. But one will know the comforting witness of the Spirit only as he manifests the other evidences of salvation which John cites. It is sheer presumption for anyone to "know" he has eternal life who is not

trusting in Christ with a sincere heart, keeping His word and commandments, walking as He walked, loving the Father and His will rather than the world, loving his fellow Christians, and practicing righteousness rather than sin. Anyone who presumes to have the inner witness of the Spirit under other circumstances is mistaken.

Not every inner witness is authentic. The Bible warns against both self-deception and deceiving spirits. There is a very real danger of being misled by seducing spirits, especially for people who become greatly concerned about inner feelings. What easy preys seducing spirits find in people who take great account of personal feelings. Satan, who masquerades as an angel of light, cannot perfectly mimic the witness of the Holy Spirit; nor can the demons and seducing spirits. But they can do so sufficiently well to deceive unwary people for whom personal feelings are the most important guide in matters of doctrine and faith. The Spirit has expressly declared "that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" (I Tim. 4:1). John warns us to be on our guard against both false prophets and deceiving spirits (I John 4:1). The peril is real. To become preoccupied with inner feelings is dangerous and wrong in this age in which we are called to "walk by faith, not by sight."

It is a blessed fact that "the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). But this is true only for those who walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. There is no fellowship with God possible for men who are walking in darkness. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another [God and the believer], and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:5-7).

There is no valid witness or assurance of salvation apart from obedient faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour from sin. John, who cites numerous ways we may know we have eternal life as a

present blessing, here and now, warns us of the necessity of continuing in faith, if we would continue to share the eternal life of God through Christ:

Whoever disowns the Son, the same has not the Father: but he who confesses the Son has the Father also. Let that therefore remain in you which you have heard from the beginning [the true Gospel, in contrast with the false doctrines of the "antichrists" who had "gone out" from the company of the faithful, embracing Gnosticism, which denied essential aspects of the nature and Person of Jesus, with which they now were endeavoring to "seduce" those who still continued true to the authentic Gospel]. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he has promised us, the eternal life. . . . And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has the life; and he who has not the Son of God has not the life. These things have I written to you who believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. . . . He who believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself (I John 2:23-25; 5:11-13, 10).

Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my word, he shall never see death.

JOHN 8:51