

INTRODUCTION

It is hard to believe that it has been 7 weeks since we last studied the book of 1 John. We have two more lessons to go. To refresh our memory, it is worthwhile to review a few key topics of the book. John wrote this letter to some believers who were under the influence of an emerging cult called Gnosticism. The belief system proclaimed that salvation was acquired through some mystical knowledge that only a handful of people could attain. John refuted the heresy by saying that salvation was founded only in Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God whom John encountered in person. God wants everyone to know Him. Becoming a Christian is not about some warm and fuzzy feeling, but it is an everyday practice to imitate the example of Christ, and to love God through loving others. To John's readers and to us, every Christian can know for sure if he/she has been saved. As we were going through the book, we also highlighted several proofs based on which we can validate our salvation. I put them on the screen and in your sermon outline. This is a check-list for yourself. If you say you are a Christian you should agree with all 12 statements, even though you may not feel so evident of every one of them in your life. Now as we come to chapter 5, it seems that John was repeating himself. The apostle went back to the overarching theme of how to have assurance of our faith. He re-stated the core message of the gospel in **verses 1 and 12**. We can clearly see a parallel in the wordings: "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God," corresponds to "He who has the Son has life." A person who accepts that Jesus is God has eternal life. John was a senior man when he wrote this letter. But I do not think that he was absent-minded and forgot what he had already said earlier. I have come to an age when my memory can suddenly turn blank. On a few occasions, I could not even recall my phone number or address. Sometimes when I go downstairs in my home, I forget what I want to get. John was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to tell us the important truth we need to keep in mind. I am sure as we study the section today, you may wonder: "Haven't we covered this already?" Biblical truth is more critical than your passwords. You have to keep reviewing it before those elements of faith will sink in to your heart. The lesson for us today is this: our salvation is grounded in truth that can be affirmed through personal experience. John gave us two categories of testimony of our faith that are sandwiched between verses 1 and 12.

EXPLANATION

1. Testimonies of the Children 神兒女的見證

First of all, John told us that our personal experience testifies that we are God's children. This testimony has three parts: love God, love brothers and sisters and overcome the world. John mentioned the first two elements in **verse 2**: This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. John reiterated the two biggest commandments Jesus said – to love the Lord and to love others as ourselves. If you say that you are a Christian, then you must have those two expressions of love. Let us do a series of self-examination. Do you obey God's commands out of love for Him? Do you have a desire to know Him more? Do you love God's Word and read it every day? Our Bible challenge is a good way to help you build a habit of reading God's Word on a regular basis. Of course, you can follow

other personal devotion or reading plan you have. Also, do you love God and make an effort to attend church meetings? Our church has regular meetings on Friday and Sunday to help you grow in the Lord. Do not just come to worship; attend Sunday school too. Do not just come for dinner on Friday, stay for Bible study as well. When you come, do you pay full attention when you are attending a church meeting? Or do you love your phone more than God, that you cannot wait to pull it out every time it chimes or vibrates? Do you love God that you are willing to serve Him? Do you serve with joy when you participate in ministries, or do you have to wait till the leaders ask you for help? Then we also need to ask ourselves if we love God's children. Yes, John was talking about the people in our church. Before we say that we love the beggars standing at street intersections, or we love the orphans starving in a foreign country, we have to love our brothers and sisters first. Sometimes, it is easier to love complete strangers. You donate money, clothes or food, then you feel good that you have helped others. Surely, those are commendable acts of kindness. But do you love fellow church members whom you see every week? They may have different personalities and hold different opinions about things. You may even have some past conflict with a few of them. Can you overlook those issues and love them from your heart? Do you pray for their needs, and sacrifice your time and resources to help them? Do you encourage them when they are in distress and rejoice with them when God blesses them? Besides our love for God and our love for each other, the third type of testimony that proves we are God's children is found in **verse 4**: for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Was John talking about breaking the world record of something? Of course not. John was referring to overcoming the attractions from the fallen world that lead us away from God. Do you still remember the three expressions of sin when we studied chapter 2? Look at **2:16** – For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. Those are the three sources of enticement the fallen world may drag us to sin. We will always be in constant struggle with an urge to chase after the world. However, by the power of God we can overcome temptations. We live in the world but we can enjoy the freedom of not indulging in what the world can offer. Here is a simple test for you: if you can say no to whatever the world provides, or you can drop that thing and walk away with ease, then you love God more than you love the world. Or are you still in bondage with something the world is selling? You cannot help but follow the world to buy this or get that, eat this or dress that, and enjoy this or experience that. Or do you fall into the trap of “look what I got and look what I did!” culture? You cannot resist the urge to compare yourself to others and to attract people's attention. The core of every sin can be boiled down to one word – self-centeredness. But the signs of God's children are a Christ-centered life, and the joy of extending our love for God to love others.

2. Testimonies about the Son 神兒子的見證

Our personal experience can testify that we are children of God. We love God by obeying His commands. We learn to love others as ourselves. Also, we can overcome temptations from the world when we rely on God. Besides those personal experience that verifies we are saved, there are also objective truth that testifies Jesus Christ is the Son of God. John said in **verses 6-8**: 6 This is the one who came by water and blood - Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. The

water, the blood and the Spirit are the three testimonies that prove Jesus is God. Why three? To the Jews, the evidences presented in a court proceeding have to be sustained by three witnesses. Testimonies that contradict one another are not trustworthy. In this case, John told us that the three testimonies were in agreement. First, we need to understand what the water refers to. Bible scholars have various interpretations. Some say that the water points to Jesus' natural birth through Mary. We know that babies are enclosed in a water pouch in mothers' womb. Therefore, the water proves that Jesus came as a true human being. Others propose that the water is related to Jesus' administering of baptism. In the gospel, Jesus said that He would baptize people with the Holy Spirit. Jesus foretold the disciples at the Last Supper that the Heavenly Father would send the Holy Spirit in His name. Then a third option has it that the water refers to Jesus receiving baptism in the river Jordan by John the Baptist. Last week, Pastor Bill preached about Jesus' baptism. I am leaning toward the last interpretation. Brothers and sisters: this is a good example that your pastor's understanding of the Bible may be different from yours. I did my homework, and I encourage you to study the Bible and read reliable commentaries too. I would love to learn from you if you will share your insights with me. While the understanding of the water may look ambiguous, most people agreed that the blood is about the cross. Jesus shed His blood on the cross for our sin. The cleansing power of Jesus' blood demonstrates that He is the Son of God. If we put the water and the blood together, Jesus' baptism symbolizes the beginning of His earthly ministries and the cross denotes the climax of His atoning work. We can look at [Matthew 3:16-17](#) about the description of Jesus' baptism: 16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." The Father spoke from heaven to affirm Jesus' identity as His Son. The Holy Spirit also descended onto Jesus. How do we know that those are facts? Listen to the words of John the Baptist in the gospel of [John 1:32](#) - Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him." Skip down to [verse 34](#): "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." When John baptized Jesus, he saw the Holy Spirit coming down onto Jesus. Though we cannot prove conclusively from the gospel records, it was likely that John heard the voice of the Father from heaven too. John verified that Jesus is the Son of God by his eye-witness account. We can have confidence that the content of the Bible is a recollection of facts. The descending of the Holy Spirit onto Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit into believers are not the same thing. When we accept Christ as our Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts as a proof of our salvation. Since then, God takes ownership of our lives. The Holy Spirit helps us understand God's Word, empowers us to live a holy life and convicts us of our sins. However, unlike us, Jesus did not have to receive the Holy Spirit into His life. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are equal in their power and authority. As Pastor Bill taught us last Sunday, the descending of the Holy Spirit onto Jesus was an affirmation from the Father that Jesus is His beloved Son. Therefore, the Holy Spirit bears testimony of Jesus' identity. A person can only be saved if he/she has a clear understanding of who Jesus is. John put it in [verse 11](#): And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Every person, regardless of age or education level, who can understand the gospel can be saved. Our faith is not built on what some religious leaders said. Anyone who reads the Bible and accepts that Jesus is God is a believer. We receive the same truth as John's readers. We do not join a religion, but we believe in a Savior. We do not just accept the Bible like a book of doctrines, but we build relationship with a living God. There are many religions in the world that inspire their followers to help the society or teach people valuable moral lessons.

We cannot overlook those great contributions. However, those benefits only impact people in this life. Also, according to the Bible, no one can be saved by doing good works or living a noble life. Salvation can only be found in the Son of God.

CONCLUSION

Our salvation is grounded in truth that can be affirmed through personal experience. Jesus revealed Himself to be the Son of God. What Jesus said is true. Every believer can also testify that God is working in his/her life. The Christian faith is not fanatic emotionalism. However, there are many people in our world, even self-proclaimed Christians, prefer to rely on feelings than truth. We love to read testimonies about how people encountered God. There is a so-called “near-death experience” when people were thought to have died in a tragic accident or major surgery. They stopped breathing or their hearts stopped beating. But their vital signs reappeared some time later. Those people recalled that when they were unconscious, they went to a place with bright light and they heard a voice talking to them. They were quite confident that they were taken to heaven momentarily and God had some personal messages for them. It is not only a few persons, but many had gone through a similar incident. Can that be real? How can you tell? How can you invalidate that if many people said the same thing? Last year there was an embarrassing lawsuit against a major Christian publisher. Alex is the main character in the book “The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven.” In 2004, 6-year-old Alex was riding with his father when their car had a terrible collision with another vehicle. Alex suffered a life-threatening injury but he did not die from it. In fact, he woke up after staying in coma for 2 months. He became paralyzed from the neck down. Then Alex started telling family and friends that he went to heaven where he saw Jesus, angels and Satan. In 2010, Alex’s story became a best-seller book. Over a million copies were sold. However, in 2015 Alex confessed that the whole heaven experience was made up. He said: “I did not go to Heaven. I said I went to heaven because I thought it would get me attention. When I made the claims that I did, I had never read the Bible. People have profited from lies, and continue to. They should read the Bible, which is enough.” It turned out that Alex’s father fabricated the story. The publisher thus retracted the book. Now 20-year-old Alex is suing the publisher for using his name without his consent and did not pay him for selling his fake story. Who is to be blamed? Is it the family, the publisher or people who bought the book? Similar stories have a huge market because people are naturally drawn to such fascinating accounts. How can we discern facts from falsehood? Pay attention to the last statement from Alex that I quoted: (people) should read the Bible, which is enough. If you want to know what heaven is like, go look it up from the Bible! We are easily captivated by dramatic experience where people described how they vividly felt God’s presence. However, such subjective experience has to be scrutinized by the objective truth in the Bible. Even if some people did go to heaven and come back, it is not something every Christian will come across in this life. In the Bible, Paul is the only person who had such amazing journey. We also need to ask why God granted a special revelation to those people. I am sure that gaining fame and fortune are not God’s purpose. It would be unwise to build our faith on those personal stories. There are many other facets of the Christian faith that every believer can attest to. We experience joy and peace when our sins are forgiven. The Holy Spirit gives us illumination into understanding God’s Word. He reminds us of what God says in the Bible when we face tough decisions, seek comfort in times of trouble or even when we are in temptations. God’s Word is the sure foundation of our faith.