

Part 1: Assurance of Salvation in the Person of Christ

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John's Purpose in Writing

Have you ever wondered if you're really saved? Sometimes our experience as a Christian doesn't seem to match up with what we think being a Christian should be like. There've been times in my life where I've wondered if I'm saved. I've had questions like:

- If I'm a Christian, then how come I don't know when I got saved?
- Or how come I don't have some special awareness that the Holy Spirit is in me?
- Or why don't I seem to have the same level of excitement or emotion that other believers have when they talk about Jesus or sing in worship?

Or maybe you've had friends in the church that seemed to love Jesus and follow him and maybe your faith even grew because of them and yet they eventually walked away. We worshiped with them, prayed with them. What happened?

Well in 1 John, the apostle John is writing to a church that is asking similar questions. False teachers had started deceiving people. They claimed that they had fellowship with God while living like the world and denying doctrines of Jesus.

So some people left the church following this new teaching. And those who remained were left questioning the Jesus they believed in and the fellowship they were a part of. Who is truly converted? How do I know that I have the truth - that I have eternal life?

And so what I want to talk to you about today is assurance – how you can have assurance that you are converted – how you can know that you are saved.

And what we'll see is that **[Slide]**: Assurance is found in believing in the person of Christ and living out your union with him.

Trusting in the person of Christ and living out your union with him provides assurance that you are saved.

And John doesn't leave any gray area. In 1 John we'll see that we are either in darkness or light, denial or confession; lawlessness or righteousness, hate or love, death or life.

John wants to encourage you with the sure hope and relief that is yours in Christ. And yet the way he goes about it is to actually invite you to examine yourself and the evidence that is seen in your life.

See whether assurance is something that you worry about or not, what you and I need is to examine ourselves according to Scripture so that we have assurance from Christ instead of being anxious or mistaken.

And ultimately, seeking assurance leads to greater fellowship with God. It's not just clarity but joy that John is after.

And so we'll be looking at 1 John chapter 1 today, and in this chapter John is going to teach us about assurance.

And we'll be looking at this in three points: [Slide]

1. Why We Want Assurance
2. Why We Need Assurance
3. How We Know We Have Assurance

Why we want it, why we need it, and how we know we have it.

So let's take a look at our first point: [Slide] Why We Want Assurance

1. Why We Want Assurance

We'll start in 1 John 1:1-2: [Slide]

John's language sounds kind of mystical. He's giving us glimpses into divine mysteries. And yet, John's purpose is really practical: he wants to help us know our personal, relational God.

Remember he wants you to have assurance you are a Christian, but you have to ask yourself "why do I even want to be a Christian?" Do you desire the God of the Bible?

If you think about what you love most in this life - the one thing you'd be most afraid to lose – is it God? The Psalmist says "I have no good apart from you" (*Psalms 16:2*) - "there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you" (*Psalms 73:25*). Is that true for you?

John wants you to know who your salvation is all about.

And so the focus of these verses is the word of life, but what is the word? Well as we'll see, the word is Jesus.

Eternal but Distinct

You see how he starts verse 1: "That which was from the beginning..." And this is reminiscent of how John also starts his gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (*John 1:1*). The word is eternal (which is to say that the Word is God), but he's also with the Father - so he's a distinct person from the Father. And this mystery is part of where we get the doctrine of the Trinity: that there is one God in three persons – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I remember over a decade ago there was a book group in the church where we read through a big ugly purple book called Heresies. And in that book we realized that every sermon illustration we'd ever heard to explain the Trinity actually described a heresy from hundreds of years ago.

But far from a simple, memorable metaphor, John wants to draw us into this mystery.

So he says that this divine person – the Son - was made manifest. He had always existed, but then at a moment in history he became the man Jesus Christ.

And this is where we get the phrase "fully God and fully man." The divinity and humanity of Jesus seem to contradict each other and yet are somehow both true at the same time. The 100% divine Son of God took on 100% flesh in the person of Jesus.

And at this point I know what some of you are probably thinking. Talking about the Trinity and Christology - this all sounds pretty academic and impractical. But for the people John is writing to, it had probably only been about 50 years since the events of Jesus' life. This "life made manifest" was a fairly recent event. Like John, some of these believers had been alive when this happened.

Testimony of John

And John hadn't just been around, he himself was an eyewitness. Did you notice the repeated words: heard, seen, looked upon, touched. He's emphasizing that he personally witnessed the life made manifest in the historical person of Jesus Christ.

The Person of Jesus

Do you ever forget that Jesus is a person? How does Jesus being a person make your life distinct? If you had all of the same moral principles and values of purpose, love, and hope but didn't have the person of Jesus...how would your life look different? What would be missing?

John is showing us that the life made manifest is the revealing of God in the person of Jesus Christ. And this is important because as we'll see this word – this person of Jesus – is actually eternal life. To miss the person of Jesus is to miss out on eternal life. And that's the very thing we want assurance that we have.

Let's read verses 1-2 again and continue into verse 3: [Slide]

John proclaims eternal life, and that life is Jesus. Jesus is not only the source of John's message but is the message itself.

But in what way is Jesus "eternal life?" Does it refer to how the Son of God had always existed? Or to how he's the only way for us to live forever?

Well, while both of these are true, John is helping us see so much more.

Let's read verse 3 again. [Slide]

John is proclaiming the person of Jesus so that we might share in the fellowship of God.

The word fellowship refers to participation – a closeness or communion. And this fellowship is with the very eternal Father and his Son.

The Fellowship of the Father and Son

Do you know what the oldest thing is that we know? If we look as far back into eternity past as the Bible lets us go what do we find? Well let's read from Jesus' prayer in John 17:24: [Slide]

So before the world existed, before one thing was ever created, there was a Father loving his Son.

Fathers know that moment in the delivery room when they hold their child for the first time. I remember what it felt like when my oldest, Nehemiah, was born. There was something almost spiritual about it. I was feeling this overwhelming love for my son that I had never experienced before, and yet it was a mere reflection of the love that the Father has always had for his Son.

The Father, Son, and Spirit had fellowship with one another from eternity past. He is one God and yet he is not a lonely or selfish God. There has always been a loving community inside of God himself.

And true life, the life that has always existed, the life that is extended to us in the gospel is the very life of fellowship enjoyed by the Father and his Son. Their love overflowed in the plan to create and redeem a people that could be joined into their fellowship forever.

And so the only reason love exists is because God exists. And now he invites us into his love.

Jesus is the only way not only because of how we get eternal life but what we get in eternal life. As John 17:3 says: "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Do you see how personal a relationship with Jesus is? He is God with us sent to us to extend the love of the Father and wrap us into their divine fellowship for all eternity.

To miss the person of Jesus is to miss absolutely everything. You see we can't have eternal life without him because he is eternal life. To ask if you have eternal life is to ask "do you know him?"

The Expanding Joy of Fellowship

And though this is incredibly personal, remember that this isn't limited to just you and God.

Look at what John says in verses 3-4: **[Slide]**

John's own joy and ours is made complete as we join in the fellowship of God.

You can sense the affection and love that John has for believers. Over and over he will call them "my little children" and "beloved." He cherishes these brothers and sisters. And this love motivated him to write so that others might know God.

The Why of Our Evangelism

And this should be our motivation in our interactions with unbelievers.

Do you realize that when you invite someone to church, to Community Group, or to read the Bible together you're not only inviting them into the fellowship of your church family but into the very fellowship of God?

This is why we evangelize. When we invite someone over for dinner it's because we want to invite them into the family of God. We want them to be a brother, a sister, participating in the fellowship of our Father.

And so in our passage John has shared the majesty of eternal life coming for us. This is why we want assurance – because we want him – to know him and be a part of his fellowship. Don't you want assurance that this is for you? That this fellowship is yours?

But this also introduces a problem. Which brings us to our next point **[Slide]**: "Why We Need Assurance"

2. Why We Need Assurance

Let's read verse 5: **[Slide]**

God is Light

So John's message, the message he heard from Jesus is this: "God is light."

Now everyone knows the famous verse that "God is love." Have you ever been in a conversation with someone where they say "well I believe that God is love." And it's true - God is love. In fact that exact verse is just a few chapters later in 1 John.

But that's not the only statement in the Bible of who God is. Look at some of the other statements about who God is **[Slide]**:

- "God is faithful" (1 Corinthians 1:9)

- "God is gracious and merciful" (*2 Chronicles 30:9*)
- "God is holy" (*Psalms 99:9*)
- "God is a righteous judge" (*Psalms 7:11*)
- "God is a consuming fire" (*Hebrews 12:29*)

You see, all these statements together start to give us a sense of God's holiness. And this is what it means that God is light. All that he is is pure and radiant. The harmony and totality of all his attributes are endless. And there is no darkness in him.

And so his light is divine but it's also deadly.

When the bible describes someone seeing a vision of God's glory two things usually happen. First, they see something bright and glorious so much so that they grasp for words to describe what they're seeing. But secondly, they:

- fall down on their face like Ezekiel (*Ezekiel 3:23*)
- or fall down as though dead like John (*Revelation 1:17*),
- or cry out "woe is me" like Isaiah (*Isaiah 6:5*).

Why does the clearest picture of God in all his radiance leave people so undone?

You see God's light is glorious, but also, it exposes everything it shines on. It exposes who we really are.

Looking in the Mirror

Have you ever been surprised by what you've seen in the mirror when you've turned on the bathroom light?

I once had a reaction to an allergy shot that unbeknownst to me had caused swelling around my eyes. I had no idea until someone asked "what's the matter with your face?" There's a lot of things that run through your mind very quickly when someone asks you that question. I went to the mirror turning on the light and in an instant what I expected to see was replaced with reality.

Well God's brilliance not only sets him apart from everything else, but like the light coming on in front of the mirror he exposes us and our ways (*Psalms 90:8*).

And this is the problem that John is going to address. If we want assurance that we have eternal life - if we want assurance we have fellowship with the God of light – then we cannot walk in darkness.

Walking in Darkness

Let's read verse 6: **[Slide]**

So what is this darkness? Well John makes it clear that it's completely opposed to God and to the truth.

It is a practice of falsehood – doing what is wrong while maintaining that it's actually okay. Walking in darkness is walking in sin.

And why do we do this? Because we love sin.

Look with me at John 3:19-20, starting in the middle of verse 19, where it says: **[Slide]**

We love darkness because it doesn't expose our evil deeds and wicked things.

Imagine turning on that light in front of the mirror only this time noticing that all that pie and cake lately is starting to have an effect. You have a choice to make. Well if you love pie and cake you know you only have one option. You turn off the light.

You know the saying “ignorance is bliss.” Well what John is describing is willful ignorance. Its self-deception. Saying “peace, peace!” where there is no peace (*Jeremiah 6:14*). Saying “I have fellowship with God!” where there is no fellowship with God. If we claim to follow Jesus but are walking in sin then whatever we think we're having fellowship with, it's not the God of light. Otherwise we would hate what God hates and love what he loves.

So this is the great dilemma. How can I share in the fellowship of this holy God? Assurance isn't just something we want - it's something we need.

Being a “Good Person”

Now we are all experts at justifying ourselves. I can think of several conversations I've had where I've tried to share the gospel with people, and at some point almost everyone will make the claim “I'm a pretty good person.” Or “I'm not a bad person.” There always seems to be plenty of other people “worse” than us to compare ourselves to.

But the standard here is not that you walk in less darkness than someone else. The comparison is with God in whom there is “no darkness at all.”

I remember one Sunday morning I met a man on the sidewalk outside the church. And we talked and I got to know a little bit about him and I had an opportunity to share the gospel with him. And he talked about how he was a pretty good person and felt that he knew God. And we had a great conversation. And he asked lots of questions. And you could see the concern in his face as he started to understand sin and our inability to make ourselves right with God. By the end of our conversation he admitted that he wasn't a good person - that he'd been telling himself what a religious person he was but it was all a sham.

So if you are able to hear of the holiness of God and not be unsettled, then that's wonderful - John wants you to feel that assurance that allows you to boldly approach your Lord. But what John wants for you even more – is to have assurance that's based in truth.

Which brings us to our third point **[Slide]**: How We Know We Have Assurance.

3. How We Know We Have Assurance

He doesn't want you to fall prey to self-deception. And so in order to do that he provides two tests **[Slide]**:

1. Are you walking in the light?
2. Are you turning into the light?

So let's take a look at the first test: Are you walking in the light?

Test 1: Are you walking in the light?

Let's read verse 7, which says: **[Slide]**

Now we just saw that God is immeasurably holy. It says in 1 Timothy that he dwells in “unapproachable light” (*1 Timothy 6:16*). How can you walk in something that you can't even approach?

See first we have to understand what it means to be "in the light" before we can understand walking in the light.

Being in the Light

Remember how John said that the message he heard from Jesus is that "God is light." So what is he referring to?

Well Jesus says in John 8, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (*John 8:12*).

Again, Jesus does not just bring us a message - he is the message. All that God is is revealed to us most clearly in the person of Christ. Jesus is God with us - the very presence of God entering humanity. He is eternal life coming for us. He is the true light coming for us.

And in that same passage in John 8 he says, "If you knew me, you would know my Father also" (*John 8:19*). To know Jesus is to know the Father and their fellowship.

Past Cleansing

But that still doesn't answer the question of how Jesus makes this fellowship possible.

Well remember what it said in the last part of verse 7: "...the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

It's through the cross that Jesus unites us to himself cleansing us from all sin.

Remember the God of light cannot have fellowship with sinners – evil cannot dwell with him (*Psalms 5:4*). And yet the story of the Bible is the unfolding plan of God to dwell with sinners without compromising who he is – without sacrificing his perfection and holiness. God's own beloved Son, his only Son willfully suffers and dies so that God's justice is vindicated even as he wraps sinners like us into his fellowship.

And all this not in cooperation with you but in spite of you. We cannot muster up one good deed to contribute to our salvation. The only good deeds God will accept are the ones Christ performed on our behalf. And the only payment he will accept for all our wickedness will be his precious Son crucified in our place.

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (*2 Corinthians 5:21*).

And so God is love, - but that love is in harmony with the fact that God is light. His holy wrath towards sin and his holy love for us are in agreement as his Son dies in our place on the cross (*Psalms 85:10*).

Who is this God? The God of light and love is most clearly revealed at the cross.

And so, brothers and sisters, - listen closely – if you have cast yourself on the mercy of Jesus, then you are united with Jesus. You are in the light because you are united to the light of the world – Christ himself. So to walk in the light is to live out your union with him.

Walking in the light is facing every moment of your day with Jesus. You trust what he has said about who he is, what he's done, who you are because of him, all his promises of being with you and supplying all that you need so that you can trust his way for your life.

You have received this fellowship by grace, you are in Christ, you are made new, and if all of this is true...then your life will increasingly be characterized by walking in God's light.

Present Cleansing

Now notice that I said "increasingly," not "perfectly." It's not perfection but a pursuit.

And we see this in verse 7. Let's reread it again: **[Slide]**

The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. And the cleansing that John has in mind here isn't past tense – speaking of conversion – instead it's present tense, - it's ongoing cleansing for all sin in the believer.

You see, walking in darkness is not the same as stumbling in the light. James says "We all stumble in many ways" (*James 3:2*). And in fact the more you grow in holiness the more you realize how far the gap is between you and his perfections.

Paul laments this in his own life in Romans 7, where he says: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (*Romans 7:24*). And then he gives the answer: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (*Romans 7:25*).

As we walk in the light, yes stumbling, and yes realizing more and more our own sinfulness, - it's the blood of God's own Son that cleanses us and we keep walking (*Philippians 3:12*).

We obey not for a relationship with God but from our relationship with God (*Psalms 56:13*). Discipleship flows out of relationship. We don't earn it. But oh, as we walk with him our fellowship does become sweeter.

And not only are we given fellowship with God but again John says "we have fellowship with one another."

Fellowship with One Another

Now what is it about the fellowship of believers that makes it exclusive to those who walk in the light?

Well, when you come to church what do you assume the basis of your fellowship will be? It's possible to confuse biblical community with comradery over shared interests or being in the same stage of life. You can form a community around sports, recreation, music – but all of these are centered around what man does. Here is true fellowship and it's based in who God is. Our fellowship with each other is sharing in him.

Have you ever met a believer for the first time and instantly they were family to you? Several years ago Patty and I were given the opportunity to host an international student for a weekend. She was a music teacher from Panama named Ene, and she was a Christian. Meeting her was like recognizing an old friend. We instantly had love for this sister. Over those short couple days we shared our life with her, sang worship songs together, she played with our kids, we took her around Missoula and went to church together, and we all cried when we had to say goodbye. It was only a few days, we'd never met before, and we had almost nothing else in common. But what was familiar – what made her like family to us - was what we share together in the Spirit of God.

And this wasn't just a one-time event. We've met so many people anywhere from our neighborhood all the way to Kenya where there was this instant fellowship with believers - fellowship based in God.

So whether you wrestle to feel included in fellowship or you're equating shared interests to fellowship, you have to ask yourself "is God at the center of what I'm looking for?" "Is it his fellowship that I'm seeking?"

If you are converted to Christ, then you will progressively, persistently grow in knowing him and walking like him. And all the things you have in common with other believers will only be enhanced because of what you share in Christ.

And all of this comes to us as we walk in the light.

Now some of you may be thinking, "I want to walk in the light, but what does that even look like?" Well John helps us again by providing the 2nd test [Slide]: Are you turning into the light?

Test 2: Are you turning into the light?

Let's read verses 8-10, which says: [Slide]

If we look at verses 6, 8, and 10 we see three claims of the unconverted:

1. They claim to have fellowship with God
2. They claim to have no sin
3. and they claim to have not sinned

We also see three deceptions:

1. They lie and do not practice the truth
2. They deceive themselves
3. And they make God a liar

To say we have fellowship with God while walking in darkness is to claim that God approves of the darkness. To deny that my sinful actions are sinful is to accuse God of being a liar.

Do you see how personally damaging that is in a relationship? If you've ever had someone misrepresent you or make false accusations about you then you know how grievous that is. Yet this is the God who created and knows us intimately, and denial of sin is an attack on his holy character.

Minimizing Sin

Now it's not shocking in the church to hear that we are sinners.

But it's far easier to stomach the concept of my general sinfulness and much harder when it starts to get specific and personal.

We'll start to minimize our sin by replacing biblical words with unbiblical ones.

For instance:

- "I'm not angry, I'm just frustrated."
- "I'm not bitter, I just avoid toxic people."
- "I'm not sexually immoral, I just slip up every now and again."
- "I'm not crude, I'm just quoting a show."

If we don't have his word in us, then everyone will do what's right in their own eyes completely apart from Christ. This is the opposite of living out our union with him.

So are your ways of interpreting what's going on in your life absent of him (*Proverbs 14:12*)? Are the words you use to give advice to others absent of him (*Proverbs 18:2*)? Are the rationalizations you give for your behavior absent of him (*Isaiah 5:21*)?

Brothers and sisters, to disregard his word in the way you choose to live is to create your own version of reality in opposition to the truth. To minimize our sin is to minimize our need for Jesus and the forgiveness found in Jesus. But he who is forgiven much, loves much (*Luke 7:47*).

You must seek him in his word if you are to know him – if you are to be more than one more person claiming to have not sinned while doing what's right in your own eyes (*Judges 21:25, Psalm 81:12, Proverbs 28:26*).

Acknowledging Sin

Let's read verse 9 again: **[Slide]**

Because of the cleansing blood of Jesus, it is safe to acknowledge our sin. Because of the cleansing blood of Jesus, there is mercy when we acknowledge our sin.

In Proverbs it says: "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy" (*Proverbs 28:13*).

See in biblical confession, acknowledgment of our sin also includes a forsaking of our sin. It's not only admitting but also accepting responsibility for our actions and renouncing our ungodliness and worldly passions (*Titus 2:12*).

So in these two tests we see walking in the light and confession of sin as we turn back into the light. And this turning and walking is what it looks like to live a life of repentance. And a life of repentance is a life filled with assurance.

False Repentance

Now it's easy to have some wrong ideas about what repentance should look like. On one hand we sometimes admit sin without really being that bothered by it, but the goal is not to simply be vulnerable.

Other times we can be bothered for the wrong reasons.

For instance: there are times when my grief over sin is really just disappointment over what people will think of me. In those times I'm not actually grieving over the fact that I have grieved God by my sin against him.

And far too often my confession has been a trite "yeah, I know, I shouldn't of done that." But have I called out to God "be merciful to me a sinner" (*Luke 18:13*)?

And in attempting to put off the old and put on the new, how often have I really just started practicing righteousness before others in order to be seen by them (*Matthew 6:1*). Suddenly there's a fresh opportunity to get the praise of man. That's not humbly desiring to show love towards others because of the love God has shown me.

On the other hand there are times that I have been in complete despair over my sinfulness. I just could not accept that God could love me in those moments. But in those moments, what had really changed? Was it God's awareness of my sin, or was it mine?

And so as the Spirit and God's word bring us awareness and conviction of sin, what should repentance practically look like? Well here are three words that you might find helpful to remember whenever you feel that conviction **[Slide]**: Pray, Practice, and Purge.

Pray, Practice, Purge.

1) *Pray*

First, pray. If you're wrestling to feel Godly grief over your sin, you may find it helpful to pray on your knees if you physically can. Perhaps kneeling down could help you bring your heart in line with the brokenness that you know you should feel.

2) *Practice*

Second, practice. Don't just settle for not doing some sins but instead become a person who is known for doing the opposite of those sins – like the thief who doesn't just stop stealing but works hard so he can be generous with others (*Ephesians 4:28*).

3) *Purge*

Now most of us would agree that we should pray and practice, but you may not have thought as much about the need to purge. This is where we need to get serious about not walking in darkness.

Stop nurturing sinful thoughts and habits and putting yourself in situations where you're easily tempted. Jesus says in Matthew 5: "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell" (*Matthew 5:30*).

He's using extreme language to wake us up. If something is causing you to sin - cut it off.

The original Hebrew word for "holy" actually means "to cut" or "to separate." And when Jesus says to "cut it off" he's commanding us to separate ourselves - to cut off what is sinful in order to be set apart for God. It's not just for sin to be separated from us but it's for us to be separated to God.

Something that helps me evaluate what needs to go in my life is simply to ask, "does this lead my heart closer to Jesus, or does it lead me away from Jesus?" "Does this increase my devotion to Jesus, or is this deadening my heart to Jesus?" "Does it somehow make Jesus seem less real to me?"

Some things are permissible that are not helpful (*1 Corinthians 10:23*).

So pray, practice, purge. We start our walk with God with repentance and from then on our walk is continually characterized by repentance.

In Proverbs it says that "the righteous falls seven times and rises again" (*Proverbs 24:16*). We need ongoing confession because we need ongoing forgiveness and cleansing to be in fellowship with God. This is essential to our assurance that we are in him.

God's Response to Our Confession

So that's what the act of confession and turning into the light looks like for us. But now we're going to see how God responds to us when we repent.

Let's read verse 9 again: **[Slide]**

So what does it mean that he is "just" to forgive?

Now if we have even the slightest awareness of our sin then the thought of standing before a just judge should be bad news for us. But here he is just to forgive the guilty.

Now it's a lot more common for someone to object to how a loving God could judge anyone. But actually the dilemma in the Bible is exactly the opposite - "how can a just God show mercy to sinners who deserve his wrath?"

But in the cross his justice does not come at the expense of his mercy or his mercy at the expense of his justice. As we said before his justice was vindicated at the cross.

How? At the cross his perfect Son bore the wrath reserved for me so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (*Romans 3:26*).

So when it comes to those who are converted, not only is God just when he forgives, but now he would be unjust not to forgive. When the Christian confesses his sin, the Son is with the Father bearing witness that he has already paid for it. God has so bound himself to us in Christ that he would have to be untrue to himself – he would have to stop being God – in order for the storehouses of his grace to run out for those who have called on his mercy.

So how does a faithful and just God meet you in repentance? Sin displeases God – that is absolutely true – but if you are converted, then his love for you doesn't fluctuate throughout the day based on your performance. This would minimize the cross as if his sacrifice wasn't enough. As if God might be welcoming or rejecting me at any moment depending on my performance. But the cross plus anything is an insufficient cross.

Imagine the difference between a father who cheers his son on as he falls down learning to ride his bike but gets back up again vs. a demanding father who is always disappointed unless perfection is achieved. Which way do you view your Heavenly Father?

Remember the prodigal son – he hadn't earned anything – he hadn't achieved anything – he just turned and walked home. But who was more enthusiastic about the son's return? The son walked, but the Father ran (*Luke 15:20*).

This is how God meets us in repentance. If we only confess and forsake our sin our Father eagerly embraces us.

And so God's grace is meant for the humble (*James 4:6*) – for those who confess their sins. Forgiveness inclines itself to the one who falls down before him, and Jesus affectionately stoops down, reaches out his hand, and brings up the lowly.

And he cleanses us from all unrighteousness - or as it said back in verse 7, his blood cleanses us from all sin. All unrighteousness, all sin.

Dear brothers and sisters, do you realize that God will judge every single sin that has ever been committed? There are only two options: either it will be dealt with in God's wrath against the sinner – or it was dealt with in God's wrath against Christ in your place.

How incredible is the worth of Jesus. The value of the blood of God's Son is so unimaginably great that every single ugly, hurtful, arrogant, God-belittling, self-exalting sin committed by a believer has been paid for. He hung on the cross, absorbed the wrath of God against millions and millions of sinners, and did not give up his spirit until he had paid for all of it. Now the Father's forgiveness keeps us in his fellowship and his cleansing purifies us for a holy life of walking in that fellowship.

Grace Alone vs. Holiness

Now in closing, it is undeniable in this passage that God cares about our holiness - our assurance depends on it. And this is something that I've personally wrestled with. Because you see, if you don't read this passage carefully there seems to be a contradiction between being saved by grace and the requirement to live a holy life.

Now I've tried to show the emphasis in these verses so that you grasp the beauty of God in his fellowship, his holiness, and his costly grace - and also the reality of holy living in the life of the truly converted. But you may still be asking the same question: "how are salvation by grace alone and a requirement to live a holy life not a contradiction?"

At different times in my life I've fallen in two different camps. Many years ago I fell in the camp of rejoicing in the peace and rest of not having to earn my way to God, but my life looked more and more like the world. I watched the same shows, sang the same music, spent too much time on the internet, ate too much food, - but I was just "enjoying the grace of God."

In more recent years I've been in the other camp. I'm far more disciplined. We cancelled Netflix, restricted internet use, changed our diet, created routines of Bible reading, prayer, family devotions. And I'd have good days when I felt I had performed well, but plenty of bad days where I felt that I just wasn't measuring up.

But over the course of working through 1 John, I am so grateful that God showed me something. You see, neither of those two camps is the antidote for the other. Both camps misunderstand how grace alone and lives of holiness relate because they miss the person of Christ.

You have to come to the person of Christ. You have to be desperate for the person of Christ (*Matthew 5:3, James 4:9-10*). Cast yourself on his mercies because you cannot change yourself - neither in conversion or the Christian life. You have sin and you cannot fix yourself. He says "apart from me you can do nothing" (*John 15:5*). Your sin goes too deep - your motivations are too twisted. You must repent not just of your bad deeds but of all your supposed good deeds done in your own strength, in your own self-righteousness, and for your own glory.

Cast yourself on Jesus. Do you see how the perfect God of love, and grace, and mercy, and righteousness, and justice, and holiness came for you in the cross? Because of the cross your joy can be constant because it's not based in worldly pleasures or dependent on your own performance - your joy is Jesus. I am loved by Jesus.

You don't know eternal life apart from him, and if you have come to this Jesus, you will remain in this Jesus.

Is your entire being wrapped into Jesus? Do you want to seek his will and his presence because you want to draw ever nearer to him? Do you want to cut off the temptations in your life because you want to be closer to him? Do you want to confess your sins and all the ways you try to protect yourself and get glory for yourself and instead say: "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (*Philippians 3:8*).