

HOW TO KNOW IF YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE

1 John 5:5 -13

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PROLOGUE

John Calvin argued that the benefits of baptism are not limited to the time when we received it. Rather the benefits lay open during the entire course of our lives because the promises that are represented in baptism are “perpetually in force.” One of these promises is the promise of eternal life.

SCRIPTURE

Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? {6} This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. {7} There are three that testify: {8} the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. {9} If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son. {10} Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. {11} And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. {12} Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. {13} I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:5-13 NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

The world is in desperate need of hope but short on answers. It is like the man who went into the hospital for tests, where he learned that he had several highly contagious and incurable illnesses. He was quite upset and asked the doctor what he was to do. The doctor informed him there was only one way to treat him. He would receive a private room and would need to eat veal cutlets and pancakes every day. The patient liked pancakes and veal cutlets but asked, "Why do you want me to eat the same things every day? How will they help me?" The doctor answered, "Oh, they won't really help you. They're just easy to slide under the door to your room."

So the world cannot offer us much hope. The Good News is - Christ came to give us hope. This hope is described in the Bible as “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (Heb 6:19a).

The anchor was an early symbol of the Christian faith, commonly found in underground burial tunnels known as catacombs where Christians had fled to escape persecution. Because of its obvious connection with water, the anchor can also serve as a powerful

symbol for baptism. The anchor reminds us of our own baptism and baptism in turn points us to the promises of God including the promise of the sure and certain hope for eternal life through Jesus Christ the Risen Lord. Paul says:

Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4 NRSV).

This new life that Christ gives is not one that is separate from the here and now but one that embraces all of life. It embraces all of life because it comes from the One who made all of life. Each and every human being is created by God. The fact that we are created by God means that only in relationship to God do we find the meaning of our existence. It is Jesus Christ who brings us into relationship with God and who assures us that we have a purposeful origin and a purposeful destiny. Such an assurance is the anchor for our souls, a sure and steadfast hope.

The world uses the word hope to mean “a feeling that what is desired will happen.” But this can end up being little more than a baseless optimism. Your favorite team may be behind thirty-five points to nothing with 2 minutes left and you still “hope” for victory but there is not a lot to justify such hope. A person may hope they will go to heaven when they die but what is the basis for such hope?

Genuine hope needs to be founded on something (or someone) which provides reasonable grounds for believing it will come to pass. This is the way the Bible uses the word hope. We need such hope.

We need to be sure of our relationship with God not just for the sake of peace of mind, not just so we can be of help to others (both of which are excellent reasons). But we also need to be sure of our relationship with God because God wants us to be sure. John states this emphatically in his first letter:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13 NRSV).

We can know that we have eternal life. We do not have to face the future with uncertainty. We can be sure of our relationship with God. The grounds for such assurance include: the Work of Christ, the Word of God, and the Witness of the Spirit.

1. THE WORK OF CHRIST (see also Heb 10:12; 1 Pet 2:24)
There is THE WORK OF CHRIST.

Our hope is grounded on the death and resurrection of Christ. John tells us that Christ came

by water and the blood (6), referring to Christ's baptism and crucifixion. John's critics accepted the baptism but rejected the idea that Christ was killed on the cross. For them, Christ was a pure spirit who merely borrowed the body of Jesus for a time. John knew otherwise and wanted to set the record straight. Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ and the Son of the Living God. He willingly gave his life to set us free from sin and death.

His death on the cross was a finished work. There is nothing we can do; there is nothing we need to do to add to that work. It is a finished work. The author of Hebrews says:

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, "he sat down at the right hand of God" (Heb 10:12 NRSV).

Christ bled and died on the cross but within three days was seen alive again. He has risen. The New Testament places a special emphasis on the resurrection. Peter says:

"By his great mercy [God] has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3 NRSV).

Ten distinct resurrection appearances are recorded in the New Testament. They show great variety as to time, place and people. Each appearance was characterized by different acts and words by Jesus. And for the same reasons that the empty tomb cannot be explained on the basis of lies or legends, neither can we dismiss the statements of the appearances of Christ on this basis. This is testimony given by eyewitnesses—fully and profoundly convinced of the truth of their statements. Indeed, Thomas Arnold, Professor of History at Oxford University described the Resurrection as "the best attested fact in history."

The Bible also tells us that Jesus is our forerunner (Hebrews 6:20a). The term can apply to a military vanguard or to a scout but later it came to refer to a small boat sent into a harbor by a larger ship unable to safely enter on its own. The forerunner boat would carry the anchor through the breakers inside the harbor and drop it there, securing the ship. There was no doubt the vessel would make it into port. It was only a matter of time.

In a similar way, Christ is our "forerunner boat" who secures a place for us in God's harbor (heaven). We do not know *when* we will get there only *that* we will get there. Our place is secure.

2. THE WORD OF GOD (see also 2 Pet 1:4; John 6:37; 10:28)

There is THE WORD OF GOD.

Eugene Peterson translates a portion of 2 Peter this way:

Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God. The best invitation we ever received! We were also given absolutely terrific promises to pass on to you—your tickets to participation in the life of God after you turned your back on a world corrupted by lust (2 Pet 1:3-4 TM).

In Hebrews Chapter 6, the author expounds on the trustworthiness of God's Word, specifically as that relates to his promises. He makes these three points:

- (1) God is eternal. God will always be around to fulfill his promises.
- (2) God is all-powerful. He will never lack the ability to fulfill his promises.
- (3) God has an unquestionable character. He can be trusted to fulfill his promises.

God promises to give eternal life to those who receive Christ. John affirms:

And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.
{12} Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life (1 John 5:11-12 NRSV).

Whoever has the Son has eternal life. If you have received Christ you have eternal life.

3. THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT (see also Rom 5:5; 8:15-16; 1 Cor 12:3; Gal 5:22-23; Matt 7:16)

There is THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

Paul says:

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children (Rom 8:16 NIV).

And elsewhere he says:

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us (Rom 5:5 NIV).

As Christians, we have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a person. Jesus addressed him as a person. The Holy Spirit is also divine. When we speak of the Spirit we are speaking of God. And so we say that the Holy Spirit is God making Jesus real to us, showing us who Jesus really is and enabling us to have a personal relationship with him that will last forever.

CONCLUSION

The Reformers, Calvin and Luther, believed that the meaning of baptism was to be renewed by faith. They understood faith to be a living, life-transforming confidence in God. By trusting in the promises of God we can be sure of our relationship with God and know we have eternal life.

Barbara Johnson, the best-selling author who has an Erma Bombeck style of writing, has written:

"The cutest illustration of hope I've found is about a little boy who was standing at the foot of the escalator at a large department store, intently watching the handrail. He never took his eyes off the handrail as the escalator kept going around and around. A salesperson saw him and finally asked him if he was lost. The little fellow replied, 'Nope. I'm just waiting for my chewing gum to come back.'"

Of course, the Christian hope is not based on chewing gum but it will "stick" around. We have a hope that is anchored in God, grounded on reasonable evidence, and looks to the future with courage knowing that someday we will be with Jesus.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16 NRSV).