

INTRO: When we hear the word “faith” today, we think of a blind leap, irrationality, gullibility. But as soon as you read the Bible, you discover that it never talks about faith like that. Faith in the Bible is not a nebulous concept. Faith takes a definite shape. It believes and does specific things. It has a clear origin, a firm basis, and a clear destination. That destination is eternal life, which in the Bible is not just life without end, but a new quality of life that begins here and now. In 1John 5:1-12, John says that we know we have eternal life because we believe Jesus is the Christ. *“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.”* So John’s answer to the question, how do I know I’m born of God? is, I know because I believe Jesus is the Christ. I know it by faith. My faith in Christ is the evidence of my life in Christ. But then what is this faith by which we know? John doesn’t just want us to be content with the answer “by faith”. He wants us to understand how we came to have this faith, who else shares it, what it does, what it believes, why it believes, and the future that awaits this faith. So this morning John will teach us 5 signature marks of faith. Faith loves a family, overcomes the world, worships Jesus, believes a testimony, and lives in the future.

1. FAITH LOVES A FAMILY (1JOHN 5:1-3)

Proof of Family Birth (5:1a). The question John is answering is, “How can you know you have eternal life?” His first answer is that *“everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.”* We know we’ve been born into God’s family because we believe Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. John is not saying that belief is the prerequisite to being born into God’s family. John is saying that belief in Jesus as the Christ is the evidence, the proof, that we have already been born into God’s family. If you want to know whether God has given you new birth to eternal life now, then ask yourself, Who is Jesus to you? If God has given you birth into new spiritual life, then you will believe that Jesus is the Christ. But what does it mean for Jesus to be the Christ?

The title “Christ” means that Jesus is God’s anointed priest and king. To be anointed means that God has chosen him and set him apart as special. As priest, He represents us to God by offering the sinless sacrifice of His own body and blood in our place, for our sins, to make atonement for us before God. And as king, Jesus was raised from the dead to vindicate His righteousness and to rule over us and realize God’s purposes in us. As priest, Jesus represents. As king, Jesus rules. That is what it means for Jesus to be the Christ, and to believe these things about Jesus is the evidence of new birth, not the requirement for it.

But no one naturally believes this about Jesus, because no one naturally wants to think we need someone more righteous than us to represent us before God, or to rule us for God’s purposes. We are natural children of our first father Adam, who fought for his moral independence from God, and so we still think God should accept us for who we are, even in all our sin, rather than accepting us for who Jesus is and what He has done for us in dying for our sins. So we need God to give us new spiritual life – a new heart that wants to submit to God, new eyes that see our sin and Jesus righteousness for what they are. And when God gives you new birth, then you believe in Jesus as naturally as you believe that the sky is blue. Jesus identity becomes self-evident to you. It becomes patently obvious that Jesus really is who he said He is.

Now, if we’ve been born of God like this, then we begin to love God as our Father. A new family relationship has been established. God has sired us to new spiritual life, and we are now part of his family, so there is a new natural love for God as our Provider and Protector. But calling God “Father” is not a right of those who still live in open rebellion against Him. We are not entitled to call God “Father” when we refuse to recognize his character or listen to his commands. Calling God “Father” is always accompanied by an admission that you live under God’s roof, and a submission to live under God’s rule.

Proof of Family Membership (5:1b). But to love God as our Father implies that we love the image of the Father in all his children. *“Everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.”* Now again, this love is evidence of being born again, and it happens naturally. You don’t have to work it up. It’s not forced. It’s natural, as an effect of the new nature God gives us when he gives us new birth. When we have eternal life, we love our siblings in Christ for the sake of our common Father’s image in them. We can’t say we love God,

and then show indifference toward God's other children. That's out of bounds. If we're part of God's family, then we act like it by not just loving God as our Father, but loving other Christians as our new brothers and sisters. You begin to love Christians because they bear the family likeness of the Father who you love, and who gave you new birth. And this love for other Christians happens most tangibly in our local churches.

Proof of Sibling Love (5:2). But then, if love for the Father is proven by love for his children, then how do we know we love God's children? John answers that question in v.2. "*By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.*" In our day and age, obedience to God's commands and love for His people have gone through a bitter divorce. But here, John keeps them together. Obedience to our Father is the way we express our love for our Christian siblings. We don't love our siblings well when we disobey our Father and encourage them to disobey by our example. We love our siblings well precisely by obeying our Father and encouraging others to obey by our example.

This is precisely the reason that the Pope's recent comments on practicing homosexuals are actually less enlightening than some people might think. In a recent interview with the Jesuit Magazine *America* last week, Pope Francis articulated what he perceives to be a more welcoming stance to the gay community. He said that the church cannot "interfere spiritually" in the lives of gays and lesbians. "Religion has the right to express its opinion in the service of people, but God in creation has set us free: it is not possible to interfere spiritually in the life of a person.... When God looks at a gay person, does he endorse the existence of this person with love, or reject and condemn this person? We must always consider the person. Here we enter into the mystery of the human being" (Eric Marrapodi and Daniel Burke, CNN Belief Blog Co-Editors, 9/19/13).

But shouldn't we always consider God? Shouldn't we be entering into the mystery of God? And isn't part of the mystery of God that he is both holy and loving? His love is a holy love, and his holiness is a loving holiness. And hasn't God made His sovereign opinion about homosexual practice abundantly clear in His word? God condemns homosexual sin just as strongly as he condemns heterosexual sin, whether fornication or adultery. He condemns those sins because they offend His holiness, and because they offend his loving concern for our good as His children. We do not love anyone well when we tell them they can be a part of God's family and just ignore God's family rules as our Father and Head of the Household. Listen to the Bible again. *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments. This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.* We do not love the children of God by telling them that God is indifferent to how they use the maleness or femaleness he gave them when he created them. No one is God's child if they show no concern for holy living before God and submitting to His moral standards in Scripture. No one is God's child if they keep thinking they can write their own Ten Commandments instead of submitting to God's. We do not love God when we encourage others to think they can have eternal life while they live in open rebellion against God's commandments, whether that rebellion is sexual or otherwise. Our love for God's children is most evident when we ourselves are loving God by obeying His commandments, and encouraging others to do the same by our example. The Bible does not consider it hate speech to call sinners to repent. That is love speech.

Proof of Father Love (5:3). Obedience to our Father's commands is how we express love for our Father. All of us who are parents understand this. We would rather our children obey us, than simply tell us they love us without doing what we say. Jesus Himself said in **John 14:15** *If you love me, you will keep my commandments.* The church should be a place where sinners of all stripes can come. But it should be a place where sinners of all stripes can come and be freed from their sinning, and free for obedience to God. It should be a place where sinners can come and turn from trying to justify themselves in their sin, to seeking to be justified in Christ's righteousness credited to their account. It should be a place where sinners begin to realize that God is holier than they thought, that they are more sinful than they thought, that Jesus is a greater savior than they imagined, and that God is calling them to change their minds about Him, about themselves, and about Jesus. The church should be a place where sinners realize that the Living God is too holy to overlook sin, yet He is too loving to do nothing about it. So he sent Jesus to die for our sin, and now calls us to turn from our sin and trust Jesus.

2. FAITH OVERCOMES THE WORLD (1JOHN 5:4-5)

Triumph over the world's refusal to believe. John says in v.4 *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.* Now what does that mean? The “world” in John is the world system in spiritual and moral rebellion against God. When faith overcomes the world, then, it is not a rise to political power. Nor is it freedom from all things physical, as if a disembodied existence would be ideal. Rather, what faith overcomes is the natural human impulse to try to create our own truth and be our own god. Faith overcomes the inertia of rebelling against God's truth in order to create our own. Faith overcomes mass human culture's persuasion and influence to join in its rebellion against God. When the world says, “Come join us as we seek to define reality apart from God...Come join us as we seek to shut God out of his world,” faith says “No. That is sin. Reality is God's, and so God has reserves the right to define reality by His Word.

Triumph over the world's refusal to love. But in context, faith also overcomes the lovelessness of the world. John has just been saying that everyone who loves the Father loves all others who have been born of the Father. We love the children of God when we love and obey God. So when we overcome the world, we're overcoming the self-centeredness of life in a sin-bitten reality.

But the faith that overcomes the world is not faith in people, or in the inherent potential of humanity, or faith in the deep-down goodness of man. It's faith in Jesus, who died out of love for the Father and for sinners like us, teaching us now to love others as God in Christ has loved us. Faith in Jesus extricates us from the tentacles of our inherent self-centeredness so that we are free to love others instead of just loving ourselves. And more specifically, what we believe about Jesus is that He is the Son of God. Jesus is the firstborn of a new humanity and he overcomes the world by his own sinless life, death, and resurrection. He said in **John 16:33** *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world.”* Jesus is the Son of God in the sense that Jesus is the truly obedient Adam. Jesus is what Adam should have been as God's son. Jesus obeyed in all the ways Adam obeyed. Jesus is also the Son of God in the sense that He is the true and obedient Israel. Israel disobeyed as God's firstborn son, but Jesus obeyed God's law perfectly. So for Jesus to be the Son of God really means that He is the True Humanity. He is what we all should have been, but could not be, because we loved sin more than righteousness. And he is all this because He is the Son of God in another sense. He is divine. He is the second person of the Trinity. He is the one who always does only what the Father is doing.

So, if we know that we have eternal life by faith, then it is a kind of faith that does overcome the world both in the sense that it breaks away from humanity's collective rebellion against God, and in the sense that it breaks away from humanity's loveless way of living. This faith doesn't leave us the same. It changes our relationship to the world. Before, we were carried along by the current of the world's pattern of thinking and living. But now, by faith, we've learned to swim against that current, and back to the shores of God's kingdom. But again, it is not faith in the power of faith, or faith in the inherent goodness of people. It is faith specifically in Jesus Christ, which leads us to our next point.

3. FAITH WORSHIPS THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST (1JOHN 5:6A)

John says in v.6 *“This is he who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood.”* John wants to make sure we know who he is talking about. Who is it that is the object of our faith? He is the historical person of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Son of God, is the one who came. That implies something doesn't it? It implies that Jesus did not spring up from within the world. He came, he arrived, from outside this world. Jesus was not simply a man like any other man. He was not an extremely religious Jew who happened to be incredibly God-conscious. He was not even just a prophet through whom God spoke. Jesus was and is the second person of the Godhead, taking on human flesh and form, to live a sinless life as only the God-Man could, and then to lay down His life for the sins of His people, only to take it up again in His resurrection. To say that Jesus is the one who came, is to say that Jesus came from heaven, sent by God the Father, as the one who would fulfill all the hopes enshrined in the types and shadows of OT prophecy. Jesus is the one of

whom the Psalmist said, “*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*” (Ps 118:26). And this “*one who is to come*” is the one John was asking about from prison in Luke 7:19 when he sent his people to ask Jesus “*Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?*” He is the one who the woman at the well spoke of before she even knew she was speaking to him, *I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called the Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.* And Jesus said to her, “*I who speak to you am he.*” Jesus is the one who the 5,000 said “*this is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!*” (John 6:15).

Jesus, then, came from heaven, to the earth, God the Son taking human form. And he came by water and the blood. But what does that mean, that Jesus came “*by the water*”? The best answer is that this is the water of Jesus’ own baptism by John the Baptist, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. But why would Jesus need a baptism of repentance when he had committed no sin? Jesus came by the water of baptism to identify with the cursed plight of his own sinful people. He identified himself with His people by submitting himself to the same baptism that was necessary for them.

But John takes particular pains to clarify that Jesus did not just come by the water, but by the blood. And the blood, of course, is the blood he shed on the cross to atone for our sins. The Christ was not simply a disembodied spirit who descended on Jesus for his earthly ministry and then left him when he was crucified. No. It was the second person of the Trinity Himself, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, both Davidic and Divine, fully man and fully God, who hung bleeding and dying on the cross. It was the Son of God who was crucified, dead, buried, and raised again to new life.

For John, it is not enough for us to believe in the earthly ministry and ethical teaching of Jesus. That does not make you a Christian. That only makes you a moralist whose role model is Jesus. That is to believe that Jesus came by the water only. What makes you a Christian – what gives you eternal life – is believing that the Heavenly Son of God became a man in order to shed His blood on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, and then rose from the dead to vindicate His righteousness and share His new life with all those who will ever repent and believe in Him. Lots of religions believe Jesus came by the water. Lots of religions believe Jesus went around doing good, identifying Himself with the plight of His people, even healing their diseases and casting out demons. But to believe that Jesus was no more than a demon-chasing do-gooder is to esteem Him far too lightly. Jesus did not just come to show us how to live. Jesus came to show us that we needed Him to die in our place, for our sins. And that is precisely what He did. The object of our faith must be the Jesus who came from heaven to earth, not just by the water of his earthly ministry, but by the blood of his atoning death.

4. FAITH TRUSTS A TESTIMONY (1JOHN 5:6B-10)

Testimony of the Spirit (5:6b). We started our study noticing that the word “faith” today is associated with a blind leap that defies logic. But John says here that there is ample testimony to trust when it comes to believing that Jesus is who he said he is. “*The Spirit is the one who testifies because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater.*” The Spirit here is the Holy Spirit, the 3rd person of the Trinity, not an impersonal force, but a person who speaks and bears witness to the truth of Jesus Christ. And He is the truth – the Spirit Himself constitutes ultimate reality as a Member of the Godhead. That is what makes the Spirit reliable – He is testifying to the ultimate reality of which He Himself is a constituent part as the Third person of the Trinity.

And John puts the verb in the present tense. The Spirit didn’t just testify in the past. The Spirit testifies. How so? Well, in the past, the Spirit was the power by which Jesus did His miracles. **Acts 2:22** “*Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you know...*” **Acts 10:38** “*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.*” (cf. John 3:2; Lk 24:19). And in the present, the Spirit is the one who confirms in our hearts that Jesus really is the Son of God.

The Spirit is the one who convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come (John 16:18). The Spirit, then, is the One who gives us certainty about these things, testifying in our hearts to the same truth that He Himself inspired the apostles to write in Scripture. So the Spirit testifies both in the sense that He moved the apostles to write the New Testament, and in the sense that He convinces us that what the apostles wrote in Scripture is true and has both immediate and eternal application to us today.

Testimony of the water (5:7-8a). The water here is still the water of Jesus' baptism. It testifies because it was at Jesus' baptism that He went public with His own identity and mission. His baptism was where God the Father testified from heaven "This is my beloved Son; with whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). And it was at His baptism that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus as a dove (Matt 3:16; cf. Lk 3:21-22).

Testimony of the blood (5:8b). The blood testifies as well, in the sense that Jesus' death was the long-awaited blood atonement that fulfilled all the OT types and shadows. The blood certainly testified to the Roman centurion who watched the way Jesus died on the cross and said point blank "*Truly this man was the Son of God*" (Mark 15:39). And in the writings of the NT apostles, the blood still testifies today. **Hebrews 12:24** says that Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant" and that his "*sprinkled blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*" The blood testifies that God has now provided a sacrifice for Himself that has appeased His own anger over the sins of all those who will ever repent and believe. As the Apostle Paul said to Festus, none of these things happened in a corner. All of this was right out in the open for everyone to see. And it is recorded now in the pages of Scripture, a 3-fold testimony for us to believe – the Spirit, the water, and the blood, all testifying in agreement to the eternal significance of Jesus' life and death.

Testimony of God (5:9-10). When we think of it John's way, there's really not much else we could ask or expect God to do to prove to us that Jesus is the Christ. He has not just given us the word of men; He has given us His own word, and that word not just in Scripture, but personified in Jesus. He has given us the voice from heaven at Jesus baptism, the Spirit descending on him as a dove, the blood of the crucifixion, not to mention the empty tomb; and all of this historical testimony, preserved for us in the most prolific manuscript families antiquity has ever produced.

For John, then, nobody doubts the truth of Jesus for want of reliable testimony. There is no such want. The testimony is abundant and firm. In fact, John says outright in v.10 that human unbelief simply calls God a liar. "*Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning His Son.*" The Spirit, the baptism of Jesus, and the crucifixion have all produced credible and congruent testimony to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. To say otherwise is to call God a liar. Unbelief is still distrusting and accusing God, just like Satan convinced Eve to do all the way back in the Garden of Eden. "*Has God really said you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?*" "*You will not surely die.*" Oh dear friend, do not call God a liar. That's just how Adam and Eve got us into this tragic mess of sin in the first place. They thought God's word to them was no good. That's what cost us the Garden and so much more.... The truth is that people don't believe God because there is in all of us a desire to be our own god, to escape accountability to anyone but self. It's not that God won't give us enough evidence. It's that we refuse to believe His sworn testimony. Martin Luther said long ago that "to be unwilling to be content with the manner in which God wants to be found by us but to seek and prescribe one's own manner is to find the devil, not God" (Yarbrough, 289).

5. FAITH LIVES IN THE FUTURE (1JOHN 5:11-12)

The Future as Present (5:11). The testimony that God has given us, John says, is eternal life. This is what the Spirit, and the water, and the blood are all testifying about. They are all saying that God provides us with eternal life only in the person of His Son Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead. We encounter all this testimony in Scripture, as the apostles bear eyewitness testimony for us, and as they introduce us to the Jesus they themselves looked at with their own eyes and heard with their own ears. The Spirit keeps on testifying, even today, to the truth of the apostolic witness. And as the Spirit confirms the truth of Scripture in our hearts,

we experience eternal life, which is actually knowing the true God in the here and now. Jesus said in **John 17:3** “*This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*” Biblical faith, then, lives in the future because it is preoccupied with eternal life. But that future, that eternal life, has erupted into the present with the resurrection of Jesus and the sending of His Spirit into our hearts. Eternal life is not just life never-ending. It is new life in right relationship to the Living God now, today. And so we are, in a sense, back where we started. *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God...*” born of God – new life in the present! God gave us eternal life in His Son. That is the testimony. That what the Spirit and the water and the blood are all saying. God has given us eternal life by sending the Son to take our punishment in our place and for our sins, so that the Spirit could come and convince us of that truth and let us experience that life now. Yet there is more to come. Look there in v.12.

The Future as Future (5:12). “*Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.*” If eternal life is in Jesus Christ the Son of God, crucified and risen, then it follows that whoever has the son – whoever believes in Him – has eternal life. But the opposite is also true. There is no eternal life, either now or in the future, for those who do not believe that Jesus is the Christ. For them, there is only the prospect of eternal death, which is a conscious, constant torment in hell, under God’s judgment, which will never put you out of your misery. There is a reason that godless, Christ-less philosophies almost universally end in nihilism, cynicism, and the will to power. It’s because verse 12 is true. *Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.* Biblical faith lives a whole new kind of life here and now, a life that overcomes the world’s cynicism about God and its loveless-ness toward each other. And it’s a life that looks forward to resurrection life forever loving and serving God in the new creation, because Jesus’ resurrection in His glorified body guarantees the complete new creation not just of our own bodies, but of the entire world.

Real, biblical faith looks forward to an even greater life hereafter. To reject God’s testimony about His Son Jesus Christ is to reject any possibility of new creation. People reject the testimony of God in Scripture for many reasons, but one of the top reasons is that they think believing God’s revelation of Jesus Christ in Scripture will set too many limits on life. Now, it is true that accepting God’s testimony about Jesus Christ in Scripture limits your moral options. But John says it un-limits your life, in the sense that you get life eternal. Every other world religion rejects God’s testimony about Jesus in preference of something else. And often other religions reject submission to the sovereign, personal God in preference of a spiritual principle that we can manipulate to our advantage so that we retain the illusion of our own sovereignty. And that illusion, whatever form it takes, has led people to hell ever since Cain killed Abel. But it doesn’t have to be like that for you. Take God at His word. Believe the testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood. They all agree. God is calling all men everywhere to repent, including you, so that you might become part of God’s family, so that you might love Him as a father and find a family in the local church. Take Him at His word. Now is the time of salvation.

CONCLUSION

Christian assurance, then, is far simpler than we often make it out to be. Who is the object of your faith? What do you believe about Jesus Christ? Where is he from, and what has he done? Do you love God’s family, the church? Do you obey God’s commands in Scripture? Does it cut you to the quick when you disobey? Or do you not much care about the answers to any of those questions? Biblical faith loves God the father and loves our brothers and sisters in Christ. Biblical faith overcomes the unbelief and loveless-ness that mark the rest of humanity. Biblical faith is directed to Jesus as its object. Faith trusts in the testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood. And biblical faith lives into the future even now. I hope all this helps you to see that biblical faith is not a blind leap that defies logic. It is not faith in faith, or faith in the inherent goodness of people. It’s not a religious gullibility that believes just anything. It’s taking God at His word. Friend, is this the kind of faith you have? Is this kind of faith the reason that you know you have eternal life? Or is your faith just a warm wish that God will somehow go easy on you, even though you’re still calling Him a liar?