

Deep Certainty -Lesson 8

1 John 5:11–20

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Christians have all sorts of concerns. Not only do they worry about the same things that nonChristians worry about, but they also have added anxieties about their faith and how society at large relates to their faith. Let's remember the situation that John's original readers were in. The world was now under the thumb of a pagan empire. Jews had been scattered among the nations, and the fledgling Christian church was misunderstood and persecuted. Most of the apostles had been martyred for their faith, and there were only a few remaining eyewitnesses to the life and death of Jesus. And now, false teachers had infiltrated the church, and were calling into question the central tenets of their faith. Jesus didn't really have a body, they said, he just appeared to. Faith isn't what matters, they said, enlightenment is—secret truths and mystical experiences. No one can be sure of their standing before God, they said; divine reality is far too mysterious for that. Many believers were beginning to doubt their faith. They were wondering if it was really true, if they really were Christians, and if they could count on anything as the world seemed to be falling apart around them.

And 2,000 years later, we are prone to the very same doubts. There's not a believer here who hasn't questioned his or her faith at some point. Maybe you made a commitment to Christ some time ago, but it seems to have little meaning to you anymore. Maybe you've been struggling with sin in your life, and you're wondering how you could be a real Christian and still think or do some of those things. It could be you've read a book recently or heard a speaker or took a class that has caused you to question your faith on an intellectual level. You look at other Christians, and they seem to have such passion and joy and power, and you wonder what's wrong with your faith. Is it real? Are you really saved? While Christians have always struggled with doubt, in our post-modern, 21st century world, it seems harder than ever to be sure of anything.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] How do you feel about the future? Are you hopeful or fearful, expectant or nervous?

[Q] What kind of world do you imagine your children and grandchildren will grow up in? How do you picture it?

[Q] What do you count on to give you any kind of confidence as you look to the future?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: John's words offer us certainty.

Read 1 John 5:11–20.

Look again at verse 13. That word know is very important to John. It appears more often in this chapter than in almost any other chapter in the New Testament. There are actually two words for know in the original language. In this verse, and most of the time in this chapter, he uses the word that describes the state of knowing rather than the process of knowing. When I say, "I know I'm an American," I'm declaring something I know to be true beyond a shadow of a doubt. When I say, "I know what it means to be an American," that's a knowledge I am still acquiring and growing into. One kind of knowing is complete and factual; the other is progressive and experiential. While both kinds of knowing are true of a Christian, it's the first kind of knowing, the certain kind of knowing, that John is emphasizing here.

[Q] Looking at this passage, what are three things John wants us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt?

Note: The first thing He wants us to know is that eternal life is possible. That expression eternal life literally means "the life of the ages." In other words, a life for the ages and a life to come. The word eternal speaks to both the quantity and the quality of life. Eternal life is longer, in that it goes on forever. But it is also deeper, in that it encompasses the full range of human potential. Eternal life is real life—the life we were created to live and long to live. In fact, in the original language of verse 12, John doesn't just refer to it as "life," but as "the life"—"whoever has the Son has the life"—suggesting that any other kind of life falls short. So, the first thing John wants us to know is that eternal life is possible.

The second thing he wants us to know is that this life is found in Jesus Christ. It's not something we find deep down inside ourselves, even though we were created with the capacity for it. It's not something we find out there in the world, even though this world was designed with that life in mind. Jesus Christ brought this life to us when He came to this earth and lived it for us. He showed us what it meant to live life the full— in relationship with God and for the good of others. The world had never seen life as it was meant to be until Jesus came and lived it among us. So logically, the only place to find real life is in the One who actually lived it—Jesus Christ.

The third thing John wants us to know is that if you have the Son, you have the life. That's an interesting way to put it; having the Son and having life. We know what it means to have an object, but how do you have a person? To have a person is to be in some kind of relationship with that person. When we say, "I have a spouse" or "I have a friend," we're declaring a certain

kind of relationship. But it makes no sense to say “I have a stranger,” because there is no relationship there; there’s no definition. So, to have Jesus Christ is to be in a relationship with Him- a relationship defined by belief and trust and obedience.

[Q] Do you know you have eternal life, or hope you have eternal life?

[Q] What difference would knowing make in the way you live your life?

Teaching Point Two: Believing and following Christ daily lead to complete confidence that you are God’s child.

John wrote this letter for a very different purpose and audience than he had in mind when he wrote his gospel. If you go back to John’s gospel, as he comes to the end in chapter 20, he tells us why and for whom he wrote: “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). You see the difference? John wrote his gospel for seekers, so that they would come to believe. He wrote his letter for believers, so they would come to know. The letter picks up where the gospel leaves off. In fact, when you put John’s gospel and his letter back-to-back, you discover that John has mapped out the journey of faith. According to John, the spiritual journey begins with hearing: understanding the life and message of Jesus. The next step is believing: putting your trust in the life and message of Jesus. These first two steps, or phases, are the purpose of his gospel. The next step in the journey, according to John, is living—not just trusting Christ, but actually following Christ in everyday life. That’s what he’s been writing about in this letter—walking in the truth, doing what’s right, loving one another.

[Q] How does believing in and following Christ lead to complete confidence that you are God’s child, now and forever?

[Q] How does living like a child of God help you know you are indeed a child of God?
• What limitations are there in that approach?

Teaching Point Three: We need to be aware of the evil one.

It turns out there's one more thing John wants us to know. He doesn't want us to be under any delusions about the kind of world we live in. Look again at verse 19. We live in a fallen world. Satan is on the loose. People do foolish and terrible things. The forces of nature run amuck sometimes. God never promises freedom from pain, hardship, or disappointment in this life, even for his children. It's important to know that, because then you no longer expect this world to deliver ultimate peace, joy, and love.

[Q] How does verse 20 give balance and perspective to verse 19?

- How does that help us in our fears of the future? Can you give a specific example?

Note: Eternal life isn't waiting for us in the here after; it's here now in Jesus Christ. And when we know, for certain, that we have eternal life, we can deal with whatever this life throws in our path. None of us know what the future holds for us, for our children, and certainly not for our grandchildren. What we do know for certain, is that God has given us eternal life and that this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has the life. When you know that, you can face anything.

[Q] What kinds of hardships would John's original audience have had to face?

- Does knowing that give you confidence as you face your own trials in life? Why or why not?

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

So the spiritual journey John mapped out for us includes hearing, believing, living, and knowing. Where would you put yourself on that road map? Maybe you're still in the hearing stage, still investigating the life and teachings of Jesus. That's okay; you're on your way. Maybe you have come to believe the message of Jesus sometime recently or in the past. That's good; that's an important step. That's when you're born again and become a child of God. But you don't want to get stuck there, merely believing. That's no fun at all. You want to start living your faith, growing in your knowledge, becoming like Christ, giving of yourself to others in love. Because once you start living your faith, you suddenly find yourself in the knowing stage, where you no longer worry and wonder, but instead step out in confidence every day, knowing who you are, why you're here, and where you're going.

Action Point: Where would you put yourself on the roadmap of hearing, believing, living, and knowing? Discuss in your group and talk through ways to move to the next stage.