

LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD

STUDY SIXTEEN

Absolute Assurance

1 John 5:13–21

A letter of assurance is a lovely thing. There's something endearing and enduring about such letters. Endearing because the one who is writing such a letter is telling you how valuable you are to her or him. Enduring because you can turn to the letter over and over again. John has written what I like to call a "framable letter." It's a letter of assurance.

—Charles R. Swindoll

ISN'T it wonderful to read words of assurance? It's such a relief to receive an e-mail from a loved one in the military saying that he or she is safe. To open a report from the doctor's office that the biopsy results indicate no malignancy. Or get a letter from your college stating that you met your academic requirements and that you qualify to graduate. What joy!

On the other hand, it can be agonizing *not* to have assurance. Uncertainty keeps us up at night worrying if our loved ones are well or the surgery was successful or we passed the test. Not knowing is like crossing a crevasse on an old wooden bridge that might break. We would much rather walk on a well-engineered bridge made of steel and feel confident that the path ahead is safe.

Thankfully, in his first letter, John built a solid walkway of truth to give us confidence about the most important matters of life. With one final stroke from his pen, John ended his letter on the subject of assurance—assurance that is *absolute* without a hint of ambiguity. In this final *Searching the Scriptures* study on 1 John 5:13–21, we examine the place and power of spiritual assurance in our walk with Jesus.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Absolute Assurance

1 John 5:13–21



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Let's take a moment to review what John has taught us about our identity as God's children.

See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him. Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.
(1 John 3:1–2)

Can you feel John's conviction? Can you sense his intent to inspire assurance in his readers? In light of the truth of John's statements, invite Jesus into your time in His Word and request His aid as you pursue spiritual growth from what you learn.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Any time we crack open the pages of Scripture, an author's purpose for writing must remain at the forefront of our mind.¹ Knowing an author's purpose helps us correctly interpret his writing.

While John wrote five works in our New Testament, three of them play an especially prominent role: the gospel of John, 1 John (our letter), and Revelation. He wrote each one with a different purpose. John, unlike some biblical authors, explicitly stated his purpose for each. Let's look at those statements.



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For the Time Is Near

Read *Revelation 1:1–3* and *22:7–15*. Why did John write Revelation according to these verses? What response did he hope to produce in his readers?

Jesus, the Son of God

Read *John 20:30–31* and *21:24–25*. Why did John write his gospel according to these verses, and how did he want his readers to respond?

The Treasure of Possessing Eternal Life

Now read the opening verse of this study's passage: *1 John 5:13*. To whom did John write and for what purpose did he write? What response did he hope to produce in his readers?



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John has written what I like to call a “framable letter.” It’s a letter of assurance. This letter is not written to those who are lost, but to those who have already believed in Christ. John wrote to Christians that you may know where you stand in your eternal life relationship with God. And the desire of the writer, John, is that you not only believe it but you live it, and, as a result, you have confidence in it. —Chuck Swindoll



Observation: Things We Can Know with Certainty

John did not conclude his theme of “knowing” in chapter five, verse thirteen. He referred to it over and over until the end of the letter. Take a few moments to read [1 John 5:13–21](#) and jot down a few observations that strike you as important or unexpected or previously overlooked.

Praying and Receiving

Read [1 John 5:14–17](#). How did John connect the assurance of “knowing” with prayer in these verses?

First John 5:16–17 has troubled readers for centuries. The difficulty of this passage brings up a vital lesson for successful Bible study: use what’s clear to understand what’s obscure. From 5:14–17, we can *know* with certainty that God hears us and gives us our requests when we ask according to His will. Note John’s emphasis on aligning our will with God’s.



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Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Prayer

In all cases, God holds the outcome of the prayer in His hands and answers it according to His plan and purpose—always for His glory and our good. Remember Hebrews 4:16: “Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace.” We don’t come groveling, pleading, begging, or bargaining. Entering His presence boldly, but with proper humility, we acknowledge that He has the power to give us what we ask . . . but also the right to answer however He pleases. And we know that however He answers—“Yes,” “No,” “Wait,” or “Here’s something better”—He’s going to work everything out for our good, not for our harm (Rom. 8:28).²

Our Spiritual Life

Read *1 John 5:18–21*. What did John say we can “know” according to these verses? How does this knowing affect our spiritual lives?

Only the true God can give us true power to overcome the evil one. Only the true God can give us true life that culminates in eternal joy. The One at the Father’s side, Jesus Christ the Son of God, has given us understanding so we can know the true God (John 1:18; 1 John 5:20). John wrote to assure us of that fact.



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Interpretation: Sin That Leads to Death and a Final Warning

Now we'll explore two subjects John mentioned: first, the sin that leads to death (1 John 5:16–17) and, second, guarding ourselves from idols (5:21). You'll want to consult your online resources and the 1 John commentaries in your personal Bible study library.³

The Sin That Leads to Death

Review *1 John 5:16–17*. Determine what John referred to by “sin that leads to death” and then summarize his instruction to us about this sin. Scholars have proposed referents such as:

- 1) Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (*Mark 3:20–30*)
- 2) Apostasy from unbelief (*Hebrews 5:11–6:8*)
- 3) A lifestyle that leads to physical death by God's judgment (*Acts 5:1–11*)
- 4) Heresy that denies or distorts Christ (*1 John 2:3–6, 22–23; 3:6; 4:1–6, 20–21*)

Guard Yourself from Idols

Review *1 John 5:21*. Consider how this verse relates to the whole message of 1 John. Why did John choose to end his letter with this statement. How is this warning relevant to us today even though our culture does not bow to idol figurines or pray to Zeus and Apollo?



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All idolatry lures people away from life-giving truth to ensnare them in life-destroying lies. Just as John's original readers did well to stay alert and guard against any form of idolatry, we do well in our day to continue with the same vigilance.



Correlation: The Folly of Idolatry Compared to God's Greatness

Isaiah crafted some of the most eloquent lines of poetic theology. Many of those verses deal with the subject of idolatry. Isaiah 40 offers an excellent comparison between the folly of idolatry and the greatness of the true God. Read *Isaiah 40:12–31* and summarize its key points below. Then note how it correlates with John's warning in 1 John 5:21.

Only the true God can give power to the weak and strength to the powerless. What a promise He gives us! Those who wait on the Lord will not be put to shame, but they will gain new strength and soar high like eagles. Idolatry, on the other hand, imparts nothing but shaky knees, fearful hearts, and broken wings. Idolatry robs us of our assurance, but we can be confident in Christ.



Application: The Severity of Idols, the Blessing of Assurance

John ended his letter with two emphases: the severity of idolatry and the blessing of assurance. We must get rid of and guard ourselves from idols if we are to stand on the solid rock of spiritual assurance.

Chuck Swindoll said that idolatry occurs in our hearts anytime we devote ourselves to an object more than we devote ourselves to Christ. Idolatry takes Christ off the pedestal in our hearts and puts something else on it. That something else might be our family or job, or it might be our reputation or material pleasures.



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What idols tug at your heart, and how can you heed John's warning against them? Clarifying our thoughts on paper helps us journey toward spiritual maturity.

Now consider the spiritual assurance John left you with in 1 John 5:13–21. Which of these truths especially comforted your heart? How can you better practice clinging to those truths as you seek to live a life of confident spiritual assurance?

In his commentary on 1 John, Chuck Swindoll wrote a superb summary of 1 John 5:13–21:

For those of us who have absolute assurance of our salvation, Christ and Christ alone should be the object of our priorities, passions, and pursuits. All other things must take second place to an intimate, obedient, and loving communion with Him. Such fellowship with the Father, through the Son and by the Holy Spirit, will result in a confident life.⁴



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, in this world I know so much temptation and tribulation, but in You I know pure light and peace and hope and assurance. Thank You for sending Your Son into this dark world that we might know You and possess the gift of eternal life. What a gift! In the majestic name of Christ, I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 131.
3. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at the Insight for Living Ministries web store. Chuck also recommends the *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* as a good single-volume reference for studying the New Testament.
4. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, 134.



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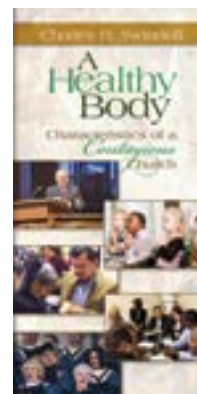
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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

