



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Assurance: What, Why & How

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In review, John is writing to a group of believers who have recently undergone a defection from their ranks. In broad terms, the defectors denied the reality of the Incarnation—that is, the full humanity and deity of Jesus. They denied the reality of indwelling sin. They denied the reality of actual sin. Finally, they denied the assurance one can have as being in fellowship with God. Their arguments and ultimate defection undoubtedly left a measure of doubt in the minds of those who chose to remain and it is these concerns John seeks to address.

But, to return to last week's portion of chapter two, especially verse 2, the last phrase, "...the sins of the whole world...".

Throughout the history of the church, this phrase has surfaced concerns because it appears to suggest all the sins of mankind have been propitiated by Jesus, the propitiator and propitiation. This has led to the teaching of what is referred to as Universalism. Others suggest the meaning of the phrase must be discerned from the context and, as the context distinctly illustrates two groups; those who believe and those who do not, with the conclusion the phrase is only applicable to the believers. A third group then suggests the phrase means the whole world, inclusive, but only effective for those who choose to believe. They typically phrase it this way, Jesus' Propitiation is "sufficient" for all, but only "efficient" for those who actually believe.

Or, to phrase it in terms of a bible teacher of centuries ago:

The Father imposed His wrath due unto, and the Son underwent punishment for, either:

1. All the sins of all mankind.
2. All the sins of some of mankind, or
3. Some of the sins of all of mankind.

We will leave this for your meditation and reflection as we continue through John's epistle. ☺

We turn now to verses 3-6 and John's attention to the issue of Assurance. That is; how do I know that I know I have fellowship with God?

³ And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴ Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, ⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

The knowledge John is referring to here is not simply intellectual apprehension, but knowledge of an experiential nature. Intellectual apprehension is part of the process of becoming a believer since there is propositional information which must be accepted. This information is understandable, but unacceptable to a person without the "light of the gospel" being shined into one's mind. (2 Corinthians 4:6) Spiritual truth is spiritually apprehended (1 Corinthians 2:14), but mankind is born spiritually dead in their understanding (Ephesians 2:1,2 & 4:18). Coming to know the truth of the gospel by means of the new birth, one grows in one's understanding and confidence, experientially and it is this aspect John is focusing on.

I'm confident we have all had the experience of thinking we knew someone quite well, only to be surprised by the addition of new information which

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then threw a whole new light on our relationship and understanding of the other.

John is concerned at this point in reinforcing their assurance of their relationship with God.

What Is Assurance?

I suggest in the simplest of terms assurance is the absence of doubt.

Why is Assurance Important?

Assurance is the cornerstone upon which we begin to build our confidence, broaden our understandings, deepen our skills and strengthen our faith.

Assurance is of such import with John that it is a major theme throughout this epistle. Over and over again, John will return to the bedrock of assurance in his concerns for this group of believers.

How is Assurance Developed?

In verse 3 John points to the object of their assurance, God. In one sense, the object of one's assurance determines the validity of that assurance. For instance: the water in the local pond freezes over and has been frozen for days. As you ponder it, you have a personal assurance it will hold your weight and venture out, only to discover the object of your assurance was only ¼ inch thick. ☹

In verse 3 John's tenderness is evident in the phrasing. He doesn't write in the Imperative mood, i.e. a command, but speaks in what is known as a "mitigated exhortation". On the order of the time when you might have said to someone, "...did you close the door?..." when you meant "Close the door!"

There is a direct correlation between one's obedience to God's commands and the level or depth of one's assurance of fellowship.

In verse 4 John makes mention of those who assert they know him, but leave little to no evidence. When anyone tells me there are deer living in them thar hills, I will expect to see deer droppings. No deer droppings, no deer. The same is true with respect to those who enjoy fellowship with God. Each of us has had the experience of knowing the impact of one individual on another over time. We tend to become like those we associate with over time. I believe it was Aristotle who put it this way, "When you walk with the lame, you learn to limp". One of the Proverbs says, "He who walks with wise men will be wise; the companion of fools will be destroyed." The Apostle Paul admonished the Corinthians that "bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33)

Verse 5 speaks of the impact of obedience to God's commands as it relates to one's assurance of fellowship with God. As one obeys God's commands, one's assurance is matured and one grows in the experience of fellowship with God. John suggests one's love of God is brought to a deeper level of maturity.

Finally, in verse 6 we come into contact with another of John's mitigated exhortations. **If you say...then you ought.** He could have used an Imperative, a command, but chooses the gentler approach.

In Summary:

One's assurance of fellowship with God is directly related to one's obedience to God's commands. Jesus had told John, years before in the Upper Room session in Jerusalem before he, Jesus, was taken prisoner: "If you love me, keep my commandments"

In terms of a possible application, two questions come to mind: 1) How are you doing in terms of the development of your assurance?, and 2) as you consider assisting another believer, might you consider the utilization of John's Mitigated Exhortation style?