



Bible Study for February 19, 2020

One of the first question that most people ask when interviewing for a job is “What are the benefits?” We live in a day when whether or not an employer pays our insurance, taxes, etc. can be a major factor in which job we choose.

Someone has said that the benefits for being a Christian are literally “out of this world.” We’ve had our sins forgiven, been given the righteousness of Christ, escaped hell and inherited heaven. What a package!

But in our Christian lives here on earth we are commanded to “love one another” (see v. 11). This exact phrase is repeated 12 times in the New Testament, along with many other similar statements which emphasize our duty to love each other as Christians.

In vv. 11-18 of the same chapter from which this week’s text comes the command to “love one another” is spelled out in a compelling and convicting way. We are told that the love which is required of us is the kind of love that Jesus showed when “He laid down His life for us.” It is a sacrificial, self-giving kind of love. It is the kind of love that must come from God because it is supernatural.

When we love in the self-sacrificial way just described, there are some benefits that will evidence themselves in our lives as believers. In this passage John shows us three benefits of loving one another.

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; **20** for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. **21** Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; **22** and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. **23** And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. **24** Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. *1 John 3:19-24*

Let’s look at each of these benefits in the order which John was inspired to record them. First, we see that when we love one another we receive the assurance of our salvation.

Assurance of our Salvation, vv. 19-21

What a grand benefit this is! Verse 19 begins with the phrase “By this we shall know” which links verse 19 with verse 18. When we love in deed and in truth, we know that we are of the truth. The net result of this knowledge is that our hearts are assured before God.

Note the logical argument of vv. 19-21. Verse 19 says that by loving one another in deed and in truth, we know that we are of the truth and our hearts are assured before God.

Verse 20 contemplates the case of one who does not love his brother in deed and in truth: their heart condemns them. Then John asserts that if our own heart condemns us, how much more will God who knows all the wickedness of our heart. In Jeremiah 17:9-10 the LORD says,

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.

These verses show us that we can’t even know the deceitfulness of our own heart. John’s argument is that if our deceitful heart condemns us, how much more will God since He knows all about us.

Remember John’s purpose in writing this letter is to assure, not to condemn. But the assurance he offers is not based upon an emotional experience or a distant memory of a childhood profession, it is assurance based upon the evidence in the professing believer’s life. Do you love one another? Verse 21 says that if your heart does not condemn you, then you can have “confidence before God.” The term “confidence” means “boldness,” “a freedom of speech,” and “a frankness such as a child has in approaching his father.” . . . here the word deals with the Christian’s uninhibited, free communion with God in prayer. The phrase “before God” portrays an intimate, relational, face-to-face encounter with the heavenly Father. This is one reason why assurance of our salvation is so important, it gives us confidence to come to God in prayer.

My children have boldness to approach me, because they are my children and I am their father. There is the assurance of a relationship which results in confidence to approach me as their father.

Do you have that kind of relationship with God?

Weekly Bible Study meets on Wednesday at two times (11:30-12 and 12-12:30). Both in Capitol Annex 436 or, if occupied, the 4th floor lounge (404).

Answering of our Supplications, vv. 22-23

We know what it means to see prayers answered. Share examples.

When we have the assurance of our salvation, we are able to approach God boldly and we are said to “receive” “whatever we ask.”

There is one sense in which these verses provide a blank check to us. It says “whatever we ask we receive from Him.” That sounds great doesn’t it. It is great, but there are some qualifications. They are that “we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” The phrase that we “do those things that are pleasing in His sight” is similar to statements elsewhere that we pray according to God’s will. If our heart is to do what pleases God, then our prayers will have that desire as well. Therefore, in this sense, it is not a blank check for a selfish, man-centered prayer. But what does it mean to “keep His commandments”?

The commandments that John is referring to are spelled out in verse 23. They are to believe on Christ and to love one another. The two parallel verbs “believe” and “love” work together to form one primary command. As Lenski declares, “You cannot believe without loving nor love without believing.” The Christian life demands an essential union between faith and love.

So the promise of answering our supplication is made to those who are loving one another. That’s why I’m saying that answering of our supplications is a benefit of loving one another. This blessing is also reserved for those who are Christians. It is for those who “believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ.” The name in biblical usage is closely associated with the nature and personhood of the one who bears it. To believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, is to place one’s faith in all that Jesus is. “His Son” emphasizes the deity and unique sonship of this individual. “Jesus” is the Greek form of the Hebrew name “Joshua,” which means “the Lord is salvation.” It is his human name he was give at birth and which identifies him as totally human. “Christ” is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Messiah” and affirms his role as the Old Testament Messiah. To believe in the name of Jesus Christ is to place one’s faith, one’s trust, in him and all that he is - the Divine Son, the incarnate Deity, the sinless Human, the Messianic Savior, and all the other facets of his unique nature and personhood. Belief is acceptance of the entirety of Him. Are you trusting in Him? Are you loving others?

The third benefit of loving one another is the . . .

Abiding of the Spirit, v. 24

There is a reality that exists for the one who believes on the name of Jesus Christ and who loves one another. That reality is that we abide in Christ and Christ abides in us. What a union!

The interesting part of this verse is how John says that we know that we are in Christ and that Christ is in us. He says it is by the Holy Spirit that indwells us. Romans 8:16 tells us:

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

There is a real sense in which the Holy Spirit assures our hearts of our union with Christ without words by our feelings, impressions and inward experiences.

This “direct experience” of the Spirit which assures us may be strong and intense, stirring our deepest emotions in our worship. At other times He comes gently and quietly, ministering peace and tranquility to your soul in the time of trial.

A word of caution about these experiences. We must be careful not to elevate our experiences to the level of Scripture. Experiences, no matter how deep, dramatic, or rapturous, prove nothing in and of themselves. Here we need to distinguish between the basis of assurance and the experience of assurance. God-given impressions of assurance are delightful blessings and desirable, but our assurance must always rest primarily on the character of God, the work of Jesus Christ, and the truth of God’s promises. If you’re not consciously resting on this basis, an experience of assurance is worthless. However, Spirit-given impressions firmly planted in the solid ground of the Word can yield life’s richest and most joyful moments.

A good test to ensure that you’re not grounded on a false assurance of salvation is to examine your life in light of Gal. 5:22-23, which is the nine-fold description of the fruit of the Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Do you experience the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit in your life? Have you experienced those deep emotions during worship? Have you experienced the peace of God during life’s most difficult trials? Are you grounded on the character of God, the work of Christ and the truth of God’s promises? Is there evidence of the Spirit in your life in the form of the fruit of the Spirit?

Conclusion:

The assurance of our salvation, answering of our supplications, and the abiding of the Spirit are all described in this passage as benefits to those who love one another. If we don’t have these three benefits, one of two things is wrong. Either we’re not believing on the name of His Son Jesus Christ or we’re not loving one another.

Are you trusting in Christ as your Savior? You will never have assurance of salvation or the answering of prayer if you’re not saved.

Are you actively, self-sacrificially loving your brothers and sisters in Christ?