

1 JOHN – CHAPTER 5:9-13

So That You Would Know That You Have Eternal Life

INTRODUCTION

As we continue through 1 John 5, the author builds on the foundational truths of Jesus' identity as the Son of God, focusing on the assurance of eternal life for believers. In verses 9-13, the author emphasizes the certainty of this assurance, rooted in the testimony of God Himself. This passage is a crescendo of the epistle's core message: believers can *know* they have eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, not based on feelings or subjective experiences, but on the objective, historical, and divine testimony provided by God.

In the previous lessons, we explored the threefold testimony of the water (Jesus' baptism), the blood (His sacrificial death), and the Spirit (the apostolic message inspired by the Holy Spirit). These testimonies confirm Jesus as the Son of God and provide the basis for the believer's confidence. Verses 9-13 now pivot to the implications of accepting or rejecting this testimony, culminating in the purpose statement of verse 13: *so that you may know that you have eternal life*. Let us approach this passage with a commitment to understanding its grammatical, historical, and theological clarity, ensuring our assurance rests on God's word alone.

1 JOHN 5:9 – THE TESTIMONY OF GOD OVER MEN

This begins by establishing a hierarchy of testimony. The phrase “if we receive the testimony of men” uses the present active indicative of **λαμβάνω** (*lambanō*, “to receive”), suggesting a customary acceptance of human testimony in legal or social contexts. In the Greco-Roman world, human testimony was foundational in courts, requiring multiple witnesses for validation (cf. Deut 19:15). The logic is simple: if human testimony is deemed trustworthy, how much more reliable is God's testimony?

The phrase “the testimony of God is greater” uses **μείζων** (*meizōn*, “greater”), emphasizing the superior authority and reliability of divine testimony. The reason is clear: “for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son.” The verb **μαρτυρέω** (*martureō*, “to testify”) is in the perfect active indicative, indicating a completed action with ongoing results—God's testimony about Jesus is definitive and enduring. This testimony, as discussed in verses 6-8, consists of the water (Jesus' baptism), the blood (His death), and the Spirit (the apostolic message). These historical events and divine revelation are God's unassailable witness to Jesus' identity as the Son.

The believer's confidence does not rest on human opinion or subjective experience but on God's authoritative testimony. In a world where truth is increasingly subjective, we must anchor our faith in the objective reality of God's Word.

1 JOHN 5:10 – THE INTERNALIZED TESTIMONY

This verse contrasts two responses to God's testimony: belief and unbelief. The phrase “the one who believes” uses the articular participle **ὁ πιστεύων** (*ho pisteuōn*), identifying the believer as one

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characterized by faith in the Son of God. The preposition **εἰς** (*eis*, “in”) with “the Son of God” denotes a personal belief in Jesus’ identity and work.

The believer “has the testimony in himself” (**ἔχει τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ**, *echei tēn marturian en heautō*). The verb **ἔχω** (*echō*, “to have”) is present active indicative, indicating a current, ongoing possession. The phrase “in himself” is a dative prepositional phrase implying that the believer has received and internalized God’s testimony as truth. This is not about an internal feeling but about embracing the objective testimony of God (water, blood, Spirit) as recorded in Scripture.

Conversely, “the one who does not believe God” (**ὁ μὴ πιστεύων**, *ho mē pisteuōn*) is described as having “made Him a liar” (**πεποιήκεν αὐτὸν ψεύστην**, *pepoiēken auton pseustēn*). The verb **ποιέω** (*poieō*, “to make”) in the perfect active indicative shows that unbelief actively and continually portrays God as untrustworthy. The reason is straightforward: “because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son.” Unbelief is not a neutral stance but a rejection of God’s truth, accusing Him of falsehood.

John 3:33 - Accepting God’s testimony affirms His truthfulness, while rejecting it denies His character.

Believers must guard against subjective measures of faith (emotions, experiences) and believe in the objective testimony of God. Not believing in Jesus is telling God that He is a liar.

1 JOHN 5:11-12 – THE CONTENT OF THE TESTIMONY

Verse 11 defines the content of God’s testimony: “that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” The verb **δίδωμι** (*didōmi*, “has given”) is in the aorist active indicative, pointing to a completed act—God’s gift of eternal life is a finished reality for believers. The phrase “eternal life” (**ζωὴν αἰώνιον**, *zōēn aiōnion*) refers to both the quality of life in fellowship with God and its unending duration.

The clause “this life is in His Son” underscores the exclusivity of salvation. Eternal life is not a standalone gift but is intrinsically tied to Jesus Christ. The preposition **ἐν** (*en*, “in”) indicates that Jesus is the source and focus of this life.

Verse 12 reinforces this with a stark contrast: “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.” The articular participle **ὁ ἔχων** (*ho echōn*, “the one having”) parallels “the one who believes” from verse 10, equating possession of the Son with faith in Him. The verb **ἔχω** (*echō*) again appears in the present active indicative, emphasizing the believer’s current possession of both the Son and eternal life. The negative counterpart, “he who does not have the Son,” uses the same construction to show that without faith in Jesus, eternal life is unattainable.

John 3:36 - This reinforces the exclusivity of salvation through Jesus alone (cf. Acts 4:12).

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Eternal life is not earned through works or sin avoidance; it is a gift received through believing in the person, work, and message of Jesus. This truth combats false teachings that dilute the exclusivity of Christ.

1 JOHN 5:13 – THE PURPOSE OF THE TESTIMONY

Now the purpose of his writing is stated: “These things I have written” refers to the content of the epistle, particularly the testimony of verses 5-12. Identifying the main verbs in verse 5 is helpful.

Verse 5 – Is: Who **is** the overcoming one? The believing one (in Jesus) **is**.

Verse 6 – Is: Jesus **is** the One having come. The Spirit **is** the truth.

Verse 7 – Is: There **are** three that bear witness. These three **are** one.

Verse 8 – Is: The three **are** in agreement.

Verse 9 – Receive, Is, Witnessed – He **has testified** concerning His Son.

Verse 10 – Has, Make, Believe, Testify – The believer **has** the witness. The unbeliever **has made** God a liar because he **has not believed** the testimony that God **testified**.

Verse 11 – Is, Gave – This **is** the witness...God **gave** us life eternal, and this life **is** in the Son

Verse 12 – Has – The one having the Son **has** life; The one not having the Son has not life.

All these verbs are in the indicative mood. The indicative mood is a verb of reality. This is all stated with the truth on display.

These verbs are coupled with seven articular participles. From verses 5-12, the author is very specific about who we are and who God is and what He has done. The only thing that distinguishes in this passage is the believing one vs the believing not one or the one having the Son vs. the one not having the Son. The One who has received vs the One who makes God out to be a liar. This information is the basis for understanding that we have eternal life, not that we are told it, but we can and should know it.

In verse 13, the author is careful to identify to whom he is writing. These things I wrote to you, the one's believing on the name of the Son of God. The Articular participle is in the plural. The believing ones should be thought of as inclusive. The fellowship there has on condition to have this assurance, are you a believing one?

The author also gets specific in this designation by indicating that the believing one has a specific object – in the name of the Son of God. Modern spiritual movements emphasize one thing, believe in something. It is not specific, nor is it exclusive. This is in opposition to the Word of God that says it is by Jesus and Jesus alone. There is no other name given among men by which we must be saved.

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The reason that he wrote is “so that” (*hina*). The reason is so that “you may know.” In the purpose clause, the Subjunctive verb is used (almost exclusively) with “*hina*.” The subjunctive nature is based upon the truth of the previous statement. Therefore, if the previous statement is true, then the Subjunctive Verb is assured. The believer has the potential to know for certain that he has eternal life, but that certainty is based upon the requisites previously stated.

What are the two requisites? The first is to be a believing one. The second is to understand and believe what was written in verses 5-12.

The word for “know” is “*οἶδα oida*,” full, complete, knowledge or understanding. This is possessed knowledge. This stands in contrast to the process knowledge. There is nothing else for you to grasp. A person either believes God, believes His Word, believes His testimony, or a person does not.

What is known? That you have eternal life. In the Greek word order, this is “that life you have eternal.” Eternal stands in apposition in this phrase. “So that you may know that life you have.” What kind of life? Eternal Life.

Have is “*ἔχω echō*” and is in the Present Active Indicative, which indicates a present status. Eternal life is a right-now possession. This does not say you will have, but rather that you do have.

Is knowing (assurance) an absolute result of being a believer? Not based on this passage, otherwise this would have needed to be written.

Why is this written? The purpose is to instill unshakable confidence in believers. Assurance is not based on feelings, works, or experiences but on the objective testimony of God. This counters modern subjectivism in Christendom, where many express uncertainty about salvation (“I hope so”). Biblical assurance is rooted in knowing God’s promises through His Word.

CONCLUSION

In 1 John 5:9-13, the author underscores the certainty of eternal life for those who believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The testimony of God—through the water, blood, and Spirit—is greater than human testimony and forms the foundation for our assurance. Believers possess this testimony when they believe, while unbelief accuses God of being a liar. The content of the testimony is clear: God has given eternal life through His Son, and only those who have the Son have this life. This is written so that believers may *know*—with full, confident understanding—that they possess eternal life now.