

THAT YOU MAY
KNOW

A STUDY OF FIRST JOHN

“Assurance and
the Confession
of Sin”

1 John 1:5–10

September 17, 2025 | Men of the Word | Grace Community Church

“Theft is punished by thy law, O Lord, and by the law written in men’s hearts, which not even ingrained wickedness can erase. For what thief will tolerate another thief stealing from him? Even a rich thief will not tolerate a poor thief who is driven to theft by want. Yet I had a desire to commit robbery, and did so, compelled to it by neither hunger nor poverty, but through a contempt for well-doing and a strong impulse to iniquity. For I pilfered something which I already had in sufficient measure, and of much better quality. I did not desire to enjoy what I stole, but only the theft and the sin itself. There was a pear tree close to our own vineyard, heavily laden with fruit, which was not tempting either for its color or for its flavor. . . .



“Late one night—having prolonged our games in the streets until then, as our bad habit was—a group of young scoundrels, and I among them, went to shake and rob this tree. We carried off a huge load of pears, not to eat ourselves, but to dump out to the hogs, after barely tasting some of them ourselves. Doing this pleased us all the more because it was forbidden. Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart—which thou didst pity even in that bottomless pit. Behold, now let my heart confess to thee what it was seeking there, when I was being gratuitously wanton, having no inducement to evil but the evil itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved my own undoing. I loved my error—not that for which I erred but the error itself. A depraved soul, falling away from security in thee to destruction in itself, seeking nothing from the shameful deed but shame itself.” —Augustine, *Confessions*, 2.4

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“Assurance and the Confession of Sin”

“This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”

—1 John 1:5–10

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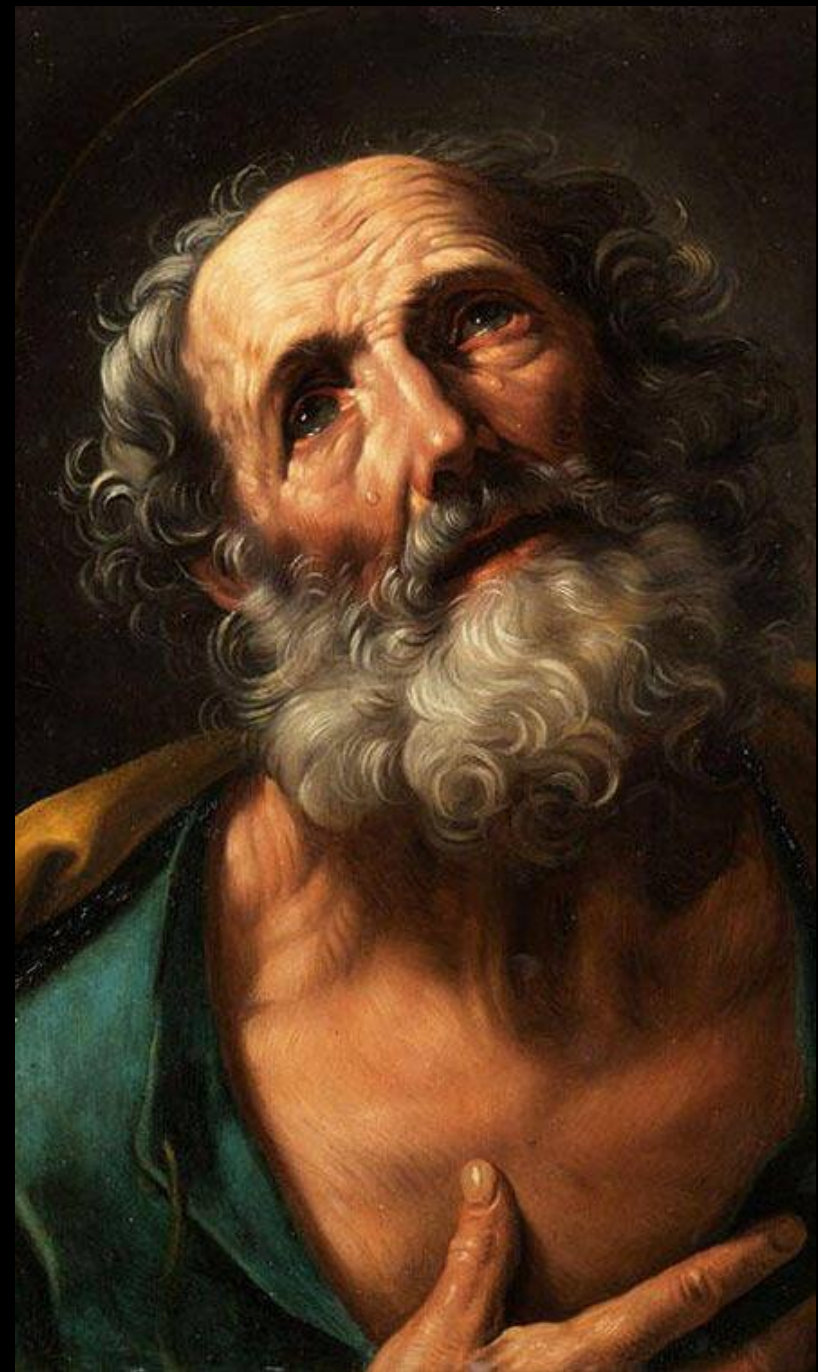
- After his prologue (1 John 1:1–4), the apostle John turns immediately to one of the fundamental themes of his letter: **the perfect righteousness of God and the reality of human sinfulness** (1:5–10).
- John dealt with the ultimate problem of sin and the need for *salvation* in his Gospel (see John 3:16–18; 20:30–31).
- John's concern here is how the professing believer responds to the reality of ongoing sin and the threat it poses to *fellowship*.
- How one responds to this reality not only indicates whether one will grow in the assurance that restored fellowship brings, but whether one has ever entered that fellowship to begin with.

- The passage is comprised of two literary components:
 - 1) an *assertion* about the character of God (1:5); and
 - 2) an *application* of this assertion to two kinds of responses to the reality of sin by those who profess to know God (1:6–10).
- These two responses to sin (1:6–10) are also contrasted with each other to form two different conclusions:
 - 1) the one response ignores or denies sin, proving that such professors do not truly know God (1:6, 8, 10); and
 - 2) the other response recognizes sin for what it really is, responds appropriately, and receives restoration to fellowship (1: 7, 9).

I. The Cause of True Confession

1 John 1:5

*"This is the message we have heard
from Him and announce to you,
that God is Light, and in Him
there is no darkness at all."*



“This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1:5).

- **“This is the message”** – John begins the main portion of his letter with his *keynote assertion*.
- **“From Him”** – this assertion is not John’s own; he and the other apostles heard it from the mouth of the Incarnate One Himself (see vv. 1–3).
- **“God is Light”** – one of John’s three fundamental assertions about God (see also John 4:24; 1 John 4:8, 16); here, an assertion about *moral perfection* (see John 3:19–21).
- **“In Him there is no darkness”** – the corresponding emphatic denial; literally, “and darkness in Him there is not, none.”

- D. Edmond Hiebert: “The assertion that ‘God is light’ is probably as near an approach to a definition of the nature of God that human intelligence can comprehend; it is meaningful to the simplest mind, yet unfathomable to the most profound thinker” (*Epistles of John*, 57).
- This is *the crucial starting point* for our understanding of assurance in relation to the reality of sin; we must focus on *theology* before *introspection*.
- **Many wrong ideas about assurance spring from wrong ideas about sin, which in turn have their roots in wrong ideas about God.**



“We never see sin aright until we see it as against God. . . . All sin is against God in this sense: that it is His law that is broken, His authority that is despised, His government that is set at naught. . . . Pharaoh and Balaam, Saul and Judas each said, ‘I have sinned’; but the returning prodigal said, ‘I have sinned against heaven and before Thee’; and David said, ‘Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned.’”

—William S. Plumer



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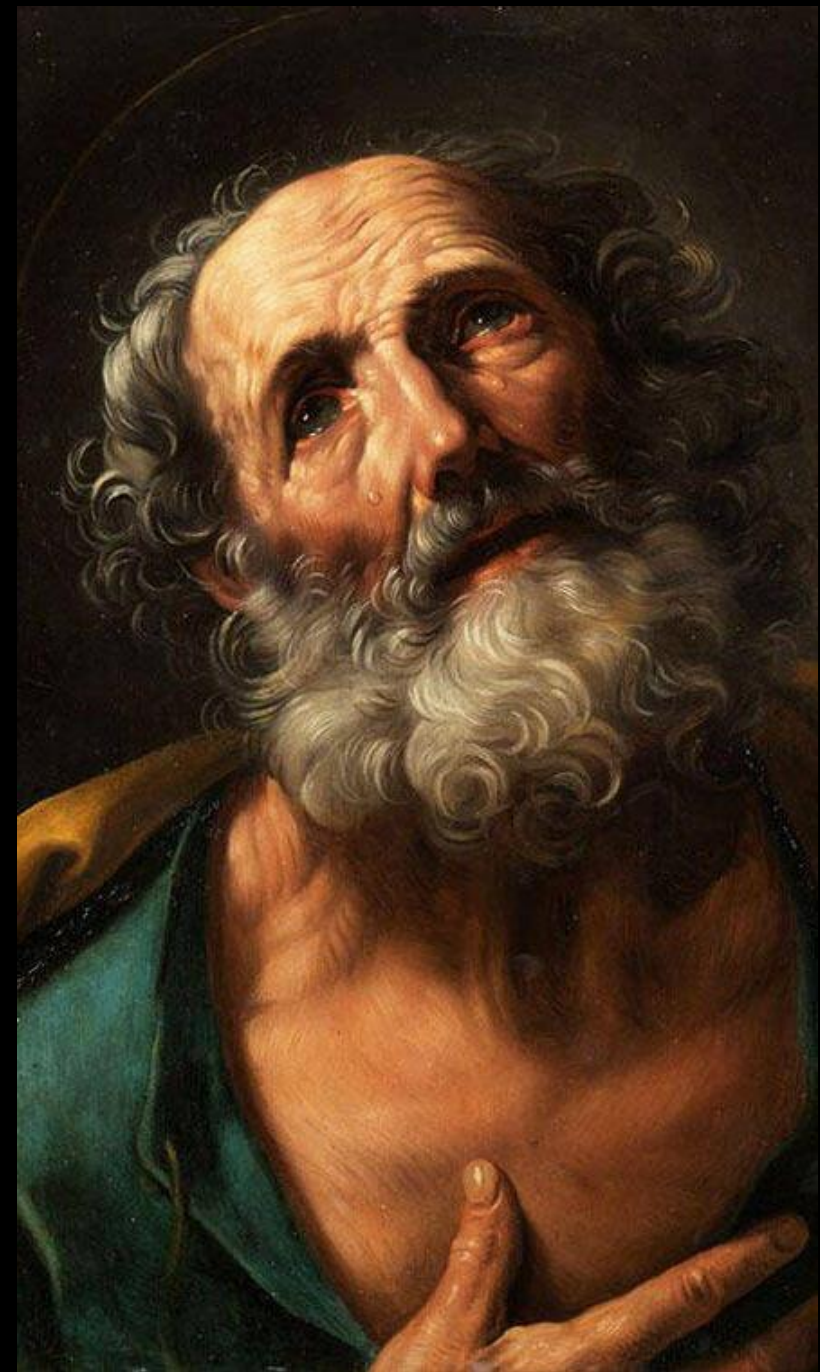
II. The Contrast of True Confession

1 John 1:6, 8, 10

*"If we say that we have fellowship with
Him and yet walk in the darkness . . .*

If we say that we have no sin . . .

If we say that we have not sinned . . . "



- John describes three kinds of “confessions” that are inconsistent with the truth of v. 5, and thus destroy any basis for assurance:

1) Verse 6 – “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”

2) Verse 8 – “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

3) Verse 10 – “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”

- Each begins with the formula of a confession (“If we say”), highlights a particular errant response to the reality of sin (“that . . .”), and then provides a definitive denunciation.

1) A confession that sin doesn't matter.

“If we say that **we have fellowship with Him** and **yet walk in the darkness,**
we lie and do not practice the truth” (v. 6).

- **“We have fellowship with Him”** – see also vv. 3, 7; a claim to possess “shared life” and deeply held “mutual interests”; this is a claim to *salvation*—to shared life in the God of Light.
- **“Yet walk in the darkness”** – “walk” describes a lifestyle; “darkness” is the antithesis to the moral purity represented by “light” (see v. 5).
- **“We lie and do not practice the truth”** – the essence of hypocrisy; the sin of *false confession* and of *disobedient living*.



“John puts his finger on perhaps the oldest syndrome of human fallenness in all of Scripture, and certainly one of the grimmest: claiming spiritual or moral high ground when from God’s viewpoint we languish in some pit.”

—Robert Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 55

2) A confession that sin no longer exists.

“If we say that **we have no sin**, **we are deceiving ourselves** and **the truth is not in us**” (v. 8).

- **“We have no sin”** – a claim of having arrived at sinless perfection; they had eradicated sin and no longer could be defiled by the world’s impurities.
- **“We are deceiving ourselves”** – emphatic: *you have deceived yourselves and it is your own doing*; intentionally self-blinded and morally culpable.
- **“The truth is not in us”** – stronger than the previous “we lie” (v. 6); what is in us are “fictions, fables, myths, self-made fancies” (R. C. H. Lenski).



“Inevitably the error of perfectionism breeds one, or usually two, deadly delusions. To convince ourselves that we have achieved sinlessness, we must either suffer from a radical overestimation of our moral performance or we must seriously underestimate the requirements of God’s law. . . . We must reduce the level of divine righteousness to the level of our own performance. We must lie to ourselves both about the Law of God and about our own obedience. . . . Perfectionism is really antiperfectionism in disguise. If we think we are becoming perfect, then we are far from becoming perfect.”

—R. C. Sproul, “The Heresy of Perfectionism”

3) A confession that sin hasn't been committed.

“If we say that **we have not sinned,**
we make Him a liar and **His word is not in us**” (v. 10).

- **“We have not sinned”** – similar to the previous confession, but emphasizing a more absolute freedom from sin, as if one *has never sinned at all*; the climax of the false confessions.
- **“We make Him a liar”** – the strongest denunciation yet (v. 6 – you lie; v. 8 – you deceive yourself; v. 10 – you call God a liar); a blasphemy of the character of God (contra v. 5), who declared all men to be “sinners.”
- **“His word is not in us”** – the absence of regeneration (James 1:21; 1 Peter 1:23).



“He who cannot find water in the sea is not more foolish than the man who cannot perceive sin in his members.”

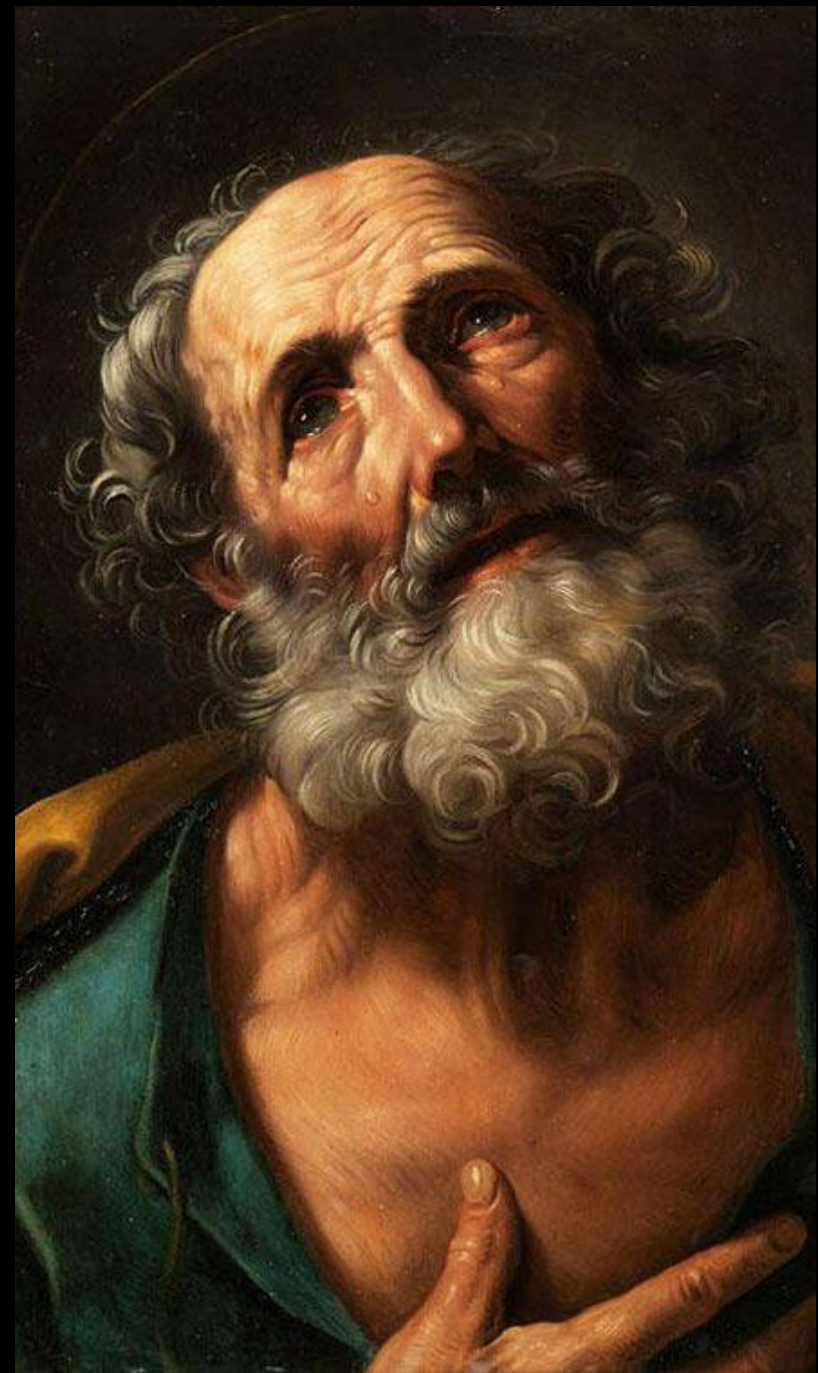
—Charles Spurgeon

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III. The Character of True Confession

1 John 1:7, 9

*"If we walk in the Light as He
Himself is in the Light . . .
If we confess our sins . . ."*



1. A confession that turns to the light.

**“but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light,
we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus
His Son cleanses us from all sin” (v. 7).**

- **“But”** – the contrast to the false confession of v. 6 (“sin doesn’t matter”).
- **“We walk in the light”** – “walk” describes a lifestyle; “in the Light” describes the turn *to* God Himself (see v. 5); this attitude toward sin prioritizes life in truth and transparency (light *reveals* and *sterilizes*).
- **“We have fellowship with one another”** – “shared life” (vv. 3, 6); sin has *social*—not just *individual*—implications; this attitude toward sin enables a fellowship *predicated* upon fellowship with God Himself.

**“but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light,
we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus
His Son cleanses us from all sin” (v. 7).**

- **“The blood of Jesus”** – the symbol of His atonement, achieved in His violent crucifixion.
- **“Cleanses us”** – “purification” or “washing”; an on-going process, applied during the “walking in the Light”; assumes the reality of on-going sin.
- **“From all sin”** – the power of the once-for-all sacrifice of the Savior is sufficient to deal with any and all sin of His people, even after conversion.







“Hereby is disproved and exposed the sacrilegious invention of the Papists as to indulgences; for as though the blood of Christ were not sufficient, they add, as a subsidy to it, the blood and merits of martyrs. At the same time, this blasphemy advances much further among us; for as they say that their keys, by which they hold as shut up the remission of sins, open a treasure made up partly of the blood and merits of martyrs, and partly of the worlds of supererogation, by which any sinner may redeem himself, no remission of sins remains for them but what is derogatory to the blood of Christ; for if their doctrine stands, the blood of Christ does not cleanse us, but comes in, as it were, as a partial aid. Thus consciences are held in suspense, which the Apostle here bids to rely on the blood of Christ.” —John Calvin on 1 John 1:7

2. A confession that acknowledges sin accurately.

“If **we confess our sins**, **He is faithful and righteous** to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (v. 9).

- **“We confess”** – “confess” = “to say the same thing,” “to acknowledge a fact as it is in reality, according to God’s definition” (see Psalm 51:6; 32:3–5)
- **“Our sins”** – in the plural, denoting their plurality and diversity.
- **“He is faithful and righteous”** – God is not *only* “Light” (v. 5); He is also “faithful” (committed and able to keep His promises) and “righteous” (morally perfect in keeping those promises).

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (v. 9).

- **“To forgive us our sins”** – the first half of God’s promise in the gospel; to “release from moral obligation or consequence”; applied to our *many* and *diverse* transgressions.
- **“To cleanse us from all unrighteousness”** – the second half of His promise in the gospel; to “purify/cleanse us” (same verb as in v. 7) from the stain of our sinfulness.
- **Q:** But how can God do this and remain *righteous*?
- **A:** “the blood of Jesus His Son.”

“There Is a Fountain” by William Cowper

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed ones of God
Be saved, to sin no more.

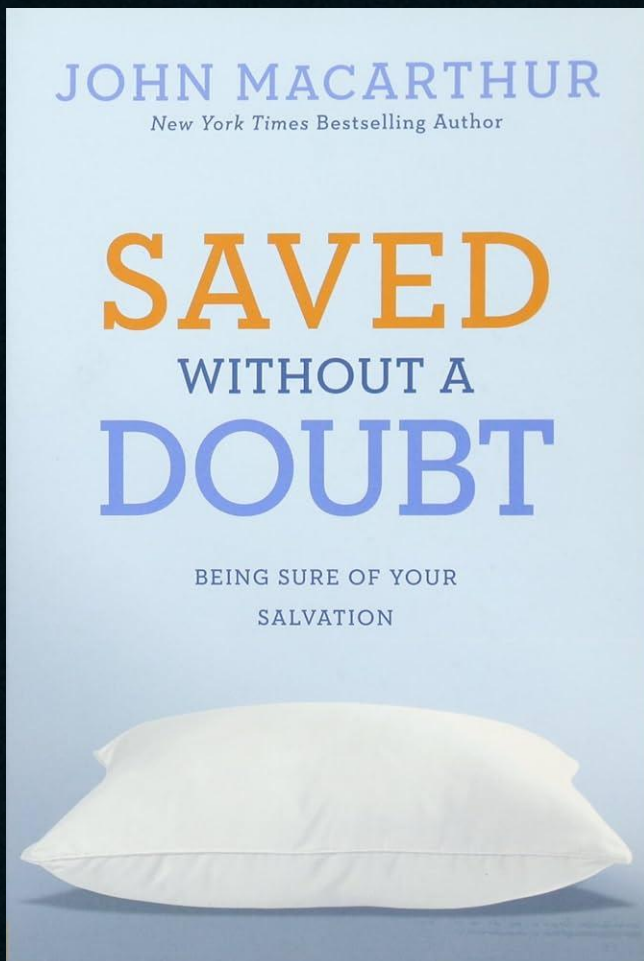
When this poor lisping, stammering tongue
Lies silent in the grave,
Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing Thy power to save:
I'll sing Thy power to save,
I'll sing Thy power to save;
Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing Thy power to save.

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THAT YOU MAY **KNOW**

A STUDY OF FIRST JOHN

- ✓ In sorting out issues related to assurance, what is needed most is not more introspection, but more awareness of who God is.
- ✓ For every look at self, take ten looks at Christ and His achievement on the cross.
- ✓ Pray for a purer understanding of the ugliness of sin and your participation in it. Come into the light and confess.
- ✓ Christ will not break a bruised reed, nor snuff out a smoldering wick.



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